

Film Feature: 48th Annual Chicago International Film Festival Highlights

Submitted by [mattmovieman](#) [1] on October 11, 2012 - 7:29am

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CHICAGO – The 48th Annual Chicago International Film Festival boasts one of the starriest opening nights in its history, with Al Pacino, Christopher Walken, Alan Arkin and Jon Bon Jovi all scheduled to walk the red carpet for the October 11th world premiere of Fisher Stevens’ crime comedy, “Stand Up Guys.” Yet that is far from the only picture worthy of attention at the year’s festival. Here are the highlights of the opening weekend covering October 11th to October 14th, 2012 (stay tuned on the 15th and 18th for more highlights).

Throughout the festival, Hollywood Chicago will be showcasing various films that deserve to not be overlooked. The opening act of this year’s CIFF includes a mind-bending fantasy that caused a sensation at Cannes and a riveting Wisconsin-set documentary that offers an unforgettable microcosm of the financial crisis. Also screening are the latest buzzed-about titles from directors including Romanian auteur Cristian Mungiu (“4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days”), French director Olivier Assayas (“Carlos”) and Windy City actress/filmmaker Kris Swanberg (who previously collaborated with her husband Joe on several features, including “Kissing on the Mouth”).

The top tier of films this weekend includes “As Goes Janesville,” “Beyond the Hills,” “The Central Park Five,” “Empire Builder,” “The Final Member,” “Holy Motors,” “Out in the Dark” and “Something in the Air.” Here they are, in order of appearance...



“Beyond the Hills”

October 12th, 8:15pm
October 15th, 8:30pm

On the heels of his pulse-pounding Palme d’Or winner, “4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days,” writer/director Cristian Mungiu serves up another slice of distinctively Romanian bleakness accentuated by the entrancing power of an ever-probing lens. Voichita (Cosmina Stratan) is so desperate to reconnect with her beloved friend, Alina (Cristina Flutur), that she runs in front of an oncoming train in order to share her embrace. Yet Voichita soon learns that Alina has no plans to leave her repressive monastery, where a grim priest (Valeriu Andriuta) instructs his female flock to love god more than mankind itself—thus creating a clan of obedient, emotionless subordinates. Oleg Mutu’s cinematography masterfully conveys a sense of entrapment, while Stratan and Flutur’s performances prove worthy of the Best Actress prize they shared at Cannes. Yet at two-and-a-half hours, Mungiu’s thematic ironies grow repetitive and all-too-obvious. It’s like watching a train wreck in slow motion, but it sure is transfixing. (MF)



Holy Motors

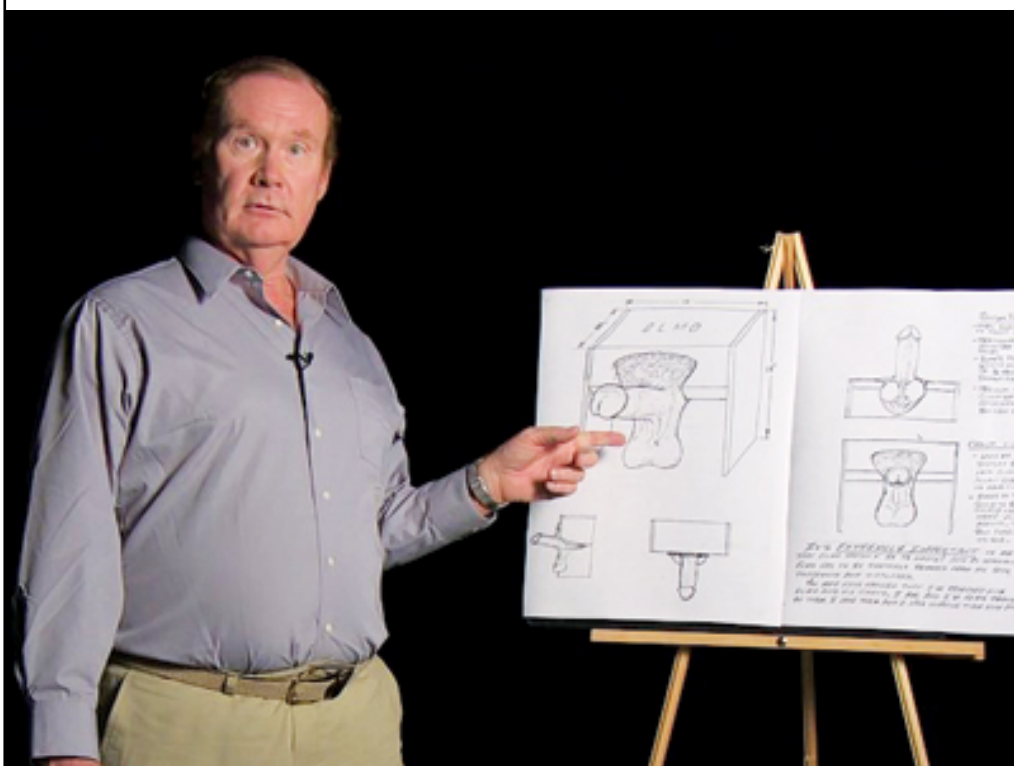
Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“Holy Motors”

October 12th, 9pm

October 14th, 7:45pm

A key contender for the festival’s most gloriously bizarre entry, as well as the most outrageously audacious curiosity of 2012. Like this year’s festival centerpiece, “Cloud Atlas,” Leos Carax’s “Holy Motors” involves shifting identities, though in this case, all of the identities are grafted onto a single man, Monsieur Oscar (Denis Lavant). During a single 24-hour period, Oscar is driven around town by his dutiful chauffeur (Edith Scob) for a series of “appointments.” Packed inside the limo are enough prosthetics and wardrobe changes to cover the entire ensemble of Cirque du Soliel. At each assigned site, he takes on a colorful array of personas: a father, a killer, a dying uncle, a bum, a crazed caveman, a horny motion capture alien, etc. Is this a metaphor for the existential plight of an actor or a surrealistic illustration of the various opposing elements that comprise a human being? This is the sort of oddball treasure best screened at David Lynch’s Club Silencio. It’s a puzzlement that makes one relish the joy of puzzles, while playing on the emotions rather than the rational mind. Among the cinematic goodies contained within this exhilarating confection are an impossibly catchy accordion number, a mournful tune sung by Kylie Minogue and the most unexpected (and inexplicable) finale since Alain Resnais’ “Wild Grass.” (MF)



The Final Member

Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“The Final Member”

October 12th, 9:15pm

October 14th, 3:15pm

A very slight amusement that barely makes it over the legal (feature) length. Jonah Bekhor and Zach Math’s documentary feels a tad stretched out in its final act, yet the pure eccentric charm of its subjects will cause audiences to sit erect throughout—and yes, all puns are intended. At first glance, the film appears to be a colorful portrait of Sigurdur Hjartarson, a retired teacher whose obsession with the male member caused him to open the Icelandic Phallological Museum. In order to complete his collection of animal phalluses, Hjartarson is determined to acquire a human penis for the museum—despite the fact that its visitors are likely aware of what one looks like. Two potential donors emerge: elderly womanizer Páll Arason and eccentric Texan Tom Mitchell, a man so intent on having his penis achieve stardom that he offers to cut it off. Mitchell is such an entertaining oddity that he ends up stealing much of the focus, while Hjartarson’s penile aspirations remain enigmatic. (MF)

Co-director Zach Math is scheduled to attend the October 12th screening.



As Goes Janesville
Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“As Goes Janesville”

October 13th, 2:30pm

One of the festival's bona fide must-see treasures is Brad Lichtenstein's excellent dissection of the controversy that has recently engulfed Wisconsin, and how the closing of a GM plant in Janesville serves as a microcosm of America's current crises. Unlike Michael Moore's brilliantly biased masterwork, “Roger & Me,” Lichtenstein provides equal screen time for both political persuasions. Mary Willmer, Community President of BMO Harris Bank, favors entrepreneurial ventures over unions and enthusiastically supports the efforts of “Rock County 5.0” (as well as the governorship of Scott Walker). Meanwhile, workers left stranded by the plant closure must either relocate their families or return to school. Leslie Simmer's editing deftly conveys the starkness of her subjects' struggles as she cuts from the pomp and circumstance of graduation day to the torturous silence of an online job search. It was Lichtenstein's lens that captured Walker's “divide and conquer” quote that helped lead to the doomed recall vote swayed by out-of-state money. While over \$45 million was spent on Walker's reelection campaign, Wisconsin remains 41st out of 50 states in job creation. Every politically conscious American owes it to themselves to see this riveting, maddening picture. It's one of the year's best documentaries. (MF)

Director Brad Lichtenstein and producer Nicole Docta are scheduled to attend the October 13th screening.



Empire Builder
Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“Empire Builder”

October 13th, 4pm

October 16th, 5pm

October 23rd, 5:30pm

Three years after her sublime (yet little-seen) debut feature, “It Was Great, But I Was Ready to Come Home,” Chicago's own Kris Swanberg returns behind the lens for a hypnotic portrait of one woman's struggle for independence in unfamiliar terrain. It's the latest showcase for the tirelessly prolific Kate Lyn Sheil (“Silver Bullets,” “Green”), who has one of the most mesmerizingly haunted faces in modern indie cinema. Sheil plays Jenny, a stay-at-home mom who escapes her windy city life by moving to a cabin in the wilderness of Montana. While awaiting the arrival of her husband, Jenny strikes up a friendship with Kyle (Bill Ross IV), a handyman who infiltrates her life in ways that become increasingly unsettling. A sense of unease is subtly conveyed through the framing, music and peerless sound design of this slow-burn gem

that bodes well for Swanberg's future in the director's chair. (MF)

Director Kris Swanberg is scheduled to attend the October 13th and October 16th screenings.



Out in the Dark

Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“Out in the Dark”

October 13th, 8pm

October 14th, 6pm

October 21st, 6:15pm

Though not quite as steamy or wrenching as Maryam Keshavarz's similarly themed “Circumstance,” this timely exploration of sexual repression and cultural conflict is bound to move audiences worldwide. The forbidden love that blossoms between two men takes place in perhaps the most volatile pressure cooker on earth. Palestinian student Nimer (Nicholas Jacob) falls for an Israeli lawyer, Roy (Michael Aloni), who justifies their attraction by succinctly surmising, “a d—k's a d—k.” There's a poignant moment when Roy's father recalls witnessing the deceptively hopeful handshake between Rabin and Arafat in '93, and observes that Nimer may have been “one of the kids holding out an olive branch.” Though the script is occasionally contrived, director/co-writer Michael Mayer wisely refuses to end the film on a note of catharsis and closure, since the war portrayed onscreen threatens to continue indefinitely, while producing generations upon generations of casualties. (MF)

Director Michael Mayer is scheduled to attend all three screenings.



Something in the Air

Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“Something in the Air”

October 14th, 3:30pm

October 17th, 8:20pm

Olivier Assayas returns to this year's festival with a film that serves as an interesting partner to his highly-acclaimed “Carlos,” in that it's also about people who fought against a system but with a much different tone and result. With echoes of the revolutionary movements going on around the world right now, “Something in the Air” tracks a group of young friends fighting for cultural freedom in France in the '70s. What's interesting about Assayas' sometimes-dull drama is that it's not as much about the passion of youth but how it fades into reality. Assayas'

blend of realism and poetry achieves a mesmerizing quality by film's end even if it's sometimes a bit too slow for its own good. (BT)



The Central Park Five

Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“The Central Park Five”

October 14th, 5pm

A new film from famed documentary maker Ken Burns, his daughter Sarah Burns and David McMahon. In 1989, a 28-year-old white female was jogging in New York City's Central Park, where she was sexually assaulted and brutally beaten. Five African-American teenage boys, who were in the park at the time, were arrested. Within 24 hours, New York City police got confessions from them, and four did jail time. Using the now classic Ken Burns documentary style, the filmmakers break down the history of the case, the overwrought fear it produced and the techniques of the law in prosecuting the Five. (PM)

Directors Sarah Burns and David McMahon and subject Raymond Santana are scheduled to attend the October 14th screening.

Check out page two for more week one highlights.

Here are another four titles that may deserve your attention with official synopses from the Chicago Film Festival. If we had the time and money, we'd check these out.



Mekong Hotel

Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“Mekong Hotel”

October 12th, 6:15pm

October 21st, 7:30pm

From Apichatpong “Joe” Weerasethakul (“Uncle Boonmee...”), whose gorgeous, thoughtful films are counted among the most acclaimed masterpieces of the new century, “Mekong Hotel” is a portrait of a hotel near the Mekong River on Thailand's border with Laos. Blending fantasy and reality, fiction and documentary, the present and the future, this exquisite poem of a film strikingly expresses the bonds of love and family between people, and the looming presence of the river in their lives.



Keep the Lights On
Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“Keep the Lights On”

October 12th, 8:30pm
October 13th, 2pm

A one-night stand between Erik and Paul quickly grows into something more. However, the two men's drastically different attitudes towards work, life, and intimacy, along with Paul’s struggles with addiction, soon chip away at their chances of happiness. This sensitive, subtle account of an intense, nine-year on-off relationship tenderly reminds us that love is not always enough.

Director Ira Sachs is scheduled to attend both screenings.



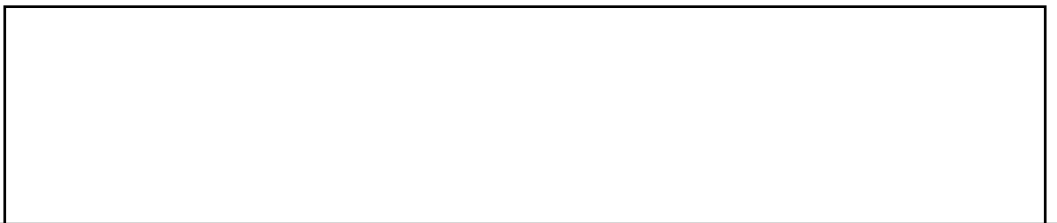
Flowerbuds
Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“Flowerbuds”

October 13th, 6pm
October 14th, 2:30pm
October 16th, 1pm

Garnering four top Czech Lions (the Czech Oscars®) Flowerbuds presents an incisive snapshot of family life in a small Czech town. Jarda works as a train signal operator but also nurses a petty gambling addiction. His wife, Kamila dreams of her lost youth while their teenage children are without work, money or illusions about life. Over the course of a long winter, a series of small tragedies unfold and collide, bringing the family to the brink.

Director Zdenek Jirasky is scheduled to attend the October 13th and October 14th screenings.





Benji

Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“Benji”

October 14th, 11am
October 17th, 6pm
October 18th, 8:30pm

In 1984, all eyes were on Ben Wilson, a high school senior on the verge of leading Chicago’s Simeon High to its second straight state basketball championship and seemingly destined for NBA greatness. But Benji’s story was cut tragically short when he was shot and killed in broad daylight on his way to school. Interviews with family and friends give fresh insight into Benji’s life and untimely end, illuminating one of sport’s most tragic “what if”s.

Directors Coodie and Chike are scheduled to attend the October 17th and October 18th screenings.

Come back on October 15th, 2012 for a look at more upcoming festival highlights and stay tuned to HollywoodChicago.com for consistent CIFF coverage.



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Source URL (retrieved on Apr 23 2024 - 1:17pm):
<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/20258/film-feature-48th-annual-chicago-international-film-festival-highlights>

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