

Film Feature: 48th Annual Chicago International Film Festival Highlights, Part Three

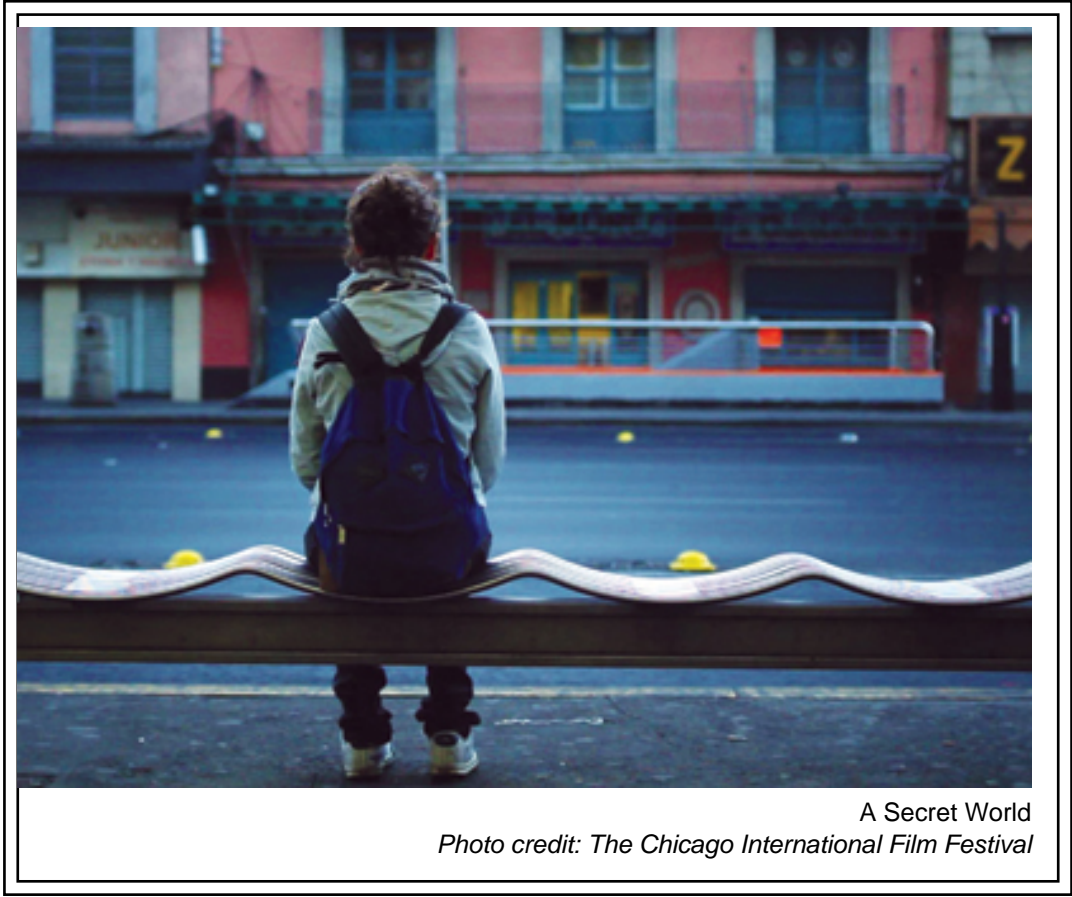
Submitted by [mattmovieman](#) [1] on October 18, 2012 - 8:53am

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CHICAGO – In its final days, the 48th Annual Chicago International Film Festival is poised to close with a glorious bang. Chicago native Robert Zemeckis (of “Back to the Future” and “Forrest Gump” fame) will return to the festival for the closing night screening of “Flight,” a thriller starring Denzel Washington. It’s Zemeckis’s first live-action feature since 2000’s “Cast Away.” Here are the highlights covering the remaining days of the festival, from October 18th to October 25th, 2012.

Zemeckis isn’t the only exciting guest scheduled to attend the festival in the days ahead. David O. Russell (“Three Kings,” “The Fighter”) will be on hand for the October 23rd screening of his widely celebrated dramedy, “The Silver Linings Playbook,” which has been singled out as a major awards season player, according to festival buzz. On the heels of his Guillermo del Toro-produced chiller, “The Orphanage,” filmmaker Juan Antonio Bayona returns to the screen with “The Impossible,” a harrowing fact-based account of one family’s survival during the catastrophic 2004 Tsunami in Southeast Asia. Bayona will be present at the October 18th screening, and will receive the festival’s Emerging Visionary Award. Also scheduled to be honored in-person at the festival is Oscar winner Helen Hunt, whose performance as a sex surrogate in Ben Lewin’s “The Sessions” has been garnering solid praise (Hunt will be awarded the Silver Hugo at the film’s October 20th screening).

Also among the top tier of films soon to screen are “Mr. Sophistication,” “Room 237,” “A Royal Affair,” “A Secret World,” “Simon Killer” and “Valley of Saints.” Here they are, in order of appearance...



“A Secret World”

October 18th, 6:15pm
October 20th, 9:45pm
October 23rd, 1:15pm

During the opening night Q&A of “Empire Builder,” an audience member praised director Kris Swanberg for favoring long takes over ADD-fueled editing. That festivalgoer will undoubtedly be pleased by documentarian Gabriel Mariño’s first narrative feature. With a quiet, almost meditative focus, the film follows a Mexican teenager, Maria (Lucía Uribe), on an impromptu road trip fueled by her desire to escape her mother’s micromanaging gaze. She sleeps with a number of men yet never appears to be enjoying herself. Afterward, she writes journal entries in which she criticizes her own behavior in third person. It isn’t until she meets a shy, kindred spirit named Juan (Roberto Mares), that she starts opening up about her inner torments. From the film’s opening images of half-opened windows and cats perched on rooftops to the final hypnotic shot hurtling down a road, cinematographer Ivan Hernandez conveys a sense of atmosphere that is utterly consuming, particularly on a big screen. Some viewers may grow impatient with the film’s uncompromising slowness, but cinephiles seeking a quiet, insightful portrait of life’s day-to-day rhythms will find themselves captivated all the way up until the truly dazzling climactic sequence set on the water. Let this film wash over you, and you will be impressed. (MF)

Director Gabriel Mariño is scheduled to attend the October 18th and October 20th screenings.



The Impossible
Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“The Impossible”
October 18th, 7pm

J.A. Bayona conveys the fury and horror of the 2004 tsunami in his highly anticipated drama featuring award-worthy performances from Ewan McGregor and Naomi Watts and a breakthrough from the young Tom Holland. The two stellar actors play mother and father in a family who are torn apart by the devastating force of nature, captured with such stunning, jaw-dropping impact that a woman passed out during the showing at the Toronto Film Festival. But Bayona’s film is no mere disaster pic. This is a masterful, moving examination of the sometimes impossible forces that lead some to safety while others are not so lucky. It conveys the strength of family while also capturing something remarkable about how people come together when they’re torn apart. (BT)

Director Juan Antonio Bayona is scheduled to attend the screening.



Room 237
Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“Room 237”
October 19th, 9:45pm
October 20th, 1pm

Most movie fans have had that cinema classic that sent them down the rabbit hole of plot theories, bizarre conjecture, and overanalyzed symbolism but the people interviewed for “Room 237” take it to extremes in their analysis of Stanley Kubrick’s “The Shining.” This brilliant documentary never shows its subjects or their interviewer, choosing instead to focus on the film itself (with a bit of archival material and shots from other Kubrick movies) in such a way that it takes the viewer on a journey into its own brand of madness to the point that you may find yourself agreeing with some of its out-there ideas. Sure, Kubrick didn’t Photoshop himself into the clouds but the bizarre architecture of the hotel can’t be denied. And by the time people start discussing what can be learned by watching the film played forward and backward simultaneously, you may find yourself questioning every movie theory you’ve ever had. This is one of the best documentaries of the year. (BT)





Valley of Saints

*Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival***“Valley of Saints”**

October 20th, 6:30pm

October 21st, 8:30pm

October 22nd, 1:15pm

Winner of both an audience award and the Alfred P. Sloan Feature Film Prize at this year’s Sundance Film Festival, director Musa Syeed’s India-set drama is a gentle, warmhearted gem well worth savoring. Gulzar Ahmed Bhat is pitch-perfect as a young man in Kashmir who is desperate to escape the warfare engulfing his beloved streets. When the military halts him and his friend (Mohammed Afzal) from escaping, the boatman is forced to endure a new curfew while waiting until Ramadan. That’s when he meets Asifa (Neelofar Hamid), a beautiful woman whose passion for saving the dying Dal Lake threatens to derail the man’s plans for escape. Bolstered by superb cinematography by Yoni Brook and fine-tuned editing by Ray Hubley and Mary Manhardt, “Valley of Saints” has the distinction of being the first film set within Kashmir’s gorgeous yet troubled lake communities. (MF)

Editor Ray Hubley is scheduled to attend the October 20th screening.



The Sessions

*Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival***“The Sessions”**

October 20th, 7pm

An emotionally and physically daring performance from the great John Hawkes (“Winter’s Bone”) drives this true story of a man looking for a sexual connection at least once in his life. Mark lives in an iron lung and barely has any human connections, much less ones that involve sex. He hires a sex therapist named Cheryl (Helen Hunt) to lose his virginity, even getting the religious support of Father Brendan (William H. Macy) in his unusual quest. Mark & Cheryl grow close and director Ben Lewin expertly works with Hawkes to capture something true about how a life without human touch is not a full one. Hawkes is likely to earn another Oscar nomination for this Sundance fave and Hunt could join him. (BT)

Actress Helen Hunt is scheduled to attend the screening.



Mr. Sophistication

*Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival***“Mr. Sophistication”**

October 20th, 7:15pm

October 21st, 12:15pm

For over two decades, Chicago character actor Harry Lennix has delivered fine performances in a host of supporting roles. His credits include films such as “Titus” and “Ray,” as well as TV shows including “ER” and “24.” In Danny Green’s well-crafted character study, Lennix finally gets the star vehicle that he has richly deserved. He plays Ron Waters, a once-respected comic whose volatile behavior caused his Hollywood career to head south in the ’90s. While performing at a Chicago club owned by his wife (Tatum O’Neal), Waters is approached by an old pal (Robert Patrick) eager to reboot his career. Upon his return to LA, Waters is immediately pursued by a lovestruck 24-year-old (Paloma Guzmán) who offers him a seductive escape from his passionless marriage. As he attempts to juggle both women while serving them equal helpings of lies, Waters could’ve easily come off as a loathsome jerk, yet Lennix manages to convey the self-loathing beneath his character’s destructive behavior. There are a few laughs to be had during Waters’ routines, particularly the one about George Foreman’s unlikely comeback, but this is ultimately a dramatic showcase for the film’s first-rate ensemble. O’Neal is particularly effective as the wronged wife, while the great Bruce McGill turns up as the late night host unlucky enough to experience Waters’ meltdown first-hand. (MF)

Director Danny Green, actor/executive producer Harry Lennix and producers Albena Dodeva and Jon E. Edwards are scheduled to attend both screenings.



A Royal Affair

*Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival***“A Royal Affair”**

October 20th, 8:30pm

October 21st, 2:30pm

This film is one of the most highly symbolic examples of how love can lead to progression for an entire era. Set in the 18th century Denmark, the story focuses on the titular rendezvous between King Christian the VII’s physician (Mads Mikkelsen) and the queen (Alicia Vikander). The rub in this hey-hey is that the good doctor is also a progressive philosopher, and starts to evolve governmental policy. Epic and somewhat melodramatic, the film does succeed in expressing how unexpected voices can emerge in the most unusual of circumstances. And in regard to passion, it is highlighted by an intense consummation. (PM)

Director Nikolaj Arcel is scheduled to attend both screenings.



Simon Killer
Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“Simon Killer”

October 20th, 8:30pm

October 21st, 9:15pm

The sad and mysterious journey of an American “student” expatriate in Paris spotlights the vulnerable nature in casualties of manipulation. Antonio Campos directs Brady Corbet as Simon, a person who seems to be much less human than he presents himself to be. The fascinating part of the film is its authenticity, using everyday looking people in erratic situations. The breakdown of the title character is also fascinating to watch, and Corbet’s performance decisions as to how Simon’s personality is revealed are quite stark. This scenario basically comes down to how individuals can handle their own pain. (PM)

Director Antonio Campos is scheduled to attend both screenings.



The Silver Linings Playbook
Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“The Silver Linings Playbook”

October 23rd, 7pm

One of the best ensemble performances of the year drives David O. Russell’s stellar follow-up to his Oscar-winning “The Fighter.” Bradley Cooper does career-best work as Pat, a man just released from a mental hospital and struggling between trying to move forward and his desire to rebuild the broken life he had before. He meets a similarly struggling girl named Tiffany (career-best work from Jennifer Lawrence) and first uses her to try and reconnect with his ex-wife but, of course, love is inevitable. Robert DeNiro shines in his best performance in well over a decade as Pat’s father and Russell yet again captures something remarkable about family with a focus on how we’re all a little mentally ill. It just comes down to how we deal with it. See what will surely be a major Oscar player a month before it’s released. (BT)

Director David O. Russell is scheduled to attend the screening.





Flight

*Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival***“Flight”**

October 25th, 7pm

With one of the best performances of his career, Denzel Washington completely discards the crutches he’s fallen back on with some of his more recent lazy decisions as an actor and proves yet again why he should be in the conversation when it turns to our best working thespians. Ignore the misguided advertising for this movie that makes it look like a thriller. “Flight” is a riveting, adult drama about alcoholism and a tragically flawed hero who director Robert Zemeckis and Washington are willing to present with all of his many flaws. Washington’s airplane pilot, a man who saves dozens of lives as he pilots a plane into a controlled crash with a .24 blood alcohol level and a couple of lines of cocaine in his system, is possibly the most fascinating character you’ll meet at the entire festival. (BT)

Director Robert Zemeckis is scheduled to attend the screening.

Check out page two for more 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.



Post Tenebras Lux

*Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival***“Post Tenebras Lux”**

October 19th, 2:30pm

October 21st, 1:30pm

October 24th, 6pm

An astonishing visual tour de force from Mexican filmmaker Reygadas (whose previous film, 2007’s Silent Light, won the Gold Hugo), this enigmatic, elusive film presents the occurrences around a family of four. Mundane domestic events are punctuated with tableaux of overwhelming beauty, while some sinister force lurks outside. Filled with arresting images from one of world cinema’s most innovative visual masters, Post Tenebras Lux is a truly sui generis work.

Director Travis Fine and producer Kristine Fine are scheduled to attend all three screenings.



Bound by Flesh
Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“Bound by Flesh”
October 19th, 5pm

The Hilton sisters’ incredible story begins in England in the early 1900s when their mother, after discovering she had given birth to conjoined twins, sold the babies to a woman who viewed the girls exclusively as “cash cows.” Their new caretaker/manager put the young pair on display in the back of pubs, eventually taking them on tour in carnivals and circuses. When the twins came to America, they instantly became a gigantic success, but the 23-year-old sisters were unable to cope with the dishonest agents and managers that would exploit them over and over again throughout their lives. Leslie Zemeckis’ compelling documentary explores the colorful, tragic lives of the world’s most famous conjoined twins. ~~Director Leslie Zemeckis is scheduled to attend the screening.~~



Starlet
Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“Starlet”
October 20th, 9:30pm

21-year-old “actress” Jane spends her time getting high with her dysfunctional roommates and taking care of her Chihuahua, Starlet. Sadie, an 85-year-old widow, passes her days alone tending to her flower garden. An unlikely friendship forms between the two after Jane makes an intriguing discovery at Sadie’s yard sale. Jane attempts to befriend the caustic older woman in an effort to satisfy her curiosity, and secrets ~~emerge as their relationship grows.~~



An Oversimplification of Her Beauty
Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“An Oversimplification of Her Beauty”

October 21st, 6:15pm
October 22nd, 8:30pm
October 23rd, 3:15pm

Starring director Terence Nance as a version of himself, a young man attempts to make a female friend something more. A single event motivates an abstract and witty introspection into the origins of his feelings toward her. Brazenly mixing live action with animation and eschewing classical narrative structure, “An Oversimplification of Her Beauty” is a stylish, exhilarating American debut.

Director Terence Nance is scheduled to attend all three screenings.

Stay tuned to HollywoodChicago.com for coverage of the CIFF 2012 award ceremony.



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