

## Feature: 2013 Chicago International Film Festival Highlights, Part One

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 10, 2013 - 10:15am

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CHICAGO – The 49th Annual Chicago International Film Festival starts tonight, October 10, 2013, with a tribute to Roger Ebert and the premiere of James Gray’s “The Immigrant,” starring Joaquin Phoenix and Marion Cotillard. Wasting no time, there are at least a dozen flicks this weekend that could grab your attention. It’s one of the strongest CIFF line-ups in memory, with a few nearly-certain Oscar candidates next to some films that are unlikely to play again in Chicago any time soon.

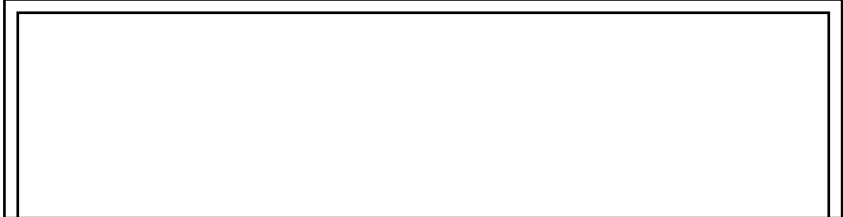
We have a great mix of options for you in the first five days of the fest (10/10-14) in our first of three highlight pieces put together by Brian Tallerico, Patrick McDonald, and, making his HC debut, Nick Allen. The first page features films we’ve actually seen and recommend while the second features films over the same period that looked interesting that we either couldn’t get to or the publicity machine failed to allow us access to view. In chronological order. Get out your calendar and buy some tickets. (Initials in parentheses after each capsule indicates critic who wrote it.)



### “Walesa: Man of Hope”

Lech Walesa is one of the greatest social leaders of the 20th Century, and this Polish interpretation of his life is honorable and honest. Robert Wieckiewicz portrays Walesa in a balanced and measured way, projecting the leader’s humility in the face of Poland’s tumultuous history from 1970 through 1988. Walesa is a man of instinct in this film, someone who has little book education, yet with a brilliant gift for motivating his working class colleagues, and precipitating a change heard around the world. Directed by famed Polish filmmaker Andrej Wajda, who really understood Lech Walesa, the man. (PM)

Friday, 10/11, 5:30pm  
Sunday, 10/13, 2:15pm  
Wednesday, 10/16, 3:20pm





The Inevitable Defeat of Mister and Pete  
*Photo credit: CIFF*

“The Inevitable Defeat of Mister and Pete”

Chicagoan George Tillman Jr. brings his latest drama to CIFF on the same day it opens in Chicago theaters, although you won’t be able to see it at 600 N. Michigan with Oscar-winning star Jennifer Hudson. She’s gives an effective supporting performance here as the drug addict mother of Mister, a headstrong young man trying to navigate the waters of urban living in New York City in 2013. Drugs, crime, cops, and an education system that has failed him serve as background for a lively, energetic piece that reminds one of Spike Lee’s tales of urban youth. (BT)

Friday, 10/11, 6:30pm

“Kill Your Darlings”



Kill Your Darlings  
*Photo credit: CIFF*

John Krokidas’ film was divisive at Sundance and Toronto but those who love it seem to feel very strongly about what works about it. Consider me in that camp. Daniel Radcliffe continues to disprove the critics who thought he’d be stuck finding roles after Harry Potter by perfectly capturing the search for identity that comes when young people start carving their own paths instead of going down the ones laid out for them. This young person just happened to become Allen Ginsberg. Radcliffe is good and Krokidas crucially brings the piece a jazzy, rebellious attitude overall but “Darlings” is driven by a spectacular supporting performance by future star Dane Dehaan. A uniquely cast ensemble filled out by fascinating actors like Ben Foster, David Cross, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Elizabeth Olsen, and Jack Huston lends the entire piece the feel of something you haven’t quite seen before. It’s a coming-of-age story told from a different angle and we need more of those. (BT)

Friday, 10/11, 8:15pm





American Vagabond  
*Photo credit: CIFF*

### “American Vagabond”

This is a notable documentary, the other side of the coin regarding families and gay acceptance in America. The film tells of the rejection of James Temple as he comes out to his family, in a small town in California. He runs away with his lover Tyler to San Francisco, but it doesn't turn out to be the gay mecca they hoped for. Homeless and broke, the pair come back to their small town, and deal with the fallout from their escape. Director Susanna Helke extends the story a bit too much, using static and moving background shots against narration. The story is exceptional, but it felt padded. (PM)

Friday, 10/11, 8:30pm

Sunday, 10/13, 2:15pm



Stray Dogs  
*Photo credit: CIFF*

### “Stray Dogs”

Tsai Ming-Liang (“Goodbye Dragon Inn”) is well known in international circles for his incredibly deliberate pace but his latest will tax even the most patient viewers. As long as you're warned that the nearly-silent opening take of a woman brushing her hair for roughly five full minutes is a tone-setter for what's to come, “Dogs” is a haunting drama. The incredibly slow pace is thematically purposeful here in that I think Tsai's film is about the numbing tedium of being homeless. It's not that these people who live on the fringe of society are just hopeless but that they have no break from that hopelessness. There are no distractions, and Tsai lets you feel the soul-draining tragedy of day-to-day life. It's a dark, depressing piece of work that features almost no dialogue or traditional narrative but you won't soon forget it. (BT)

Friday, 10/11, 8:30pm

Sunday, 10/13, 12:30pm







Northwest  
*Photo credit: CIFF*

### “Northwest”

With a grime that echoes the Euro-trashier early films of Nicolas Winding Refn, Northwest is a coming-of-criminality tale set within a chilly Danish underworld. Remarkable newcomer Gustav Dyekjær Giese plays Casper, a rising young thug who enlists the help of his younger brother (Oscar Dyekjær Giese) with rippling consequences. Co-written by Rasmus Heisterberg (co-writer for first The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo film adaptation) director Michael Noer’s hoodlum hierarchy film is cast with newcomer grit, especially from center focus Giese and his real-life brother. Along with sullen street scenes and gradual pacing, all lead Northwest to a tough rawness, making its unforgiving conclusion all the more crushing. (NA)

Saturday, 10/12, 2pm

Tuesday, 10/22, 6:30pm

Wednesday, 10/23, 6pm



Blue is the Warmest Color  
*Photo credit: CIFF*

### “Blue is the Warmest Color”

This extraordinary exploration of one woman’s relevant sexual emergence won the Palme d’Or – the top film award – at the Cannes Film Festival. Focusing on Adèle (Adèle Exarchopoulos) as she negotiates her love life by hooking up with Emma (Léa Seydoux). The sex is graphic, but it also provides a window into the passion of love and exploration through adolescence and young adulthood. It is also a discovery of how and who we are when we hook up into a serious relationship – what do we owe our lovers in fidelity and consequence? It’s long, and drags a bit, but is truly fascinating. (PM)

Saturday, 10/12, 6:30pm

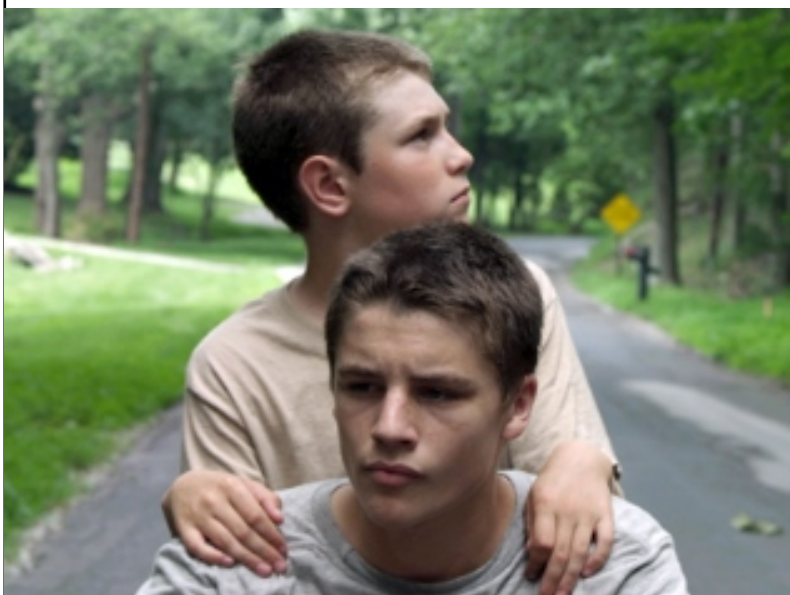


12 Years a Slave  
Photo credit: CIFF

“12 Years a Slave”

The always-stellar Chiwetel Ejiofor leaps to the front of the Oscar race with what will be his breakthrough performance as Solomon Northup, a free man kidnapped and forced into slavery in Steve McQueen’s already-acclaimed drama. Ejiofor is riveting (and he’s matched by another incredible turn from Michael Fassbender) in this relentless tale of human struggle in unimaginable horror. McQueen pulls no punches, highlighting the daily horror of life as a slave in ways that we haven’t really seen on film before. I’ll go into deeper detail on my mixed feelings on some elements of the film next week in a full review but it’s definitely worth seeing. Be the first to do so in Chicago at CIFF. (BT)

Sunday, 10/13, 7pm



Hide Your Smiling Faces  
Photo credit: CIFF

“Hide Your Smiling Faces”

Some have criticized debut director Daniel Patrick Carbone’s excellent drama for being too reminiscent of David Gordon Green and Terrence Malick. As if THAT’S a problem. Carbone’s film will definitely remind you of “George Washington” and “Tree of Life” but it has its own tone as well in the way Carbone focuses on how death impacts adolescence. The days of young men having no care in the world, wrestling in the woods, and playing with whatever they find there, are shattered when one of them ends up at the bottom of a bridge. Two brothers at very different points in their youth respond with aggression and fear. It’s a captivating piece of work that heralds great things to come from its creator. (BT)

Monday, 10/14, 6:15pm  
Wednesday, 10/16, 6:30pm  
Tuesday, 10/22, 1:30pm

These films weren’t screened (or we missed ‘em) but look super-interesting to us. Check ‘em out and let us know.





Blue Ruin  
Photo credit: CIFF

### “Blue Ruin”

Blue Ruin is a classic American revenge story that recently won the FIPRESCI International Critics Prize at the Cannes Film Festival where it screened in the Directors' Fortnight. The film follows a mysterious outsider whose quiet life is turned upside down when he returns to his childhood home to carry out an act of vengeance. Proving himself an amateur assassin, he winds up in a brutal fight to protect his estranged family.

Friday, 10/11, 6:15pm

Sunday, 10/13, 8:15pm

### “A Thousand Times Good Night”

A Thousand Times Good Night follows driven war photographer Rebecca (Juliette Binoche in one of her most powerful performances), known for her willingness to tackle risky subjects. While photographing suicide bombers, she is badly hurt in an explosion. When she returns home to Norway, her husband (Game of Thrones' Nikolaj Coster-Waldau) and daughter are tired of her risking her life on dangerous assignments. They give her an ultimatum, making her choose between her work and her family.

Saturday, 10/12, 3pm

Monday, 10/14, 8:15pm

Wednesday, 10/16, 12:40pm



Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom  
Photo credit: CIFF

### “Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom”

Mandela: A Long Walk To Freedom is based on South African President Nelson Mandela's autobiography of the same name, which chronicles his early life, coming of age, education, and 27 years in prison before becoming President and working to rebuild his country's once segregated society. Idris Elba (Prometheus) stars as Nelson Mandela, and Naomie Harris (Skyfall) stars as Winnie Mandela, with Justin Chadwick (The Other Boleyn Girl) directing.

Saturday, 10/12, 5:45pm

### “Borgman”

Driven by the authorities from his underground hideout, the enigmatic Camiel Borgman is on the run. Covered in dirt, he arrives at Marina and Richard's large suburban estate asking to use their shower, thus beginning a game of sly calculation as he insinuates himself into their home. He soon starts to manipulate the family with almost preternatural charisma as his more sinister plans make themselves known in this chilling demonic tale.



Saturday, 10/12, 10pm  
Monday, 10/21, 3pm  
Wednesday, 10/23, 8:15pm



The Fifth Estate  
Photo credit: CIFF

“The Fifth Estate”

A dramatic thriller based on real events, The Fifth Estate follows WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange (Benedict Cumberbatch) and his colleague Daniel Domscheit-Berg (Daniel Brühl), underground watchdogs of the privileged and powerful. But when they gain access to the biggest trove of confidential intelligence documents in US history, they battle each other and a defining question of our time: what are the costs of keeping secrets in a free society - and what are the costs of exposing them?

Sunday, 10/13, 5:15pm



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