

## 12th Annual EU Film Festival Highlights, Week One: 'I'm All Good,' 'Zift,' 'Kisses,' 'Shall We Kiss'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 4, 2009 - 4:04pm

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CHICAGO – The Annual European Union Film Festival at the [Siskel Film Center](#) [12] has become a calendar-clearing event for foreign film and arthouse movie lovers in the city of Chicago, but working your way through what to see of the five dozen films can be overwhelming. Let us guide the way.

This year's edition, running from March 6th to April 2nd, includes high profile films from world renowned filmmakers like Peter Greenaway, Francois Ozon, Agnes Varda, Nicholas Roeg, Shane Meadows, Olga Malea, and Olivier Assayas, along with some movies that probably won't be seen outside of the EU in the Windy City.

The 12th Annual European Union Film Festival includes 59 feature films, all of which are making their Chicago premiere. If you're interested in seeing something off the beaten path, the EU is the fest for you. Week by week, every Wednesday, come back to HollywoodChicago.com for the highlights of the upcoming weekend and following week with a synopsis for every single film premiering that week.



I'm All Good  
Photo credit: Siskel Film Center

The festival kicks off with the annual custom of a celebration presided over by the nation currently holding the presidency of the European Union. On Friday, March 6th, the host is the Honorable Marek Skolil, Consul General of the Czech Republic in Chicago, introducing Jan Hrebejk's breezy and fun "I'm All Good".

The award-winning director of "Up and Down" and "Beauty in Trouble" will also be present for audience discussion and the gallery/cafe at the Siskel Film Center will feature an exhibition of Czech film posters from the '60s and '70s.

The opening night film, "I'm All Good," which starts at 7pm on March 6th, is a delightful diversion, a lively comedy about a group of friends looking out for one of their own.

A poor schmuck finally has enough money saved up to take his wife on a much-needed vacation when he stumbles across and falls hard for a shell game scam. Worried that his wife will leave him if she knows he lost all their money gambling, his friends, including a sly former magician, come up with their own complicated scheme to get revenge on the scammers.

With charming performances by Jiri Schmitzer and Boleslav Polivka and a light, breezy tone, "I'm All Good" lives up to its title, falling just shy of "great". It's a great opening night choice.



Kisses

*Photo credit: Siskel Film Center*

The best film in week one of the half-dozen or so that I’ve seen that premiere from March 6th-12th (and arguably beyond) is easily Ireland’s “Kisses,” a surprisingly genuine and sweet film from director Lance Daly.

With two of the best child performances that have come out of any country in a long time, “Kisses” tells the story of two children on the run from their drab, depressing lives outside of Dublin. Dylan (Shane Curry) has had enough of his father’s abuse. After an altercation, he runs away to the city with his neighbor Kylie (Kelly O’Neill), a tough-but-sweet girl who clearly has a bit of a crush on Dylan. As the pair get closer to the city the black-and-white of their lives turn into beautiful color.

With music by Bob Dylan, a surreal appearance by Stephen Rea, beautiful cinematography, and some of the most unsentimental, genuine, coming-of-age material I’ve seen in a long time, “Kisses” has arthouse hit written all over it. See it at the EU Fest and jump on the bandwagon early. I adore this film. It plays on Sunday, March 8th at 7:30pm and Monday, March 9th at 6pm.



Shall We Kiss

*Photo credit: Siskel Film Center*

Another movie likely to find a huge arthouse audience this Spring when it plays at the Music Box in April is France’s “Shall We Kiss?,” a clever dissection of romance and friendship that feels nearly like a French Woody Allen film.

Director Emmanuel Mouret has written and directed a comedy/romance with a story within a story. A man and woman spend a lovely evening



together and when the former asks for just one little kiss at the end of the night, his object of affection shares a story to illustrate that there’s no such thing as “just a kiss”.

The cautionary tale of romance that she weaves is about Judith (the fantastic Virginie Ledoyen) who agrees to kiss her platonic friend Nicolas (the director) mostly to prove the innocence of it all. Of course, the one kiss leads to deeper analysis of just what a kiss, a touch, or a night together can mean to a young couple.

“Shall We Kiss?” feels slightly forced at first, but, like a kiss itself, if you just give in to the style and the talented ensemble, it’s really difficult not to enjoy this light, clever comedy. It will be a huge hit for Francophiles and arthouse audiences. “Shall We Kiss?” plays on Saturday, March 7th at 7:30pm and again on Tuesday, March 10th, at 6:00pm.



Zift

Photo credit: Siskel Film Center

The final first-week highlight that I can definitely recommend is Bulgaria’s “Zift,” although this one is not for the faint of heart. “Zift” could be the opposite of “Shall We Kiss?,” perfectly illustrating the breadth of material you’ll see at the EU Film Festival this month.

Javor Gardev’s Tarantino-esque journey into the heart of darkness was Bulgaria’s submission for Oscar consideration this year and kind of needs to be seen to be believed. It’s a sick, dark slice of humor about a man leaving prison and stumbling back into a world of torture, hidden secrets, and random violence.

“Zift” pulls no punches, featuring copious amounts of male and female nudity, physical humor, a twisting and turning mystery, and dark, dark characters. Even the title - both a chewable resin and Bulgarian slang for “sh\*t” - warns you what you’re in for with “Zift,” but this will be a cult hit for most of the audiences willing to pay to see it. “Zift” premieres on Saturday, March 7th at 9:30pm and plays again on Thursday, March 12th at 8:15pm.

A great quartet from the first week of the 12th Annual EU Film Festival at the Siskel Film Center would consist of “I’m All Good” on the 6th, an awesomely different double feature of “Shall We Kiss?” and “Zift” on the 7th, and “Kisses” on the 8th. But maybe that’s not enough. If you’re looking for more in week one, check out one of the following, films that were either seen and not deemed worthy of a highlight or not seen in time...



**The School of the Art  
Institute of Chicago**

Siskel Film Center

Photo credit: Siskel Film Center

### **"The Beheaded Rooster," Romania, Radu Gabrea**

Saturday, March 7, 3:00 pm

Sunday, March 8, 7:30 pm

Synopsis: "Somewhere deep in Transylvania, the city fathers of a small town boast of peace, prosperity, and brotherhood. It's August 1944, and all that is about to change. Gabrea (A MAN LIKE EVA, GRUBER'S JOURNEY) focuses his story on Felix and his friends, members of an ethnic German minority, on the eve of their high school graduation party. With Romania siding with Germany in the war, then changing sides to back the Allies, plans for the all-important celebration are thrown into disarray by divided political loyalties. Meanwhile, Felix faces peril in his growing love for his only Jewish classmate. In German and Romanian with English subtitles. Beta SP courtesy of Radu Gabrea and Total TV."

Director Radu Gabrea and actress/producer Victoria Cocias will be present at both screenings for audience discussion.

### **"Wonderful and Loved by All," Sweden, Hannes Holm**

Saturday, March 7, 3:15 pm

Monday, March 9, 7:30 pm

Synopsis: "Bridget meets Bergman in this breezy chick flick based on the bestselling novel by Martina Haag, often described as Sweden's answer to Helen (Bridget Jones) Fielding. Haag herself stars as Bella, a would-be actress whose personal life is as stalled as her professional career. Then she gets her big break: a role in the Royal Dramatic Theatre's production of Twelfth Night, directed by Ingmar Bergman himself. There's one catch: the part calls for advanced acrobatic skills, which Bella totally lacks. Her love life improves, too, in the form of a hunky Danish actor, but looming ever closer is the fatal moment when she will have to perform a spectacular and dangerous stunt. In Swedish with English subtitles. 35mm print courtesy of the Swedish Film Institute."



Gruber's Journey

Photo credit: Siskel Film Center

### **"Gruber's Journey," Romania, Radu Gabrea**

Saturday, March 7, 5:15 pm

Monday, March 9, 7:45 pm

Synopsis: "A friend of Mussolini's working as a war correspondent with the German army arrives at his new post in a Romanian provincial town in the throes of a life-threatening asthma attack. With unintended irony, officials recommend consultation with the local specialist, a certain Jewish doctor. The journalist's search for the man becomes an increasingly absurd wild goose chase leading him through a maze of Third Reich bureaucracy to the heart of the final solution. Based on a true story. In Romanian with English subtitles. Beta SP video courtesy of Radu Gabrea and Total TV."

Director Radu Gabrea and actress/producer Victoria Cocias will be present at both screenings for audience discussion.

### **"Charlotte: A Royal At War," Luxembourg, Ray Tostevin**

Saturday, March 7, 5:15pm

Tuesday, March 31, 8:00pm

Synopsis: "When the Nazis invaded Luxembourg in 1940, the royal family was forced into exile, yet Grand Duchess Charlotte conspired to lead her people through the dark war years to resistance and victory by any means possible. This meticulously researched documentary tells

the intensely moving story. Hope was kept alive as all of Luxembourg listened in secret to Charlotte's weekly BBC broadcasts to the nation. With the support of President Roosevelt, the princess raised awareness of Luxembourg's plight across the U.S., partially through a significant sojourn in Chicago. In English. DigiBeta video courtesy of Grace Productions."

Producer Candice Olson will be present for audience discussion on Saturday, March 7. Producers Olson and Lynn Rothwell, and historian Curtis Roosevelt, author of "Too Close to the Sun: Growing Up in the Shadow of My Grandparents, Franklin and Eleanor," will be present for audience discussion on Tuesday, March 31.

**"Goodnight Irene," Portugal, Paolo Marinou-Blanco**

Saturday, March 7, 7:30pm

Thursday, March 12, 6:00pm

Synopsis: "A vivacious portrait painter who seems to collect misfits brings Alex, a reclusive expatriate British actor living in Lisbon, together with Bruno, an anti-social young locksmith with a strange nocturnal hobby, as rivals for her flirting friendship. One day the lady disappears without a trace and the two men take over her cluttered apartment, jealously vying with each other for clues until a road trip to Spain puts a new slant on their relationship. In English and Portuguese with English subtitles. 35mm print courtesy of Films Do Tejo II."



Eldorado

Photo credit: Siskel Film Center

**"Eldorado," Belgium, Bouli Lanners**

Saturday, March 7, 9:30 pm

Monday, March 9, 6:00 pm

Synopsis: "Belgium's recent history of black-humorous films steeped in profound absurdity is upheld in this gem of a road movie. The roads circle in on themselves in a microcosmic countryside that nevertheless seems limitless and empty when Yvan, a pudgy vintage car dealer, and Elie, the pathetic crackhead he apprehends robbing his house, take Yvan's prized ancient Chevy for a haunting spin into oblivion. In French with English subtitles. Preview courtesy of Film Movement. 35mm widescreen."

**"The Beaches of Agnes," France, Agnes Varda**

Sunday, March 8, 3:00 pm

Thursday, March 12, 6:00 pm

Synopsis: "If you open people, you'll find landscapes. If you open me, you'll find beaches," says filmmaking giant Varda in this enchanting autobiographical documentary. Using beaches as a touchstone (including childhood seaside vacations, the fishing-village location of her first film LA POINTE COURTE, and her current island home in northwestern France), the 80-year-old auteur takes a breezy, reflective "walk backwards" through her life and films, accompanied by such fellow travelers as Alexander Calder, Gerard Depardieu, Jim Morrison, Harrison Ford, Chris Marker, Jean-Luc Godard, and her late husband, Jacques Demy. In French with English subtitles. Preview courtesy of The Cinema Guild. DigiBeta video."

**"Rooster's Breakfast," Slovenia, Marko Nabersnik**

Sunday, March 8, 3:00 pm

Thursday, March 12, 8:00 pm

Synopsis: "Selected wishes come true through the back door in a bittersweet comedy with a winningly charming cast. Handsome, resilient Djuro lands in a little flyspeck of a town working for an amiable dreamer in an auto body shop. While the boss lusts after the pop star whose poster he hangs in the garage, Djuro beds the luscious wife of the local pimp. Generous helpings of black humor spice the story as the two erotic futures collide in the most unlikely way. In Slovenian with English subtitles. 35mm print courtesy of the Ministry of Public Affairs, Republic of Slovenia."

**"Days and Clouds," Italy, Silvio Soldini**

Sunday, March 8, 5:15 pm



Tuesday, March 10, 8:00 pm

Synopsis: "Silvio Soldini is best known to American audiences for his 2001 hit BREAD AND TULIPS. Here he ventures into the territory explored by such downsizing dramas as TIME OUT, THE AXE, and THE PURSUIT OF HAPPYNESS, but with a low-key lack of melodrama that is all the more affecting. A well-to-do Genoa couple has the rug pulled from under them when the husband (comedy star Albanese in an effective change of pace) is squeezed out of the company he founded. As their perks, privileges, and comforts dwindle away, they are forced to confront a harsh new world that puts their marriage to the test. In Italian with English subtitles. Preview courtesy of Film Movement. 35mm."



Fermat's Room

Photo credit: Siskel Film Center

**"Fermat's Room," Spain, Luis Piedrahita and Rodrigo Sopena**

Sunday, March 8, 5:30 pm

Tuesday, March 10, 6:15 pm

Synopsis: Your logarithm or your life! Four math whizzes are lured to a manor on a remote island. They find themselves trapped in a room whose walls are shrinking with a crushing inevitability that can be paused only by the solving of periodic brainteasers piped in via computer. Who could have concocted this diabolical trap, and why? Combining smarts and suspense, this thinking person's thriller resembles the SAW series in some respects but has a closer (and classier) pedigree in the terror-ific tales of Edgar Allan Poe. In Spanish with English subtitles. Preview courtesy of IFC Films. DigiBeta video."

**"About Water: People And Yellow Cans," Austria/Luxembourg, Udo Maurer**

Tuesday, March 10, 8:15 pm

Wednesday, March 11, 6:00 pm

Synopsis: "ABOUT WATER tells an inconvenient truth, but one that receives considerably less press than the issue of global warming. Director Maurer traverses the Third World to tell a three-part story of water: essentially, the equally disastrous plights surrounding too much, too little, and not a drop to drink. From a flooded river delta in Bangladesh to a Kazakhstan desert to the slums of Nairobi, this probing and provocative film questions the shockingly flawed stewardship of one of the earth's greatest resources. In German with English subtitles. DigiBeta video. Courtesy of the Austrian Consulate General, Chicago, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs."

**"Colorado Avenue," Finland, Claes Olsson**

Wednesday, March 11, 7:45 pm

Monday, March 16, 7:45 pm

Synopsis: "In 1905, after ten years in Colorado, a woman returns to Finland with a shady past and a thick wad of greenbacks that earns her the nickname "Dollar-Hanna" and enables the one-time maid to open a thriving general store. This sprawling, handsomely produced saga takes in the Russian occupation, World War I, and the Roaring Twenties, as Hanna's only son becomes involved in a bootlegging racket that puts him on a collision course with his iron-willed mother. In Finnish with English subtitles. 35mm widescreen print courtesy of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland."

Come back next week for week two of the 12th Annual European Union Film Festival.



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