

## Preview: The Best of the 45th Chicago International Film Festival, Week One

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 8, 2009 - 10:51am

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CHICAGO – We’ve been working our way through the schedule for the upcoming 45th Annual Chicago International Film Festival, kicking off tonight with the premiere of “Motherhood,” starring Uma Thurman, Anthony Edwards, and Minnie Driver. We’ve watched dozens of films from some that stand among the best of the year to a few that stand among the worst. We’re here to focus on the former and point out a few highlights for your movie-going weekend.

The best films of the first week of the fest include a spectacular coming-of-age story, an intense drama, a fascinating documentary, and a Russian musical. The lineup at this year’s fest may be a little light on true gems that instantly jump out from the printed schedule, but it just means you’ll have to dig a little harder. There are great films on there. Here are a few.

The top tier of film’s this weekend includes Lone Scherfig’s “An Education,” Oren Moverman’s “The Messenger,” Ruxandra Medrea Annonier and Serge Bromberg’s “Henri-Georges Clouzot’s Inferno,” and Valery Todorovsky’s “Hipsters”. They stand among the best films of the year to unspool in Chicago, outside of the film festival or within it.



“An Education”  
October 11th, 6pm

Last year, “Slumdog Millionaire” and “The Wrestler” played at the Chicago Film Festival before they became major Oscar contenders. “An Education” is one of the films from this year’s fest with Oscar written all over it. Carey Mulligan gives what will become an iconic debut performance (and possibly Oscar-winning) as a young, bright schoolgirl in London in the early ’60s. Much smarter and more mature than her age, she finds herself drawn in by a charismatic older man (Peter Sarsgaard), but “An Education” is not a traditional May-December coming-of-age tale. With a script by Nick Hornby (“High Fidelity,” “About a Boy”), it’s funny, genuine, sweet, and incredibly moving. Alfred Molina, Dominic Cooper, Olivia Williams, Sally Hawkins, and Emma Thompson also star in one of the best films of the year. Director Lone Scherfig will be in attendance.



Hipsters

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

October 9th, 6:30pm

October 10th, 6:00pm

October 11th, 12:30pm

From a film that will be a major part of the year-end conversation to one that probably won't play again in Chicago (unless it has a quick Facets, Siskel, or possibly even Music Box run down the road). See “An Education” because it's great. See “Hipsters” because it's like nothing else you'll see this year and you probably won't get the chance again soon. Like a Russian version of “West Side Story” reimagined by Jean-Pierre Jeunet (“Amelie”), “Hipsters” is a musical about Moscow life in 1955. Young Russians are infatuated with American culture, puffing up their pompadours, falling in love with jazz, and learning all the big band dance moves. A young KGB agent falls in love with someone on the other side of the counter-culture fence and a star-crossed romance ensues. The word I keep think of when it comes to “Hipsters” is vibrant. This movie is so alive that it's bursting at the seams. The festival program asks if it could be this year's “Slumdog Millionaire”. The answer is no because Russian musicals have much bigger hills to climb to popularity than Danny Boyle films, but after seeing it, the question doesn't seem that ridiculous. Director Todorovsky will be in attendance.



Henri-Georges Clouzot's Inferno

*Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival***“Henri-Georges Clouzot's Inferno”**

October 11th, 1pm

October 15th, 6pm

One of the best documentaries of the year is about the mid-'60s French masterpiece that was never meant to be. Henri-Georges Clouzot had already directed two of the most influential films of all time - “Diabolique,” “The Wages of Fear” - when he was basically given complete control and nearly unlimited budget on what would be his most ambitious film, “Inferno”. The story of an average-looking man and the jealousy that destroys his life with his stunning wife (the gorgeous Romy Schneider) would incorporate different film styles, require multiple camera teams, and take weeks. The film would never be completed and what was shot languishes in film cans, unfinished and unseen. Directors Ruxandra Medrea Annonier and Serge Bromberg not only unveil the footage that was shot but try and link it together with actors stage-reading from the screenplay to fill in the storytelling the gaps. At the same time, they tell the story behind the story - a man with his own demons of obsession making a movie about uncontrolled emotion. “Inferno” would be an amazing film if just to see what Clouzot was intending with his lost masterpiece but the documentary that details its fall is just as interesting. This is a must-see for film historians.





THE MESSENGER

The Messenger

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

October 10th, 8pm (\$25)

October 11th, 7:30pm

It appears that 2009 was the year that enough time had passed that interesting films could be made about the Iraq War. After years of films that ranged from just bad to downright insufferable, 2009 has given us an amazing film about being in country (“The Hurt Locker”) and a great one about the return home in “The Messenger”. Ben Foster gives the best performance of his career as Will Montgomery, a troubled young man just returned from the front lines without much to hold on to in the States. With three months to serve, he is given one of the most emotionally devastating jobs imaginable, one of the two men who tell the “NOK” (next of kin) when their relative has died in combat. Co-starring Woody Harrelson, who also gives one of the best performances of his career,” The Messenger is a film that is hard to watch and even harder to shake. The sad eyes of its characters linger with you and the film serves as a better reminder of the true cost of war than any in a very long time. Star Ben Foster and director Oren Moverman will be in attendance at the screening on the 10th.

Check out page two for the second tier of week one highlights.

Just under the quartet of most highly recommended films from week one lies a half-dozen films that deserve to play to a full audience this weekend.



Cropsey

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

October 9th, 11pm

October 11th, 5:30pm

October 17th, 10:45pm



Like “Capturing the Friedmans” meets “48 Hours Mystery,” the very good “Cropsey” is about two filmmakers investigating an urban legend of their own past and discovering that it was shockingly, disturbingly true. The directors, who both grew up on Staten Island, heard stories of a child-snatching escaped mental patient that roamed the woods and the underground tunnels of the abandoned psychiatric hospital. He reportedly stole children who went missing in the community. This absolutely chilling documentary reveals that the stories were possibly true. The directors investigate several missing children stories, investigate the possible scenes of the crime, and potentially discover a world of unbelievable horror and brutality. “Cropsey” sometimes plays like something that could run on television, but true crime fans shouldn’t miss it.



Girl on the Train

*Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival***“Girl on the Train”**

October 9th, 5pm

October 10th, 5:30pm

October 11th, 12:45pm

The beloved director Andre Techine brings his interesting “Girl on the Train” to this year’s fest. This drama can be read as a commentary on a generation longing for attention and sympathy or merely as a character study about a little girl truly lost. Either way, “Girl on the Train” is strong dramatic filmmaking with excellent performances and intriguing ideas. Emilie Dequenne (“Rosetta”) stars as Jeanne, a freewheeling 22-year-old with a mysterious boyfriend and a penchant for telling lies. She’s right on the cusp of deciding where her life will go with a potential job with a prestigious attorney (the great Michel Blanc) courtesy of her mother (Catherine Deneuve) or a life of cons and seedy behavior with her new boy toy. But “Girl on the Train” is not a traditional coming-of-age story. Jeanne tells an amazing lie, one from which there is no adequate apology. Francophiles should definitely put “Girl on the Train” on their schedule and if you’re not a French film fan, you may want to take a look. Andre Techine will be in attendance.



Red Cliff

*Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival***“Red Cliff”**

October 9th, 7:30pm

October 10th, 2:30pm

John Woo is back. The legendary director has made one of the most ambitious and successful films in the history of China. Well, he made two. The two-part “Red Cliff” has been merged into one version and brought to the festival and the result is a bit mixed but certainly



impossible to dismiss completely. Based on the classic Chinese novel “Romance of the Three Kingdoms,” “Red Cliff” tells the story of the scandals, spies, and romance surrounding the epic battle that signaled the end of the third-century Han Dynasty. With hundreds of cast members and amazing battle sequences, “Red Cliff” is a beautiful film to look at. The truncated storytelling can make it hard to follow but it’s never hard to look at. John Woo will be in attendance.



House of the Devil

*Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival***“House of the Devil”**

October 9th, 11pm

October 10th, 11:15pm

October 18th, 9:30pm

Director Ti West brings the most unique horror film to the festival, the '80s reject “House of the Devil”. Well, it’s not really an '80s reject, but West’s slow-burn horror entry plays like a long lost Tobe Hooper film from 1980 or 1981. From the font of the opening credits to the cheesy music, “House of the Devil” isn’t set IN the early '80s as much as it’s set in the films of that era. A cute college girl takes a babysitting gig at a creaky country house lorded over by a creepy old couple with big plans to celebrate the night’s lunar eclipse. Desperate for cash, she agrees to stay even after she finds out there’s no baby. With a great small turn by Tom Noonan, “House of the Devil” is a film in love with the slow burn, dragging out the suspense until all hell breaks loose. Literally. Fans of the era and of drawn-out horror should take a look. Director Ti West will be in attendance.



Women in Trouble

*Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival***“Women in Trouble”**

October 10th, 1:45pm  
October 16th, 8pm  
October 17th, 7pm

Director Sebastian Gutierrez has made a few reviled films, including the controversial “Snakes on a Plane,” so his attendance at the fest may come as something of a surprise. You also don’t usually see films SO heavy with star power or with such obvious distribution deals already in place. But a few minutes into “Women in Trouble,” you’ll see why the film was chosen. It’s far from perfect, but “Women in Trouble” represents a drastically creative left turn for Gutierrez, something closer to Lynch than anything he’s done before. Actually, “WIT” often plays like a twisted version of “Sin City” meets “Short Cuts”. The stunning Carla Gugino plays one of the title characters, a porn star who discovers she’s pregnant. Hers is only one story that intertwines with nine other female characters (including Connie Britton, Marley Shelton, Emmanuelle Chriqui, and more). Josh Brolin and Simon Baker also star in this very unusual film that is sure to find a devoted cult following. I think the set-up is much stronger than the follow-through and the end is unsatisfying, but the excellent cast alone is reason to see “Women in Trouble” and the confident film hints at potentially great things to come from Gutierrez. Sebastian Gutierrez will be in attendance.



Mother

Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival

“Mother”

October 9th, 9:30pm  
October 11th, 8:45pm  
October 15th, 3:30pm

We’ve saved possibly the best for last. Why possibly? Because we haven’t see the damn thing. For some reason, Bong Joon-Ho’s festival favorite “Mother,” South Korea’s choice for the Academy for Best Foreign Language Film (over the highly acclaimed “Thirst” from Chan-wook Park”) was one of the very, very few films this year unavailable on screener and un-screened. The synopsis reads: “Hye-ja is a single mom to her naïve and dependent adult son, Do-joon. When a young girl is found dead, Do-joon is accused of murder. With an inefficient lawyer and an apathetic police force as her only allies, Hye-ja is forced to take justice into her own hands. Part thriller, part family drama, Bong Joon-Ho’s (The Host, Memories of Murder) latest is South Korea’s entry for the best foreign-language Oscar®.” Why include it if we haven’t seen it? Because we’ve seen “The Host” and “Memories of Murder,” two truly excellent films. Anything Bong Joon-Ho does is worth a look. We’ll see you there this weekend at “Mother” or any of these other great choices for week of the Chicago International Film Festival. Bong Joon-Ho will be in attendance.

Come back on October 14th, 2009 for a look at week two and stay tuned to HollywoodChicago.com for consistent CIFF coverage, including red carpet photos of Uma Thurman from tonight’s premiere, and interviews with Willem Dafoe, John Woo, Ti West, Ben Foster, and more.



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