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PREVIEW

Minneapolis-St. Paul International Film Festival



By Christopher Bahn April 11, 2012

Sure, taking a trip around the world sounds awesome, but there are also many potential hassles: losing your passport, drinking strange water, and maybe even being kidnapped by pirates. Better to let the world come to you, as it does every spring with the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Film Festival, an always-reliable showcase of not-often-seen indie films and foreign cinematic gems. Opening with the hit French buddy comedy *The Intouchables* on April 12, the festival will show more than 250 films from 60 countries through May 3. The festival will also offer plenty of chances to hobnob with visiting filmmakers at screenings, parties, and other events celebrating the 50th anniversary of the fest's parent organization, the Film Society Of Minneapolis-St. Paul. All films screen at the St. Anthony Main Theatre; for a complete, up-to-date schedule, visit the festival's [website](#). Here's a taste of what this year's festival has to offer.

Sleepless Night

France's reputation for terrifically taut, propulsive noir thrillers gets another boost with Frederic Jardin's excellent *Sleepless Night*. The film is a masterful blend of relentless action and twisty plotting that's already slated for an American remake. *Sleepless Night* hits the ground running with a

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breathless sequence involving shady cop Tomer Sisley, who rips off a duffel bag of cocaine from drug kingpin Serge Riaboukine only to bungle the job and wind up with his son kidnapped and held for ransom in exchange for the powder. The bulk of the film weaves its way around Riaboukine's mazelike viper's nest of a nightclub, as Sisley plays a cat-and-mouse game against a deadly array of competing cops and criminals, not knowing whom he can trust. He does this all while desperately struggling against a couple of other little complications like the deep stab wound in his belly, and the inconvenient fact that he's lost the cocaine.

Juan Of The Dead

Bloody visions of apocalypse and morbidly cutting humor are the hallmarks of almost every great zombie movie, going all the way back to the original *Night Of The Living Dead*, and the Cuban/Spanish production *Juan Of The Dead* deserves a place of honor among the undead horde. Writer-director Alejandro Brugués gives the genre a fresh twist with an energetic mix of broad, bawdy jokes and surprisingly acidic Third World political satire—suggesting that if a zombie plague devastated Havana, it wouldn't necessarily be worse than anything else Cubans have had to suffer for the last 50 years. But although a Romero-esque rage bubbles underneath the film, *Juan* has a tone that's usually more in the buddy-comedy vein of rhyming forebear *Shaun Of The Dead*, as layabout drunk fisherman and petty criminal Juan (Alexis Diaz de Villegas) uses the end of the world as a money-making opportunity, starting an anti-zombie kill-crew business with the memorable slogan "We kill your beloved ones!" Brugués clearly knows and loves the genre, filling *Juan* with knowing winks to everything from Lucio Fulci's shark versus undead fight in *Zombi 2* to a shout-out to the best line from Peter Jackson's *Braindead*.



Rent-A-Cat

This offbeat, leisurely paced comedy by Japanese director Naoko Ogigami blends the endearing

quirkiness of *Amélie* and of Hayao Miyazaki’s animated features with the Internet’s most potent weapon—kitten videos. The plot is almost absurdly simple: A lonely young woman named Sayoko (Mikako Ichikawa) rents cats to other lonely, lost souls. It’s repetitious, but purposefully so—the cyclical patterns of Sayoko’s day are also a major source of *Rent-A-Cat*’s humor and charm. Sayoko wanders the riverside with a cart full of endearingly docile felines while shouting “Cats for rent!” through a megaphone. She meets clients whose life needs brightening—a widow, a salaryman separated from his family, an unfulfilled office worker, and a young man who knows secrets about Sayoko’s past. She matches them with the right kitten for the job, then returns home to brood on her love life and endure demeaning insults from the old woman next door (played by male actor Katsuya Kobayashi as an over-the-top comic harridan in the Monty Python mode). *Rent-A-Cat* takes unabashed pleasure in the cuteness of its furry critters, and though an undercurrent of sadness keeps the adorability quotient from turning saccharine, its message is neither hard to figure out or to argue with: Life’s better when shared with a cat.



Andrew Bird: Fever Year

The intricate beauty of **Andrew Bird**’s music, with its layers of whistles, violin, and looped instrumentation is reason enough to see director Xan Aranda’s chronicle of a tumultuous year on tour with the Chicago indie rock composer. Fans will also love the behind-the-scenes look at Bird’s artistic process, endlessly improvising and reworking his material with thoughtful inventiveness and an intensity that suggests he’s often swept away by the melodies in his head. Bird himself remains enigmatic—you get the impression that he’s so focused on his music that it overshadows everything else. But *Fever Year* pulls back the curtain with a few peeks into his personal life, including a look at the converted barn-studio on his family’s farm and backstage moments with collaborators including

Annie Clark of **St. Vincent** and his all-Minneapolis backing band of Martin Dosh, Jeremy Ylvisaker, and Michael Lewis.

Bert Stern: Original Madman

As one of the hot new talents to emerge in the early 1960s, fashion photographer Bert Stern helped create the era that *Mad Men*'s Don Draper celebrates today, which the title of this documentary by Stern's longtime muse Shannah Laumeister makes sure we don't miss. Stern himself doesn't need Draper's reflected glory to be a compelling figure—his talent helped change the advertising industry, and his story weaves around a who's-who of Kennedy-era celebrity, including Stanley Kubrick, Elizabeth Taylor, and not least Marilyn Monroe, whose last series of nude photos before her death were shot by Stern. Passionate about his work and a little too passionate about his love life, his legacy includes a trail of wrecked marriages but also hundreds of iconic images, and Laumeister's film captures both Stern's artistic heights and the price he paid to get there.



King For Two Days

Dave King brings a wealth of authority and creative force to every band he drums with—and there have been zillions of them, most notably jazz trios **Happy Apple** and **The Bad Plus**—but it's fair to say that he's not a bandleader. That's because "leading" is the antithesis of what King is all about. What he loves instead is a musical conversation, a collective in-the-moment approach to music that's informed his whole career. It's a view that the ensemble is more important than the individual, and that music is meant to be shared between the players as well as with the audience. Director Noah Hutton (son of actors Timothy Hutton and Debra Winger) captures that collaborative spirit in *King For Two Days*, covering the drummer's 2010 Walker Art Center five-band concert series in which King jammed with a whirlwind of collaborators including his Apple/Plus compatriots and a core of

prominent jazz players including cellist Hank Roberts, saxophonist Tim Berne, and keyboardist Craig Taborn.

Other good bets

- ***Trip To The Moon and The Extraordinary Voyage***: George Melies, the stage-magician-turned-director celebrated in Martin Scorsese's recent *Hugo*, was one of the first true geniuses of moviemaking, finding new kinds of wizardry in editing and special effects that still dazzle more than a century later. His classic 16-minute silent *Trip To The Moon* is touring the festival circuit in lavish style, with a new soundtrack by French electronica duo **Air** and a companion documentary featuring Scorsese and others inspired by Melies' magic.

- ***Of Dolls And Murder***: John Waters narrates this Minnesota-made documentary about Frances Glessner Lee, a grandmother in the 1930 and '40s who helped homicide investigators by building tiny replicas of crime scenes—which she called the nutshell studies of unexplained death—out of dollhouse furniture.



- ***God Bless America***: Directed by Bobcat Goldthwait, this biting dark satire sounds something like *Breaking Bad* as John Waters might have imagined it, following an unemployed, terminally ill loser (Joel Murray) who finally snaps and goes on a cross-country rampage to eliminate America's worst problem: Irritating no-talent reality TV stars.

- ***I'm Carolyn Parker: The Good, The Mad, And The Beautiful***: Jonathan Demme's documentary captures the hard-won rebirth of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina through the eyes

of a Lower Ninth Ward matriarch who was last to leave before the storm and the first to move back to rebuild. Indomitable and ebullient despite everything—even before Katrina, her husband had been murdered in a bar fight—Parker’s enthusiasm for life is inspiring.



- ***The Sound Of Small Things***: Isolation and lack of communication spell trouble for two young newlyweds in Minneapolis director Peter McLarnan’s mumblecore-style indie drama, which uses non-actors and improvised dialogue to tell the story of a musician and a hearing-impaired woman whose lives are drifting apart just when they’re supposed to be growing closer.

- ***Keyhole***: Canadian director Guy Maddin (*My Winnipeg*) continues his string of surreal, bizarrely psychosexual David Lynchian experimental dramas with this gangsters-and-ghosts story about a gun-toting criminal (Jason Patric) who holes up with his combative crew inside the decrepit, abandoned house where he grew up, which is now haunted by the spirits of his wife (Isabella Rossellini) and her vengeful father.

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