

## **Africa United**

**Dir: Debs Gardner-Paterson      UK, South Africa      87 mins      Cert: 12A**

**Starring: Eriya Ndayambaje, Roger Nsengiyumva, Sanyu Joanita Kintu, Yves Dusenge, Sherrie Silver**

**Language: English**

**Formats: 35mm**

**Available: January**

On the surface, youngsters Dudu and Fabrice are an unlikely couple of friends. Both live in Rwanda and love football, but Fabrice comes from a privileged background and is destined for great things, whereas Dudu lives on the streets hustling to make a living. When a FIFA rep recognises Fabrice's football skills, he invites him to the city to take part in trials for Africa United, linking in with the World Cup in South Africa. Dudu's poor planning lands them in Congo, where they are threatened with a bleak future within the child army. A daring escape is followed by a new plan: a 3,000 mile trip to the Finals themselves, a journey that - if successful - will take them through seven countries and assorted dangers en route.

It's easy to understand why comparisons have been made with *Slumdog Millionaire*, in that *Africa United* has an uplifting story and isn't afraid of depicting hardship as much as it revels in an infectious sense of fun and joy. Either way, this is an opportunity to see Africa in a different light than we are used to, and is a beautifully made picture that is destined to become a classic in its own right for its brave, honest and humane sensibility that comes straight from the heart. - *Justin Johnson / BFI British Film Festival 2010*

## **Alamar**

**Dir: Pedro Gonzalez-Rubio Mexico      2009      73 mins      Cert: Club**

**Starring: Jorge Machado, Natan Machado Palombini, Nestór Marín, Roberta Palombini**

**Language: Spanish**

**Formats: Digital & 35mm**

**Available: February**

Unusual film in an unusual location: the Mexican coral reef Banco Chinchorro, where grandfather, father and five-year-old son spend their days fishing for crabs and snappers. In a surging rhythm, *Alamar* shows that nature does not always form a stark contrast to cultivated humans.

In *Alamar* there is a striking role for the crab, the barracuda and the caiman, who have all found their habitat together with Mexican fisherman in Banco Chinchorro, the richest coral reef in Mexico. This cross-genre film - mixing documentary and fiction - rocks gently to the rhythm of the sea where the fishermen and the animals spend their days. Fishermen and prey live with each other on this coral reef, the second largest in the world, which has an intact ecosystem.

One of the fishermen receives a visit from his son Jorge, who is recently divorced, and his five-year-old grandson. Building is not allowed on the islands of this nature reserve, so they live several meters off shore in huts on stilts. Every day, they dive for snappers, drink cups of coffee and maintain the fishing boat. Their life looks ideal: the days are made up of eating fish by the sea where it is caught, with wet hair from diving. Although

a farewell is approaching between Jorge and his son, who is returning with his mother to Italy, that sentiment is not exploited. The contrast between this remote spot and Rome, between the wilds of nature and human civilisation, is more subtle than in many nature films. On Banco Chinchorro, humans are not the dominant species and humility graces the characters. González-Rubio made his debut in 2005 with *Toro negro*, a rough portrait of a stuntman annex bullfighter. - *Rotterdam International Film Festival 2010*

*Winner - FIPRESCI Prize, Toulouse Latin America Film Festival*

### **All Good Children**

---

**Dir: Alicia Duffy**      **UK, Ireland**      **2009**      **81 mins**      **Cert: TBC**  
**Starring: David Brazil, Kate Duchene, Martin Firket**  
**Language: English**  
**Format: 35mm**  
**Available: January**

The debut feature from the British film-maker Alicia Duffy, which premiered in the directors' fortnight, is a disquieting tale of obsession and violence in the French countryside. Duffy's movie has the trance-like evocation of mood and detail to be found in the work of Lynne Ramsay and Duane Hopkins; it is a parable for the emotional discrepancy between male and female adolescence, for the loneliness of boyhood and perhaps, at a deeper level, the combustible proximity of Ireland and England.

Jack Gleeson plays Dara, an introverted teenage boy from the Irish Republic who, along with his older brother Eoin (David Brazil), has been brought to France one long, hot summer by their French father after the death of their mother. Rambling in the local woodland, Dara comes across a derelict mansion that has been bought by a well-off English family; the couple have a daughter, Bella (Imogen Jones) who befriends the shy, thoughtful Dara, and with her bewitchingly spoiled, flirtatious manner encourages Dara to fall painfully in love with her. She has a very English sense of casual entitlement and a patrician incomprehension of her new friend's feelings.

Gleeson's sky-blue eyes have an unearthly look, suggesting eerie depths, and his face is a picture of pain, wonderment, frustration and resentment. The violence that finishes the story is not exactly predictable, but it does take the movie pretty close to a certain sort of arthouse cliché: a dreamy eroticism and languor that must be snapped shut with a violent act. But Duffy's intelligence makes this film a success; with daring, she holds on to the feeling and texture of the visual scene. - *Peter Bradshaw / The Guardian*

### **Another Year**

---

**Dir: Mike Leigh**      **UK**      **2010**      **129 mins**      **Cert: 12A**  
**Starring: Jim Broadbent, Lesley Manville, Ruth Sheen, Peter Wight, Oliver Maltman, David Bradley, Karina Fernandez, Martin Savage**  
**Language: English**  
**Formats: Digital & 35mm**  
**Available: February**

*Another Year* marks a change of sorts in Mike Leigh's illustrious and distinctive career. His work has always been based around a wicked and acute sense of social observation

that employs an unforgiving gaze to explore the neuroses of families or individuals. At the centre of many of his films is a restless protagonist, angrily flailing against the world. In *Another Year* – a wry and affectionate character study of a mostly middle-aged group of people– Leigh stands this structure on its head, focusing on a happily married, completely grounded couple who soak up the frustrations and unhappiness of friends and family alike.

Husband and wife Tom and Gerri (perhaps cheekily named after the cartoon characters) lead blissful lives. They are deeply content in their relationship and satisfied with their careers; Tom (Jim Broadbent) is a geological engineer and Gerri (Ruth Sheen) a counselor. They are secure people whose outlet is the small market garden that they tend with loving care, come rain or shine.

Dividing his film into chapters based on the four seasons, Leigh structures his film around a series of encounters that feel almost Rohmerian. Friends and family drop by, occupy centre stage as they unload their problems and then exit, only to have their stories picked up as the film moves into another season. Humour is never far from the surface of any Mike Leigh film, but the mood here is more complex, revolving around Tom and Gerri's close friend, the fidgety and flighty Mary (Lesley Manville), a beauty past her prime who is still on the hunt for a mate. When her eyes settle on Gerri's unsuspecting grown-up son, the story twists and turns in surprising odd and directions.

*Another Year* is a deeply absorbing look at a couple who seem to have gotten it right and a bunch of people who haven't – and a son that could go either way! Leigh's grip on the material is unfailingly confident and his actors all deliver highly charged and beautifully shaded performances. - *Piers Handling / Toronto International Film Festival*

### **Ballroom, The**

*Chega de Saudade*

**Dir:** Laís Bodanzky      **Brazil**      **2007**      **95 mins**      **Cert: Club**  
**Starring:** Betty Faria, Cassia Kiss, Leonardo Villar, Maria Flor, Stepan Nercessian, Tonia Carrero  
**Language:** Portuguese  
**Formats:** 35mm only  
**Available:** January

A diverse cast of characters crosses paths on the floor of a beautiful old São Paulo dance hall, and the experiences of many different lifetimes play out against each other during one eventful night. Director Laís Bodanzky has drawn comparisons to Robert Altman for her handling of a fine ensemble cast and their overlapping storylines, while the other star of the show—the film's soundtrack—features performances by singers Elza Soares and Marku Ribas. - *AFI Latin American Film Festival 2009*

The week's hidden gem is at the ICA, a lovely Brazilian film set during a single night in a São Paulo dancehall, from doors opening to lights out. The music is superb – singer Elza Soares plays a local cabaret star – and the camerawork by Walter Carvalho thrilling, proving you don't need 3-D for a fully immersive experience. We get right in among the dancers and their various stories of ageing, loneliness, love and dancing. - *Jason Solomons / The Observer*

Winner - Audience Award, Best Director, Best Screenplay, Brasilia Film Festival 2007

### **Beautiful Kate**

---

**Dir: Rachel Ward                      Australia                      2009                      101 mins                      Cert: Club**

**Starring: Rachel Griffiths, Bryan Brown, Sophie Lowe, Maeve Dermody, Ben**

**Mendelsohn, Scott O'Donnell, Josh McFarlane, Robbie Clissold**

**Language: English**

**Formats: 35mm only**

**Available: January**

Wholly uncompromising but elegant with it, *Beautiful Kate* marks a shift into feature directing for actress Rachel Ward, whose script grafts Newton Thornburg's American-set novel seamlessly onto the grizzled dustiness of rural South Australia. The results are disquieting, marking one of the most interesting films to come out of Australia for some time.

The set-up is not the thing of note here. Prodigal son Ned Kendall (Ben Mendelsohn) returns to his Flinders Ranges family home during what are assumed to be the last few months of his father Bruce's (Bryan Brown) life. Ned is a writer with a girlfriend half his age (Maeve Dermody) who's left the nursing of his cantankerous father to his younger sister Sally (Rachel Griffiths) so he can escape the confines of this familial space.

The Kendall's home is oppressively hot and bright by day, and flooded with inky darkness by night, seemingly stuck in the middle of nowhere. As Ned returns, so do memories of his youth growing up in the house alongside his twin sister, the titular Kate, and older brother, who both died during his teens. Locating the root of Ned's fractious relationship with Bruce in these emotionally fraught formative years, the story oscillates between past and present, dreamily but ruthlessly uncovering the truth of those years.

*Beautiful Kate* confronts some truly dysfunctional family issues and does so with a brave lack of moral judgement, skilfully padding out its characters with some mean and immoral traits but never letting them veer into the purely dislikeable. In fact, despite some shocking behaviour, the film's characters have a heightened humanity, which is mainly down to the exceptional cast.

As is often the case with directors who've spent time in front of the camera, Ward elicits multi-faceted performances from her cast, especially Mendelsohn, whose past and present is infused with an eroticism that's vulnerable and threatening by turns. His Ned is a man on the run from a confusion entrenched in his youth that refuses to be exorcised, even when thrashed out between father and son in the final few days they have left together. - *Little White Lies Magazine*

## **Buried**

---

**Dir: Rodrigo Cortés      USA      2010      95 mins      Cert: 15A**

**Starring: Ryan Reynolds, Ivana Miño, Stephen Tobolowsky, Samantha Mathis, Dianne Farr, Rob Patterson**

**Language: English**

**Formats: Digital & 35mm**

**Available: January**

If you've glanced across the credits for this excellent high- concept thriller, you will – aware the film concerns Ryan Reynolds buried in a box – have noted that the cast list runs to about six or seven people.

So Rodrigo Cortés's film is not quite so daring, after all. He has, you deduce, felt compelled to include footage of worried relatives and frantic rescue workers.

Not a bit of it. Those other actors contribute only their voices. Making Hitchcock's *Lifeboat* seem like *The Big Country*, causing *Phone Booth* to appear as expansive as *Gone With the Wind*, *Buried* takes place entirely within the confines of a small wooden box.

Reynolds plays a truck driver, employed in Iraq, who wakes up to find himself sheathed in darkness and almost incapable of movement. Buried several feet beneath the desert, he has only a telephone, a lighter and a pencil for company. He tries phoning home, but nobody is in. He phones the State Department and gets put on hold.

In between juggling unhelpful officials and screaming despairingly at the coffin lid, he receives a phone call from his kidnappers. They want him to make a video with the phone and allow them to post it on the internet.

As in *Lifeboat*, much of the tension hangs around the viewer's worry that the film-makers may quickly exhaust the limited possibilities offered by their insanely restrictive scenario. Rather brilliantly, by giving Reynolds (who proves his chops with a performance run through with tangible desperation) a series of increasingly frustrating telephonic options, Cortés infuses the piece with a surprising array of tones and moods.

A deadly intruder provides material for a fine close-quarters (what else?) action sequence. Conversations between the hero and his wife are properly moving. Reynolds's efforts to communicate with uninterested receptionists half-a-world away are blackly hilarious.

*Buried* even manages to offer some useful, mature commentary on the conflict in Iraq. It really is astonishing how much you can fit into a seven-foot-long box. - *Donald Clarke / The Irish Times*

## **Chico and Rita**

*Chico y Rita*

**Dir: Fernando Trueba & Javier Mariscal Spain 2010 94 mins**

**Cert: Club**

**Starring: Limara Meneses, Eman Xor Oña and Mario Guerra**

**Language: Spanish**

**Formats: Digital & 35mm**

**Available: February**

*Chico & Rita*, is an epic, animated love story set within the splendour of Cuban culture, history and music. Beginning in 1948, *Chico & Rita* tells a tale of passion and creation worthy of a bolero, the Latin America ballad of anguish and heartache.

Chico is a promising young pianist who spends his evenings taking American girls to Havana's latest hotspots with his friend Ramon. He discovers Rita's exquisite voice at a nightclub and the two quickly become enamoured. Their new love is interrupted the following morning by Chico's girlfriend, Juana, and Rita flees, vowing never to see him again. Luckily, Ramon convinces Rita to enter a radio contest with Chico and the two quickly resume their love affair by beginning a musical partnership.

When an American producer, Ron, approaches Rita with a contract and an offer to travel to New York. A misunderstanding with Chico leads Rita to accept the offer. Soon afterward, Chico sells his piano and follows her with Ramon in tow. Rita, now Rita LaBelle, is becoming increasingly famous, and Ron, increasingly possessive. With a little help from Ramon and the Cuban Revolution, Ron succeeds in keeping the lovers apart

Old Havana is recreated with masterful fervour; the filmmakers use warm, bright hues to capture the charms and vibrancy of this captivating city. The palette shifts towards a monochromatic tone when the narrative moves to New York, and the result is a striking contrast between differing cultures.

The film is also rife with jazz history. Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie are seen playing the clubs and the story of Chano Pozo, one of the first Latin percussionists to grace a major American jazz band, is fluidly interwoven with the narrative. *Chico and Rita* is a tribute to Trueba and Mariscal's long love affair with the music, culture and people of Cuba. - *Diana Sanchez / Toronto International Film Festival 2010*

## **Enter The Void**

**Dir: Gaspard Noé**

**France**

**2009**

**135 mins**

**Cert: Club**

**Starring: Nathaniel Brown, Paz de la Huerta, Cyril Roy**

**Language: English**

**Formats: 35mm & Digital**

**Available: January**

It has been eight years now since Gaspar Noé released his notorious rape-revenge film *Irréversible*, an ultra-violent, ultra-extreme movie that effortlessly exceeded in shock value anything, by anyone, at any time. I myself, having admired his previous feature, *Seul Contre Tous*, reacted fiercely against it as a piece of macho provocation. Rereading my review now, I find none of its points wrong exactly, but I have to concede the possibility that I was just freaked out in precisely the way Noé intended. Having staggered out of the auditorium, my eyeballs still vibrating from the director's trademark sado-stroboscopic white light display, I may well have succumbed to a convulsion of

disapproval.

*Enter the Void* is, in its way, just as provocative, just as extreme, just as mad, just as much of an outrageous ordeal: it arrives here slightly re-edited from the version first shown at Cannes. But despite its querulous melodrama and crazed Freudian pedantries, it has a human purpose the previous film lacked, and its sheer deranged brilliance is magnificent. This is a grandiose hallucinatory journey into, and out of, hell: drugged, neon-lit and with a fully realised nightmare-porn aesthetic that has to be seen to be believed. Love him or loathe him – and I've done both in my time – Gaspar Noé is one of the very few directors who is actually trying to do something new with the medium, battling at the boundaries of the possible. It has obvious debts, but *Enter the Void* is utterly original film-making, and Noé is a virtuoso of camera movement.

We get the classic Noé tropes: throbbing ambient soundscape, murky lighting design bursting into unwatchable vortices of dazzling, flickering light, explicit sex and violence, colossal sans-serif lettering for the title- and end-credits. This film, however, has a new motif: what we see is purely the point of view of its leading figure; we watch everything through his eyes. He is a small-time drug-dealer called Oscar (Nathaniel Brown). *Irréversible* had a horrific club called the Rectum; this one has a bar in Tokyo called the Void, where Oscar is shot by cops. His spirit hovers over the city, an unquiet ghost unable or unwilling to leave, watching over his sister Linda (Paz de la Huerta), a pole-dancer now utterly alone in the world.

This brother and sister have a strange and tragic story, which might in other circumstances have interested authors like Ruth Rendell or PD James: orphaned as kids, they were fostered separately, and on becoming 18, the older child Oscar apparently enters into some modest trust-fund inheritance which enables him to travel to Tokyo – a long-lost childhood longing for exotic travel – and later makes enough through drugs to bring his adored sister over, and live with her in an atmosphere of incestuous yearning.

He revisits in horrified anguish, primal scenes from his childhood, including the death of his parents in a car wreck, which has seeded in Oscar this obsessive closeness to his sister and a sexualised longing for his lost mother, which finds expression in an affair with an older woman in Tokyo. Through some bizarre karmic influence, Oscar's spirit now sets out to part Linda from her current boyfriend, sinister tough guy Mario (Masato Tanno) and to get her together with his friend Alex (Cyril Roy), an amiable, dishevelled artist and the nearest thing this film has to a normal, sympathetic human being.

Oscar's dead-man floating-eye view gives us a ringside seat at scenes of unending horror, violence, squalor and pain. Yet there is a kind of barking mad spiritual dimension in Noé's film. *Enter the Void* is about life after death. Specifically, it's about the life after death that troubles all of us atheists and rationalists most of all: the life after death that we all believe in – other people's lives in this busy and unhappy world carrying on heedlessly after we are dead.

The POV-style changes as the film progresses. When Oscar is still alive, we see strictly what he sees, and the view is periodically impeded by his blinks – as the initial scenes continued, I found my own blink-rate coming into synch with Oscar's, and so this became invisible. His thinking mind is represented by a whispered, paranoid soliloquy. After his death, this falls silent and he sees the past partly impeded by the back of his own head.

Then, this disappears as his spirit floats everywhere and anywhere: death as the ultimate out-of-body experience. It's like a psychedelic innerspace version of Kubrick's *2001*, and the film even finally presumes to offer a version of the star-child rebirth. Like Kubrick, incidentally, Noé has a fondness for trad classical – he brings Air on a G String on to the soundtrack. As for the overhead visions of violence and claustrophobic horror, they are clearly influenced by the climactic sequence of Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*.

Noé's most startling achievement in *Enter the Void* is his vision of Tokyo: he reimagines it as a branching, crystalline network of neon laid out starkly against the night sky. The city is never seen in daytime. It is not real, but has merged with an illusory vision of the neon-model created by an artist friend of Victor's, and it is also an architecturalised version of those spiralling, kaleidoscopic snake-shapes that Oscar sees while tripping.

Some may find *Enter the Void* detestable and objectionable, though if they affect to find it "boring" I will not believe them. For all its hysterical excess, this beautiful, delirious, shocking film is the one offering us that lightning bolt of terror or inspiration that we hope for at the cinema. - *Peter Bradshaw / The Guardian*

**Girl Who Kicked The Hornet's Nest, The** *Luftslottet som Sprängdes*  
**Dir: Daniel Alfredson**      **Sweden**      **2009**      **148 mins**      **Cert: 16**  
**Starring: Noomi Rapace, Michael Nyqvist, Annika Hallin, Per Oscarsson, Lena Endre, Peter Andersson**  
**Language: Swedish**  
**Formats: Digital & 35mm**  
**Available: February**

Europe's most famous punk hacker-cum-avenging angel, Lisbeth Salander, is put on trial in *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*, based on the closing installment of the spiky Millennium trilogy by late writer Stieg Larsson. Originally made for TV and shot back-to-back by Swedish helmer Daniel Alfredson with part two, *The Girl Who Played With Fire*, this bland-looking Scandi crimer benefits from edge-of-your-seat pacing despite a conspicuous lack of action.

Alfredson weaves several short flashbacks to "*Fire*" into the opening scenes of "*Hornet's Nest*" and immediately picks up where he left off, with a bloody Salander (Noomi Rapace) being admitted to a hospital. The police want to question her about the shooting that ended "*Fire*," but her kind doctor (Aksel Morisse) keeps away the law enforcers -- as well as the pushy psychiatrist (Anders Ahlbom) who treated (or rather, maltreated) her as a child -- until she's recovered from a bullet wound.

Because she's still a possible suspect in a multiple-murder case and a shootout, Lisbeth is confined to her hospital room. But she's aided from the outside by Millennium journalist Mikael Blomkvist (Michael Nyqvist), who still believes in her innocence. Blomkvist asks his lawyer sister, Annika (Annika Hallin), to help Salander prepare a defense, though initially, the socially awkward punkette is wary of her help.

Many men at various levels of society -- not all of them aware of each other -- have an interest in silencing Salander, and the movie cuts to their conspiratorial meetings and actions throughout. These characters are even less developed than they are in the

books, but screenwriter Ulf Rydberg and editor Hakan Karlsson (both new to the crew, to the pic's clear benefit) effectively convey the sense that Salander is being attacked and schemed against from all sides by testosterone-driven monsters with more than a few skeletons in their closets.

All-around excellent work by a host of Swedish character actors is a further boost in moving these villains away from caricature.

After spending much of "*Fire*" apart, Salander and Blomkvist finally have some scenes together again, and their odd chemistry, such a key element of the first film, comes through strongly again, thanks to Rapace's and Nyqvist's performances. Hallin also impresses, and her scenes alongside Rapace during the trial are among the best in the trilogy.

Like the other two segments, the film is almost all talk, with few sequences of real thriller action. (In fact, when these do occur, they feel perfunctory.) The near-constant sense of tension derives more from the way the film cuts between scenes and cleverly allows the audience to root for the characters by providing hints of what's to come. - *Boyd Van Hoeij / Variety*

### **Involuntary**

*De Ofrevilliga*

---

**Dir:** Ruben Östlund      **Sweden**      **2008**      **101 mins**      **Cert: Club**  
**Starring:** Leif Edlund, Maria Lundqvist, Olle Lijas, Cecilia Milocco, Villmar Björkman, Lola Ewerlund  
**Language:** Swedish  
**Formats:** Digital & 35mm  
**Available:** February

Ruben Östlund's second feature dissects the Swedish mentality with surgical precision. Five unrelated stories pinpoint several painfully recognizable personality traits, such as lack of courage, not wanting to make a scene in front of others and the group's influence over the individual. *Involuntary* is a tragic comedy, both amusing and frightening.

On a bus from Göteborg to Stockholm, a well-known actress is afraid to admit that she was the one who broke the drape runner in the bathroom. Leif is partying with the boys at a country house, and once the booze starts to flow, he's willing to do almost anything to impress the crew. Teenagers Sara and Linnéa are raiding their parents' bar to get ready for a night out on the town.

The fragmented storytelling, with black screens that clearly separate the different narratives, is enhanced by the minimalist camera work. And the use of relatively unknown actors, apart from Maria Lundqvist, who basically plays herself, only adds to Östlund's quest for realism. - *Stockholm Film Festival 2010*

*Winner - FIPRESCI Prize, Palm Springs Film Festival 2009*

### **Kids are Alright, The**

---

**Dir:** Lisa Cholodenko      **USA**      **2010**      **106 mins**      **Cert: 16**  
**Starring:** Julianne Moore, Annette Bening, Mark Ruffalo, Mia Wasikowska, Josh Hutcherson  
**Language:** English  
**Formats:** Digital & 35mm  
**Available:** January

Simply put, this whip-smart comedy drama about modern family life is one of the most enjoyable films of the year. Long-term couple Nic (Annette Bening) and Jules (Julianne Moore) are the parents of teenagers Joni (Mia Wasikowska [*Alice in Wonderland, In Treatment*]) and Laser (Josh Hutcherson), both conceived with the help of an anonymous sperm donor. The family live in a comfortable LA suburb, and theirs is a pretty normal existence - loving, but not perfect. Nic is a medic and the main breadwinner, something of a worrier. Jules is a bright underachiever, and has dabbled in a few careers. Before Joni leaves home to start college, her brother persuades her to help him contact their biological father, and so Paul (Mark Ruffalo) enters the family's life. An unattached organic farmer and restaurateur, Paul is all alt values and easy charm, so it's little wonder that he's soon causing ripples in the domestic set-up.

Director Lisa Cholodenko (*High Art, Laurel Canyon, The L Word*) and co-writer Stuart Blumberg spent years getting their nimble script just right, and their engaging cast do a superb job in bringing it to life. It feels like we've stumbled into a real family, with all the intimacies, shared histories and simmering frustrations that entails. And if the devil is in the detail, that's taken care of too, thanks to the film's recognisable SoCal settings and sprightly soundtrack. - *Sandra Hebron / BFI London Film Festival 2010*

### **Leap Year**

*Año bisiesto*

---

**Dir:** Michael Rowe      **Mexico**      **2010**      **92 mins**      **Cert: TBC**  
**Starring:** Monica Del Carmen, Gustavo Sanchez Parra, Marco Zapata, Armando Hernandez, Diego Chas and Ernesto Gonzalez  
**Language:** Spanish  
**Formats:** Digital & 35mm  
**Available:** February

A fearless and haunting performance from relative newcomer Monica Del Carmen distinguishes *Leap Year*, the portrait of 29 days in the dispiriting existence of a young Mexican woman who seems to have little control over her life, yet perversely - emphasis on perverse - calls all the shots.

This first film by writer-director Michael Rowe will be off-putting to some but makes the most of its basic ingredients in searing increments.

Set entirely in the small apartment of freelance journalist Laura Lopez, this first film by writer-director Michael Rowe, an Australian playwright, poet and screenwriter who lives and works in Mexico, will be off-putting to some but makes the most of its basic ingredients in searing increments. Set for a June 16 theatrical release in France, the film premieres in the Directors Fortnight at Cannes.

Twenty-five year old Laura, who only leaves her apartment to shop and pick up

anonymous men for expedient rutting, is a master at putting a positive spin for others on what we can plainly see are dead-end circumstances. Eating generic food directly out of the can while speaking to her mother on the phone, she recounts the gourmet feast she's allegedly savouring. Her neighbours probably don't know she's alive but she describes them as a tightly knit community of caring friends.

She lies to others but painful truths seem to adhere to her like the crummy decals on her laptop. At least one of those daunting antecedents has been with her since she was 12.

Del Carmen has zero vanity: Laura masturbates while observing the couple across the courtyard; picks her nose while typing and more or less tolerates incredibly rude behaviour from her interchangeable parade of recreational lovers. Laura's distinctly native Indian features subtly underline lingering class divisions in contemporary Mexico where much of the wealth accrues to those of European descent.

The only loving relationship in Laura's shambles of a life is with her younger brother (Marco Zapata) who turns up when he's expected as well as when he's not.

Laura marks the 29th of February on her wall calendar with a red square. Her date with destiny may involve Arturo (Gustavo Sanchez Parra) a guy she brings home whose sadism seems to mesh with her masochism. A sort of revenge plot takes shape in small but startling instalments.

Veteran actor Gustavo Sanchez Parra convincingly conveys both cruelty and tenderness, while long, unfussy takes make good use of the widescreen format. - *Lisa Nesselson / Screen International*

*Winner - Camera D'Or, 2010 Cannes Film Festival*

### **Loose Canons**

*Mine vaganti*

**Dir: Ferzan Ozpetek                      Italy                      2010                      110 mins                      Cert: TBC**  
**Starring: Riccardo Scamarcio, Nicole Grimaudo, Alessandro Preziosi, Ennio Fantastichini, Lunetta Savino, Elena Sofia Ricci**  
**Language: Italian**  
**Formats: 35mm**  
**Available: March**

Turkish-Italian director Ferzan Ozpetek (*Facing Windows*) takes a fresh detour in this amiable coming-out comedy *Loose Cannons*, which was nominated for Best Film and Best Director at the David di Donatello (Italian Academy) Awards 2010.

Tommaso (Riccardo Scamarcio) has a comfortable life in Rome as an aspiring writer and is in a steady relationship with his boyfriend Marco — a life he has kept secret from his family. When he's called back to his hometown of Lecce in Southern Italy to help run the family business, he decides to reveal his homosexuality to his conservative family and hopefully get out of his business obligations in the process. But when his plans are thwarted, Tommaso gets stuck on the path that he was desperately trying to avoid.

Ozpetek takes a playful approach to this family dramedy, matching a critique of provincial Southern values with an eccentric cast of characters that includes a



phone book in hopes of gaining an answer to where babies come from in America. In Australia babies are found in beer mugs, or so Mary's grandfather tells her. After reading Mary's letter, Max suffers the panic attack that results whenever anything disrupts his orderly routine, but a dozen chocolate hotdogs later and after some sage advice from his shrink, Dr. Bernard Hazelfhoff, Max answers Mary's question. Babies in America are found in eggs laid by rabbis.

So begins the extraordinary correspondence between *Mary and Max*, two lonely souls, a little less lonely now. . . Brilliantly animated by Oscar-winning director Adam Elliot and brought to life by the bravura voice work of Toni Collette and Philip Seymour Hoffman, *Mary and Max* is a bittersweet tale of a friendship between oddballs at their wits' end with the world, but at peace with each other. - *Joshua Moore / San Francisco Jewish Film Festival*

### **Mr Nice**

---

**Dir: Bernard Rose**                      **UK**                      **2010**                      **121 mins**                      **Cert: 18**  
**Starring: Rhys Ifans, Chloe Sevigny, David Thewlis, Elsa Pataky, Andrew Tiernan, Omid Djalili**  
**Language: English**  
**Formats: Digital & 35mm**  
**Available: January**

The pro-pot movement gets another champion, albeit a self-interested one, in *Mr. Nice*, a biopic of the Welshman Britain's Daily Mirror once called "the most sophisticated drugs baron of all time."

Rhys Ifans plays Howard Marks not only as an adult but, in brief introductory flashbacks, as a schoolboy whose smarts made him something of an outcast. The adult-playing-child conceit may lead viewers to expect a film with a Michel Gondry-like experimental bent, which is misleading: Aside from some fake-looking (intentionally so, one assumes) effects that insert the actor into stock footage of '70s England -- a peculiar choice that should go over well with stoned viewers -- the movie, pardon the expression, plays things straight.

We watch as Marks quickly goes from an upstanding Oxford student to '60s experimenter, then cleans up in time to graduate and become a schoolteacher. But a favor for an old friend leads to a lucrative hash-smuggling trip, and after seeing all that cash Marks's legit career vanishes in a puff of smoke.

Unlike many drug-dealer portraits, *Mr. Nice* doesn't dwell much on the trappings of wealth or seductive nightlife; rather, it is hypnotized by Ifans' unflappable performance and fascinated with a few details of the smuggler's career, particularly his involvement with a self-mythologizing IRA figure played with relish by David Thewlis.

Marks became a counterculture hero to many (including Ifans, who reportedly wrote to him after he was caught and sentenced to an American prison term), and has in recent years had great success with a memoir and speaking tours. - *John DeFore / South by Southwest Film Festival, 2010*

### **My Afternoons With Margueritte**

*La tête en friche*

**Dir: Jean Becker                      France                      2010                      82 mins                      Cert: TBC**

**Starring: Gérard Depardieu, Gisèle Casadesus, Maurane, Patrick Bouchitey, Jean-François Stévenin, François Xavier Demaison**

**Language: French**

**Formats: Digital & 35mm TBC**

**Available: January**

Fifty-something Germain lives a quiet life. At the local bar with his girlfriend Annette, in the park where he counts the pigeons, or in the vegetable garden where he grows produce to take to market. Germain is a simple man. His father left his mother when she became pregnant and she still blames her son for ruining her chance at love. At school German was the butt of all the teacher's jokes and never learned to read properly. One day, in the park, he meets Margueritte, an old lady whose work as a scientist took her all over the world. She has a passion for literature, which she soon shares with Germain. Before long, a true bond of affection unites them, and Germain realizes that he has the right to take control of his destiny... - *Montreal Film Festival*

"Best viewed with a baguette and a Bordeaux, and while wearing a beret, veteran director Jean Becker's *My Afternoons With Margueritte* is French feel-good filmmaking to the max. Yet a heaping pile of clichés doesn't prevent this touchingly simplistic tale -- about a fifty-something knucklehead who encounters the titular senior on a park bench and learns some valuable lessons about life and literature -- from exuding a strong and universal emotional appeal, backed by Gerard Depardieu's finely tuned performance as a dungaree-wearing ogre with a heart." -- *Jordan Mintzer / Variety*

### **Revanche**

**Dir: Götz Spielmann                      Germany                      2008                      122 mins                      Cert: CLUB**

**Johannes Krisch, Irina Potapenko, Andreas Lust, Ursula Strauss**

**Language: German**

**Available: February**

Anyone who's seen director Götz Spielmann's *Antares* knows he's a director with a style that foregrounds analytical precision, both visually and in the way his plots unfold. *Revanche* ("revenge"), which garnered Spielmann the Best European Film award in the Panorama sidebar at Berlin, is a perfect vehicle for his unique talents--a suspense-filled thriller, full of jarring angularities, perfectly composed scenes and dollops of steamy sex.

Alex (a stellar Johannes Krisch) is a disgruntled, tightly wound ex-con working in a Viennese brothel. His only respite is his love for Ukrainian prostitute Tamara (Irina Potapenko) who reluctantly plies her trade in the same brothel. Out in the sun-dappled countryside, couple Susanne (Ursula Strauss) and inexperienced cop Robert (Andreas Lust) have just moved into their new home. Two couples in seemingly diametrical opposition are brought into one another's spheres after a deadly botched robbery sets Spielmann's taut tale in motion...

The pleasures here are threefold: the intelligently constructed screenplay that never tips its hand to the viewer; the gorgeous compositions and rural locations filmed by Spielmann and cinematographer Martin Gschlacht; and, above all, the performances of Krisch et al., who ground their characters in the milieux they have found themselves in,

make them human and believable, and then demonstrate that insurmountable differences are not necessarily so. - *Vancouver International Film Festival 2008*

*Winner - Europa Cinemas Label, Berlin Film Festival 2008*

### **Savage**

---

**Dir: Brendan Muldowney**                      **Ireland**                      **2009**    **83 mins**                      **Cert: 18**  
**Starring: Darren Healy, Nora-Jane Noone, Ryan Andrews, Karl Argue, Marisa Armstrong, Cathy Belton**  
**Language: English**  
**Formats: 35mm & Digital**  
**Available: January**

Some years back, it was customary to moan that, despite the wealth and happiness all about, Irish film-makers refused to make films concerning frolicking urban gadabouts. Soon they were making little else.

Perhaps we now yearn for a movie that reflects the current surging pessimism. If so, then Brendan Muldowney's *Savage* does the job very nicely indeed. The picture begins with a pair of bloodied, shoeless feet padding their way across a dangerous pavement and continues in that jolly vein for a nippy, economic 85 minutes. Fáilte Ireland won't be including the film in any welcome packs.

Darren Healy plays Paul, a modestly successful newspaper photographer with Premiership hair and an introspective manner. While out on the town, he is savagely, randomly assaulted and finds himself in hospital recovering from serious injuries. He doesn't take it well.

Despite the efforts of a forceful psychiatrist (Cathy Belton) and a well-meaning nurse (Nora-Jane Noone), Paul spins into madness and begins plotting some sort of vague revenge. He attends martial arts classes. He buys a knife. He shaves his head. He begins twitching at the mirror.

There isn't much plot to *Savage*: Paul gets sliced up and becomes steadily more deranged. But the distraught, permanently crushed performance by Healy and the impressively sinister ambience elevate the film beyond standard urban-revenge melodrama.

Using a palate of icy cobalt blues and alienating greys, Muldowney and cinematographers Tom Comerford and Michael O'Donovan create a kind of science-fiction nightmare of the dangerous Dublin streets. The anxiety in Healy's eyes makes it clear that we are viewing the city as it would seem to a dangerously untethered paranoiac. The effect is wholly successful.

The film could, perhaps, accommodate a tad more nuance, and the shock twist in the middle does risk pushing it into penny-dreadful territory. But *Savage* remains a finely honed shocker enlivened by occasional moments of impressively black humour: the knife fight between Paul and a surprisingly blasé sheep plays like something out of *Jackass*. We strongly urge you not to try this at home. - *Donald Clarke / The Irish Times*

### **Silent Army, The**

*Wit licht*

**Dir: Jean van de Velde      Netherlands    2008    120 mins      Cert: TBC**

**Starring: Abby Mukiibi Nkaaga, Andrew Kintu, Marco Borsato, Thekla Reuten**

**Language: Dutch, English, Swahili, French**

**Formats: 35mm only**

**Available: January**

Even in a barbarous era, one practice that still seems like a special crime against nature is the kidnapping of children by guerrilla forces with the intent of turning them into murderers. It's the impulse to fight this inexcusable outrage that lies at the resilient heart of *The Silent Army*.

This involving drama follows a father and son who plunge deep into the heart of darkness looking for another boy who has been swept into bondage by a rebel army leader. Played to mesmerizing effect by Abby Mukiibi Nkaaga, the leader quietly tells his terrified young charges that "You can call me Daddy" - while instructing them how to kill.

Having grown up on the Congo/Rwanda border, writer-director Jean van de Velde knows his subject and setting intimately, and succeeds in injecting topical concerns into a story of African political strife far more successfully than attempts by outsiders. - *Todd McCarthy / Variety*

### **Stoning of Soraya M**

**Dir: Cyrus Nowrasteh      Iran      2009      116 mins      Cert: TBC**

**Starring: Shohreh Aghdashloo, Jim Caviezel, Mozhan Marnò, Navid Negahban, Ali Pourtash**

**Language: Farsi**

**Formats: 35mm only**

**Available: January**

The Iranian-American moviemaker Cyrus Nowrasteh has brought his experience of TV documentaries to bear on the true story of an Iranian woman, Soraya M, framed as an adulterer by her husband in the early years of Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran and stoned to death by her fellow villagers. Her elderly father is compelled by the town's mayor and a corrupt mullah to cast the first stone.

James Caviezel (chosen, no doubt, because he had the title role in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*) plays the Franco-Iranian journalist Freidoune Sahebjam, on whose book the film is based, but the chief role is taken by the magnificent Shohreh Aghdashloo as the conscience of the village. This widow puts her life on the line to tell him about the legal murder of her niece under sharia in the hope he will bring the news to the world.

The craven community is persuasively created, the stages through which the atrocity escalates are convincingly handled and the climactic killing is almost unwatchable in its intensity. The director compares his film with *The Ox-Bow Incident*, the distinguished 1943 western based on Walter Van Tilburg Clark's novel about lynch law. I was reminded of the lines Milton gives to the Messenger in *Samson Agonistes*: "I sorrow'd at his captive state, but minded/ Not to be absent at that spectacle." - *Philip French, The Observer*

**Swansong: Story of Occi Byrne**

---

**Dir: Conor McDermottroe**      **Ireland**      **2009**      **Cert: 15A**  
**Starring: Martin McCann, Jodie Whittaker, Marcella Plunkett, Gerard McSorley**  
**Language: English**  
**Formats: 35mm**  
**Available: January**

When he was young, Austin (Occi) Byrne was tormented by the recurring rhyming taunts of the local bullies who were relentlessly cruel about the fact that Occi had no father.

As he grows older, within the closed ecclesiastical communities of 1970's Ireland, those taunts have escalated in his delicate mind into a chorus. Occi's quest to find his father becomes core to his identity; but his mother – all but shunned by her parents and the local community, keeps this secret.

Narrated through Occi's wayward world view, his story unfolds as a series of chaotic encounters, tempered by moments of tenderness and longing.

Written by Sligo-born writer Conor McDermottroe, the timely *Swansong* puts on central stage a hero who, at every step, is abused by the system: the church, the hospitals, the community – a troubled soul who never gives up his search for peace. - *Galway Film Fleadh*

**Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives**      *Loong Boonmee raleuk chat*

---

**Dir: Apichatpong Weerasethakul**      **Thailand**      **2010**      **117 mins**      **Cert: Club**  
**Starring: Thanapat Saisaymar, Jenjira Pongpas, Sakda Kaewbuadee, Natthakarn Aphaiwong, Geerasak Kulhong,**  
**Formats: Digital & 35mm**  
**Available: February**

Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Thai movie has a cumbersome title, but it is a gloriously worthy winner of the Palme d'Or at this year's Cannes film festival. This is a visionary film in the director's characteristic style: mysterious, dreamlike, gentle, quiet, magical. It has elements that are at first glance absurd, and at second or third glance, too, come to that. But they are beguiling and beautiful as well: the extended, wordless opening sequence in which a water buffalo appears to break free from its rope and roam the plains and forests of north-east Thailand at dusk is superbly filmed.

Boonmee is a middle-aged man, in need of kidney dialysis, who has come to the remote forest to end his days: this is an important place from his childhood, and, he believes, the location for his former existences. His recalling of these past lives is partly, but only partly, a case of previous incarnations being presented in a mystical flashback parallel. There is an extraordinary scene in which an unhappy princess converses and then has ecstatic sex with a catfish. The past lives of the title also refer to those of other people now lost to Boonmee: his dead wife and lost son.

He has come to the forest with Laotian nurse Jaai (Samud Kugasang), his sister-in-law Jen (Jenjira Pongpas), and his young cousin Tong (Sakda Kaewbuadee). At the dinner table, they are astonished when the ghost of Boonmee's wife, Huay (Natthakarn

Aphaiwonk), appears to them. Huay has come to give modest advice on the manner in which we must surrender to death. But this is not all: the spirit of Boonmee's son Boonsong (Geerasak Kulhong), who disappeared many years ago, presents himself reincarnated as a forest monkey spirit – a hairy, Wookieish creature. Baldly recounted, these events sound ridiculous, and yet it all has something sublime and visionary about it, with a spiritual quality I can't remember seeing in any film recently. *Uncle Boonmee* offers pleasure and heartbreak in equal measure. - *Peter Bradshaw / The Guardian*

*Winner - Palme D'Or, Cannes Film Festival 2010*

### **Winter's Bone**

---

**Dir: Debra Granik**                      **USA**                      **2010**                      **100 mins**                      **Cert: 15A**  
**Starring: Jennifer Lawrence, John Hawkes, Dale Dickey, Garret Dillahunt, Sheryl Lee, Tate Taylor**  
**Language: English**  
**Formats: Digital & 35mm**  
**Available: January**

Hillbilly-gangster-realist-noir is a genre new to me, and *Winter's Bone* may be the only example. Starting on a downbeat note of indie miserablism, it builds inexorably through successive stages of tension to an extraordinary finale of horror: a white-trash nightmare, featuring a chainsaw and a horrible visit to a moonlit lake. But it is all given unironic dignity and power due to the outstanding lead performance from 20-year-old Jennifer Lawrence as Ree, a young woman who must take on some scary neighbourhood types to protect her family.

The action takes place in the Ozark Mountains of Missouri, where teenage Ree is effectively the only sentient adult in her household: her mother has become catatonic with depression and her younger brother and sister need looking after. Ree is considering joining the US army, on account of the \$40,000 cash bonus promised by the recruitment posters. Her father is absent, and thought to be engaged in the criminal manufacture of the 21st-century equivalent of moonshine: crystal meth, or crank. When the local sheriff (Garret Dillahunt) shows up outside Ree's ramshackle property, he does so the same way any outsider pays an unannounced visit in these parts: very nervously. The sheriff informs Ree her daddy has posted the family home as bail, and if he doesn't show up for next week's court date, they will be required to leave. So, to keep a roof over everyone's head, Ree must shoulder a strange breadwinner's burden – she must find her errant father. In doing so, she starts to dig up some very dangerous secrets.

The drama of *Winter's Bone* looks like the intramural wrangling of one gigantic dysfunctional family. Pretty much everyone Ree meets is her "kin" of some distant sort, and when she claims the connection in asking for help, it enforces a resentful acquiescence but also the promise of violence if she pushes the privilege too far – more violence, in fact, than a stranger would get. Everyone who knows the truth about Ree's dad has a great interest in keeping quiet about it, combined with a sentimental, family-based compulsion to help this one person who must be kept in the dark.

Ree's investigations take her nearer and nearer to the truth, but also nearer and nearer to being whacked and the person to whom she must ultimately submit is a shadowy powerbroker and kingpin called Little Arthur, played by Kevin Breznahan: a person who

stays invisibly inside his shack for most of the film, a brooding figure of malevolent power, and someone not to be messed with. That curious diminutive "Little" reminded me a little of "Uncle Junior" in *The Sopranos*: an ironic piece of family lore.

Possibly the most dangerous person from whom Ree asks for help is her uncle, known as "Teardrop", played by John Hawkes, resembling something like a young Harry Dean Stanton. Like everyone, he is involved in drugs. Again, the sickly-sweet nickname is horribly inappropriate. He will either help Ree, or assault her, or kill her. The audience cannot tell, neither can Ree, and neither can Teardrop himself.

One of the eeriest scenes is that which takes place out in open country: one of the people that Ree has gone to for information takes her to a burned-out "crank house", a wreck where the secret drugs factory blew up – a professional hazard – and where he claims Ree's daddy met his final moments. This black, twisted monument to poverty, catastrophe and despair stands out surreally on the landscape.

Lawrence is excellent as Ree: intelligent, and possessed of a moral courage that commands respect. When she goes to the army recruitment fair and tactlessly asks the sergeant when she would get her \$40,000, the ensuing dialogue cleverly provides an incidental gateway for the audience to understand that there could be an alternative existence for Ree. In the army, away from all this, she could be a model soldier: smart, disciplined, resourceful, tough. But of course, simply asking the question about the money makes the sergeant wary, as does the fact that she is underage and has shown up for the interview covered in bruises; Ree cannot escape her terrible destiny in the Ozark mountains.

Debra Granik's movie is adapted from a novel by Daniel Woodrell, whose *Woe to Live On* was the basis for Ang Lee's film *Ride With the Devil*. Something in this one reminded me, just a little, of Elmore Leonard. Granik tells her story not as a thriller, but a naturalistic drama, in which the thrills are the more potent for being unexpected, and she uses keening country music to underscore the stoicism and melancholy of this brutal, amoral world. In the end, *Winter's Bone* is about transgression and taboo, and the consequences of trespassing upon the past. – *Peter Bradshaw, The Guardian*

*Winner - Grand Jury Prize 2010 Sundance Film Festival*