

The College of Media at Illinois presents

# 16th Annual Roger Ebert's Film Festival 2014



April 23-27, 2014

Virginia Theatre  
203 W. Park Ave., Champaign

*Champaign County Alliance for the Promotion of Acceptance, Inclusion, & Respect  
and Steak 'n Shake*





*This year's Festival is dedicated to our beloved founder*

# Roger Ebert

June, 18 1942-April 4, 2013

*For me, the great gift that he left us was not only his personal portrait of courage, but his faith that the spreading of the love of film through journalism would continue through an investment in the next generation of talented young critics – [rogerebert.com](http://rogerebert.com).*

*These young journalists, too, can shout out that it is film which has the power to unite us, to make us understand people other than ourselves, to open our hearts.*

*Thank you, Roger Ebert: film has never had a better friend.*

*– Milos Stehlik*

The above quote is an excerpt from a speech given by Milos Stehlik on February 11, 2014. To read the entire speech honoring Roger, please see page 13 of the program.

# Festival Schedule 2014

## Film Screenings

### Tuesday, April 22

7 p.m. *The Taking of Pelham One Two Three*

Free student screening,  
hosted by Patton Oswalt  
Foellinger Auditorium,  
University of Illinois campus

### Wednesday, April 23

7:30 p.m. *Life Itself*

### Thursday, April 24

1 p.m. *Museum Hours*

4 p.m. *Short Term 12*

9 p.m. *Young Adult*

### Friday, April 25

1 p.m. *He Who Gets Slapped*

4 p.m. *Capote*

8:30 p.m. *Do the Right Thing*

### Saturday, April 26

11 a.m. *Wadja*

2 p.m. *A Simple Life*

5 p.m. *Goodbye Solo*

9 p.m. *Born on the Fourth of July*

### Sunday, April 27

Noon *Bayou Maharajah*

## Academic Panel Discussions

### Illini Union

1401 W. Green Street, Urbana, IL

Free and open to the public

### Thursday, April 24, 2014

Pine Lounge, 1st Floor

9 a.m. – 10 a.m.

*Challenging Stigma Through the Arts*

Moderated by  
Dr. Julian Rappaport

10:15 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.

*Reimagining Filmmaking for the Digital Age*

Moderated by Nate Kohn

### Friday, April 25, 2014

Pine Lounge, 1st Floor

9 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.

*Remembering Roger Ebert*

Moderated by Omer Mozaffar

10:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.

*Film and Cultural Politics*

Moderated by Eric Pierson

### Saturday, April 26, 2014

Pine Lounge, 1st Floor

9 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

*The State and Future of Independent Film*

Michael Barker, Ted Hope,  
Vanessa Hope and Chaz Ebert  
Moderated by Nate Kohn

9 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

*Filmmakers Workshop*  
General Lounge, 2nd Floor

*Cinematography for No Budget Filmmakers:*

Presented by Don Tingle

*Working with SAG-AFTRA*

*Low Budget Contracts:*

Presented by Kathy Byrne

For more details about the  
workshop, see page 16.

## Live On-air Interview

### Wednesday, April 23, 2014

9 a.m. – 10 a.m.

*Jim Turpin's (WDWS-AM 1400) Ebertfest Interview*





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The Daily Illini is  
proud to produce  
this Festival Program  
each year.

We are honored to  
call Roger Ebert one  
of our own.

*Roger Ebert, The Daily Illini editor-in-chief, 1963-64.*

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# Welcome to Ebertfest!

A year ago, on April 4, 2013, my sweet Roger, a visionary and a founder of this Festival, transitioned out of this world into the next. So it is in his honor and in his spirit that I welcome you to the 16th edition of the Roger Ebert's Film Festival. He loved this festival so much, from its very beginning as an event at the Krannert Art Center to mark the birthday of HAL 9000, the computer in "2001: A Space Odyssey," to its incarnation as the "Overlooked Film Festival," intended for films or genres that had been overlooked. We discovered that some directors were reluctant to think of their films as "overlooked" so now the festival is affectionately known as Ebertfest.

Last year, Roger programmed the 15th edition of the festival almost single-handedly. In prior years both Festival director Nate Kohn and I had played a bigger role in the discussion of the films with Roger. But last year Roger had very specific things in mind. It was only as the Festival progressed that it became apparent to us that he suspected he wouldn't be here with us. Roger gave instructions for the Festival to open with a sing-a-long inspired by the sound bite from Orson Welles' "Falstaff." He said it was used by the late professor Daniel Curley, one of his mentors at Illinois. He also programmed emotionally poignant short films about loss and love by Grace Wang and Sophie Kohn and poetic, elegiac ones like "Days of Heaven," "Ballad of Narayama," and "Vincent," by Paul Cox, one of his favorite festival guests. Cox's own health challenges caused his absence from the festival, but we could imagine both Roger's voice and Paul's in some stretches of narrative during the showing of "Vincent."

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*Thank you for honoring Roger's memory and for keeping his legacy alive. In the tradition of Roger, I encourage you to please greet your fellow festival goers. As Roger used to paraphrase a well-known movie title, they're no longer strangers when they meet.*

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I daresay there wasn't a dry eye in the house as we realized that the "Ballad of Narayama" told the tale of a small village in Japan where the elders went to the mountain top to meet their gods when they were 70 years old as a sacrifice for the younger generation. Roger was 70 years old when he left us. He had insisted on substituting that film at the last minute without explanation, and he wanted no discussion of it. We belatedly understood why. Roger would have been delighted to know that Tilda Swinton led the audience in a dance-a-long to counteract the palpable pall in the air caused by the freshness of our mourning. Like a high priestess her movements magically changed The Virginia Theater into a temple of praise and gratitude and allowed our sad energy to be transformed into a joyous tribute to Roger. We will be forever grateful to her for that moment.

It was Roger's wish to carry on the tradition of Ebertfest and in our selection of this year's roster of films we are attempting to maintain the high standards he set, knowing how much it meant to him. He likened the Festival to the greatest train set a boy ever had. What film critic wouldn't want to show only the films he thought worthy? Over the years Roger left long lists

of suggestions for us to draw from, and where possible we will incorporate his reviews, so that the richness of his language and passions will enliven the Festival. High standards are also maintained through the participation of our esteemed colleagues, the very learned film scholars and historians professor David Bordwell and his wife, professor Kristin Thompson. We are so grateful for their continued attendance.

This year we are privileged to open the festival with "Life Itself," the documentary about Roger filmed by acclaimed director Steve James. James began filming in December 2012. His plan was to follow Roger over the period of a year, but sadly, Roger passed away four months into the shooting. James did a magnificent job redirecting the trajectory of the film, and the documentary won unanimous rave reviews at the Sundance Film Festival. Steve, whose "Hoop Dreams" was championed by Roger 20 years ago, will be with us.

We will also have the privilege of unveiling a statue in Roger's honor outside of The Virginia Theater. I call it a statue from the heart since the Festival's travel coordinator, Donna Anderson, made it her mission to deliver the completed project when she was in the hospital for a heart

transplant. Donna wanted this to be a gift from the communities of Champaign and Urbana to their native son. Fortunately, Donna is better and she and her husband Scott (who worked tirelessly on the fundraising), will join us when the artist Rick Harney unveils his sculpture. Rick's story is also from the heart. His son, who is autistic, loved Siskel & Ebert and spent many happy times engaging his father in discussions about movies and about Roger's movie review books. So undertaking this commission was a very personal and meaningful decision for Harney. We are fortunate he accepted. He has sculpted two other favorite sons of Illinois, Abraham Lincoln and Adlai Stevenson.

This is the 25th anniversary of two films to which Roger gave four-star reviews; "Do The Right Thing," by Spike Lee tackled race relations and "Born On The Fourth of July," by Oliver Stone tackled the Vietnam War. I am particularly pleased that both directors will be with us because Roger enjoyed deep discussions about cinema and life with them over the years. In the same vein, Ramin Bahrani will be here with "Goodbye Solo." Roger had high praise for Bahrani's filmmaking, and this will be a return visit for him after "Man Push Cart," and "Chop Shop." In fact, Ramin is currently working on a film that he had discussed with Roger. Sadly, Roger will not get to see it, but Ramin said he sometimes imagines Roger along in the process.

Michael Barker, a co-president of Sony Pictures Classics studio, has been a good friend of the Festival from the beginning. Roger always praised Barker's intelligence and good taste in

*continued on page 7*



# CHAMPAIGN COUNTY **ALLIANCE** FOR THE PROMOTION OF

*Acceptance, Inclusion, & Respect*

## *Upcoming Events:*

### **16th Annual Roger Ebert's Film Festival**

April 23 - April 27, Virginia Theatre

#### **Alliance Panel Discussion**

Thursday, April 24, Illini Union

#### **Alliance Art Show/Sale**

You never know where we'll pop up!!



### **CU Autism Network's Annual Autism Walk**

Sunday, April 27 11:30AM, Hessel Park in Champaign

### **Children's Mental Health Awareness Week**

May 4 through May 10

#### **National Children's Mental Health Day**

Thursday, May 8



### **Down Syndrome Network's Annual "Buddy Walk"**

Saturday, October 11, Champaign County Fairgrounds

### **Eighth Annual disAbility Resource Expo**

Saturday, October 18, 9AM -2PM



### **Depression Screening Event**

Wednesday, November 5, Noon, Parkland Room D244

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## *We're All in This Together*

The Champaign County ALLIANCE for the Promotion of Acceptance, Inclusion, and Respect (formerly The Champaign County Anti-Stigma Alliance) is a collaborative campaign to challenge discrimination and promote inclusive communities.

The ALLIANCE has used the arts to initiate dialogue about acceptance and dignity and their effect on persons with disabilities, their loved ones, and the community itself.

[www.facebook.com/allianceforAIR](http://www.facebook.com/allianceforAIR)

# Welcome to Ebertfest

*continued from page 5*

movies. He will present two of his studio's films. "Wadja," the first feature shot in Saudi Arabia by a female filmmaker from that country, is about a girl who covets a bike even against the prevailing thought and custom. The director Haifaa Al-Mansour will be a guest. Barker is also presenting "Capote," the award-winning film starring the late Philip Seymour Hoffman. Roger said, "Hoffman's precise, uncanny performance as (Truman) Capote doesn't imitate the author so much as channel him." We are happy to welcome the film's director, Bennett Miller.

Roger praised two international films that we have included in our roster. "A Simple Life," about a Hong Kong servant who has served generations of the same family, but who now must depend on the family member for caregiving after she suffers a stroke. We are happy to welcome the director Ann Lui. And "Museum Hours" is director Jem Cohen's film about a guard in a Vienna museum who befriends a foreign visitor. This doesn't begin to describe what this film is really about, and I hope the director will forgive this generic description. He will be a guest.

Our college crowd is pretty jazzed that comedian and actor Patton Oswalt will be here with "Young Adult," a film directed by Jason Reitman, starring Oswalt and Charlize Theron. Oswalt was supposed to come to Ebertfest the year we showed, "Big Fan," but he wasn't able to make it. He promised Roger he would make it up to him. And he is keeping his word. Oswalt is much in demand, recently emceeding the Spirit Awards the day before the Oscars, and he will also emcee the Webby Awards, of which Roger was a recipient in 2010.

Two of our other guests were also at the Spirit Awards with their nominated film "Short Term 12," Brie Larson ("United States of Tara") and Keith Stanfield. This film has been a favorite of critics

and audiences on the festival circuit, and we are pleased to present it.

Our friends the Alloy Orchestra (Ken Winokur, Roger Miller and Terry Donahue) will return for the 13th year with their composition for the 1924 silent film, "He Who Gets Slapped." After seeing them once at Telluride, Roger knew he wanted them for Ebertfest, and they haven't disappointed. And closing the festival with a musical bang will be Lily Keber's documentary about a one-eyed, gay overlooked New Orleans musician called the "Bayou Maharajah." Our festival director Nate Kohn is a producer. I am thrilled to report that we will have a live performance by New Orleans musician Henry Butler.

In addition to the films we will present stimulating panels about the future of the film industry, led by Ted Hope, the new head of Fandor.com, who previously stirred controversy in Hollywood with his wake-up call to the studios. Another panel will be led by our Far Flung Correspondents, whom Roger gathered from the corners of the globe. This year we may possibly have visitors from Turkey, Australia, Dubai, India, Poland, Egypt, California, Canada, Mexico and Chicago.

I am grateful to Roger's alma mater, the College of Media, of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, for making it possible to gather once again and welcome the 1,500 guests to The Virginia Theater. So I say a special thanks to Dean Jan Slater, to University of Illinois President Bob Easter and his wife Cheryl, and to Chancellor Phyllis Wise, for their generous support. Roger and I announced the start of a Roger Ebert Film Studies program, and I hope to work with them to make it a reality. We may need to call on you for help.

From Day 1, professor Nate Kohn from the University of Georgia's Grady College has been the festival director. Nate is an Urbana native and an

Illinois alumnus. So Ebertfest is close to his heart. He made a commitment to Roger to carry on, and he has been resolute in that commitment. Mary Susan Britt makes everything run and despite the challenges we present her with, she remains level-headed, organized and diplomatic. She heads a dedicated staff, including many volunteers whose smiling faces have become familiar over the years.

Steven Bentz and his cheerful staff at The Virginia Theater put out the welcome mat. The Champaign Park District and the Champaign Police Department are always helpful. Betsy Hendrick throws her now-legendary Saturday night party. Where would we be without our fabled projectionist James Bond who recently worked on outfitting the Virginia with new digital capability in addition to maintaining our capacity to screen in celluloid.

We thank our friend Bertha Mitchell, who serves her famous downstate barbeque from the tent in front of the theater. She came back year after year all while trying to support her gifted hockey-playing son Marcus in Canada and the U.S. Mrs. Mitchell and other vendors make it convenient for our festival-goers to grab a bite to eat in between movies.

Thanks also goes to the Illini Union which plays host for most of our guests in the heart of the campus.

Our sponsors are crucial. They help make the festival possible. Without their financial support we could not undertake the festival year after year. Some sponsors have been with us all 16 years; some are with us for the first time this year. We say a special thanks to some of our leading sponsors: The Champaign County Alliance for the Promotion of Acceptance, Inclusion and Respect and Steak n' Shake.

Volunteers serve in many ways, including serving as drivers and



*Chaz Ebert, Executive Producer and Host*

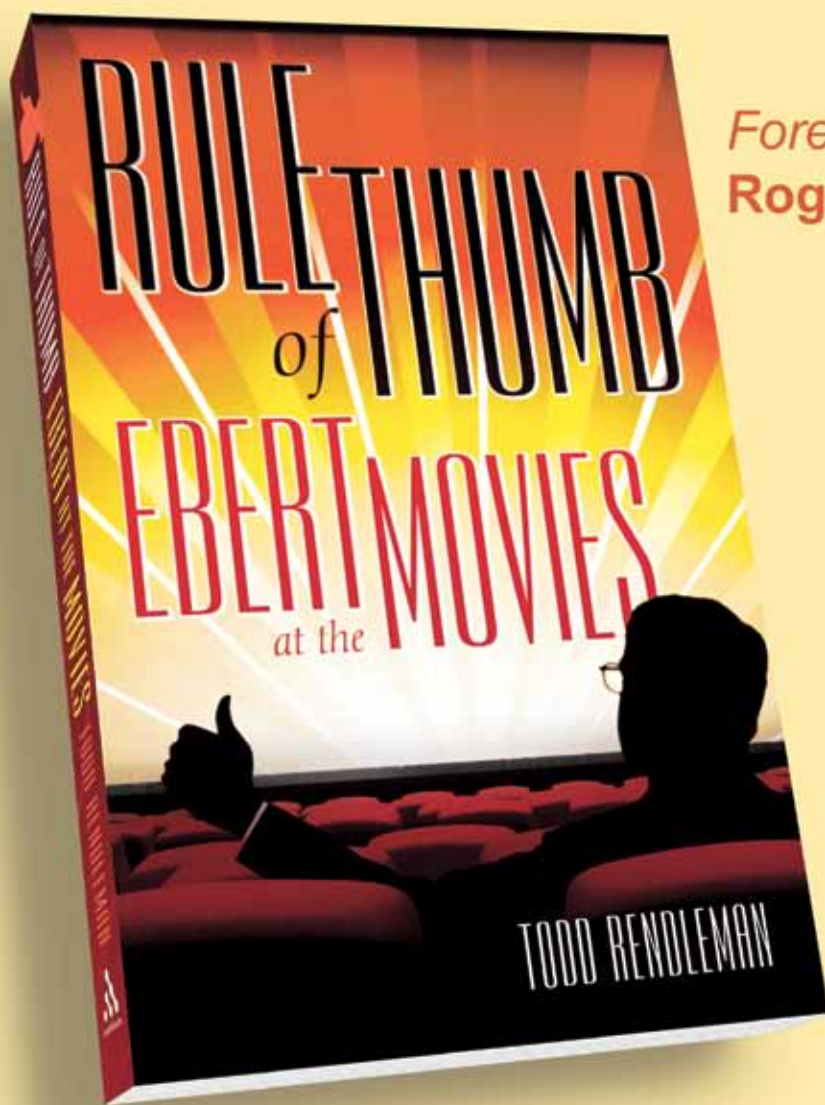
guides for festival guests. We thank them for their loyalty and continuing support.

Thank you to Leone Advertising who is our invaluable webmaster at [ebertfest.com](http://ebertfest.com); Carlton Bruett who is responsible for the posters and the look of the Festival; and The Daily Illini, which produces this splendid program.

And once again I want to call attention to our Ebertfest iPad App from Shatterglass Studios. The app contains every Festival interview, photograph, review, panel discussion, link and artifact that we could find from the first 15 Ebertfests. It is available on iTunes and updated annually. Our thanks to Shatterglass for doing this and for the spectacular festival videos they do for us every year. Look for Luke Boyce and Brett Hayes, the Shatterglass guys, in the east lobby during the Festival.

And finally, I want to thank the festival goers who keep coming back year after year. Thank you for uncovering cinema gems with Roger over the years. And also thank you to those coming for the first time. Thank you for honoring his memory and for keeping his legacy alive. In the tradition of Roger, I encourage you to please greet your fellow festival goers. As Roger used to paraphrase a well-known movie title, they're no longer strangers when they meet.

**Rest In Peace my Dear Husband.**  
— Chaz



*Foreword by  
Roger Ebert*

“Todd Rendleman’s book on **Roger Ebert** is a remarkable achievement—biography, cultural history, astute appreciation and analysis of the critic’s methods and values, and on top of all that, a lovely read.”

*Richard T. Jameson, editor, Film Comment (1990-2000)*

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# Ebertfest, envy of many, plays on

Welcome to Ebertfest — a film festival that we at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign simply describe as the finest film festival in the world. Argue if you want, but when you look around The Virginia Theatre or sit in a coffee shop buzzing with movie conversations, this event transforms our community every single year. For a few days, all of us step out of our daily lives, sit back in a darkened theater and see where an imagination and a camera can lead.

I know you'll have a wonderful time at this year's festival, and you attend because of the opportunity to see these films from new perspectives and hear about the stories behind them from different voices. And once again, I think everyone will walk away proclaiming this Ebertfest as the best ever.

We are so proud to be the host of this event that turns an international spotlight on our community and that makes all of you holding one of those coveted passes the envy of film fans and critics around the

world. In a time when media is so pervasive and so accessible, this is a special opportunity. You can stream these movies to your phone or a laptop any place at any time. And their artistic merits would still stand out.

But there will only be one moment, ever, where you will watch these movies in a crowded theater where Roger Ebert grew up. It is a shared, singular and fleeting moment for which you literally, "had to be there."

Thanks for being here. This is going to be a great week.



**Phyllis M. Wise**  
Chancellor, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

## JAN SLATER UIUC COLLEGE OF MEDIA DEAN

# Festival made possible with your help

### Welcome to Ebertfest!

The College of Media is proud to be your host for Ebertfest, and our pride is only intensified as we celebrate the life and contributions of our dear Roger.

If this is your first Ebertfest, this will be an experience like no other. We are delighted you are with us and feel certain this will not be your only Ebertfest. For those of you who have joined us before — welcome back. Your support and enthusiasm recharges our batteries each year.

Ebertfest is a very special time in our community. We welcome movie lovers from around the world who make Champaign-Urbana their home for a week. We roll out the red carpet for the industry

guests who come to share their experiences making these films. We expose students to some of the greatest storytellers of our generation.

Ebertfest brings us together to revel in film, to share a unique experience and to pay tribute to those that make this a reality. Many years ago, Roger and Chaz committed to giving back to the University of Illinois and to this community, and they have done so beyond any expectation. Because of their love for this place and for the movies, we can experience and appreciate film as it was meant to be. For that, we are eternally grateful.

Our heartfelt thanks go to Mary Susan Britt and Nate Kohn who organize and direct this festival. It requires logistics that would humble ordinary humans. They work tirelessly and

graciously to make this event the best each year. Many thanks to our sponsors who return each year to make Ebertfest possible. And to our own community volunteers and students — your support means the world to us.

Finally, thanks to all of you, the movie lovers. Your love of the art of storytelling and filmmaking keeps us looking toward the future. Thank you for your support and for joining us for this annual tribute to great movies and to a great movie critic.

The College of Media at the University of Illinois welcomes you to the best show in town. We appreciate your support and delight in your enthusiasm for what the next few days bring to Champaign-Urbana.

**Enjoy the show!**



**Jan Slater**  
Dean, College of Media, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

# EBERTFEST

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# Festival continues in Ebert's tradition

It is a great privilege to welcome you to the 16th annual Roger Ebert's Film Festival, a special event of the University of Illinois' College of Media in partnership with the greater Champaign-Urbana community and lovers of movies everywhere.

I have written variations of that opening sentence since we started the festival in 1999. This is the first time we've put together a festival without Roger's active participation in the process, yet it feels to us as if he is still here, making suggestions, giving us guidance, watching over us and our Ebertfest, his very personal festival.

And so this year, Chaz and I have selected films that are true to Roger's original vision for Ebertfest: films that contribute to our celebration and shared enjoyment of great movies, films large and small that are projected as they were meant to be seen by those who made them. Ebertfest is and always will be about the films. We give no prizes and have no categories, and no business is done at our festival. That's how we conceived the festival, and that's how it will always be.

I remember when we first discussed doing a festival. It was 1997 and we'd just shown "2001: A Space Odyssey" at the Virginia Theatre as part of the University's birthday party for HAL, the fictional computer. Roger and I got to talking about what makes a successful film festival. We agreed that movies are best seen on a really large screen. And watching a movie is not something to be done alone — it is a communal activity, bringing together friends and strangers in a mutual emotional adventure.

It was Roger's idea to show films that have been overlooked by audiences, critics or distributors — films that deserve a second look. We have since

dropped the word "overlooked" from the name of the festival. A couple of directors complained that they were not overlooked, and of course they were right. But we still show films that are either little known or can be seen in a different light, given cultural shifts and new perspectives.

So this year we celebrate the 25th anniversaries of "Do The Right Thing" and "Born on the Fourth of July," both dealing with issues that are as relevant today as they were in 1989. And building on that base we create a heady confection with the poetic "Museum Hours" and the bluesy "Bayou Maharajah," as well as films from China and Saudi Arabia, 1924 and 2013, from old friends like Ramin Bahrani and new ones like Patton Oswalt and Brie Larson. We only show 12 films each year, but those films, taken as a whole, show us the breadth, potential and wonder of cinema.

Every Ebertfest has multiple themes, but we don't construct the festival around them. Rather

they emerge as the festival plays out, discoveries that you, our audience, make in discussion with each other and then bring to our attention. For our festival is about sharing, and community, and Roger Ebert, and the love of great movies.

We would like to thank Paramount Pictures, Sony Pictures Classics, Universal Pictures, Warner Bros, Park Circus LLC, The Cinema Guild, China Lion Film Distribution, Cinedigm, Lily Keber, and Roadside Attractions for graciously providing us with their very best 35 millimeter and digital prints.

I also want to thank all of our sponsors, volunteers, festival pass holders and individual ticket holders for their welcome participation in this endeavor. We look forward to your unwavering support as our festival continues to blossom each year in the central Illinois spring.

A particular thanks goes out to our Film Circle Sponsors: Roger and Chaz Ebert, Champaign County Alliance for the Promotion

of Acceptance, Inclusion and Respect, Steak 'n Shake, Betsy Hendrick and Shatterglass Studios; and to our Diamond Sponsors: Leone Advertising, L.A. Gourmet Catering, and The News-Gazette.

Roger was — and continues to be — Steak 'n Shake's biggest booster. In the early years of the festival, Roger, Chaz, Dusty, Joan and other guests would invariably end up at Steak 'n Shake after the last show on Thursday night and carouse there until the wee hours. In the past few years, our far-flung correspondents always include Steak 'n Shake as part of their tour of festival landmarks. And, of course, Mary Susan Britt and I have been known to frequent the South Neil Street branch on more than one occasion during the festival. Steak 'n Shake is sponsoring our showing of Steve James' "Life Itself" at this year's festival.

One of our most dedicated sponsors, the Champaign County Alliance for the Promotion of Acceptance, Inclusion and Respect, in addition to sponsoring our showing of "Short Term 12," is holding a panel discussion on Thursday morning at the Illini Union. Please plan to attend this free event. We thank the Alliance for realizing the power of film to change minds and attitudes, for supporting our festival and for all the good it does year after year in Champaign County.

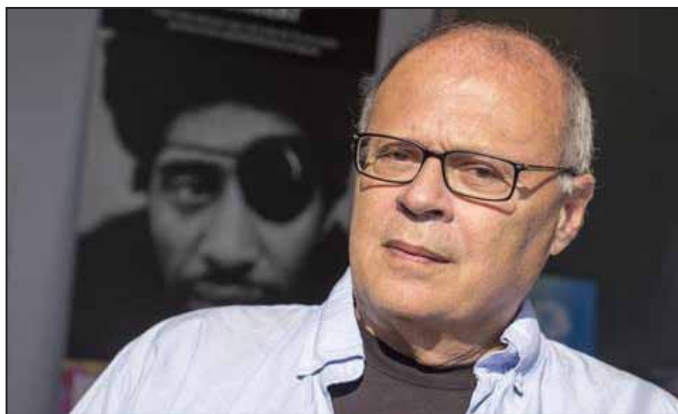
Finally, I want to recognize Associate Festival Director Mary Susan Britt, College of Media dean Jan Slater, President and Mrs. Bob Easter and Chancellor Phyllis Wise, without whose hard work and enthusiastic support this festival would not be possible.

This festival is Roger Ebert's gift to his hometown, and, for that, we thank him and his wife Chaz. They continue to be a remarkable team, and it is an honor to work with them.

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*We still show films that are either little known or can be seen in a different light, given cultural shifts and new perspectives.*

---



Nate Kohn, Festival director





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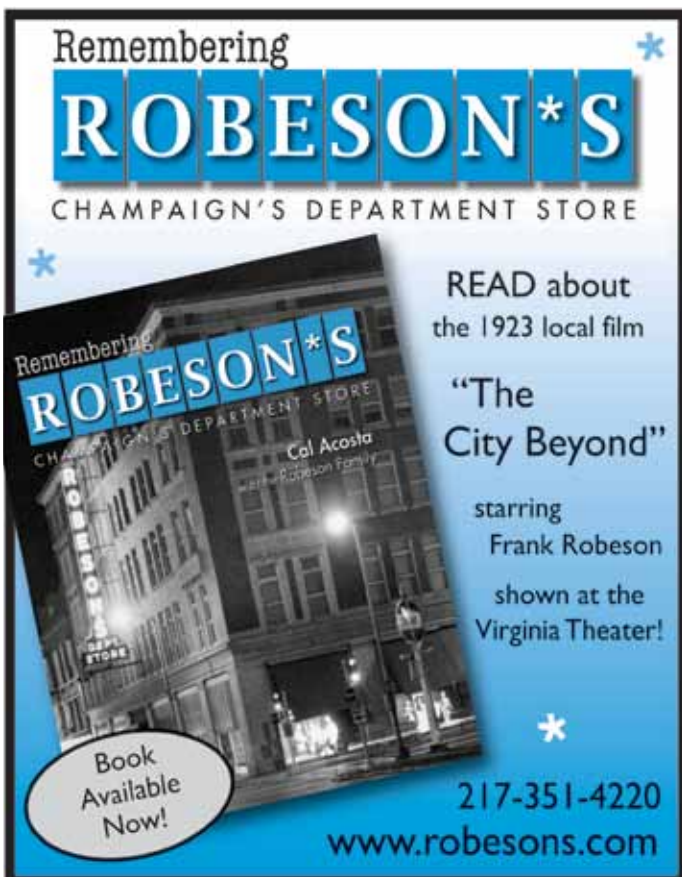
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# Thank you, Roger Ebert

## Film has never had a better friend

*Roger Ebert was honored posthumously with the Illinois Prize for Lifetime Achievement in Journalism on Feb. 11, 2014, by the College of Media's Department of Journalism, University of Illinois. This speech was given by Milos Stehlik at that event. The 2014 Roger Ebert's Film Festival is dedicated to Roger.*

I know Roger Ebert for more than 40 years. I use the present tense consciously, because for me, his words still breathe, and through them, so does he. Despite the fact that television is what gave Roger a national platform and an influence far beyond what was possible through newspapers, I think his heart always belonged to print. Walking to deliver him press kits or screeners, past the presses on the ground floor of the old Sun-Times building was a powerful symbol that words needed paper and ink to spread, to take flight, to penetrate lives. For me, Roger belongs to a generation of journalists for whom journalism was not just a profession, but a culture and a way of life. This goes beyond hanging out at O'Rourke's. The most sacrosanct — and non-negotiable — sentence I heard him speak was "I have to write." Writing was life itself. When Roger moved to television and then online — it was still words which had the magic to engage minds and make those minds see.

What would Roger Ebert have been if he had not been given the job of film critic at the Chicago Sun-Times and remained a sports writer or written

something else? Fortunately for us in the film world, we will never know.

While words ran in Roger's blood, but film was in his heart. He contradicted the conventional stereotype of a journalist or critic as a dispassionate and distanced investigator and communicator of facts. Roger knew that film was something messy and intangible, which could not be easily objectified or quantified. Film is about love and fear, about dreams and failure, about an individual's potential to alter his or her destiny. Film is

the characters on the screen.

He would show us how film can help us understand, and become whole. His was an engaged journalism: A journalism in which words have the power to change things.

Through Roger's writing, we could feel the urgency of what the filmmaker was trying to say. The great lesson which Roger Ebert taught: Film was not about drama or character, it was about us, the audience. It is about helping us be, and be better.

It is what made him unique and irreplaceable. You can't learn

was a shared belief: Film is the most important art and it has the power to change the universe. I never saw Roger happier than when he discovered a film he thought was great.

In this sense, Roger was a part of all of us. He belonged to our community of filmmakers and film lovers. That community is a global community, stretching from Hollywood to Mumbai, Munich to Tehran. I remember Roger's enthusiastic embrace of the film, *MOOLADE*, by the great Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembene — a film intended to empower African women to band together and resist genital mutilation, or Iranian filmmaker Tahmineh Milani's feature *TWO WOMEN* — the story of two school friends forced to choose a life of oppression because they are women living in a rigid society. It's paradoxical that Roger was ALL Illinois — a proud Chicagoan but even more proud of being a native son of Champaign-Urbana.

These were not films backed by large studio campaigns or coming with a lot of buzz. The films needed help to be recognized and appreciated. And Roger Ebert, film critic, led the charge.

For me, the great gift that he left us was not only his personal portrait of courage, but his faith that the spreading of the love of film through journalism would continue through an investment in the next generation of talented young critics — RogerEbert.com.

These young journalists, too, can shout out that it is film which has the power to unite us, to make us understand people other than ourselves, to open our hearts.

Thank you, Roger Ebert: Film has never had a better friend.

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*Through Roger's writing, we could feel the urgency of what the filmmaker was trying to say. The great lesson which Roger Ebert taught: Film was not about drama or character, it was about us, the audience. It is about helping us be, and be better.*

---

about individuals trying to find the strength to reassert their goodness, to save other lives and to be saved in turn. Roger knew that film could only be approached with passion.

Roger engaged that passion to communicate this uncertainty of our human existence. He fashioned a different kind of film criticism. His writing would communicate constructs of a filmmaker's imagination. Roger's writing would be the glue between the souls of the characters on the screen and our souls. Roger would be the writer, but he would also be the shaman, channeling the mysteries of film, aligning our spirits to those of

this in journalism school. You have to BE it. For Roger, this pact which I think he made with himself gave him the permission to be something more than a journalist: to be a champion. The films and filmmakers who owe the success of their films and their careers to Roger is long: Greg Nava and Anna Thomas and "El Norte," Werner Herzog and "Aguirre, the Wrath of God," Errol Morris and "Gates of Heaven" — just three examples from my personal experience.

Roger's message for these films and for scores of others was at once uniform and clear, "This film HAS TO EXIST."

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# Ebert's reviews inspire, resonate love for film

By Declan Harty, *The Daily Illini*

From his review of "La Dolce Vita" in 1961 for *The Daily Illini* to his final Chicago Sun-Times review of "To the Wonder," Roger Ebert published countless film reviews.

Even with the ever-changing film industry, and hundreds of sub-par films, one of Ebert's lifelong loves was the cinema.

"He was more than a fan, he felt a passion for the art form that went beyond just liking movies," said Susan Wloszczyna, a film critic for *RogerEbert.com* and a former USA Today entertainment reporter. "He really wanted to encourage the best of film making."

Ebert began reviewing films for *The Daily Illini*, the student newspaper at his alma mater, University of Illinois, as a sophomore in 1961. His first review was of "La Dolce Vita," and though Ebert acknowledged that the movie was one of the greatest films he had seen in a note before his review, he said, "obviously that was not my first impression" of the film.

Following his first review at the newspaper, Ebert would go on to spend the next 50 years of his life writing of his passion: film.

"The motion picture is the most important art film ever devised by the human race," Ebert said in a speech at the



Photo courtesy of Ebertfest

Roger Ebert looks on in downtown Chicago. This year's Ebertfest is dedicated to the Festival's founder, a Pulitzer Prize-winning film critic who with his iconic thumbs-up, thumbs-down reviews become one of the most well-known and well-respected pundits in the country. Ebert died early April last year after a battle with cancer.

American Film Institute in 2004 after receiving an honorary degree. "I sincerely believe to see good films, to see important films is one of the most profoundly civilized experiences that we can have as people."

From the Chicago Sun-Times to the other 200 newspapers to which Ebert's reviews were syndicated, his words touched and inspired many in their lives.

Peter Sobczynski, a film reviewer for *RogerEbert.com*, said Ebert was an inspiration for him in his career path.

Sobczynski said he began

reading Ebert's reviews in the Sun-Times at the age of 5 and even wrote Ebert a letter when he was 7 years old. He received one back, along with movie passes. Sobczynski said Ebert not only shaped the style of how many looked and wrote about films, but also he shaped the way the audience saw movies.

"He helped his readers define their taste, by showing them all the things that film could achieve outside of being a way to kill two hours on a Saturday night," Sobczynski said.

Another contributor to *RogerEbert.com*, Nell Minow, said Ebert was also a crucial inspiration for her career choice now. Minow said as a 15-year-old who read the Sun-Times regularly, Ebert was exciting because he was a young reviewer who loved film.

"He never got numb. He always opened his heart fully to every movie he sat down to

watch whether it was the most formulaic multiplex (film) or the most low budget indie," Minow said. "He really brought all of himself to everything he watched, and that was just an unbeatable combination."

Wloszczyna, Sobczynski and Minow will all be in attendance at this year's Roger Ebert's Film Festival, they said, which is in honor of its founder. It will not solely commemorate his life, but it will also honor his passion for film and his love for the art.

The festival will open with a tribute to Ebert with a screening of the film, "Life Itself," the film adaptation of Ebert's memoir.

"I think it is going to be very emotional," Wloszczyna said of her expectations for this year's festival. "He was honest, he wasn't just doing it to glorify himself. ... He did truly love movies, and I think that is what we are keeping alive."

---

*"He helped his readers define their taste, by showing them all the things that film could achieve outside of being a way to kill two hours on a Saturday night."*

*— Peter Sobczynski —*

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# Additional Schedule Information

## Filmmakers Workshop

9 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. General Lounge, 2nd Floor

### *Cinematography for No Budget Filmmakers*

Presented by **Don Tingle**

### *Working with SAG-AFTRA Low Budget Contracts*

Presented by **Kathy Byrne**

This workshop will teach basics of cinematography for the beginner, hobbyist or penny pinching filmmaker. The quality of your movie depends less on what camera you use than how you use it.

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Also, learn about the low budget contracts that SAG-AFTRA has to offer — everything from a no budget Student Film or Short Film to a \$2.5 million dollar feature film. Signing a SAG-AFTRA low budget contract will enable you to have professional actors work on your film. The paperwork is much easier and the cost is much less than you would think. Come see for yourself!

## Directions to the Illini Union

### *From The Virginia Theatre to the Illini Union:*

- Turn RIGHT (south) onto N. NEIL STREET
- Turn LEFT onto E. SPRINGFIELD AVENUE
- Turn RIGHT onto S. WRIGHT STREET
- Turn LEFT onto W. GREEN STREET
- The Illini Union will be on the right.

## For More Information

All films will be shown at the historic Virginia Theatre, 203 W. Park, Champaign, IL. Festival guests will appear on stage after each film to join the audience in discussions about the films. Festival passes (\$145). Individual tickets (\$14) and student & senior citizen tickets (\$12) on sale at the Virginia Theatre box office, 217-356-9063.

For more information contact:

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# Life-size statue commemorates Ebert

By Ryan Weber, *The Daily Illini*

**R**oger Ebert spent just the first quarter of his life in Champaign-Urbana, but a statue of the late film critic will live forever just outside of The Virginia Theatre.

Announced in September, just five months after Ebert died from years of battling cancer, the life-size bronze sculpture depicts the Chicago Sun-Times critic sitting among three movie theater seats as he gives a signature thumbs-up. Sculptor Rick Harney designed it so that residents and Ebertfest-goers could pose with him in the seats on either side of him. Normally, when Ebert would review a film, he would sit on an aisle seat.

Originally, the statue's price tag read \$122,500, but it dropped by \$10,000 when Champaign agreed to pay to light it and cover installation costs. The money will cover labor, materials and other dedication costs. Scott Anderson, who has led the funding campaign, said he's received large donations from Ebert's wife, Chaz, the Alice and Gene Lamb Foundation and director Martin Scorsese. Roughly 150 people or organizations have donated or pledged money, but Anderson said the project could still use more help.

"We hope the attendees think it's a nice thing and get involved with it," he said.

Champaign-Urbana residents are familiar with Ebert's generosity. He set up the Roger Ebert Center for Film Studies at the University of Illinois' College of Media and helped raise money to pay off the heavy debt of *The Daily Illini*, the student newspaper Ebert led as



Photo by Ryan Weber, *The Daily Illini*  
Sculptor Rick Harney created a model of a planned Roger Ebert statue to be placed in front of The Virginia Theatre in Champaign. There have been a few alterations since the original model, pictured above, was unveiled in September.

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*"Roger's example of giving back to the community while persisting through huge health challenges is something to be emulated."*

— Scott Anderson —

---

editor-in-chief in the early '60s. And, of course, he began his film festival here to celebrate his favorite yet overlooked films through the years.

Anderson's wife, Donna, originated the idea of bringing an Ebert statue to the area a few years ago because "it would be a wonderful thing to honor him," she told *The Daily Illini* in September.

The project has brought together the Public Art League,

the cities of Champaign and Urbana, the Champaign Park District and the College of Media, and it has elicited a welcoming support in the community.

Since the plan's unveiling in the fall, not much changed in the design, Harney said. Ebert sits more upright and his right arm is slightly more raised than the original clay model. Harney estimates the 35 pieces that make up the completed

sculpture weigh more than 1,200 pounds.

At the request of Chaz Ebert, Harney sculpted the Pulitzer Prize-winning critic to look as he did in his late 50s or early 60s, which is about how old he was when the festival began.

The spirit of the eponymous founder of Ebertfest will live on at the Festival, boosted by the statue's presence, Anderson said, and it will serve as a reminder for what Ebert did for the community.

"Roger's example of giving back to the community while persisting through huge health challenges is something to be emulated," Anderson said.

***The statue of Roger Ebert will be unveiled at noon on Thursday, April 24 outside of The Virginia Theatre.***



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# Letter from a Far-Flung Correspondent

By Michael Mirasol, April 26, 2012. Michael will be back with us at Ebertfest this year.

Usually at this time of year, I am at the University of Illinois, taking in the sights, scents and sounds of Champaign Urbana. At this moment, I'd be waking up in the Illini Union, taking in the abundance of youth walking through its halls. Inspired by the vigor and hope I see in the students that I would see walk past me.

I would walk out of the back entrance and be in awe at the Quadrangle, overcome by even more campus denizens walking through the grounds. I'd walk along with them, looking at the history in the green and mahogany around me. The architecture, the trees, the sheer space and Spring is intoxicating, if only for the short time that I would have it at UIUC.

But I'm not there this year, not there to share in Ebertfest, where wondrous films will be seen in a secluded place far away from the world's worries and concerns. I won't be able to see dear friends I've made in the past two years, people who I've come to care for deeply because we care about the same things. These silly little treasures called movies, the kind that stay with you, grab you, and don't let go. My heart aches.

The first time was the best. Speaking at panels, illuminating my world of film with foreigners curious about what lies beyond their borders. I share strange perspectives with fellow strangers from strange lands, but without the alienation. Just love and enthusiasm. We don't speak in an auditorium down to an audience. We share in a room just paces away from those facing us. We see each other closely. We listen.

Then come the movies in

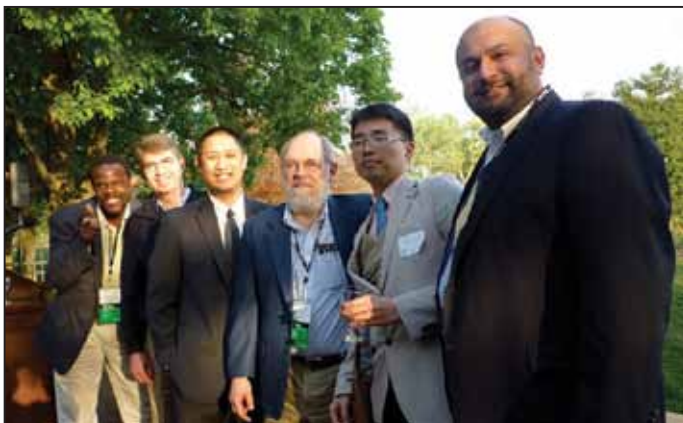


Photo courtesy of Ebertfest  
Omar Moore, Gerardo Valero, Michael Mirasol, David Bordwell, Seongyong Cho and Omer Mozaffar at the 2010 Ebertfest.

---

*I think we should all call Ebertfest what it really is to all those who love Roger and film.*  
**Camp Ebert.**

---

the Virginia Theatre. An actual Movie Theatre! Not one of those fancy multiplexes with cushy seats. It's got history in it. Donald O'Connor of "Singin' In The Rain" danced up on its stage in the age of Vaudeville. Would that be something you'd want to tear down just for a comfortable derriere?

The theatre is lush, with hues of rouge surrounding you. Taking my seat, I stepped back in time, recalling those old saturday matinees of my youth. The screen is majestic, wide in its breath, larger than most theaters without the overpowering feel of an IMAX screen.

There is a balcony. An honest to goodness balcony that seems to have gone the way of the dodo everywhere else. There's popcorn and snacks, but how I miss the sandwiches being cooked right outside the theatre. You can see the

sausages smoking. You know it's cooked.

There's the audience. That Midwestern small town feel that you never want to leave. Before and after screenings, people chalked up random conversations with me. "What do you think it will be like?" "What did you think?" The most common question I would always hear was, "Wasn't that great?"

I've also been scolded for chatting during a screening. I welcomed it. These movie lovers don't mess around.

These people around me weren't merely an audience. For those five days, they were my neighbors, a concept that seems to be sadly disappearing. I would see many folks in the same seats day after day, coming to see overlooked films because they knew they weren't going to be disrespected, and loved the communal moviegoing

experience that might go extinct. They stay long afterwards to ask moviemakers questions, and the moviemakers are moved that we are moved.

There are no movies that are being marketed or sold. No paparazzi chasing down stars for sound bytes. There is a trust that exists here that you can find nowhere else. It exists because Roger Ebert reaffirms that trust by what he selects and how he maintains this festival landscape.

As a film critic, I miss Ebertfest dearly for these reasons and more. I miss knowing that a major critic gets to ride in the trunk of a 4x4, just as I did. I miss finding out Chaz Ebert's favorite karaoke song is Rapper's Delight, and seeing her tearing up the mic. I miss the BBQ at Black Dog, the double guacamole steak burgers at Steak N' Shake, chatting with David Bordwell (with him doing most of the chatting), hearing people in the know dishing out the dirt, and meeting some of my heroes, whether they write about films, or help make them.

I miss it because I learn something every time I set foot on its grounds. I miss meeting fellow movie lovers I've met online and off, who have gone on this pilgrimage with me. I miss disagreeing with my critic friends after a bad film, and smiling with them in quiet unison during a good one.

Most of all, I miss spending quiet moments with Roger, a friend and teacher who gave me so much. Who gave all of us so much. This is one of the very few things I can do for him in return. I think we should all call Ebertfest what it really is to all those who love Roger and film.

**Camp Ebert.**



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Chris Kienke, *Rapture* (detail), 2013. Acrylic and digital pigment on canvas. © Chris Kienke

# Festival Info

*Things to know about Ebertfest*

## TICKET INFORMATION

- A Festival pass to all 12 screenings is \$145.
- Individual tickets are \$14. Student and Senior Citizen tickets are \$12.
- Festival passes and tickets are available at The Virginia Theatre, 217-356-9063 or [www.thevirginia.org](http://www.thevirginia.org).
- All the films are screened at the historic Virginia Theatre, 203 W. Park Ave., Champaign, IL.

## PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Panel discussions will be held at the Illini Union, 1401 W. Green St., Urbana, IL in the Pine Lounge on the 1st floor.

- Thursday, April 24, 2014
- Friday, April 25, 2014
- Saturday, April 26, 2014

## FESTIVAL UPDATES

Updated schedules and information will be posted on the festival's website: [www.ebertfest.com](http://www.ebertfest.com).

## THEATRE GUIDELINES

- Patrons may enter the theatre ONE HOUR prior to the FIRST screening of the day, with the VIP/Festival passholders doors opened first, and then individual ticket holders shortly thereafter.

- Seating for each film will begin approximately 30 minutes before each screening time. Seating is general admission only. NOTE: Some seats will be reserved for special guests of the Festival. Please respect the designated areas.

- Only Festival passholders are allowed in the theatre between screenings. Please wear and have your pass visible at all times! Festival staff will be checking for them.

- A Festival pass guarantees seating to all 12 screenings. Shortly before each film begins, any empty seats will be sold to individual ticket holders waiting in line. Latecomers cannot be guaranteed admittance. NOTE: Passholders — please arrive 15 minutes before each screening.

- Passes and tickets cannot be exchanged, and no refunds can be issued.

- Smoking is prohibited in The Virginia Theatre.

- The newly-restored Virginia Theatre has updated all of its restrooms to be ADA-compliant and now includes transfer seating on both levels plus wheelchair-accessible seating on the auditorium's main floor. Up to 18 wheelchairs can be accommodated with one companion seat available per wheelchair. Tickets for accessible and companion

seating may be purchased at [www.thevirginia.org](http://www.thevirginia.org), by calling 217-356-9063, or by visiting the theatre's box office at 203 West Park Avenue, Champaign, IL 61820. Please note that the Virginia's mezzanine and upper balcony seating are still accessible only via stairs.

- The theatre also features a wheelchair lift for guests accessing the stage from the auditorium, a LULA (Limited Use Limited Access) elevator allowing access from the stage to the downstairs dressing rooms, and an elevator allowing access to the building's upstairs lobby and restrooms.
- Assisted listening devices are available upon request. A single earpiece bud, ear speaker, or neck loop may be used by a guest to enhance their enjoyment of films, spoken word events and some live performances. Devices may be obtained at the box office before the show. A credit card, driver's license or other form of ID is required. For specific questions about the assisted listening devices, accessible seating or other accommodations, please call the box office at 217-356-9063.
- No outside food and drink allowed inside the Virginia Theatre at any time.

## FESTIVAL MERCHANDISE

During the festival, you'll find great merchandise in the east lobby of The Virginia Theatre.

## SOLD OUT FILMS

If you want to see a film that is sold out, go to The Virginia Theatre box office 30 minutes before the screening time and wait in the rush ticket line. Shortly before the film begins, any empty seats will be sold on a first-come, first-served basis. **NOTE:** At every festival since 2002, all patrons waiting in line for tickets for sold out films were able to get in.

## TICKET POLICY

The number of Festival passes sold is limited to 1,000. An additional 500 seats are reserved for individual ticket holders and sponsors. We want to make sure that everyone who wants to attend the Festival — be it for one film or all of them — can be accommodated.

## NO RECORDING, PLEASE ...

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“ **Melissa Merli covers  
Ebertfest like the dew.** ”

– Roger Ebert

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Hourly and long term parking for Ebertfest is available in the Hill Street Parking Deck, just a few short blocks away from the Virginia at the corner of Hill St. and Randolph St.





# Dining tips

## Festival Restaurant Sponsors

If it's mid-afternoon and you're hungry or if it's late night and you need a quick bite to eat, Champaign-Urbana has dining options for everyone.

We greatly appreciate our generous restaurant sponsors and encourage you to join us in patronizing them, not only during the festival but throughout the year. They are our subjective favorites among the many great restaurants in the Champaign-Urbana area.

For a more complete list, check out the **Champaign-Urbana Dining Guide:**  
[visitchampaigncounty.org](http://visitchampaigncounty.org)

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# Guests

A warm welcome to our **Special Festival Guests**

The following are invited special guests for the festival. As always, their attendance is contingent on factors over which we have little control, such as unforeseen changes in their work schedule. But we hope that most, if not all, will be with us — plus additional surprise last-minute guests.

## Life Itself

Wednesday, April 23, 7:30 p.m.

**STEVE JAMES (director)** is best known for directing *Hoop Dreams*, winner of every major critics prize including a Peabody and Robert F. Kennedy award. James' other acclaimed films include *Stevie*, which won the top prize at IDFA, major awards at Yamagata, Sundance and Philadelphia film festivals, was nominated for an Independent Spirit Award, and landed on a dozen year-end ten best lists; the IDA-winning miniseries *The New Americans*; *At the Death House Door*, which won numerous festival awards and was James' fourth film short-listed for an Academy Award®; *No Crossover: The Trial of Allen Iverson* for ESPN's Peabody-winning *30 for 30* series; and *The Interrupters*, James' fifth film to premiere at Sundance, winner of the Independent Spirit Award, the two top Cinema Eye awards and numerous festival prizes. It was the top documentary in the end-of-the-year national critics' polls for both *IndieWire* and the *Village Voice*, and recently received the duPont-Columbia Journalism Award and an Emmy®.

## Museum Hours

Thursday, April 24, 1 p.m.

**JEM COHEN (director)** is a New York based filmmaker whose feature-length films include *Chain*, *Benjamin Smoke*, *Instrument* and *Evening's Civil Twilight in Empires of Tin*. His shorts include *Lost Book Found*, *Amber City*, *Little Flags* and *Anne Truitt*, *Working*. His films are in the collections of New York City's Museum of Modern Art and Whitney Museum and have been broadcast by PBS, Arte and the Sundance Channel. He's had retrospectives at London's NFT, BAFICI, Oberhausen, Gijon and Spain's Punto de Vista.

Cohen's recent projects include the *Gravity Hill Newsreels* (about Occupy Wall Street) and *We Have an Anchor*, a portrait of Cape Breton. He has collaborated with musicians including Fugazi, Patti Smith, Terry Riley, Godspeed You! Black Emperor, Gil Shaham/Orpheus Orchestra, R.E.M., Vic Chesnutt, and The Ex, as well as with writer Luc Sante.

## Short Term 12

Thursday, April 24, 4 p.m.

**BRIE LARSON (actor)** has built an impressive career as one of the more versatile young actresses working today. She received numerous acting nominations for her performance as Grace, the director of a foster care facility, in *Short Term 12*, directed by Destin Daniel Cretton. She won best actress at the Locarno Film Festival and the Gotham Awards, and was nominated for a 2014 Critic's Choice Award.

The *Los Angeles Times* labeled her the "It Girl" of 2013 with four films showing at SXSW®. In addition to *Short Term 12* (which took home the Grand Jury prize and the Audience Award), she had supporting roles in *The Spectacular Now*, as well as *Don Jon*, Joseph Gordon-Levitt's directorial debut.

Both films were also at Sundance. Last year she was seen in *21 Jump Street*, and received rave reviews for her supporting role in Oren Moverman's *Rampart*. Larson will star in *The Gambler*, slated to release in 2015. She is still widely recognized for her portrayal of Kate, Toni Collette's sarcastic and rebellious daughter, in Showtime's *United States of Tara*. Other credits include *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* and Noah Baumbach's *Greenberg*.

She has appeared on stage at the prestigious Williamstown Theater Festival production of *Our Town*, and recurred on the F/X cult favorite series, *The League*.

In addition to acting, Larson is a writer and director. Her short film *The Arm* won the prize for best comedic storytelling at Sundance 2012. The other, *Weighting*, was in competition at SXSW® 2013.

A native of Sacramento, Larson started studying drama at the early age of 6, the youngest student ever to attend the ACT San Francisco. Larson currently resides in Los Angeles.

**KEITH STANFIELD (actor)** delivers a breakthrough performance in *Short Term 12*, written/directed by Destin Cretton, which premiered at SXSW® and won Audience and Grand Jury awards for best narrative feature. Stanfield plays Marcus, a teenager faced with the imminent threat of out-aging the foster system that the film is set in. Stanfield earned an Independent Spirit Award nomination for his role.

Stanfield's first on-camera role was in the short-film version of *Short Term 12*, which premiered at Sundance 2008 and led to the feature film. After an audition in Cretton's own living room that left the young writer/director in tears, Stanfield was the only actor from the short film that was asked to reprise his role in the feature film. As evidenced by a scene in the film where Marcus opens up for the first time through a rap song

that Stanfield and Cretton co-wrote, Stanfield is also a talented vocalist who raps in the group Moors.

Stanfield currently resides in the LA area and will be seen in *Purge: Anarchy* and in James Franco's *Memoria*.

## Young Adult

Thursday, April 24, 9 p.m.

**PATTON OSWALT (actor)**

continues to find success in all areas of entertainment, from his Grammy®-nominated comedy specials to many memorable guest roles on his favorite TV shows (including *Parks and Recreation*, for which he received a TV Critics Choice Award); to *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*; and his starring role on Adult Swim's *The Heart, She Holler*. He is the narrator on ABC's breakout comedy *The Goldbergs*. Last year he was nominated for a Critics Choice Award for his brilliant performance in *Young Adult*. In 2009, Oswalt earned a Gotham Award nomination for his performance in *Big Fan*.

As a comedian, Oswalt is currently promoting his fifth television special *Tragedy Plus Comedy Equals Time*, adding to his four critically acclaimed albums, including *Finest Hour* (2012), which received a Grammy® nomination for best comedy album, as well as a one-hour Showtime special by the same name. In 2009, Oswalt received his first Grammy® nomination for his album *My Weakness Is Strong*, distributed through Warner Brothers Records.

In addition to his guest roles on *Parks and Recreation*, *Justified*, *Two and a Half Men*, *Portlandia* and *Burn Notice*, Oswalt also voiced characters on *The Simpsons* and *Bob's Burgers*. He was a series regular on Showtime's *United*

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*States of Tara*, appeared as a guest star on *Bored To Death* and *Flight of the Conchords* on HBO, *The Sarah Silverman Program* on Comedy Central, and the SyFy series *Caprica*. Oswalt was also a regular contributor to *Countdown with Keith Olbermann*, *Real Time with Bill Maher* and Lewis Black's *Root Of All Evil*. In 2009, Oswalt appeared in Steven Soderbergh's *The Informant*, and *Observe and Report* with Seth Rogen.

Oswalt provided the voice for Remy the rat in Pixar's Oscar®-winning *Ratatouille*, and characters on *Word Girl* and *Neighbors from Hell*. He has appeared in more than 20 films including *Magnolia*, *Starsky and Hutch* and *Reno 911!: Miami*. He starred in *The Comedians of Comedy*, which was shot as an independent feature film, a TV series and a long-running tour.

Oswalt tours regularly and extensively, headlining both in the U.S. and U.K., and is a regular at music festivals like Bumbershoot, Bonnaroo, Comic-Con and Coachella. He also has a regular bi-monthly show at the new Largo at the Coronet Theater in Los Angeles. On TV, he played Spence on *The King of Queens* on CBS for nine seasons and appeared on *Seinfeld*, *Reaper*, *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* and *Tim and Eric's Awesome Show, Great Job!*

Oswalt's first published book, *Zombie Spaceship Wasteland* (2011) was a *New York Times* bestseller.

## He Who Gets Slapped

Friday, April 25, 1 p.m.

**ALLOY ORCHESTRA** is a three-man musical ensemble, writing and performing live accompaniment to classic silent films. Working with an outrageous assemblage of peculiar objects, they thrash and grind soulful music from unlikely sources. Performing at prestigious film festivals and cultural centers in the U.S. and abroad (The Telluride Film Festival, The Louvre, Lincoln Center, The Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, the National Gallery of Art and others), the Alloy Orchestra has helped revive some of the great

masterpieces of the silent era.

An unusual combination of found percussion and state-of-the-art electronics gives the Orchestra the ability to create any sound imaginable. Utilizing their famous "rack of junk" and electronic synthesizers, the group generates beautiful music in a spectacular variety of styles. They can conjure up a simple German bar band of the 1920s or a French symphony. The group can make the audience think it is being attacked by tigers, contacted by radio signals from Mars or swept up in the Russian Revolution.

Terry Donahue (junk percussion, accordion, musical saw and banjo), Roger Miller (synthesizer, percussion) and Ken Winokur (director, junk percussion and clarinet).

## Capote

Friday, April 25, 4 p.m.

**BENNETT MILLER** (producer/director) is an Academy Award® nominated film director and producer best known for *Moneyball* and *Capote*.

Miller's most recent feature, *Foxcatcher*, tells the story of Olympic Gold Medal-winning wrestler Mark Schultz (Channing Tatum) and the self-destructive spiral he is driven to after moving to the estate of eccentric multi-millionaire John du Pont (Steve Carell) to train for the 1988 Seoul Olympics. Based on actual events, *Foxcatcher* is a gripping and profoundly American story of fragile men who pin their hopes for love and redemption on a desperate obsession for greatness.

*Moneyball* (2011) chronicles the story of the 2002 Oakland Athletics baseball team and its general manager Billy Beane. The film received substantial critical praise, and went on to receive 6 Academy Award® nominations, 4 Golden Globe® nominations, and 2 Screen Actors Guild awards nominations, in addition to nominations from AFI, BAFTA, PGA and WGA.

Miller earned an Academy Award® nomination for Best Director for the 2005 drama *Capote*, starring Philip Seymour Hoffman in his Oscar®-winning performance as Truman Capote

Miller is also an acclaimed director of TV commercials and music videos and, most recently, he directed short films for the Academy Awards® and for the Democratic National Convention.

*Friday, April 25, 8:30 p.m.*

An avid Knicks fan, Spike began hosting a one-hour bi-weekly sports talk, *Spike Lee's Best Seat In Da House* show featuring discussions on various news and topics concerning basketball and the NBA in January 2014. Lee received a Peabody Award for the Documentary *If God is Willing and Da Creek Don't Rise*, which revisits the storm-ravaged Gulf Coast region as residents attempt to rebuild in their cities, while also demanding assistance and accountability from their political leaders. Recent critical and box office successes include such films as *Inside Man*, *25th Hour*,

Lee began teaching a course on filmmaking at Harvard in 1991, and in 1993 he began as a professor at NYUs Tisch School of the Arts Graduate Film Program, where he received his MFA in Film Production. In 2002 he was appointed the Artistic Director of the Graduate Film Program. Lee has combined his extensive creative experience into yet another venture: partnering with DDB Needham, he created Spike/DDB, a full-service advertising agency.

*Saturday, April 26, 11 a.m.*

Through her films and her work in TV and print, Al-Mansour is famous for penetrating the wall of silence surrounding the sequestered lives of Saudi women and providing a platform for their unheard voices.

*continued on next page*





# Roger lives on.

We know you  
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us in spirit.

— Betsy  
from Hendrick House





## A Simple Life

Saturday, April 26, 2 p.m.

**ANN HUI (director)** was born in China in 1947 and moved to Hong Kong when she was still in her youth. After graduating in English and Comparative Literature from Hong Kong University, she spent two years at the London Film School. Returning to Hong Kong, she worked as an assistant to director King Hu before joining TVB to direct dramatic series and short documentaries. In 1977 she produced and directed six films for the ICAC, and in 1978 she made three episodes for the RTHK series *Below the Lion Rock*, followed by her debut feature film, *The Secret* (1979). Since then, she has directed 24 feature films including *Boat People* (1982), *Summer Snow* (1995), *Song of the Exile* (1990) and *The Way We Are* (2008).

## Goodbye Solo

Saturday, April 26, 5 p.m.

**RAMIN BAHRANI (director)** has won numerous awards for his films, including the FIPRESCI Prize for best film for *Man Push Cart* (London 2005) and *Goodbye Solo* (Venice 2008); the "Someone to Watch" Independent Spirit Award for *Chop Shop* (2007); and he was the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship. He collaborated with Werner Herzog on his short film *Plastic Bag* and directed a music video for Sigur Rós as well as several commercials. His last film *At Any Price* (Dennis Quaid, Zac Efron) was nominated for the Golden Lion at The Venice Film Festival (2012) and was released by Sony Pictures Classics. He is currently in post production on his new film *99 Homes* (Andrew Garfield, Michael Shannon, Laura Dern) and is finishing his first documentary. Bahrani is a professor of film directing at Columbia University's graduate film program in NYC.

## Born on the Fourth of July

Saturday, April 26, 9:00pm

Academy Award®-winning **OLIVER STONE (director)** has written and directed over 20 full-length feature films, among them some of the most influential and iconic films of the last decades. Some have been at deep odds with conventional myth – films such as *Platoon* (1986), the first of three Vietnam films; *JFK* (1991); *Natural Born Killers* (1994); *Nixon* (1995); and *World Trade Center* (2006).

Stone's films have often reached wide, international audiences and have had significant cultural impact. These include *Salvador* (1985), deeply critical of the US Government's involvement in Central America; *Wall Street* (1987), a critique of America's new capitalism; *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), criticizing US involvement in Vietnam (for which Stone won a third Academy Award®); and *The Doors* (1991), about the 1960s and its music. His other films include *Any Given Sunday* (1999), an unconventional view of the world of American sports; an epic historical drama *Alexander* (2004, Final Cut Version 2007); *W.* (2008), a satirical view of George W. Bush; and *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* (2010), a sequel to the original, which deals with the 2008 financial crash.

In a series of crime-related films, Stone has, in addition to *Natural Born Killers*, directed *U Turn* (1997) and *Savages* (2012), none of them conventional in their approach to their subject.

His written screenplays, though not directed, gave him an early taste of the controversial nature of his ideas. An uproar greeted *Midnight Express* (1979), which only grew with *Scarface* (1983). He also wrote *Year of the Dragon* (1985) and *Conan the Barbarian* (1982). He has produced or co-produced a dozen films including *The People vs. Larry Flynt* (1996), *Joy Luck Club* (1993) and *Reversal of Fortune* (1990).

His documentaries include three on Fidel Castro (*Comandante* (2003), *Looking for Fidel* (2004) and *Castro in Winter* (2012)) and one on South America, *South of*

*continued on next page*

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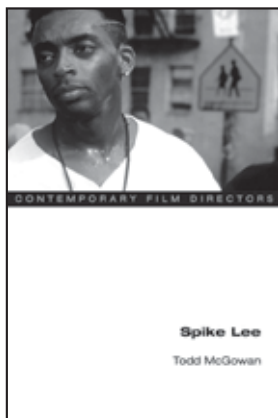
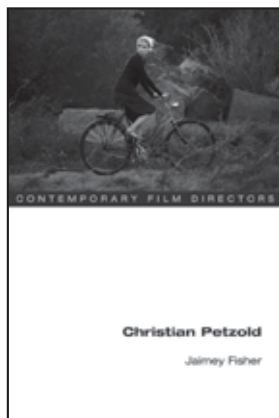
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## CONTEMPORARY FILM DIRECTORS

Other directors in the series include: Philip Kaufman, Jim Jarmusch, Richard Linklater, Jerry Lewis, David Lynch, Lars von Trier, Michael Haneke, and Wong Kar-wai.



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*the Border* (2009), prominently featuring Hugo Chavez and six other Presidents in a continent undergoing huge social changes. He also made *Persona Non Grata* (2003) on Israel-Palestine relations.

His latest work *The Untold History of the United States* (Showtime, 2012), five years in the making, is a monumental 10-hour interrogation of the conventional triumphalist narrative of US history.

Stone was born September 15, 1946 in New York City. He wrote a novel at 19 — *A Child Night's Dream* — about his youth, which was published in 1997 by St. Martin's Press. He served in the US Army Infantry in Vietnam in 1967-68 and was decorated with the Bronze Star for Valor. After returning from Vietnam, he completed his undergraduate studies at NYU Film School in 1971, where he made several short films. He has also worked as a taxi driver, merchant sailor, messenger, advertising salesman, and production assistant on porno films and others.

Awards, considered to be the highest award for electronic media. He is also festival director of Roger Ebert's Film Festival, hosted by Chaz Ebert. Dr. Kohn's credits as a producer include the Academy Award®-nominated *Zulu Dawn* starring Burt Lancaster and Peter O'Toole; the independent feature *Somebodies*, which premiered in competition at Sundance 2006; *Rain*, Bahamas' first indigenous feature which premiered at Toronto 2008 and on Showtime (2010); the feature film *Bottleworld* (2010); and the BET television series *Somebodies* (2008). He is author of *Pursuing Hollywood: Seduction, Obsession, Dread* (Alta Mira Press, 2006), and he is most recently producer on the feature-length documentary *Bayou Maharajah: The Tragic Genius of James Booker*, which premiered at SXSW® 2013.

**TIM WATSON (editor)** is a documentary editor, writer, and producer in New Orleans. His work has been seen on PBS, the Sundance Channel, HBO and other networks in the US and Europe, and at many film festivals around the world. He edited and co-produced *Campo to B.C.* (2014); co-edited and co-wrote *Bayou Maharajah* (2013); co-produced and co-edited *The Music's Gonna Get You Through* (2010); was supervising producer and co-editor for *Bury The Hatchet* (2010); co-edited *Walker Percy: A Documentary Film* (2010); edited the series *Taste Of Place* (2010-11); did story development for and edited *Vows of Silence* (2008); edited *Member Of The Club* (2008); co-produced and edited *By Invitation Only* (2006); edited a documentary segment for *HBO Comic Relief* (2006); co-produced and edited *A Player To Be Named Later* (2005); co-produced and co-edited *Desire* (2005); edited and co-wrote *Shalom Y'All* (2002); and edited *Ruthie The Duck Girl* (1999). Through his New Orleans-based company, *Ariel Montage*, Watson has edited and facilitated many other documentary, narrative, and experimental projects over the past 18 years.

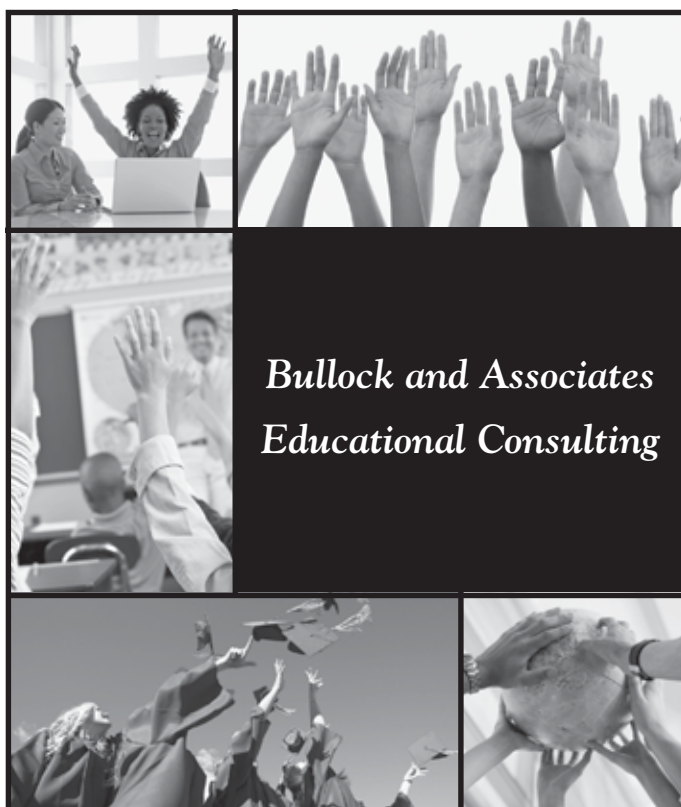
## Bayou Maharajah

Sunday, April 27, noon

### LILY KEBER (producer/director)

is a filmmaker and educator based in New Orleans. A graduate of the University of Georgia, Keber learned filmmaking at the International Film & Television Workshops in Rockport ME. During the summer of 2007, she co-directed *Hutto: America's Family Prison*, a short film on the Department of Homeland Security's policy of family detention. Keber is a co-founder of New Orleans Video Voices, a women-led media collective dedicated to expanding media literacy across the Gulf Coast. Her work has appeared on *Democracy Now!*, *GritTV with Laura Flanders*, *Current TV*, *Electronic Intifada* and local PBS programming. *Bayou Maharajah* is her first feature-length film.

**NATE KOHN (producer)** is a professor at the University of Georgia and Associate Director of the George Foster Peabody



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**HENRY BUTLER (musician)**, considered the premier exponent of the great New Orleans jazz and blues piano tradition, is a ten-time Pinetop Perkins (formerly W.C. Handy) Best Blues Instrumentalist Award nominee. A rich amalgam of jazz, Caribbean, classical, pop, blues and R&B, his music is as excitingly eclectic as that of his New Orleans birthplace. Blinded by glaucoma at birth, Butler has been playing the piano since he was 6, and arranging, composing and performing professionally since he was 12.

Butler's sound has been influenced by the streets (he grew up in the Calliope Projects in New Orleans, has traveled the world, lived on both coasts and in the heartland); by studying with the greats (Alvin Batiste, Sir Roland Hanna, Professor Longhair and James Booker, among others); by institutions (Louisiana School for the Blind, Southern University, Baton Rouge and Michigan State University); and by his willingness to explore new boundaries and take risks. Butler has played almost every major club and festival in the US, as well as venues in Brazil, France, Norway, Italy, Japan, Australia and more. For over 40 years, he has conducted workshops and master classes through the US. He has also developed a camp for blind and visually impaired teen musicians, the subject of the 2010 documentary *The Music's Gonna Get You Through*.

Butler's photographs, exploring the sighted world's relationship with the flat representation image and its power, continue to be exhibited nationally and internationally and to appear in major newspapers across the US. He and his photographic work were featured in the HBO documentary *Dark Light: the Art of Blind Photographers*.

The most recent of Butler's many CDs is *PiaNOLA Live*, with works pulled from his rich archives – about his only possessions that survived Hurricane Katrina, which decimated his home and took his piano, Braille scores and all his recording equipment. Butler can also be heard on recordings by other musicians including Cyndi Lauper, Jeff Golub and Odetta, and on the soundtrack of HBO's

*Tremé*, Season 2 (2012). Whether it's as a soloist or with his blues groups (Henry Butler and the Game Band, and Henry Butler and Jambalaya) or his traditional jazz band (Papa Henry and the Steamy Syncopators), you're in for the ride of a lifetime!

## 2014 Panelists & Special Guests

**BARRY ALLEN** started his career in the late 1960s as a film editor at WISH-TV in Indianapolis in the era when all local movies came in on 16mm film and had to be edited for length and commercial breaks. Several pre-1948 feature libraries from the 1930s and 1940s formed the backbone of the station's library. Building them for on-air presentation was an education in film history; they had to screen hundreds of films a year.

Moving from work in local television, he began booking and programming films for repertory and second run for a small group of independently owned theatres in Indianapolis. In 1987, he was hired by Paramount Television to be Manager of Domestic Television Distribution.

In 1999, he became executive director of Film Preservation, responsible for evaluating film assets for preservation and supervising the manufacture of film elements to be mastered for broadcast and DVD. He retired from Paramount Pictures in 2010 and is now a consulting film preservationist.

**DAN ARONSON**, CTO of Fandor, has been at the forefront of technology since the 1980s, when he began building supercomputers at Thinking Machines Corporation. Prior to founding Fandor, he was an early employee at WAIS, the first internet search engine company, and went on to help manage AOL's servers following its acquisition of WAIS. Aronson co-founded anti-spam company Brightmail and internet incubator Campsix. He has served on the boards of City Car Share and networked music player company Slim Devices.

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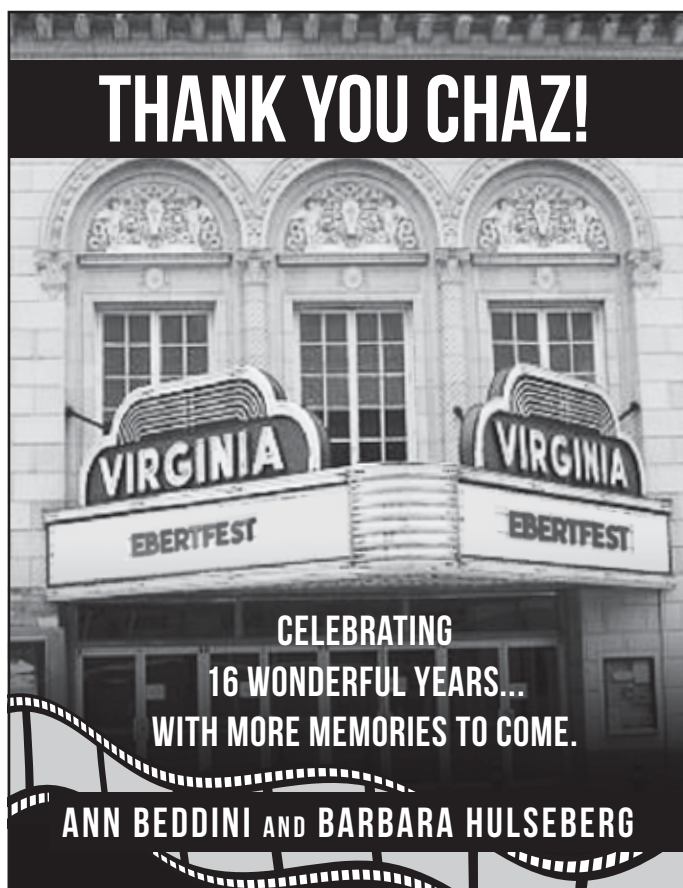

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**MICHAEL BARKER**, as Co-President and Co-Founder of Sony Pictures Classics (with Tom Bernard), which celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2012, has distributed (and quite often produced), some of the finest independent movies over the past 30 years. Previously he was an executive at United Artists (1980-1983) and went on to co-found Orion Classics (1983-1991) and Sony Pictures Classics.

Over the span of his career, Barker's films have received 140 Academy Award® nominations including several for Best Picture *Amour*; *Midnight in Paris*, Woody Allen's most successful film of all time; *An Education*; *Capote*, for which Philip Seymour Hoffman won the Academy Award® for Best Actor; *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, recognized as the highest grossing foreign film of all time in North America; and *Howards End*. His company's Academy Award® nominations resulted in 32 wins (most recently Cate Blanchett for Best Actress for *Blue Jasmine*), including five for Best Documentary Feature, most recently for *Searching For Sugarman*, *Inside Job* and *Fog Of War*, and 12 for Best Foreign Language Film, which include *Babette's Feast*, *All About My Mother*, *The Lives Of Others*, *A Separation* and *Amour*. Other notable award wins include 35 Independent Spirit Awards and 19 Golden Globe® Awards.

Barker has collaborated with some of the world's finest filmmakers, including Woody Allen, Pedro Almodovar, Louis Malle, and Zhang Yimou, all of whom he's worked with on multiple occasions, as well as Robert Altman, Michelangelo Antonioni, Suzanne Bier, Ingmar Bergman, Francis Coppola, David Cronenberg, Guillermo del Toro, the Dardenne brothers, Jonathan Demme, R W Fassbinder, Michael Haneke, Nicole Holofcener, Akira Kurosawa, Norman Jewison, Ang Lee, Richard Linklater, David Mamet, Errol Morris, Roman Polanski, Sally Potter, Francois Truffaut and Wim Wenders.

Over the years, Barker has released features from American masters (*Only Lovers Left Alive*, *Rachel Getting Married*, *Sweet And Lowdown*) and new American filmmakers (*Take Shelter*, *Pollock*,

*Slacker*, *Welcome To The Dollhouse*, *Frozen River*); cutting edge films (*Kung Fu Hustle*, *Moon*, *Orlando*, *Run Lola Run*, *The Raid*); animated features (*The Triplets Of Bellville*, *Persepolis*, *Waltz With Bashir*); feature documentaries (*Dogtown And The Z Boys*, *Crumb*, *Winged Migration*, *It Might Get Loud*, *The Gatekeepers*, *Tim's Vermeer*, *The Armstrong Lie*) and foreign films (*Ran*, *A Prophet*, *White Ribbon*, *Talk To Her*, *Central Station*, *Wings Of Desire*).

He and his colleagues have also restored and theatrically reissued some of the great films of the past, including *The Passenger*, *The Garden Of The Finzi Continis*, *Murmur Of The Heart*, and the classic films of Indian master Satyajit Ray.

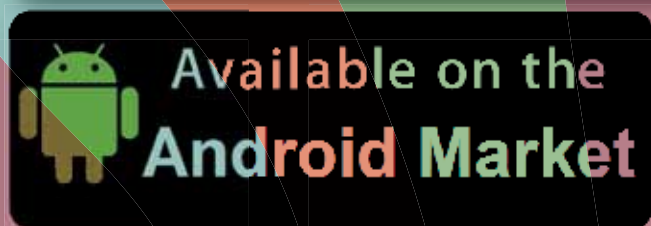
In theaters now, *The Lunchbox* (Ritesh Batra), *Jodorowsky's Dune* (Frank Pavich) and *The Raid 2* (Gareth Evans), *Only Lovers Left Alive* (Jim Jarmusch) and *For No Good Reason* (Charlie Paul).

Upcoming releases include *Magic In The Moonlight* (Woody Allen), *Third Person* (Paul Haggis), *Land Ho!* (Martha Stephens & Aaron Katz), *Love Is Strange* (Ira Sachs), *Whiplash* (Damien Chazelle), *Foxcatcher* (Bennett Miller), *Mr. Turner* (Mike Leigh) and *Lambert And Stamp* (James D. Cooper).

**DAVID BORDWELL** is retired from teaching at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He has written several books on film aesthetics and history, most recently *Poetics of Cinema* (2007), *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment* (2nd edition, 2011), and *Pandora's Digital Box: Films, Files, and the Future of Movies* (2012). He and Kristin Thompson, who collaborated on *Film Art: An Introduction* (10th edition, 2012), write about film regularly at [davidbordwell.net/blog](http://davidbordwell.net/blog). Some of their online essays have been collected in *Minding Movies: Observations about the Art, Craft, and Business of Filmmaking* (University of Chicago Press, 2011).

**C.O. "DOC" ERICKSON**, an executive producer, has over fifty years experience as a producer and production manager on many of Hollywood's biggest films. He

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began his career at Paramount Pictures, serving as production manager on five Alfred Hitchcock films: *Rear Window*, *To Catch A Thief*, *The Trouble with Harry*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, and *Vertigo*. He left Paramount to become John Huston's associate producer on *The Misfits*, *Freud* and *Reflections in a Golden Eye*. He was production manager on Joseph L. Mankiewicz's *Cleopatra*. He also spent three years supervising film production for Brut Productions and later became associated with Robert Evans on *Chinatown*, *Players*, *Urban Cowboy* and *Popeye*. Other producer/production credits include *55 Days at Peking*, *Blade Runner*, *Groundhog Day*, *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, *Magic* and *The Lonely Guy*.

**SAM FRAGOSO**, a native of Chicago, lives and works in San Francisco as a journalist and student at SF State University. He's the founder and editor-in-chief of *Movie Mezzanine*, thumbnail editor for [RogerEbert.com](http://RogerEbert.com), residential film critic for *SF Bay* and member of the Online Film Critics Society. His work has also appeared at *The Week*, *Film School Rejects* and *Fan the Fire Magazine*. You may find everything he does at [SamFragoso.com](http://SamFragoso.com).

**TED HOPE** recently became CEO of Fandor, a subscription-based streaming site committed to the preservation and advancement of film culture for filmmakers and audiences alike. He is one of the most respected producers in independent film. A survey of his 70-plus films includes many highlights and breakthroughs in cinema, including Ang Lee's *The Ice Storm*, Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini's *American Splendor*, Alejandro González Iñárritu's *21 Grams*, Todd Solondz's *Happiness*, Tamara Jenkins' *The Savages*, and Todd Field's *In the Bedroom*, amongst many others. Known within the industry for his ability to recognize emerging talent, he has more than 20 first features to his credit, including those of Alan Ball, Todd Field, Michel Gondry, Hal Hartley and Nicole Holofcener.

As the creator, editor and regular contributor to the [Hope For Film](http://HopeForFilm) blog, Hope provides a

must-read forum for discussion and engagement about the critical issues faced by filmmakers, artists, and the film industry. Ted's first book, *Hope For Film: Scenes From The Independent Film Revolutions*, is slated for publication late this summer. Hope is married to filmmaker Vanessa Hope, and has a 13-year-old son, Michael.

**VANESSA HOPE** started her film career in China while teaching a graduate course on law and society and completing her PhD at Columbia. Fluent in Chinese, she's produced three films in China, Wang Quanan's second feature (Berlin 2004), Chantal Akerman's Shanghai film (2007) and her own short film directorial debut, *China In Three Words* (Palm Springs 2013). She directed a web series for NYU's US-Asia Law Institute called *Law, Life & Asia*. Her US producing credits include Zeina Durra's directorial debut (Sundance 2010), Joel Schumacher's *Twelve* (Sundance 2010) and a feature documentary on *William Kunstler* (Sundance 2009) distributed by Arthouse films and *POV*. Civil rights and China are common subjects of Vanessa's films, including the feature documentary she's in post on right now, *All Eyes and Ears*.

**WAEEL KHAIRY** was born in London on February the 29th (leap year) 11 minutes before his twin brother. After birth, Wael stayed in the UK for 5 years and then moved to his home country, Egypt. He has been living in Cairo ever since.

His passion for cinema started at a very young age when his old man gave him an old VHS tape of *Jaws* for his birthday. The viewing of that film triggered a movie watching frenzy, and he's been reading about film ever since. Wael graduated from the American University in Cairo with a major in Communications of Media Art and minors in both Accounting and in Film, the latter completed at UCLA. Wael is an Egyptian national film critic writing for a number of local publications. He started writing for Egypt's first film magazine, *C*, and is currently the main film critic for Egypt's most popular online magazine, *Cairo Scene*, with his own column, "Wael

*continued on next page*

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Watches.” He has written several reviews and essays published in two *World Film Locations* books in the UK.

His revolution-related tweets were published in the bestseller, *Tweets from Tahrir*. Wael was also one of Roger’s FFCs and is a multi-award winning senior copywriter working for the Cairo branch of multinational ad agency BBDO. Besides his website [The Cinephile Fix](#) and the *Chicago Sun-Times* blog, Wael also wrote regularly for *The Spectator’s* arts blog, and several other publications around the world.

**KEVIN B. LEE** is a film critic, filmmaker, and producer of over 200 video essays on film and TV. In 2013 *New City* magazine included him (along with Chaz Ebert) in Chicago’s Top 50 Film People. He is founding editor and chief video essayist at Fandor Keyframe and founding partner of dGenerate Films. Kevin has contributed to *Ebert Presents*, [RogerEbert.com](#), *The New York Times*, *Sight & Sound*, and *Indiewire*. He tweets at @alsolikelife.

**MICHAEL MIRASOL** is a Filipino independent film critic and blogger who has been writing about film for the past 14 years. He briefly served as film critic for the *Manila Times* and now contributes occasionally to several online publications such as the *ACMI blog*, *Fandor*, *IndieWire’s PressPlay*, *The Spectator Arts* blog, and *Uno*. In 2010, he was named as one of Roger’s FFCs. He has also contributed to *World Film Locations New York*, a film photography book by Scott Jordan Harris. Michael’s blog is [The Flip Critic](#).

**OMER MOZAFFAR**, a scholar of religion, received an “Excellence in Teaching Award in the Humanities, Arts, and Sciences” in 2011 from the University of Chicago’s Graham School. He also teaches at Loyola, DePaul and other Chicago area institutions, academic and confessional. In 2009, Roger named him as one of his Far Flung Correspondents. Omer misses Roger tremendously.

**NELL MINOW** began reviewing movies for her high school and college newspapers and has been writing reviews online as the Movie Mom since 1995. Her website [Movie Mom](#) includes reviews of theatrical and DVD/Blu-Ray releases as well as features, interviews, and contests, and she appears each week on radio stations across the country and in Canada to talk about new releases. Her writing about movies and popular culture has appeared in many outlets, including [RogerEbert.com](#), *USA Today*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the *Kansas City Star*, and the Motion Picture Association’s [thecredits.org](#). Her books include *The Movie Mom’s Guide to Family Movies*, *101 Must-See Movie Moments*, and the *50 Must-See Movies* series.

**MICHAEL PHILLIPS** is the *Chicago Tribune* film critic. He cohosted 100 or so episodes of the long-running nationally syndicated *At the Movies*, first opposite Richard Roeper, then A.O. Scott. He reviewed *Taxi Driver* for his high school paper, *The Shield*. He went on to write about movies for the Twin Cities weekly *City Pages*. He served as theater critic of the *Los Angeles Times*, the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, the *Dallas Times-Herald* and the St. Paul *Pioneer Press*. He came to the Tribune as its drama critic in 2002 before being named film critic in 2006. He has hosted programming for Turner Classic Movies. He lives in Logan Square with his wife, Tribune columnist Heidi Stevens, and their three children. He’s also happy and honored to be back at Ebertfest.

**ERIC PIERSON** is an associate professor and former chair of the Communication Studies Department at the University of San Diego. His work on black images and audiences has appeared the *Encyclopedia of African American Business History*, *Screening Noir*, the *Encyclopedia of the Great Black Migration*, *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* and *Watching While Black: Centering the Television of Black Audiences*. His most recent work, “The Clinton 12” and “Prom Night in Mississippi: Conversations in Integration,” appears in the forthcoming



book, *Documenting the Black Experience*. Eric can also be seen in the documentary *Infiltrating Hollywood: The Rise and Fall of the Spook Who Sat By The Door*.

Eric holds two degrees from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, a BFA in Fine Arts and a PhD from the Institute for Communications Research.

**STEVE PROKOPY** is the Chicago editor for *Ain't It Cool News*, where he has contributed film reviews and interviews under the alias 'Capone' since 1998. He is also a frequent guest on Chicago Public Radio's *Filmspotting* movie review show. Steve received a BA in journalism from Northwestern University in 1990.

**MATT ZOLLER SEITZ** is the editor-in-chief of [RogerEbert.com](http://RogerEbert.com), the TV critic for *New York Magazine* and [Vulture.com](http://Vulture.com) and a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in criticism. He is the founder and original editor of the influential blog [The House Next Door](http://TheHouseNextDoor.com), now a part of *Slant Magazine*, and the founder and publisher of *Press Play*. Matt has written, narrated, edited or produced over 100 hours worth of video essays about cinema history and style for The Museum of the Moving Image, The L Magazine, *Vulture* and *Press Play*, among other outlets. His 5-part 2009 video essay *Wes Anderson: The Substance of Style* was later spun off into the hardcover book *The Wes Anderson Collection*, a New York Times bestseller. Matt is the director of the romantic comedy *Home*, several short films, and a forthcoming science fiction epic that will be shot in his apartment. He lives in Brooklyn with his two children.

**KRISHNA BALA SHENOI** is an 19-year old Indian boy who has been obsessed with movies for as long as he can remember. He's a lover of Steven Spielberg, Ray Harryhausen, movie soundtracks, superhero films, the Eels, and his mother's food.

His passion for film viewing and filmmaking began early on. When he was 7 or 8, he used to make home movies with an old Sony camcorder, building blocks, clay models, or whatever he could

find, employing very rough stop-motion animation techniques. Today, he studies at Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology in Bangalore, and still creates short films, animations, paintings and digital art, all of which you can see on his website, [Krishna Bala Shenoi](http://KrishnaBalaShenoi.com). He is extremely proud, and slightly intimidated, to be Roger's youngest FFC and will be coming to Illinois from Bangalore along with his mother for his third Ebertfest.

**KRISTIN THOMPSON** is an Honorary Fellow in the Department of Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her eleventh book, *The Frodo Franchise: The Lord of the Rings and Modern Hollywood* (for which she interviewed Roger on the subject of press junkets) was published in 2007 by the University of California Press. Her previous books include *Storytelling in the New Hollywood* (Harvard, 1999) and *Herr Lubitsch Goes to Hollywood* (Amsterdam, 2005). With David Bordwell, she maintains the blog [Observations on Film Art](http://ObservationsOnFilmArt.com).

**SUSAN WLOSZCZYNA** spent much of her nearly 30 years at *USA Today* as a senior entertainment reporter doing her dream job: visiting the New Zealand film set of *The Lord of the Rings*, being a zombie extra in George Romero's *Land of the Dead* and interviewing countless show biz figures including icons (Vincent Price, Shirley Temple, Peter O'Toole, Mr. Rogers), A-list stars (George Clooney, Julia Roberts, Meryl Streep, Tom Hanks, Will Smith, Sandra Bullock, Denzel Washington) and big-name filmmakers (Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, Martin Scorsese, Jane Campion, Nancy Meyers, Spike Lee, Wes Anderson and Alexander Payne).

Her positions at the newspaper included being a film reviewer for 12 years as well as the Life section copy desk chief. Now unchained from the grind of daily journalism, she is ready to view the world of movies with fresh eyes.

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# Life Itself

## Steve James offers emotional portrait of Ebert in tributary film

By Scott Foundas, *Variety*

A life spent at the movies gets the cinematic epitaph it richly deserves in “Life Itself,” documentarian Steve James’ meticulous and intensely emotional portrait of the late Roger Ebert. Given unfettered access to Ebert during what turned out to be the last four months of the venerated critic’s life, James cuts — as in all of his best work — straight to the human heart of the matter, celebrating both the writer and the man, the one inseparable from the other, largely in Ebert’s own words. One can only hope that this CNN Films presentation, a natural for wide fest play, will also end up on the bigscreen, where Ebert himself surely would have wanted it.

James, whose own association with Ebert dates back to 1994 (when the critic waged an impassioned campaign on behalf of the director’s debut feature, “Hoop Dreams”), began filming in December 2012, just as Ebert

was admitted to a Chicago rehab hospital for a hairline hip fracture. It was Ebert’s seventh stay at the facility since the 2006 cancer surgery that left him without much of his jaw and unable to speak or eat. And yet, in spite of his latest medical setbacks, Ebert remains eager for James to film — joking jubilantly with his nurses one moment, undergoing the clearly painful process of having his throat drained by suction the next, and later struggling to walk during a grueling physical therapy session. Through it all, Ebert’s computer is never far from hand, as he continues to write reviews and blog entries, and makes conversation through a computerized voice box.

From there, James delves into Ebert’s biography, not so much chronologically as impressionistically, guided by the critic’s email responses to questions James sends him during his rehab (a kind of pre-interview for an anticipated



A young Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel pose for a portrait.

longer, in-person sitdown that never transpired). Also quoted at length are passages from Ebert’s 2011 memoir, also titled “Life Itself,” which are read on the soundtrack by voice actor Stephen Stanton. Enriched by marvelous archival photographs and reminisces from friends, colleagues and drinking buddies, James’ film traces Ebert’s prodigal journey from a newspaper-obsessed childhood to the editorship of his college paper, The Daily Illini,

where the impassioned young Ebert wrote fiery editorials in support of the civil rights movement and even once stopped the presses to prevent a tasteless advertisement from appearing opposite the news of JFK’s assassination.

As the film moves into Ebert’s professional career at the Chicago Sun-Times, where he became the youngest daily newspaper critic in the country, James vividly evokes a bygone era of rolled-sleeve

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*Unsurprisingly, much of “Life Itself” is given over to Ebert’s democratizing and popularizing impact on the world of film criticism ...*

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Windy City newsmen and the storied watering holes where they caroused until dawn. Among the docu's most candid sections is the one devoted to Ebert's battle with alcoholism, which he admits would have ended both his life and career had he not joined AA in 1979. (It was at an AA meeting, it is revealed here for the first time, that Ebert met his future wife, Chaz.)

Unsurprisingly, much of "Life Itself" is given over to Ebert's democratizing and popularizing impact on the world of film criticism, with judiciously chosen clips ("Bonnie and Clyde," "Cries and Whispers," "Raging Bull") and excerpts from those same films' respective reviews used to show how Ebert combined his encyclopedic knowledge of cinema with an accessible, plainspoken writing style that could be understood by anybody. Filmmakers including Errol Morris, Werner Herzog and Martin Scorsese (also an executive producer here) speak to the specific contributions Ebert made to their careers, Scorsese tearing up as he remembers a tribute Ebert and his TV sparring partner Gene Siskel organized for him in Toronto at one of the lowest moments of his personal and professional life.

Of course, it was TV that made Ebert a cherished cultural institution, and "Life Itself" delights in taking us behind the scenes of the long-running series that began on public television as "Opening Soon at a Theater Near You" (with, as clips here attest, neither host quite yet ready for primetime) and evolved into the syndicated "Siskel & Ebert." Veteran show producers, along with Chaz Ebert and Siskel's widow,



Roger Ebert and Gene Siskel look on at a film screening.

Marlene Iglitzen, recall how the rival newspapermen barely spoke to each other in private during the early years of the program, only to eventually grow very close (a friendship cut short by Siskel's own cancer-related death in 1999).

James also takes time to show that not everyone was so enamored of the TV program and its iconic thumbs-up, thumbs-down judgments, with some critics (including Film Comment's Richard Corliss, who published a lengthy attack piece later rebutted by Ebert) bemoaning what they saw as its crass consumerization of film reviewing. But compared to what passes for informed debate — of movies or anything else — on TV today, the "Siskel & Ebert" clips included here seem almost a model of erudite discourse.

The heart of "Life Itself" — and of Ebert's life, itself — is the love story between Roger and Chaz, whom he married at age 50 after having more or less resolved that he would spend the rest of his life alone, and who would prove to be his tower of strength throughout his prolonged illness. Interviewed at length here, Chaz's warm presence,



Steve James directed "Life Itself," a biographical film on Roger Ebert.

her effusive love for her husband, and her palpable fear of losing him permeate the film, especially when Roger is diagnosed with newly discovered spinal tumors and resolves that, this time, he no longer has the will to fight. "This is the third act, and it is an experience," he tells James bravely, even as we can plainly see that Chaz is not nearly so ready to let go.

Cliché as it may be to say, there's no denying that Ebert's encroaching mortality made him appreciate life all the more: He threw himself into his writing with renewed vigor (the only time, he tells James, he felt like his

## FILMCREDITS

# LIFE ITSELF

(2014) Not Rated

Written and directed by  
**Steve James**

### Cast:

**Roger Ebert** as himself  
**Martin Scorsese** as himself  
**Werner Herzog** as himself  
**Errol Morris** as himself

Running time: 115 minutes

Print courtesy:  
**Kartemquin Films**

old self), reflecting not just on cinema, but on politics, religion and other issues of the day. But the title "Life Itself" is fitting in another regard, too; it evokes one of Ebert's favorite films, Akira Kurosawa's "Ikiru," whose title is Japanese for "to live." That film tells the story of a cancer-stricken Tokyo bureaucrat determined to build a children's playground as a valedictory gesture before he dies, and James includes an unidentified clip from it here in a montage near the end of "Life Itself." It is easy to think of "Ikiru," too, when James shows us Ebert in his final days, working tirelessly on a revamped version of his RogerEbert.com website, a film buff's playground where Ebert's voice will live on, as it does in this film, a gleaming beacon to guide us through the moviegoing dark.



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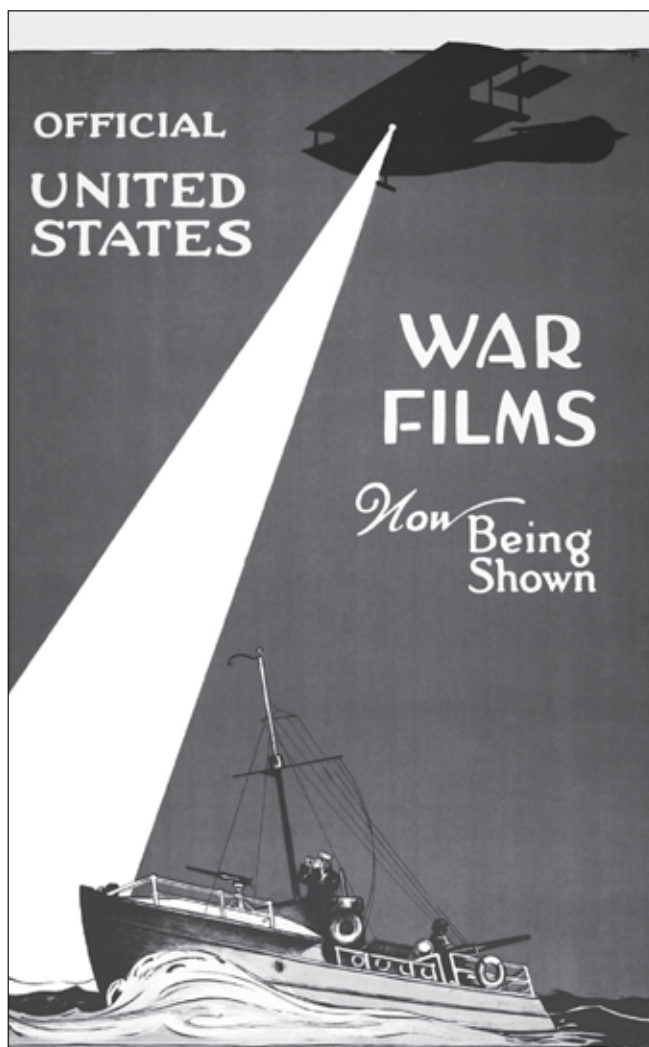


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THURSDAY 1PM

# Museum Hours

## Cohen's magical depictions liven up world of museums

By Kevin B. Lee

Quick, name the last great film you saw that was a true-to-life telling of how friendship works. Not a frat-house bro-mance or other Hollywood formulae for fraternizing, but a film that leaves you thinking, "This is how people really get along. This is how we talk to each other and share our lives." Now ask yourself when was the last time you saw a great film about art. How many movies about museums can you expect to see in a given year? I'm staring at a list of 100 or so first-run movies that I saw in 2013 and only one film matches these criteria. Luckily that film, "Museum Hours," fits them all brilliantly.

The film's first shot introduces us to Johann (Robert Sommer), a security guard at the majestic Kunsthistorisches Art Museum in Vienna. Seated quietly underneath masterpieces by the likes of Rembrandt and Bruegel, he seems as unremarkable as the guards we pass by whenever we visit galleries. But over the course of this film, director Jem Cohen will have us pay attention to him and many other things that we normally overlook, for they all possess incredibly rich experiences to share, if we just



Robert Sommer plays Johann, a security guard, in the film "Museum Hours."

pay attention to them.

"What is it about some people that makes one curious?" Johann asks in voiceover. He's speaking specifically about Anne (Mary Margaret O'Hara), a middle-aged Canadian woman who visits the museum, but is actually in Vienna to tend to a comatose cousin, largely because she was the only relative the hospital could reach. Alone in a strange city, she too is in need of help, and Johann does what he can, getting her a museum pass and accompanying her on hospital visits. Neither of them have much money, but



"Museum Hours" depicts Vienna in a more modest and genuine light.

that simply affords them time to spend talking and getting to know each other as they explore the city on the cheap. As we follow them, we get to know the city as well, not in a

glamorous touristy way, but in a way that's more modest and genuine: the subdued textures of its ancient streets, and the warm, inviting moods of its working class cafes and bars.

This story might recall another famous movie about a couple exploring Vienna, Richard Linklater's swooningly romantic "Before Sunrise." But unlike that youthful coupling, here there's no chance of an amorous encounter between the leads, for reasons I'll leave you to discover. Here the two talk with no agenda other than to enjoy each other's company, discussing their families, their jobs and their honest reactions to the artwork in the museum. Johann is able to deliver exquisite descriptions of many paintings, as he's spent countless hours looking at them. Anne's responses are more impulsive: She sees Adam and Eve hanging naked on the wall and talks about an old boyfriend who would walk around nude "as if he was in a tuxedo." She catches herself mid-sentence: "This is too much information!"

The film then takes a mysterious turn with a sequence of museum visitors walking as naked as some of the figures painted on the walls. Is Cohen making a direct comparison between the classic nudes and the live figures in front of his camera? Or is he evoking a state of total openness that great art can inspire? Paradoxically, museums seem to be a place that shut down such openness, dressed as they are in an aura of class and decorum. In another key scene, a museum guide (Ela



*Johann and Anne, played by Mary Margaret O'Hara, spend countless hours in the Vienna art museum, finding friendship in each other's company.*

Piplitz) discusses Breugel's paintings with visitors, politely entertaining their amateur interpretations before delivering an exhaustive (and exhausting) account of the historical and artistic contexts for appreciating the works. The guide's vast array of knowledge is impressive, and yet somehow oppressive; her passion for these works is obvious, and yet it threatens to stifle those whom she is eagerly inviting to share her enthusiasm.

To his credit, Cohen's eye is more open and loose in generating meanings both in and outside the Kunsthistorisches. To him, the streets of Vienna are as delectable a gallery of images as the museum; he even juxtaposes audio from a museum guide with scenes from a flea market. There's a generous assortment of everyday sounds and images that manage to be sharply

detailed yet elusive in meaning. Cohen, a New York-based filmmaker, has a street-bred punk sensibility, having made music films with the likes of Patti Smith and Fugazi. Like those artists, he mines poetry out of the raw, unpretentious materials of the quotidian. These happen to be the same qualities found in Breugel's sublimely grimy panoramas of human squalor and salvation from over 500 years ago. As Cohen brings new life to the museum experience, he also brings the refined eye of the artist to look at everyday life.

Key to tying the two worlds together are Sommer and O'Hara as the leads. Neither are professional actors; O'Hara is a self-described "non-disciplinary" artist of many interests; her face shines with an inner light of charismatic goodness, while her speaking style has a charming flightiness that resembles a hummingbird. Sommer, a former road manager for rock bands who now works for the Viennale Film Festival, bears a demeanor that exudes zen-like tranquility. For Cohen to entrust his film to two unproven talents, and for it to pay off in such exquisite moments between the two

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*It also questions what it is that we value in the museum experience. Is it to look at fancy paintings and feel cultured, or is it to experience something more direct?*

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## FILMCREDITS

# MUSEUM HOURS

(2012) Not Rated

Written and directed by  
**Jem Cohen**

**Cast:**  
**Robert Sommer** as Johann  
**Mary Margaret O'Hara** as Anne  
**Ela Piplitz** as Gerda

Running time: 107 minutes

Print courtesy:  
**The Cinema Guild**

of them, attests to a unique approach to casting that sees the star power of one's simple humanity.

"Museum Hours" is a unique film that creates a richly rewarding experience from the scraps of life. It doesn't rely on A-list actors or expensive sets; true that it films inside one of the world's greatest museums, but it also questions what it is that we value in the museum experience. Is it to look at fancy paintings and feel cultured, or is it to experience something more direct: to dare to unsheathe oneself of one's expectations and inhibitions, and truly embrace what a work of art can offer? And then, how could one carry that open mindset to embrace all of life itself? With patient attention and quiet devotion, these are challenges that this film dares to tackle.

THURSDAY4PM

# Short Term 12

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INCLUSION, AND RESPECT

## Larson stars as a ‘revelation’ in film about troubled teens

By Christy Lemire

It all could have been painfully mawkish, populated as it is with the kinds of kids who provide inspiration for after-school specials. Instead, “Short Term 12” comes from a place of delicate and truthful understatement, which allows the humanity and decency of its characters — and, yes, the lessons — to shine through naturally.

The film’s originality begins with the setting: a foster-care center for at-risk teens whose troubles run the gamut from depression to substance abuse to self-mutilation. Writer-director Destin Daniel

Cretton based “Short Term 12” partly on his own experiences working at such a center and previously made a short film on the subject. In drawing the story out to feature length, Cretton takes an abidingly naturalistic, conversational approach to both the complicated issues these kids face and the no-nonsense way their counselors try to help them.

Chief among them is Brie Larson as the 20-something Grace, a formerly troubled teen herself who now hopes to serve as a guide for others. Just as the extent of Grace’s painful past is revealed to us

in deliberate pieces, Larson’s performance itself is a revelation. It’s a welcome and long-overdue lead role for the actress who’s been so engaging in supporting parts in films like “The Spectacular Now” and “Scott Pilgrim vs. The World” and the Showtime series “The United States of Tara.” There’s a directness about her that’s appealing, even here where she’s meant to look a little mousy and low-key.

At the film’s start, Grace seems to have achieved a comfortable balance between her professional and personal lives. She handles both the mundane routine of the place



Brie Larson plays Grace, a counselor for at-risk teens who has a troubled past herself, in “Short Term 12.”

and the volatile emotional flare-ups with the same sort of cool confidence. She also has a loving, playful relationship with her longtime live-in boyfriend, the shaggy, foulmouthed Mason (played amiably by John Gallagher Jr.), who works alongside her as a supervisor at the center.

But the impending departure of one kid and the arrival of another shake everything up for her. Tough, intense Marcus (Keith Stanfield) is about to turn 18, which means he’ll have to leave the home; frightened to make his way on his own, he acts out during these final days instead of facing his future. A profane and deeply felt rap song he wrote details his life of neglect and abuse, and the



Grace, played by Brie Larson, and Marcus, played by Keith Stanfield, talk in a scene from “Short Term 12.”



## FILMCREDITS

# SHORT TERM 12

(2013) Rated R

Written and directed by  
**Destin Daniel Cretton**

**Cast:**

**Brie Larson** as Grace  
**John Gallagher Jr.** as Mason  
**Keith Stanfield** as Marcus  
**Stephanie Beatriz** as Jessica  
**Frantz Turner** as Jack

Running time: 96 minutes

Print courtesy:  
**Cinedigm**



Grace and Mason, played by John Gallagher Jr., share an intimate moment as the central couple in the film "Short Term 12."

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*One of the subtle beauties of "Short Term 12" is the way it intimately depicts how the counselors find ways into these kids' lives and connect with them.*

---

fact that Cretton presents the performance in one long take adds to its power.

Marcus overlaps briefly with the surly and withdrawn new girl, Jayden (Kaitlyn Dever), who insists her father is coming to get her soon so she refuses to make friends. One of the subtle beauties of "Short Term 12" is the way

it intimately depicts how the counselors find ways into these kids' lives and connect with them. For Grace and Jayden, it's through a shared love of drawing. But Jayden also uses her art to reveal the truth about her home life, which stirs secrets within Grace that she'd fought hard for years to suppress.

This upheaval comes at a time when Grace and Mason are trying to create something lasting for themselves: a home and a family of their own. The ambivalence Grace finds herself feeling, and the way that emotional shift shatters Mason, are both believable and heartbreaking.

Cretton shows as much care and kindness with the minutiae of the daily routine — the doling out of meds, searches for contraband and forced recreational activities like Wiffle ball games — as he does with the larger issues that plague these lives in flux. He also infuses his story with unexpected humor as the kids

hassle each other — and their supervisors — on the road to healing.

While some of the third-act choices his characters make seem a little extreme compared to the realism that marks the rest of the film, Cretton consistently refrains from employing a tone that's heavy-handed. "Short Term 12" is a small gem in which the uplift feels earned rather than preached.



THURSDAY 9PM

# Young Adult

‘Fearless character study’ provided by Reitman, Cody collaboration

By Roger Ebert, December 7, 2011

They must have closed their eyes and crossed their fingers while they were making this film. It breaks with form, doesn't follow our expectations, and is about a heroine we like less at the end than at the beginning. There are countless movies about Queen Bitches in high school, but "Young Adult" has its revenge by showing how miserable they can be when they're pushing 40.

The movie stars Charlize Theron, one of the best actors now working, as Mavis, a character we thoroughly dislike. Not only is she knock-dead gorgeous, but we see how she makes herself look that way, and what happens when it comes undone. She plays the one-time high school beauty queen in Mercury, Minn., who moved to the big city (Minneapolis), got her own condo, and is sorta famous as the author of series of a young adult novels about vampires. Back home in Mercury, they think of her as a glamorous success. Of course they haven't

seen her in years.

They're about to. In real life, Mavis lives alone, her apartment is a pigpen, she chugs liters of Diet Coke and throws back shots of bourbon and is likely to be single until the end of time. She receives an email from Buddy Slade (Patrick Wilson), her high school boyfriend. Buddy and his wife Beth (Elizabeth Reaser) have just had a baby, and here's a photo of the little darlin'. That does it. Mavis gets into her shiny Mini, drives home to Mercury and intends to attend the baby shower. In her mind, a tragic mistake has occurred. Buddy was intended to marry her, the baby should have been hers, and damn it all, it's not too late to set things straight.

"Young Adult" is the first collaboration between director Jason Reitman and screenwriter Diablo Cody since the success of their "Juno" (2007). Once again they center on a woman, but Juno was enormously likable and Mavis seems unaware of her frightening



Charlize Theron plays Mavis Gary in "Young Adult."

effect on people. In the role of Buddy, Patrick Wilson faces one of an actor's trickiest challenges, portraying polite social embarrassment. When you have a wife and a new baby and are holding a breast milk pump in your hand, how do you respond when an old flame turns up at the door and expects you to drop everything and run off to Minneapolis with her?

The impossibilities of Mavis' behavior in "Young Adult" require some sort of cushioning, and the film wisely provides the character of Matt Freehauf, played by the comedian Patton Oswalt. Matt and Mavis had nothing to do

with each other in high school. "I remember you!" Mavis now tells him. "You're the hate crime guy!"

She is never the soul of tact. Yes, Matt was nearly killed in a gay-bashing incident in high school, despite the inconvenience that he is not gay. Now he still lives in Mercury with his sister, stuck on pause. His experience has given him insight into pariahs, and he immediately realizes Mavis is nose-diving into disaster. What Matt knows while Mavis remains clueless is that Buddy is perfectly happy with Beth and their baby, and shudders when he sees Mavis approaching.

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*The character of Mavis makes "Young Adult" tricky to process. As I absorbed it, I realized what a fearless character study it is. That sometimes it's funny doesn't hurt.*

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## FILMCREDITS

# YOUNG ADULT

(2011) Rated R

Written by **Diablo Cody**

Directed by **Jason Reitman**

### Cast:

**Charlize Theron** as Mavis Gary

**Patrick Wilson** as Matt Freehauf

**Patton Oswalt** as Buddy Slade

Running time: 94 minutes

Print courtesy:

**Paramount Pictures**



*Buddy Slade, played by Patton Oswalt, and Mavis Gary talk during a scene from "Young Adult."*

Patton Oswalt is, in a way, the key to the film's success. Theron is flawless at playing a cringe-inducing monster and Wilson touching as a nice guy who hates to offend her, but the audience needs a point of entry, a character we can identify with, and Oswalt's Matt is human, realistic, sardonic and self-deprecating. He speaks truth to Mavis.

Though he's had many supporting parts, this is only Oswalt's second major role; he was wonderful a few years ago in "Big Fan," the story of a loser who lived through his fantasy alter ego as a "regular caller" to sports talk radio. Patton Oswalt is a

very particular actor, who is indispensable in the right role, and I suspect Reitman and his casting director saw him in "Big Fan" and made an inspired connection with Matt.

As for Mavis, there's an elephant in the room: She's an alcoholic. "I think I may be an alcoholic," she tells her hometown parents during an awkward dinner. Anyone who says that knows damn well they are. But civilians (and some of the critics writing about this film) are slow to recognize alcoholism. On the basis of what we see her drinking on the screen, she must be more or less drunk in every scene. She drinks a lot

of bourbon neat. I've noticed a trend in recent movies: Few characters have mixed drinks anymore. It's always one or two fingers, or four or five, of straight booze in a glass.

Alcoholism explains a lot of things: her single status, her disheveled apartment, her current writer's block, her lack of self-knowledge, her denial, Fher inappropriate behavior. Diablo Cody was wise to include it; without such a context, Mavis would simply be insane. As it is, even in the movie's last scene, she reminds me of what Boss Gettys says of Citizen Kane: "He's going to need more than one lesson. And he's going to get more

than one lesson."

After I left the screening of "Young Adult," my thoughts were mixed. With "Thank You for Smoking," "Juno" and "Up in the Air," Jason Reitman has an incredible track record. Those films were all so rewarding. The character of Mavis makes "Young Adult" tricky to process. As I absorbed it, I realized what a fearless character study it is. That sometimes it's funny doesn't hurt.

## FREESCREENING

# The Taking of Pelham One Two Three

**Tuesday, April 22**

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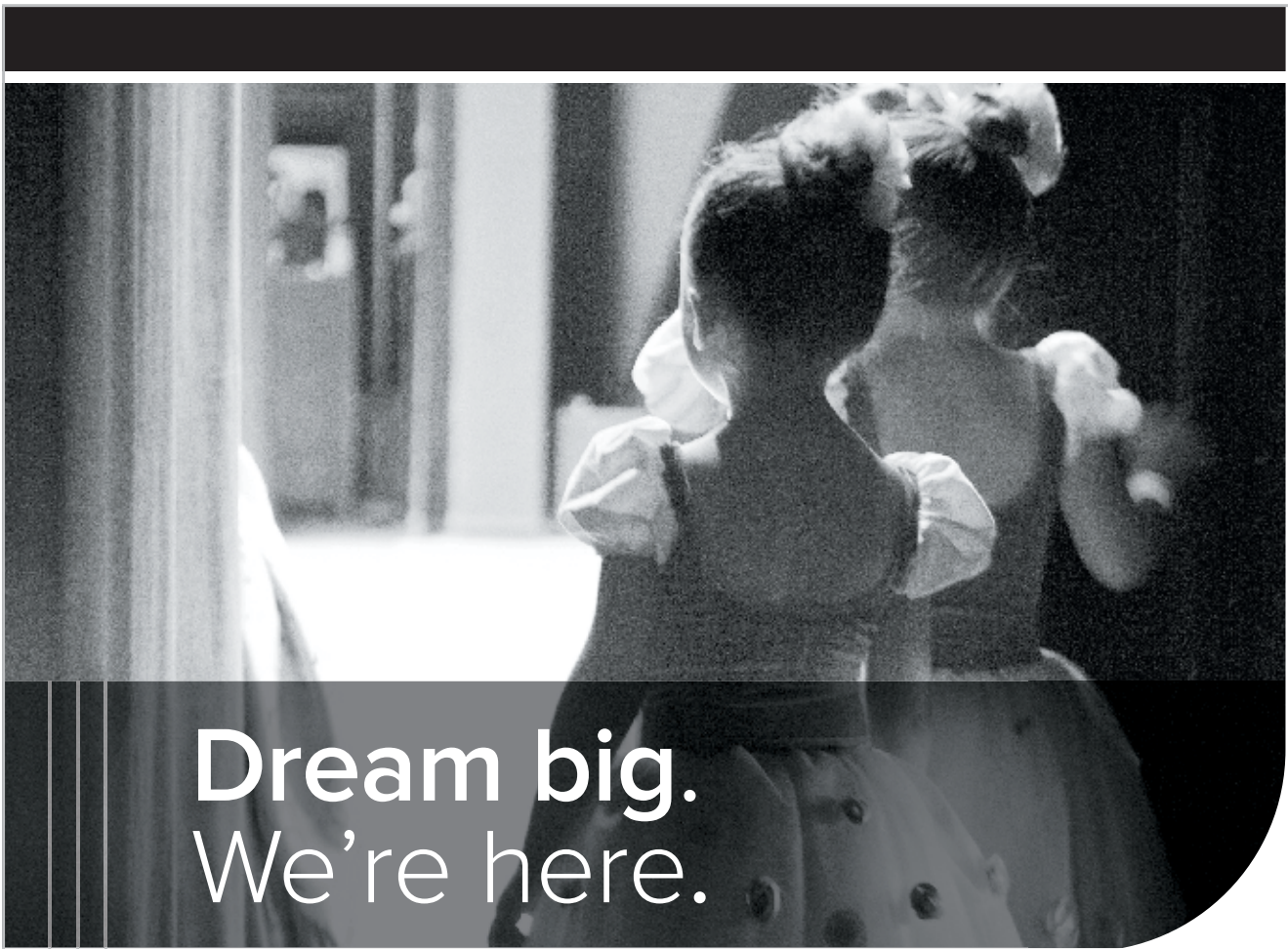
This action film follows a hijacked New York City subway train and how the ordinary day for dispatcher, Walter Garber, is turned upside down.

Free student screening, hosted by Patton Oswalt



*Patton Oswalt will host the screening.*





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FRIDAY1PM

FEATURING: THE ALLOY ORCHESTRA

# He Who Gets Slapped

## Silent film depicts clown's life of betrayal, love and pain

By Thomas Gladysz, San Francisco Silent Film Festival

Seeking a change of pace from his already successful career as a Swedish director and actor, Victor Sjöström arrived in New York in January 1923 at the invitation of Goldwyn Pictures. Sjöström's intention was to study American production methods and to involve himself in a film or two. The Swede never thought to stay in America for very long.

By the spring of 1924, however, when notable actors, directors, and producers gathered for a celebration of the merger of Goldwyn with the Metro and Mayer companies, Sjöström was in the thick of things. By then, he had anglicized his name to Seastrom and had directed "Name the Man" (1924), a popular and critically acclaimed film for Goldwyn. Admired by newly appointed MGM production head Irving Thalberg, Seastrom was chosen to direct the new company's first film — a prestige production on which the studio's fortunes rode. That film was "He Who Gets Slapped."

Leonid Andreyev's celebrated play, the basis for the script, was the last dramatic work by the celebrated Russian author whose stories had turned increasingly pessimistic. First published in 1914, the play

had its premiere in the United States in 1922 at New York's Garrick Theater, where it enjoyed a six-month run and was widely reviewed. Alexander Woollcott, a founding member of the Algonquin Round Table wrote, "It has things in it that belong to the theater of all the world."

As an acclaimed European director at work in America, Seastrom (like Murnau and Lubitsch) enjoyed contractual privileges not usually granted to studio directors, including script approval, choice of cast, selection of cameraman and assistant director, and the right to supervise editing. Attentive to every facet of a film, Seastrom carefully considered the stories offered to him. Andreyev's symbolic work, with its existential themes, no doubt appealed to the émigré director.

"He Who Gets Slapped" is the story of a scientist whose happiness is destroyed by a friend who steals not only his wife but also the results of his life's research. The scientist turns bitter and, in desperation, joins a circus as a clown whose popular act is based on being repeatedly slapped. The clown, now known only as "He" (even his identity has been taken), is slapped whenever he attempts to speak and, with each slap, relives



*"He Who Gets Slapped" is a silent film about a scientist, who loses both his breakthrough research and his wife to a dishonest man.*

his personal and professional humiliation. Eventually, the clown finds redemption when he falls in love with another circus performer, a pretty young bareback rider named Consuelo.

Lon Chaney, a great success as a pathetic character in a previous Thalberg production, "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" (1923), was given the lead role as the disillusioned, masochistic clown. As with the hunchback, it was a choice role in a famous story. Canadian-born Norma Shearer, then an emerging actress, played the bareback rider. The role helped

make her a star. John Gilbert, also on the brink of stardom, at first refused his part, thinking his role too small. In a recent interview, Leatrice Gilbert Fountain, the actor's daughter and biographer, said, "I heard about Jack's reluctance to play the role from several people. I believe the first was his friend Carey Wilson, who adapted the story for the film. He quoted Irving Thalberg to me, 'Jack, that part will do more for your career than anything you have done so far.' 'He Who Gets Slapped' was a quality movie. Jack's part was small, but he glittered brightly in it and it



did indeed move his career forward."

The supporting cast is likewise notable. Ford Sterling, one of the original Keystone Cops, plays Tricaud, a fellow clown, while veteran actors Tully Marshall and Marc McDermott each give memorable characterizations as the unsavory and scheming count and baron, respectively. Bela Lugosi, then a recent émigré from Hungary, is often said to have had an uncredited role as another clown, but no evidence has surfaced to support or refute the claim.

Thalberg supervised the production but interfered little with Seastrom's work. The director once said in an interview, "It was like making a picture back home in Sweden. I wrote the script without any interference, and actual shooting went quickly and without complications."

*"He Who Gets Slapped" is the story of a scientist whose happiness is destroyed by a friend who steals not only his wife but also the results of his life's research.*

"He Who Gets Slapped" was in production between June 17 and July 28, 1924. It ran seven reels and, according to its copyright registration, featured amber-tinted sequences. "He Who Gets Slapped" was the first production of the newly formed MGM, but not its first release. The film was held back to benefit by a holiday release, opening on Nov. 3, 1924, at the Capitol Theatre in New York City. MGM promoted its first release vigorously, if somewhat inaccurately, with a campaign that billed the film as a "big production of circus life." The

film set a one-day world record with \$15,000 in ticket sales, a one-week record of \$71,900, and a two-week record of \$121,574.

In its review, the New York Times described the film as "... a picture which defies one to write about it without indulging in superlatives ... so beautifully told, so flawlessly directed that we imagine it will be held up as a model by all producers." One fan magazine, Movie Weekly, went further: "Occasionally an exceptional

*continued on page 56*

## FILMCREDITS

# HE WHO GETS SLAPPED

(1924) Not Rated

Written by **Leonid Andreyev**, **Carey Wilson** and **Victor Sjöström**

Directed by **Victor Sjöström**

### Cast:

**Lon Chaney**

as Paul Beaumont/He

**Norma Shearer**

as Consuelo Beaumont

**John Gilbert** as Bezano

**Tully Marshall** as Count Mancini

Running time: 80 minutes

Print courtesy:

**Warner Bros**

## SPECIAL PERFORMANCE

# The Alloy Orchestra



**TERRY DONAHUE** (junk percussion, accordion, musical saw, banjo),  
**KEN WINOKUR** (director, junk percussion and clarinet) and  
**ROGER MILLER** (synthesizer, percussion).

Alloy Orchestra is a three-man musical ensemble, writing and performing live accompaniment to classic silent films. Working with an outrageous assemblage of peculiar objects, they thrash and grind soulful music from unlikely sources.

Performing at prestigious film festivals and cultural centers in the U.S. and abroad (The Telluride Film Festival, The Louvre, Lincoln Center, The Academy of Motion Pictures, the National Gallery of Art), Alloy has helped revive some of the great masterpieces of the silent era.

An unusual combination of found percussion and state-of-the-art electronics gives the Orchestra the ability to create any sound imaginable. Utilizing their famous "rack of junk" and electronic synthesizers, the group generates beautiful music in a spectacular variety of styles. They can conjure up a French symphony or a simple German bar band of the '20s. The group can make the audience think it is being attacked by tigers, contacted by radio signals from Mars or swept up in the Russian Revolution.

# He Who Gets Slapped

*continued from page 55*

picture comes along which makes no attempt to pander to the box office. 'He Who Gets Slapped' is one of this sort, an artistic masterpiece."

The success the film enjoyed in New York was repeated throughout the country. When it opened in San Francisco, critics were just as enthusiastic. The San Francisco Call and Post headlined its review by calling the film a "truly great photoplay," while the critic for the San Francisco Examiner wrote, " (the film) must be classed among the very best of the truly dramatic pictures." It was chosen as one of the top-10 movies of the year by the Boston Post, New

York News, New York Times, and Los Angeles Times, as well as Photoplay, Cine Mundial, Movie Monthly, and Motion Picture magazine.

Seastrom's seven years in the United States were productive and resulted in eight other highly regarded works, including *The Scarlet Letter* (1926) and *The Wind* (1928), both with Lillian Gish, as well as the now-lost Greta Garbo film *The Divine Woman* (1928).

With the coming of sound, however, Seastrom's career began to falter. The director, feeling out of synch with the quickly changing industry, decided to return home. He directed only a few more films

and, for the next 15 years, continued to act both in movies and on the Swedish stage. At age 78, Seastrom — once again Sjöström — gave his final and probably best remembered performance as the elderly professor in Ingmar Bergman's *"Wild Strawberries"* (1957).

Today, some silent films are remembered for their historical importance, some for their artistic value, and still others because a particular actor or director played a role in their creation. "He Who Gets Slapped," a singular and even profound work, possesses each of these cinematic virtues. It stands as one of the great films of the silent era.



*Lon Chaney plays the clown in "He Who Gets Slapped."*



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FRIDAY4PM

# Capote

## Biographical film depicts Capote's journey to best-selling book

By Roger Ebert, October 20, 2005

On Nov. 16, 1959, Truman Capote noticed a news item about four members of a Kansas farm family who were shotgunned to death. He telephoned William Shawn, editor of *The New Yorker*, wondering if Shawn would be interested in an article about

the murders. Later in his life, Capote said that if he had known what would happen as a result of this impulse, he would not have stopped in Holcomb, Kan., but would have kept right on going "like a bat out of hell."

At first Capote thought the story would be about how a

rural community was dealing with the tragedy. "I don't care one way or the other if you catch who did this," he tells an agent from the Kansas Bureau of Investigation. Then two drifters, Perry Smith and Richard Hickock, are arrested and charged with the crime. As Capote gets to know them,

he's consumed by a story that would make him rich and famous, and destroy him. His "nonfiction novel," *In Cold Blood*, became a best seller and inspired a movie, but Capote was emotionally devastated by the experience and it hastened his death.

Bennett Miller's "Capote" is



*The late Philip Seymour Hoffman plays Truman Capote in a scene from "Capote."*

about that crucial period of less than six years in Capote's life. As he talks to the killers, to law officers and to the neighbors of the murdered Clutter family, Capote's project takes on depth and shape as the story of conflicting fates. But at the heart of his reporting is an irredeemable conflict: He wins the trust of the two convicted killers and essentially falls in love with Perry Smith, while needing them to die to supply an ending for his book. "If they win this appeal," he tells his friend Harper Lee, "I may have a complete nervous breakdown." After they are hanged on April 14, 1965, he tells Harper, "There wasn't anything I could have done to save them." She says: "Maybe, but the fact is you didn't want to."

"Capote" is a film of uncommon strength and insight, about a man whose great achievement requires the surrender of his self-respect. Philip Seymour Hoffman's precise, uncanny performance as Capote doesn't imitate the author so much as channel him, as a man whose peculiarities mask great intelligence and deep wounds.

As the story opens Capote is a well-known writer (of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, among others), a popular guest on talk shows, a man whose small stature, large ego and affectations of speech and appearance make him an outsider wherever he goes. Trying to win the confidence of a young girl in Kansas, he tells her: "Ever since I was a child, folks have thought they had me pegged, because of the way I am, the way I talk." But he was able to enter a world far removed from Manhattan, and write a great book about

ordinary Midwesterners and two pathetic, heartless killers. Could anyone be less like Truman Capote than Perry Smith? Yet they were both mistreated and passed around as children, had issues with distant and remote mothers, had secret fantasies. "It's like Perry and I grew up in the same house, and one day he went out the back door and I went out the front," he tells Harper Lee.

The film, written by Dan Futterman and based on the book the book "Capote" by Gerald Clarke, focuses on the way a writer works on a story and the story works on him. Capote wins the wary acceptance of Alvin Dewey (Chris Cooper), the agent assigned to the case. Over dinner in Alvin and Mary Dewey's kitchen, he entertains them with stories about John Huston and Humphrey Bogart. As he talks, he studies their house like an anthropologist. He convinces the local funeral director into letting him view the mutilated bodies of the Clutters. Later, Perry Smith will tell him he liked the father, Herb Clutter: "I thought he was a very nice, gentle man. I thought so right up until I slit his throat."

On his trips to Kansas he takes along a southern friend from childhood, Harper Lee (Catherine Keener). So long does it take him to finish his book that Lee in the meantime has time to publish her famous novel "To Kill a Mockingbird," sell it to the movies, and attend the world premiere with Gregory Peck. Lee is a practical, grounded woman who clearly sees that Truman cares for Smith and yet will exploit him for his book. "Do you hold him in esteem, Truman?" she asks, and he is defensive: "Well, he's



Bennett Miller is the director of "Capote."

a gold mine."

Perry Smith and Dick Hickock are played by Clifton Collins Jr. and Mark Pellegrino. Hickock is not developed as deeply as in Richard Brooks' film "In Cold Blood" (1967), where he was played by Scott Wilson; the emphasis this time is on Smith, played in 1967 by Robert Blake and here by Collins as a haunted, repressed man in constant pain, who chews aspirin by the handful and yet shelters a certain poetry; his drawings and journal move Capote, who sees him as a man who was born a victim and deserves, not forgiveness, but pity.

The other key characters are Capote's lover, Jack Dunphy (Bruce Greenwood), and his editor at the New Yorker, William Shawn (Bob Balaban). "Jack thinks I'm using Perry," Truman tells Harper. "He also thinks I fell in love with him in Kansas." Shawn thinks "In Cold Blood," when it is finally written, is "going to change how people write." He prints the entire book in his magazine.

The movie "In Cold Blood" had no speaking role for Capote, who in a sense stood behind the camera with the director. If "Capote" had simply flipped the coin and told the

## FILMCREDITS

# CAPOTE

(2005) Rated R

Directed by  
**Bennett Miller**

Written by  
**Dan Futterman**

**Cast:**  
**Philip Seymour Hoffman**  
as Truman Capote  
**Catherine Keener**  
as Nelle Harper Lee  
**Clifton Collins Jr.** as Perry Smith

Running time: 114 minutes

Print courtesy:  
**Park Circus LLC**

story of the Clutter murders from Capote's point of view, it might have been a good movie, but what makes it so powerful is that it looks with merciless perception at Capote's moral disintegration.

"If I leave here without understanding you," Capote tells Perry Smith during one of many visits to his cell, "the world will see you as a monster. I don't want that." He is able to persuade Smith and Hickock to tell him what happened on the night of the murders. He learns heartbreaking details, such as that they "put a different pillow under the boy's head just to shoot him." Capote tells them he will support their appeals and help them find another lawyer. He betrays them. Smith eventually understands that, and accepts his fate. "Two weeks, and finito," he tells Capote as his execution draws near. Another good line for the book.

FRIDAY 8:30PM

# Do the Right Thing

## Director Spike Lee's classic study of race in America

By Roger Ebert, May 27, 2001

I have been given only a few filmgoing experiences in my life to equal the first time I saw "Do the Right Thing." Most movies remain up there on the screen. Only a few penetrate your soul. In May of 1989 I walked out of the screening at the Cannes Film Festival with tears in my eyes. Spike Lee had done an almost impossible thing. He'd made a movie about race in America that empathized with all the participants. He didn't draw lines or take sides but simply looked with sadness at one racial flashpoint that stood for many others.

Not everybody thought the film was so even-handed. I sat behind a woman at the press conference who was convinced the film would cause race riots.

Some critics agreed. On the Criterion DVD of the film, Lee reads from his reviews, noting that Joe Klein, in *New York* magazine, laments the burning of Sal's Pizzeria but fails to even note that it follows the death of a young black man at the hands of the police.

Many audiences are shocked that the destruction of Sal's begins with a trash can thrown through the window by Mookie (Lee), the employee Sal refers to as "like a son to me." Mookie is a character we're meant to like. Lee says he has been asked many times over the years if Mookie did the right thing. Then he observes: "Not one person of color has ever asked me that question." But the movie in any event is not just about how the cops kill a

black man and a mob burns down a pizzeria. That would be too simple, and this is not a simplistic film. It covers a day in the life of a Brooklyn street, so that we get to know the neighbors and see by what small steps the tragedy is approached.

The victim, Radio Raheem (Bill Nunn), is not blameless; he plays his boom box at deafening volume and the noise not only drives Sal (Danny Aiello) crazy, but also the three old black guys who sit and talk at the corner. He wears steel knuckles that spell out "Love" and "Hate," and although we know Radio is harmless, and we've seen that "Love" wins when he stages an imaginary bout for Mookie, to the cops the knuckles look bad. Not that the cops look closely,



*Spike Lee is the director of "Do the Right Thing."*

because they are white, and when they pull Radio off of Sal in the middle of a fight, it doesn't occur to them that Radio might have been provoked (Sal has just pounded his boom box to pieces with a baseball bat).

There are really no heroes or villains in the film. There is even a responsible cop, who screams "that's enough!" as another cop chokes Radio with his nightstick. And perhaps the other cop is terrified because he is surrounded by a mob and the pizzeria is on fire. On and on, around and around, black and white, fear and suspicion breed and grow. Because we know all of the people and have spent all day on the street, we feel as much grief as anger. Radio Raheem is dead. And Sal, who has watched the neighborhood's kids grow up for 25 years and fed them with his pizza, stands in the ruins of his store.



*Radio Raheem wears "Love" and "Hate" on his knuckles in the film "Do the Right Thing."*



A pizzeria does not equal a human life, but its loss is great to Sal, because it represents a rejection of the meaning of his own life, and Spike Lee knows that and feels bad for Sal, and gives him a touching final scene with Mookie in which the unspoken subtext might be: Why can't we eat pizza, and raise our families, and run our businesses, and work at our jobs, and not let racism colonize our minds with suspicion?

The riot starts because Buggin' Out (Giancarlo Esposito) is offended that Sal has only photos of Italians in the wall of his pizzeria: Sinatra, DiMaggio, Pacino. He wonders why there isn't a black face up there. Sal tells him to open his own store and put up anyone he wants. One answer to Sal is that he's kept in business by the black people who buy his pizza. An answer to that is that we see no black-owned businesses on the street, and if it were not for Sal and the Koreans who run the corner grocery, the residents would have no place to buy food. And the answer to that is that economic discrimination against blacks has been institutionalized for years in America. And around and around.

The thing is, there are no answers. There may be heroes and villains, but on this ordinary street in Brooklyn they don't conveniently turn up wearing labels. You can anticipate, step by step, during a long, hot summer day, that trash can approaching Sal's window, propelled by misunderstandings, suspicions, insecurities, stereotyping and



*Radio Raheem, played by Bill Nunn, and Mookie, played by director Spike Lee, talk in the streets of Brooklyn in the film "Do the Right Thing."*

simple bad luck. Racism is so deeply ingrained in our society that the disease itself creates mischief, while most blacks and whites alike are only onlookers.

Seeing the film again today, I was reminded of what a stylistic achievement it is. Spike Lee was 32 when he made it, assured, confident, in the full joy of his power. He takes this story, which sounds like grim social realism, and tells it with music, humor, color and exuberant invention. A lot of it is just plain fun. He breaks completely away from realism in many places in the closeups of blacks, whites and Koreans chanting a montage of racial descriptions, and in the patter of the local disc jockey (Samuel L. Jackson), who surveys the street from his window and seems like the neighborhood's soundtrack. At other times, Lee makes points with deadpan understatement; there are two slow-motion sequences involving the way that people look at each other. One shows two cops and the three old black guys

exchanging level gazes of mutual contempt. Another takes place when Sal speaks tenderly to Jade (Joie Lee), and the camera pans slowly across the narrowed eyes of both Mookie and Pino (John Turturro), one of Sal's sons. Neither one likes that tone in Sal's voice.

It is clear Sal has feelings for Jade, which he will probably always express simply by making her a special slice of pizza. He tells her what big brown eyes she has. Sal is sincere when he says he likes his customers, and he holds his head in his hands when Pino calls them "niggers" and berates a simpleminded street person. But in his rage Sal is also capable of using "nigger," and for that matter the blacks are not innocent of racism either, and come within an inch of burning out the Koreans just on general principles.

Lee paints the people with love for detail. Notice the sweet scene between Mookie and Tina (Rosie Perez), the mother of his child. How he takes ice cubes and runs them over her brow, eyes, ankles, thighs, and then the closeup of their lips as they talk softly to one another. And see the affection with which he shows Da Mayor (Ossie Davis), an old man who tries to cool everyone's tempers. Da Mayor's scenes with Mother Sister (Ruby Dee) show

## FILMCREDITS

# DO THE RIGHT THING

(1989) Rated R

Written and directed by  
**Spike Lee**

### Cast:

**Spike Lee** as Mookie  
**Bill Nunn** as Radio Raheem  
**Danny Aiello** as Sal Fragione  
**Giancarlo Esposito**  
as Buggin' Out  
**Ossie Davis** as Da Mayor

Running time: 120 minutes

Print courtesy:  
**Universal Pictures**

love at the other end of the time line.

None of these people is perfect. But Lee makes it possible for us to understand their feelings; his empathy is crucial to the film, because if you can't try to understand how the other person feels, you're a captive inside the box of yourself. Thoughtless people have accused Lee over the years of being an angry filmmaker. He has much to be angry about, but I don't find it in his work. The wonder of "Do the Right Thing" is that he is so fair. Those who found this film an incitement to violence are saying much about themselves, and nothing useful about the movie. Its predominant emotion is sadness. Lee ends with two quotations, one from Martin Luther King Jr., advocating non-violence, and the other from Malcolm X, advocating violence "if necessary." A third, from Rodney King, ran through my mind.

*Spike Lee had done an almost impossible thing. He'd made a movie about race in America that empathized with all the participants.*

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# SATURDAY 11AM

# Wadjda

## Saudi Arabian film captures ‘real hopes’ for change, progress

By Oliver Lyttelton

**T**he cinematic revolution in the Middle East over the last few of decades, led principally by a generation of Iranian filmmakers who’ve flourished creatively despite restrictions placed on them by the regime, hasn’t necessarily carried over to every region. Saudi Arabia, for instance, is hardly known for its cinema, which isn’t especially surprising, given that movie theaters were banned in the country 30 years ago.

But things have been loosening up a little: theaters started to reopen around 2005, and six years ago, “Keif al-Hal?” was billed as the first-ever Saudi film (although mostly shot in the United Arab Emirates, and available only on pay-per-view in the nation), and a few others have subsequently followed. But “Wadjda” is reportedly the first film to be made entirely within the country, and even more unexpectedly, it’s a film by a first-time female filmmaker, Haifaa Al-Mansour, in a country



Eleven-year-old Wadjda, who is played by Waad Mohammed, dreams of owning a bicycle that she passes each day on her way to school.

where women cannot drive or vote (the latter is set to change in 2015), and men and women have to be segregated in public. Most remarkably of all, it’s all one of the best films of the year.

The title of “Wadjda” refers to its central character, played by 12-year-old actress Waad Mohammed. Wadjda is more rebellious than most around her; she makes mixtapes of forbidden music, wears battered Converse to her school, and, a born hustler, sells home-made football bracelets to classmates, all incurring the wrath of headmistress Ms. Hussa (Ahd). More than anything else, she wants a bike to race her friend Abdullah (Abdullrahman Al Gohani) on, but the 800 riyal price of the bike she covets

seems out of reach, until it’s announced that her school’s Koran-recitation competition carries a 1,000 riyal prize. As she ekes closer to it, however, things start to fall apart at home, as her mother (Reem Abdullah), who’s unable to have more children, begins to fear that her mostly absentee husband (Sultan Al Assaf) is on the lookout for a second bride.

The word ‘bicycle’ instantly summons up images of a certain Italian neo-realist classic, and that’s certainly the kind of neighborhood that

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*There’s enormous warmth and comedy, and a fine observational eye of a world that’s pretty alien to Western audiences, which makes it consistently fascinating.*

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Al-Mansour is in here, with a simple pristine style that mostly gets out of the way of the story, and a touching humanism that's reluctant to paint any of her characters as pure hero or villain (even the strict, humorless Ms. Hussa is given more texture than you'd expect).

There is one major hero, of course: Wadjda herself, who in the hands of Mohammed is one of the most memorable on-screen protagonists in some time. Essentially fearless, smarter than everyone else around her, and conning her way around Riyadh, it's the showcase of a terrific performance by Mohammed (whose parents will apparently only let her act until she's 16); the young actress owns every second she's on screen. She's not alone, though; while some performances are raw and a little rough around the edges, there are a few other standouts, not least from Abdullah. The two carve out a rare and complex mother/daughter relationship that feels entirely authentic, in both the conflicts and the moments of bonding.

It's appropriate that the two are the film's standouts, because it's so much a film that's about the role of women in a man's world. Wadjda is constantly told what she can't do — ride a bike, uncover her face, follow her own path.



*Haifaa Al-Mansour is the director of "Wadjda."*

Her mother, focused almost entirely on pleasing her husband yet unable to bear sons, is forced to consider buying a dress she can't afford to keep her husband's attention. And at school, Ms. Hussa (who might have her own secrets) expels one girl for being caught with a boy and reads too much into the friendship of two others. Al-Mansour never overeggs this stuff, but it's omnipresent, constantly brewing away in the background, and in a world where an independent-minded 14-year-old girl can be shot by the Taliban, it's a vital thing to be putting on the agenda.

All this makes the film sound rather dry, and it's not at all; there's enormous warmth and comedy, and a fine observational eye of a world that's pretty alien to Western audiences, which makes it consistently fascinating. Al-Mansour knows she has to play the audience like a fiddle (the Koran competition near the end is nail-bitingly tense), and yet it feels honest, rather than manipulative. As with last year's "A Separation," which it shares some surface similarities with, much of it is down to a watertight, hugely satisfying screenplay, written

## FILMCREDITS

# WADJDA

(2012) Rated PG

Written and directed by  
**Haifaa Al-Mansour**

### Cast:

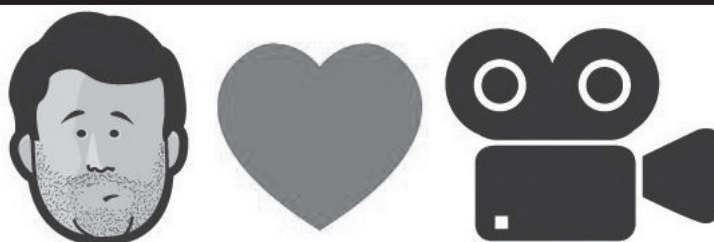
**Waad Mohammed** as Wadjda  
**Reem Abdullah** as Mother  
**Abdullrahman Al Gohani** as Abdullah

*Running time: 98 minutes*

Print courtesy:  
**Sony Pictures Classics**

by the director.

The film doesn't sugarcoat the situation in Saudi Arabia — far from it — but by the end, it makes clear in that in the likes of Wadjda, there are real hopes for progress and change in years to come. That it manages to do so in such a technically adept way (much of the production team is German), with such clarity of storytelling, and is able to do with humor, emotion and smarts, is something close to a miracle.



## Doug Loves Movies

SATURDAY2PM

# A Simple Life

## Film tells unexpected story of master and servant

By Roger Ebert, August 8, 2012

“A Simple Life” paints portraits of two good people in gentle humanist terms. It filled me with an unreasonable affection for both of them. Here is a film with the clarity of fresh stream water, flowing without turmoil to shared destiny. No plot gimmicks. No twists and turns. Just a simple life.

The life is that of Ah Tao, who was orphaned during the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, spent her entire life in the service of four generations of a Chinese family, and is now the servant of the only family member still living in China. He is Roger, a movie producer. They have a settled routine: During a meal, he puts out his hand, knowing she will be standing behind him with a bowl of rice. No words.

But this meal, which opens Ann Hui’s film, doesn’t contain the full truth of their relationship. That is something we discover at the same time they do, when Ah Tao (Deanie Ip) suffers a stroke, and Roger (Andy Lau) takes charge of her care. He assumes she will continue to live with him and says he will hire her a caregiver. She wants nothing to do with that. She wants to live in an old folks home, and that’s that.

Throughout the film, she



Ah Tao, played by Deanie Ip, and Roger, played by Andy Lau, share a laugh in a scene from “A Simple Life.” The movie, which was inspired by the true story of producer Roger Lee and his servant, depicts a couple who develops an unexpected bond.

resists his money, protests that his presents cost too much, tells him to spend more time at his job and less on his visits to her. This despite the fact that she literally has no one else in her life (all the members of Roger’s family now live in America).

Is she angry? Not at all. She eagerly awaits his visits. But having spent a lifetime caring for others, she now feels badly about being cared for. The retirement home at first seems

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*“A Simple Life” is content to regard these two inward people as they express love and care in their quiet ways.*

---

a grim and barren place, with toothless old people staring vacantly into space. Although the supervisor tells her she has the “coziest” private room, it is a sterile cubicle with no ceiling, so the cries and calls of others can easily be heard.

She doesn’t complain. Deanie Ip, who won half a dozen “best actress” awards for this role, achieves the miracle of giving Ah Tao integrity, humanity and lovability without seeming to try. She is a beautiful and serene woman. The role of



Roger is taken by Andy Lau, a big Hong Kong star, who here seems more ordinary and less heroic than in most of his roles.

We see that although they have never articulated it, they have become dependent on each other. She raised him from infancy. When we meet his mother, she seems perfectly nice, but there isn't the same unspoken bond. Neither Ah Tao or Roger is demonstrative; I found myself waiting for a hug that never came. But they care.

Life in the nursing home seems less grim than at first. Ah Tao recovers from her stroke, and there is a wonderful scene when they go on a walk and he teases her that old Uncle Kin (Paul Chun) has a crush on her. She tries to hit him for that — playfully, like a girl.

What we understand is that



Roger comforts Ah Tao in a scene from "A Simple Life."

"A Simple Life" is content to regard these two inward people as they express love and care in their quiet ways. A movie in which the old lady is forgotten by the family would have been predictable melodrama,

but how much more moving it is when she is remembered. The movie has an emotional payoff I failed to anticipate. It expresses hope in human nature. It is one of the year's best films.

## FILMCREDITS

# A SIMPLE LIFE

(2011) Not Rated

Directed by  
Ann Hui

Written by  
Susan Chan and Yan-lam Lee

Cast:  
Andy Lau as Roger  
Deanie Ip as Ah Tao  
Hailu Qin as Ms. Choi

Running time: 118 minutes

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China Lion Film Distribution



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SATURDAY 5PM

# Goodbye Solo

## Actors use personal background to emulate characters

By Roger Ebert, March 25, 2009

**T**wo actors. One from Africa. The other who was a bodyguard for Elvis. Who but Ramin Bahrani would find these men and pair them in a story of heartbreaking depth and power? Bahrani is the new great American director. He never steps wrong. In "Goodbye Solo," he begins with a situation that might unfold in a dozen different ways and makes of it something original and profound. It is about the desire to help and the desire to not be helped.

In Winston-Salem, N.C., a white man around 70 gets into the taxi of an African immigrant. He offers him a deal. For \$1,000, paid immediately, he wants to be driven in 10 days to the top of a mountain in Blowing Rock National Park, to a place so windy that the snow falls up. He says nothing about a return trip. The driver takes the money but is not happy about this fare. He asks some questions and is told to mind his own business.

Now look at these actors. They aren't playing themselves, but they evoke their characters so fully that they might as well be. Red West plays William, the white man. West's face is a map of hard living. He was a Marine and a boxer. He became



*William, who is played by Red West, and Solo, who is played by Souléymane Sy Savané, talk in a scene from "Goodbye Solo."*

a friend of Elvis in high school. He was his bodyguard and driver from 1955 — a charter member of the "Memphis Mafia." He split with Elvis after breaking the foot of the cousin who was bringing Elvis drugs, and telling him he would work his way up to his face.

Souleymane Sy Savane plays Solo, the taxi driver. He is from the Ivory Coast, although the character is from Senegal. Savane was a flight attendant for Air Afrique. Solo is studying

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*Now look at these actors. They aren't playing themselves, but they evoke their characters so fully that they might as well be.*

---

for just such a job. Solo lives in Winston-Salem, is married to a Mexican-American woman, adores the woman's young daughter, acts as her father. William's face was made to look pissed off. Solo's face was made

to smile. We are not speaking of an odd couple here. We're speaking of human nature. You can't learn acting like this.

Bahrani worked with the actors for months. Savane drove a taxi in Winston-Salem.



*Solo and William share a conversation in a car in a scene from "Goodbye Solo."*

Red West spent a lifetime rehearsing William (although in real life, he is said to be kind and friendly). Bahrani and his cinematographer, Michael Simmonds, discussed every shot. Although this is an independent film in its heart and soul, it is a classical film in its style. It is as pure as something by John Ford. Only its final shot might call attention to itself — but actually, we aren't thinking about the shot, we're thinking about what has happened and why.

Don't get the idea the whole film takes place in the taxi. It takes place in Winston-Salem, a city it wears with familiarity because Bahrani was born and raised there. We feel the rhythms of Solo's life. Of his relationship with his wife, Quiera (Carmen Leyva), and their pride in her daughter, Alex (Diana Franco Galindo). Like many taxi drivers, Solo knows where you can find drugs or a sexual partner. But he isn't a pusher or a pimp; he's a one-man service

industry, happy to help.

The film sees cars being repaired in front yards, a few customers at a downtown movie theater on a weekday night, a lonely motel room, a bar. The next few times William calls a cab, he begins to notice the driver is always Solo. What's up with that? With almost relentless good cheer, Solo insinuates himself into William's life — becomes his chauffeur, his protector, his adviser, even for a few nights, his roommate and almost his friend. It occurred to me that Red West may have performed similar functions for Elvis, another man pointed to doom.

Neither William nor Solo ever once speaks about their real subject, about what William seems to be about to do. It hangs in the air between them. Alex, the stepdaughter, comes to love old William, who has the feel of a grandfather about him. But no, Alex is not one of those redeeming movie children. She doesn't understand everything and brings in an innocence that

Solo and William both respect.

The film is not finally about what William and Solo do. It is about how they change, which is how a great movie lifts itself above plot. These two lives have touched, learned and deepened. Not often do we really care this much about characters. We sense they're not on the plot's automatic pilot. They're feeling their way in life. It's a great American film.

"Goodbye Solo" is Bahrani's third feature, after "Man Push Cart" (2005) and "Chop Shop" (2007). His films are about outsiders in America: a Pakistani who operates a coffee-and-bagel wagon in Manhattan, Latino kids who scramble for a living in an auto parts bazaar in the shadow of Shea Stadium. Now a Senegalese who wants to help an American whose weathered face belongs in a Western. Bahrani, whose parents immigrated from Iran, felt like an outsider when he was growing up in Winston-Salem: "There were blacks, whites,

## FILMCREDITS

# GOODBYE SOLO

(2008) Rated R

Directed by  
Ramin Bahrani

Written by  
Ramin Bahrani and  
Bahareh Azimi

Cast:  
Souléyman Sy Savané as Solo  
Red West as William  
Diana Franco Galindo as Alex

Running time: 91 minutes

Print courtesy:  
Roadside Attractions

and my brother and me." He loves the city, and you can tell that in this film. He is curious about people, and you can tell that from all his films. He told me he asks the same question of all of his characters: How do you live in this world?

A film like this makes me wonder if we are coming to the end of the facile, snarky indie films. We live in desperate times. We are ready to respond to films that ask that question. How do you live in this world? Bahrani knows all about flashy camera work, tricky shots, visual stunts. He teaches film at Columbia. But like his fellow North Carolinian, David Gordon Green, he is drawn to a more level gaze, to a film at the service of its characters and their world. Wherever you live, when this film opens, it will be the best film in town.



SATURDAY 9PM

# Born on the Fourth of July

## Stone and Kovic draw from Vietnam War experience

By Roger Ebert, December 20, 1989

For weeks now, we've been reading in the papers about public apologies by governments of the Eastern bloc. The Russians admit they were wrong to invade Afghanistan and Czechoslovakia. The East Germans tear down the Berlin Wall and denounce the secret luxuries of their leaders. The Poles and Hungarians say Marxism doesn't work very well.

There is a temptation for an American, reading these articles, to feel smug. And yet — hold on a minute, here. We had our own disastrous foreign policy mistake, the war in Vietnam. When is President Bush going to get up before Congress and read an apology to the Vietnamese? Never, is the obvious answer. We hail the Soviet bloc for its honesty but see no lessons for ourselves. And yet we have been issuing our own apologies, of a sort. A film like Oliver Stone's "Born on the Fourth of July" is an apology for Vietnam, uttered by Stone, who fought there, and Ron Kovic, who was paralyzed from the chest down in Vietnam.

Both of them were gung-ho patriots who were eager to answer their country's call to arms. When they came back home, they were still patriots, hurt and offended by the



Ron Kovic, who is played by Tom Cruise, in a scene from "Born on the Fourth of July."

hostility they experienced from the anti-war movement.

Eventually, both men turned against the war, Kovic most dramatically. He and his wheelchair were thrown out of the 1972 Republican convention, but in 1976 he addressed the Democratic convention. And if you wanted to, you could say his 1976 speech was the equivalent of one of those recent breast-beatings in the Supreme Soviet. We do apologize for our mistakes in this country, but we let our artists do it instead of our politicians.

Kovic came back from the war with a shattered body, but it took a couple of years for the damage to spread to his mind and spirit. By the time he hit

bottom he was a demoralized, spiteful man who sought escape in booze and drugs and Mexican whorehouses. Then he began to look outside of himself for a larger pattern to his life, the pattern that inspired his best-selling autobiography, "Born on the Fourth of July."

Writer-director Stone, who based his earlier film "Platoon" on his own war experiences, has been trying to film the Kovic story for years. Various stars and studios were attached to the project, but it kept being canceled.

And perhaps that's just as well, because by waiting this long Stone was able to use Tom Cruise in the leading role. Nothing Cruise has done

will prepare you for what he does in "Born on the Fourth of July." He has been hailed for years now as a great young American actor, but only his first hit film, "Risky Business," found a perfect match between actor and role. "Top Gun" overwhelmed him with a special-effects display. "The Color Of Money" didn't explain his behavior in crucial final scenes. "Cocktail" was a cynical attempt to exploit his attractive image. Even in "Rain Man," he seemed to be holding something in reserve, standing back from his own presence.

In "Born on the Fourth of July," his performance is so good that the movie lives through it. Stone is able to make his statement with

*A film like Oliver Stone's "Born on the Fourth of July" is an apology for Vietnam, uttered by Stone, who fought there, and Ron Kovic, who was paralyzed from the chest down in Vietnam.*

Cruise's face and voice and doesn't need to put everything into the dialogue.

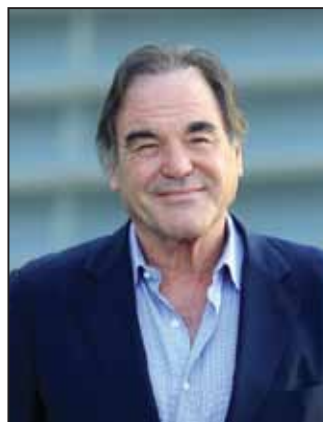
The movie begins in the early 1960s with footage of John F. Kennedy on the television exhorting, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." Young Ron Kovic, star athlete and high school hero, was the kind of kid waiting to hear that message. And when the Marine recruiters came to visit his high school, he was ready to sign up. There was no doubt in

his mind: There was a war in Vietnam, and his only worry was that he would miss the action.

He knew there was a danger of being wounded or killed, but, hell, he wanted to make a sacrifice for his country.

His is the kind of spirit all nations must have, from time to time. The problem with the Vietnam War is that it did not deserve it.

There was no way for a patriotic small-town kid to know that, however, and so we follow young Kovic from his



Oliver Stone is the director of "Born on the Fourth of July."

last prom to the battlefield. In these scenes, Cruise still looks like Cruise — boyish, open-faced — and I found myself wondering if he would be able to make the transition into the horror that I knew was coming. He was.

Stone was in combat for a

*continued on page 72*

## FILMCREDITS

# BORN ON THE FOURTH OF JULY

(1989) Rated R

Directed by  
**Oliver Stone**

Written by  
**Oliver Stone and Ron Kovic**

Cast:  
**Tom Cruise** as Ron Kovic  
**Raymond J. Barry** as Mr. Kovic  
**Caroline Kava** as Mrs. Kovic  
**Josh Evans** as Tommy Kovic

Running time: 145 minutes

Print courtesy:  
**Universal Pictures**



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# Born on the Fourth of July

*continued from page 71*

year. In "Platoon," he showed us firefights so confused that we (and the characters) often had little idea where the enemy was. In "Born on the Fourth of July," Stone directs a crucial battle scene with great clarity so that we can see how Kovic made a mistake. That mistake, which tortures him for years afterward, probably produced the loss of focus that led to his crippling injury.

The scenes that follow, in a military hospital, are merciless in their honesty. If you have even once, for a few hours perhaps, been helpless in a sickbed and unable to summon aid, all of your impotent rage will come flooding back as the movie shows a military care system that is hopelessly overburdened. At one point, Kovic screams out for a suction pump that will drain a wound that might cost him his leg. He will never have feeling in the leg, but, God damn it, he

wants to keep it all the same. It's his. And a distracted doctor absent-mindedly explains about equipment shortages and "budget cutbacks" in care for the wounded vets.

Back in civilian life, Kovic is the hero of a Fourth of July parade, but there are peaceniks on the sidewalks, some of them giving him the finger. He feels more rage. But then his emotional tide turns one night in the backyard of his parents' home, when he gets drunk with a fellow veteran, and he finds they can talk about things nobody else really understands. It is from this scene that the full power of the Cruise performance develops.

Kovic's life becomes a series of confusions: bar brawls, self-pity and angry confrontations with women he will never be able to make love with in the ordinary way. His parents love him but are frightened by his rage. Eventually it is suggested

that he leave home.

In a scene of Dantean evil, Stone shows Kovic in Mexico with other crippled veterans, paying for women and drugs to take away the pain, and finally, shockingly, abandoned in the desert with another veteran with no way to get back to their wheelchairs or to town. It's the sort of thing that happens to people who make themselves unbearable to other people who don't give a damn about them. (In a nod toward "Platoon," the other crippled veteran in the desert is played by Willem Dafoe, co-star of that film; the other co-star, Tom Berenger, is the Marine who gives the recruitment speech in the opening scenes.) "Born on the Fourth of July," one of the best movies of the year, is one of those films that steps correctly in the opening moments and then never steps wrongly. It is easy to think of a thousand traps that Stone,

Kovic and Cruise could have fallen into, but they fall into none of them.

Although this film has vast amounts of pain and bloodshed and suffering in it, and is at home on battlefields and in hospital wards, it proceeds from a philosophical core: It is not a movie about battle or wounds or recovery, but a movie about an American who changes his mind about the war. The filmmakers realize that is the heart of their story and are faithful to it, even though they could have spun off in countless other directions. This is a film about ideology, played out in the personal experiences of a young man who paid dearly for what he learned. Maybe instead of anybody getting up in Congress and apologizing for the Vietnam War, they could simply hold a screening of this movie on Capitol Hill and call it a day.



*"Born on the Fourth of July" is based on the best-selling autobiography of the same name by Vietnam War veteran Ron Kovic. In the film, Kovic is portrayed by Tom Cruise.*



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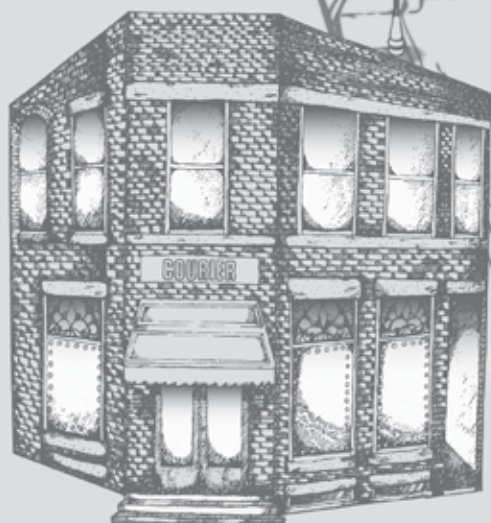
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SUNDAYNOON

# Bayou Maharajah

## New Orleans musician's talent showcased in documentary

By Chris Morris

If you weren't looking for it, it was easy to miss the L.A. premiere of *Bayou Maharajah*, Lily Keber's magnificent new documentary about the New Orleans singer-pianist James Booker. It was scheduled for a 5 p.m. Tuesday screening at Outfest, the local LGBT film festival. At this point, it may be the only screening the picture will receive locally for some time: It still has not secured theatrical distribution, possibly because of clearance issues relating to the voluminous amount of music, almost all of it splendid, in the film. But it may show up at a film festival in your neck of the woods.

It was odd to see the feature in the context of a gay film fest, since Booker's homosexuality is treated so matter-of-factly that it's one of the lesser narrative threads in the film. (Another reason it plays in the background, Keber suggested in a post-screening chat at the DGA 2 Theater, may be the reluctance of those who knew Booker, whether intimately or casually, to discuss his sexuality on camera.) But even the most radically sensational aspects of his life — his alcoholism, his addiction to heroin and cocaine — get measured treatment. One violent piece of Booker's legend — the loss of his left eye — receives widely



*Photo courtesy of Historic New Orleans Collection*  
New Orleans R&B musician James Booker plays the piano during a concert. The movie "*Bayou Maharajah*" is based on Booker's extraordinary musical talent.

divergent retelling from a host of witnesses, none of whom appears to have the real story. Every element of what could have been a luridly told tale is recounted even-handedly, with the heat turned down low.

The focus of "*Bayou Maharajah*," as it should be, is on Booker's extraordinary music. He was a pure product of New Orleans, where he was born in

1939 and died, at the age of 43, in 1983. He stands in a line of Crescent City piano wizards that includes Edward Frank, Tuts Washington, Archibald, Professor Longhair and Fats Domino, to name just a few. Jelly Roll Morton was clearly a model of sorts. But Booker's style, though rooted in New Orleans jazz and R&B, was sui generis. Perhaps that is why he

still remains one of the city's least-known giants. The fact that he cut just two studio albums in his own right during his lifetime — *Junco Partner* (1976) and *Classified* (1982) — may have something more to do with his comparative obscurity.

It's a pity, for Booker is beyond compare. Reared in a family of Baptist ministers, he learned piano and organ (and



*While there is no shortage of mind-boggling detail, first-time filmmaker Keber never leans on it for effect. The movie is emphatically about Booker's music, and you get to hear plenty of it.*

saxophone as well) as a child, and showed prodigious skill on the keyboards. He was as at home with the classics as he was with the funk. He was just 14 when he recorded his first hit, "Doin' the Hambone," for Imperial Records. A No. 3 R&B hit, "Gonzo," followed in 1960; its title inspired the handle for Hunter S. Thompson's school of unbridled journalism. Booker became a preferred New Orleans sideman, playing with just about every bandleader of note. But his own preferences turned to hard drugs, and he wound up, in his words, "partying on the Ponderosa" — doing a stint at Louisiana's notorious Angola prison farm, where bluesmen Lead Belly and Robert Pete Williams also did time.

Booker had opportunities to record — the master tapes of a 1973 album cut with Dr. John's band disappeared after he absconded with them for "safe keeping" — but he found his greatest success as a performer on the European festival circuit. "Bayou Maharajah" reaches the height of intensity with a performance drawn from Booker's 1978 appearance at Switzerland's Montreux Jazz Festival, a rendition of R&B pianist Lloyd Glenn's "True."

Keber lets the song run for most of its seven-minute length, making one small and imperceptible edit. I've long found this performance to be among the really great achievements in any genre. Everything that is astonishing

about Booker is audible there. It's a combination of taut, profoundly felt singing and dizzying piano improvisation. But Booker's keyboard work is never merely ornamental. It arcs over itself in a kind of instrumental embellishment of the pain one hears in Booker's vocal. I've watched the complete "True" dozens of times on YouTube, and it seldom fails to bring me to tears. At the DGA screening, some of the audience broke out in applause.

After his Montreux moment, it was almost all downhill for Booker. He returned to New Orleans from Europe and found that he couldn't get a gig. Maple Leaf Bar owner John Parsons provided him with about the only steady work he would get for the remainder of his life. For a time, he took a job for the city of New Orleans, sitting at a desk behind a computer in a municipal finance department. A year after his last 1982 recording session (with producer Scott Billington, for Classified), he died, unattended, sitting in a wheelchair in a hallway of Charity Hospital. Though his death was reputedly the result of cocaine abuse, the truth is likely that his body just gave out after years of hard living.

"Bayou Maharajah" could easily have focused on the most sordid aspects of Booker's life. While there is no shortage of mind-boggling detail, first-time filmmaker Keber never leans on it for effect. The movie is emphatically about Booker's



Lily Keber is the writer and director of "Bayou Maharajah."



Photo courtesy of Roland Stucky  
The film focuses on James Booker's unique R&B music.

music, and you get to hear plenty of it.

Most of the interview subjects in the film — most notably Harry Connick, Jr., whose father, for a time New Orleans' district attorney, was exceptionally tight with the musician — are plainly in awe of his work. At one juncture, Connick sits at a piano and picks apart Booker's style, a flexible, wholly original amalgam of classical, R&B, and jazz. But the music resists analysis in the end, and you sit almost stupefied by its brilliance. One winds up swept away by the wildness of its

## FILMCREDITS

# BAYOU MAHARAJAH

(2013), Not Rated

Written and directed by  
Lily Keber

Cast:  
Joe Boyd  
Douglas Brinkley  
Henry Connick Jr.

Running time: 90 minutes

Print courtesy:  
Lily Keber

flights — no place more so than in a sequence near the end of the film, in which a long, frenetic Booker arabesque is set against sped-up black-and-white footage of Crescent City barrooms at night. (This material and other vintage home movie footage beautifully evoke the city in Booker's heyday of the '70s and '80s.)

In all, it's a beautiful picture, and you should — must, actually — keep your eyes open for it. "Bayou Maharajah" is subtitled *The Tragic Genius of James Booker*, but the film never wallows in its hero's dark fate. It's a very poised piece of moviemaking that declines to sink to the maudlin, and instead invites viewers to revel in the unique genius of its subject, who deserves a seat high in the pantheon of New Orleans' greats. Even in that crowded field, Booker stands by himself.



# Couple collects tokens, memories at Festival

By Annabeth Carlson, *The Daily Illini*

In Diane and Gary Stensland's Urbana home, stacks of books with topics ranging from Abraham Lincoln to weather are found in every room, and photographs of their family, friends and travels paper the walls. Diane and Gary are just shy of 70 years old, and these items tell the story of their life.

One part of their story sits on their dining room table. Festival passes, programs and mugs from the Roger Ebert's Film Festival cover Diane's floral tablecloth. Collectively, the Stenslands have attended 12 Ebertfests.

Gary, a retired research scientist for the Illinois State Water Survey, began attending the festival in 2002. In the beginning, he says he did not know a lot about movies but realized he could learn a lot about film by going to Ebertfest.

"Once I got in there and saw it, I was hooked," Gary says.

One aspect that Gary says draws him back to the festival each year is the accompanying academic panels and workshops. Through these sessions, Gary says he has learned about the financial and operational parts of film, such as how a movie is distributed.

"If you spend millions of dollars making a movie, how do you convince theaters to show it? I learned that if movies got in the key New York City and

Los Angeles theaters they had it made."

In 2005, Gary persuaded Diane to join him at Ebertfest. She, too, says she was immediately "hooked." She says she enjoyed seeing movies that she would have never gone to if not for Ebertfest and learning about their background.

One of the most memorable festival moments for Diane, a retired U.S. Postal Service mail carrier, was in 2006, when she saw "My Fair Lady."

Diane says that the movie played on a screen with 70 millimeter film, which brought out every detail, like the dresses and hats.

"Oh!" she sighs, closing her eyes and tilting her head back with a wide smile. "It was a beautiful, stunning movie."

Every year, Diane also enjoys standing in line before each day of the festival.

At Ebertfest, attendants pick their seats in the order they were standing in line, and can try to keep the same seats for the entire day. For the Stenslands, it is important to get there early, especially since Gary likes seats that are on the right side on the aisle.

If the first movie starts at 1 p.m., Diane says she shows up at 9 a.m. or earlier.

"There are always at least four people ahead of me. It wouldn't matter if I came at 6 in the morning, I think they



Photo by Melissa McCabe, *The Daily Illini*  
Diane and Gary Stensland of Urbana showcase their memorabilia from past Roger Ebert's Film Festivals. Together, the couple has attended 12 Ebertfests and plan on attending this year's Festival.

would be there," she says with a laugh.

Because Gary often spends festival mornings at the workshops, Diane says she passes the time by talking to other people in line.

Through that, the Stenslands say they have made friends, such as a couple from Ohio who coincidentally worked with Diane's cousin.

"We find the conversations we have interesting and quite different because we don't have another group that talks about movies," Gary says. "It is a unique group; they are articulate and intelligent."

Once inside, Gary says he looks forward to all of the movies.

"I haven't looked at the list (of this year's movies) yet, but it doesn't affect that I am going to go," he says.

This year, Diane says she is anxious to see the first movie; a documentary on Roger Ebert called "Life Itself."

This is the second festival

since Ebert's death. In 2008 when Ebert was not at the festival because of illness and last year because of his death, Diane says something was missing.

"I always looked forward to hearing him talk and introduce movies," Diane says.

Gary agreed, saying that Ebert was very likeable and a knowledgeable, good speaker.

Pulitzer Prize-winning critic Ebert in 1999 introduced the Festival — then called Roger Ebert's Overlooked Film Festival — to the Champaign-Urbana community. His goal for the film festival was to play movies that went unnoticed by critics and to bring the public together to appreciate them, and that's exactly what it has done for the Stenslands.

Of all the films Diane and Gary have seen at Ebertfest, their favorite is "Departures," a Japanese film about a cello player who lost his orchestra job and became an undertaker.

"In Japan, there is a special

---

*"There are always at least four people ahead of me. It wouldn't matter if I came at 6 in the morning, I think they would be there."*

— Diane Stensland —

---

*"I haven't looked at the list (of this year's movies) yet, but it doesn't affect that I am going to go."*

— Gary Stensland —

burial ceremony involved and the undertaker would dress (the deceased). It was so delicate and they would put the clothes on the body like a ballet," Gary says. "The background cello music was special."

Following the screening, Diane has ordered the film five times to give to friends and relatives.

All in all, both say they really enjoy every aspect of the festival. Diane even admires the lady who always moves the lectern on and off stage between movies.

"She's a mainstay!" Diane says.

At the end of the festival, Diane and Gary will bring home more film passes, programs and mugs to add to their collection. These items, like their books and photographs, will add to the story of their life. But more importantly, they will carry with them the friendships they've made and the appreciation of movies they've seen at Ebertfest.

That's what Ebert wanted the Festival to be, and that's what it has become.

## Q&A FILLING EBERT'S SHOES

By Megan Jones, The Daily Illini

The associate director of Roger Ebert's Film Festival, Mary Susan Britt, speaks about the film festival's advancement after the passing of film critic Roger Ebert.

**The Daily Illini:** What was the deciding factor for Roger when he chose which movies to screen?  
**Mary Susan Britt:** Roger always chose an array of films. Whether it was a classic movie that he loved or an indie without a distributor, his mission was selecting films well-deserving of a second look and bringing them to Ebertfest.

**DI:** How are films chosen now that he has passed?

**MSB:** Although Roger is not with us, we are keeping with the spirit of how he always chose the films. Some films come from lists that Roger drew up over the past 15 years, and additional films are selected by his wife Chaz and festival director Nate Kohn. Both

Chaz and Nate worked very closely with Roger on programming the festival over the years.

**DI:** How does the legacy of reviewing films continue?

**MSB:** Roger's voice is still very much alive via RogerEbert.com; there are 65-67 contributors who watch films and write reviews for the site, all of whom Roger admired and featured their writing on his site prior to his passing. Matt Seitz is a main contributor and currently serves as editor-in-chief of RogerEbert.com.

**DI:** From your perspective as associate director, how does it feel to be able to continue the festival in honor of him?

**MSB:** Roger has always expressed a desire for his festival to live on and continue to provide the community with a space to celebrate great films and the relevant discussions they inspire. Through Ebertfest, we honor Roger and all that he has given to his hometown, alma mater and surrounding world.



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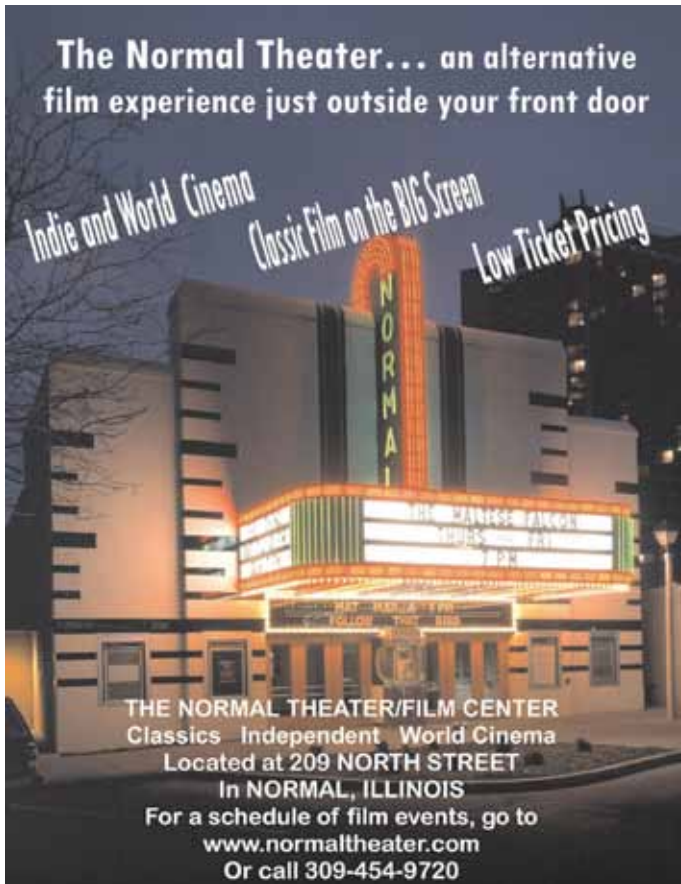
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# Last year

*A look back at the 2013 Festival*

*Photos courtesy of Thompson McClellan Photography*



*Festival director Nate Kohn introduces Chaz Ebert at the 2013 Opening Night Gala, which was hosted by President and Mrs. Robert Easter at the president's house.*



*Patrons wait in the "rush ticket line" for a screening of the movie "The Spectacular Now."*



*Festival director Nate Kohn and Chaz Ebert watch the scene from Orson Welles' "Chimes at Midnight," which opened last year's Festival.*



*"Julia" actor Tilda Swinton pays homage to Festival founder Roger Ebert by spearheading 1,500 audience members in a "dance-along" to Barry White's "You're the First, the Last, My Everything."*



*"In the Family" director Patrick Wang and actor Trevor St. John extend gratitude after their film received a standing ovation at last year's Ebertfest.*



*Festival guest and "Blancanieves" director Pablo Berger receives a standing ovation after his screening at Ebertfest.*



*Chaz Ebert and members of the University of Illinois Black Chorus lead the Festival audience in singing "Those Were the Days."*



*Vikram Gandhi, director of "Kumaré," speaks on-stage after the screening of his film.*



*The writer and director of "Oslo, August 31st" Joachim Trier speaks at Ebertfest.*

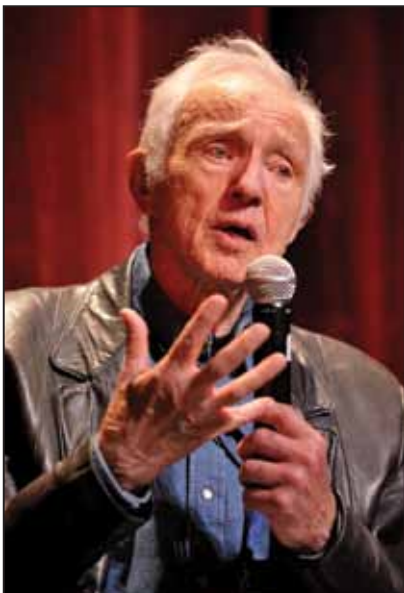




Deborah Townsend moderates the panel discussion "Challenging Stigma Through the Arts" held at the Illini Union.



Sgt. Erik Goodge and producer and co-director Sabrina Lee speak about the film "Not Yet Begun to Fight" at the 2013 Festival.



Haskell Wexler, director of photography for the film "Days of Heaven," speaks at Ebertfest.



Nate Kohn (Ebertfest director), James Ponsoldt (director), Shailene Woodley (actor) and Steve Prokopy (moderator) discuss "The Spectacular Now" in a Q-and-A session following the movie's screening at Ebertfest.



"Spectacular Now" director James Ponsoldt interviews the "Escape From Tomorrow" cast and crew after the movie's screening at Ebertfest.





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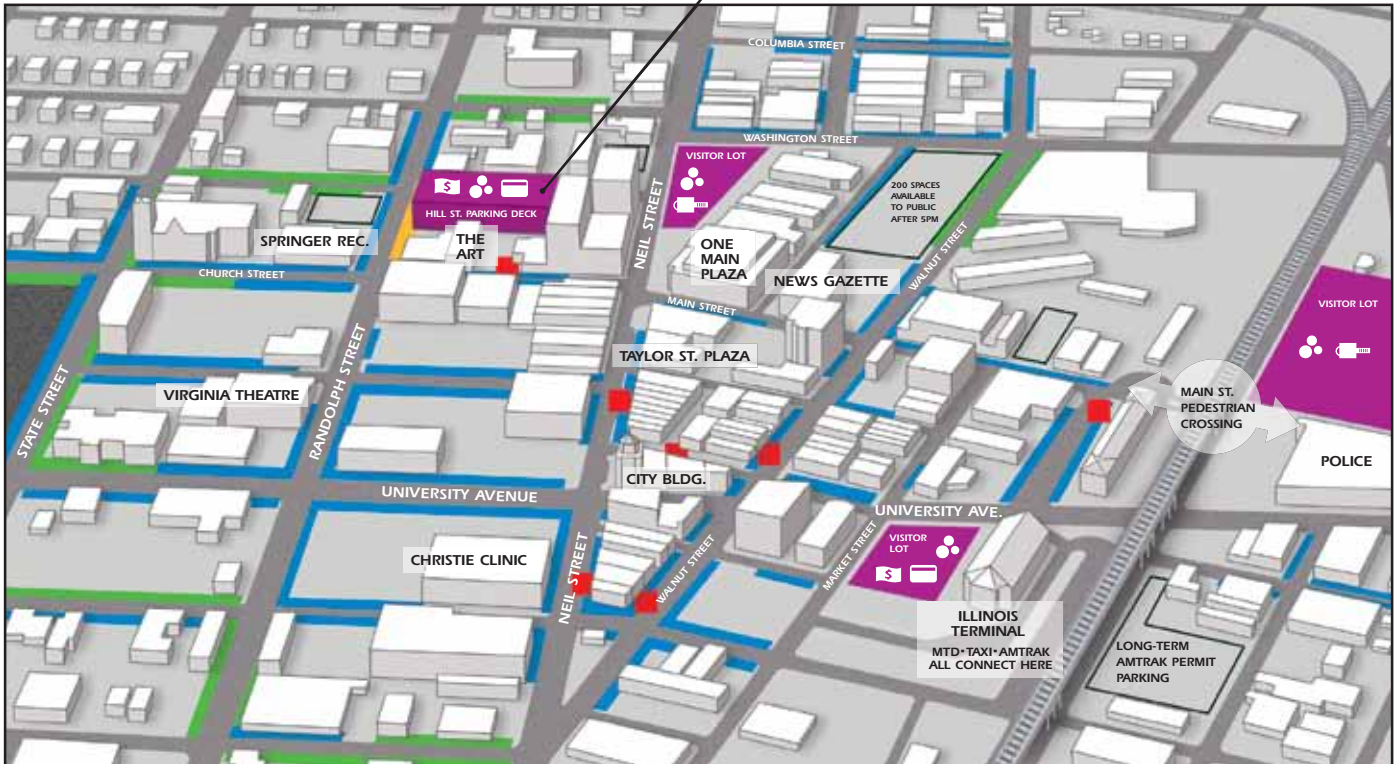
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# Parking

*City of Champaign public parking information*

**HILL STREET PARKING DECK:** 600 spaces with hundreds available to the general public



[www.getdownchampaign.com](http://www.getdownchampaign.com)

## Downtown Champaign

Color-coded meter labels make it easy to figure out where to park.

**Look for the colored stickers that meet your downtown needs:**

- Red = 30 minutes or less to grab lunch or coffee to go
- Blue = 2 hour maximum for lunch or some light shopping
- Orange = 3 or 4 hour maximum for a movie or museum visit
- Green = 10 hour maximum for a day-long meeting or outing downtown

Visitor lots are easy to find and easy to use.

**Four centrally located visitor parking locations where parking is allowed in different time increments up to 10 hour maximum:**

- Hill Street Parking Deck
- Neil & Washington Lot
- Market & University Lot
- North First Street Lot

Public parking lots abound.

- ☐ Permit parking lots open to public after 5pm

Lots of options.

**Check for these icons in the map for various options to pay:**

- Cash
- Coin
- Credit
- CashKey



**Pay stations.**

**Pay stations are located in the Market and University Lot.**

Note your stall number, proceed to pay station, keep your receipt and go to your destination. Cash, coin, credit and debit accepted.



**CashKeys.**

**All downtown parking meters accept CashKeys.**

For more information, call 217.403.7050 or visit [getdownchampaign.com](http://getdownchampaign.com).



**Parking at night.**

**Parking is monitored Monday–Friday until 9pm.**

However, time limits are waived after 5pm. So go ahead... get down. And plug any meter after 5pm for as long as you like.





## *Help us finish the job!*

In the spring of 2012, the Champaign Park District launched the largest renovation project yet for the Virginia Theatre since taking ownership of the historic facility in 2000. Major components of the project included restoration of the auditorium paint and plasterwork, installation of an elevator to transport patrons between the main and mezzanine level lobbies, upgrades of the electrical and stage systems, replacement of the seats and complete renovation of the basement dressing rooms.

This was an enormous undertaking for the park district and like any project involving a building that is nearly 100 years old, there were a few surprises. One of the nicest surprises was the discovery of 24k gold leaf around the proscenium that has now been restored. Another well-kept secret of the Virginia's past was revealed while workers were cleaning and preparing the auditorium ceiling for painting. Their careful work around light fittings on each side of the dome exposed four canvases depicting coats of arms from Spain supported by two male figures. Each of the figures is holding a shield, adorned with different devices. In addition, we uncovered large areas of stenciled decoration around the dome, the ornamental plaster, the light fittings and the proscenium. This was truly a treasure uncovered.

With improvements to the Virginia Theatre come increased opportunities for community groups, including youth and community theater groups, educational curriculum for children, rentals, increased options for performing arts

groups and an opportunity to become the cornerstone for cultural arts in downtown Champaign. But there is still work to be done.

The purchase of new lighting and sound equipment was not part of the latest renovation due to budget constraints so your help is still needed. With your support, funds currently allocated for rental of this equipment will become available for other programs within the theatre and will help keep ticket prices for shows affordable.

Our commitment to restoring this beloved facility is apparent to all who walk through her doors, and we pledge that same level of quality workmanship will continue with everything we do. Please go to [www.champaignparkdistrict.com/foundation.htm](http://www.champaignparkdistrict.com/foundation.htm) and donate today so we can continue our efforts to ensure that the Virginia Theatre remains a vital part of our community for generations to come.

**CHAMPAIGN**  
**PARKS**  
**FOUNDATION**

*Champaign Parks Foundation is a 501(c)(3) charitable nonprofit providing philanthropic support for the Champaign Park District.*

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