

It is almost impossible to choose a list of favorite films in the festival with such an extraordinary selection for all types of tastes and interest to discover. We are providing this list of selected highlights with the caveat that this is just a sampling of the many choices on offer at SIFF 2009. Inclusion does not necessarily mean a film is better than another. Below is a sampling of films to consider amongst your choices whether you only see one or one hundred features at SIFF.

Carl Spence, SIFF Artistic Director:

LOVELY LONELINESS (Argentina) – An offbeat comedy about an awkward 20-something who is tempted to start dating again despite making a hard and fast commitment to remain single for three years after a recent break-up. Stars Inés Efron (**XXY**, SIFF 2008)

FACING ALI (USA) – An insightful documentary from the perspectives of ten boxers who reminisce about Ali's career through their momentous encounters with him in the ring.

MOMMY IS AT THE HAIRDRESSER'S (Canada) - Léa Pool brings an exacting sensibility to this vivid family drama set in 1960s Quebec.

NURSE.FIGHTER.BOY (Canada) – An urban love story that explores archetypal characters of a nurse, boxer and young boy intertwined by fate.

INJU, THE BEAST IN THE SHADOW (France) - Barbet Schroeder's elegant suspense thriller is based on a novel by the great Japanese crime writer Edogawa Rampo (a pen name that pays homage to his American forebear, Edgar Allan Poe).

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MYSELF (France) - An uplifting and captivating film that is subtle and rich as a comedy. Sonia, Félicité Wouassi leads a superb African-French cast with her spellbinding, indelible performance.

MY DEAR ENEMY (South Korea) - a strong female character, subtle comedy, with a leisurely charm. The two leads, Jeon Do-yeon and Ha Jung-woo, easy onscreen chemistry makes for a delightful day trip.

THE ANARCHIST'S WIFE (Spain) - Told from a young girls point of view, the story unravels over decades of family drama, tracing her understanding of love, politics, and passion during the terror of the Spanish Civil War.

DON'T LET ME DROWN (USA) – A refreshingly honest and romantic story that unfolds as a “Mexi-Yorker” boy and a Dominican girl try to reconcile their differences with an irresistible attraction.

THE HURT LOCKER (USA) - Ratcheting up the tension from the very first scene, Kathryn Bigelow has crafted a masterpiece about conflict that works effectively as pure thriller

A second top ten in no particular order: **EVERY LITTLE STEP** (USA), **ZIFT** (Bulgaria), **THE COUNTRY TEACHER** (Czech Republic), **BUDDENBROOKS** (Germany), **KIMJONGILIA** (France/USA), **ADAM** (USA), **THE BURNING PLAIN** (USA), **THE COVE** (USA), **THE MARKET – A TALE OF TRADE** (UK/Turkey), **MOON** (United Kingdom), **TROUBLED WATER** (Norway)

Beth Barrett, Programming Manager

MORRIS, A LIFE WITH BELLS ON – heartwarming mockumentary about Morris dancing, and the striving of one dancer to rise to the next level

THE DESERT WITHIN – beautiful and spare story of a man

seeking God's forgiveness

ALL TOMORROW'S PARTIES – the UK music festival - has great performances and a truly unique style

TALHOTBLOND – doc about internet lovers who never meet, but lives are destroyed - fascinating

SHORTSFEST WEEKEND – a celebration of the short form, with over 100 films in 3 days (now an Academy® qualifier!)

BLUEBEARD – the newest from French provocateur Catherine Breillat

THE BABY FORMULA – move over Cat Cora - these women are REALLY having each others babies - no male sperm required...

HANSEL AND GRETEL – a man whose car runs off the road finds himself at “Happy House,” and the children don't want him to leave

REMBRANDT'S J'ACCUSE – Peter Greenaway explains the intricacies of Rembrandt's “Night Watch” as only Greenaway can...

Maryna Ajaja, Programmer

MOMMY IS AT THE HAIRDRESSER'S, Lea Pool, Canada

TULPAN, Sergey Dvortsevov, Kazakhstan

THE OTHER BANK, George Ovashvili, Georgia

OPIUM WAR, Siddiq Barmak (OSAMA) Afghanistan

EVERYONE ELSE, Maren Ade, Germany

HOOKED, ADRIAN Sitaru, Romania

SNOW, Aida Begic, Bosnia-Herzegovina

BLUEBEARD, Catherine Breillat, France

BUICK RIVERA, Goran Rusinovic, USA/Croatia

THE KARAMAZOVs, Petr Zelenka, (**BUTTONERS**) Czech Republic

TREELESS MOUNTAIN, So-yong Kim, USA

LIVE AND REMEMBER, Alexander Proshkin, Russia

WILD FIELD, Mikhail Kalatozishvili, Russia

WIND BLOWS IN THE MEADOW, Khoistro Masoumi, Iran

BE CALM AND COUNT TO SEVEN, Ramtian Lavafipour, Iran

CAN GO THROUGH SKIN, Esther Rots, Netherlands

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MYSELF, Francois Dupeyron, France

THE FORTRESS, A transparent look at the Swiss procedure of processing asylum seekers

DEFAMATION, about anti-Semitism in today's world

GARBAGE DREAMS, about the Zaballeen, the “garbage caretakers” of Cairo Egypt

Justine Barda, Programmer

THE CLONE RETURNS HOME - This beautiful, thoughtful film uses its setting in a hypothetical high-tech future, when cloning has become a reality, to explore what it means to be human.

THE ONE-HANDED TRICK - A story of two best friends in a Barcelona barrio who are trying to make something out of nothing and just might pull it off. Moving, exciting, and real –

with a terrific soundtrack.

INLAND - a lyrical portrait of present-day Algeria – the landscape, the politics, and the struggles of the people who live there.

STELLA - An insightful, unsentimental look at the life of a bright little girl growing up in a working class neighborhood outside Paris in the 1970s.

ZIFT - Set in 1960's totalitarian Bulgaria, **ZIFT** is part thriller, part satire, with a witty script and a stylized noir aesthetic. Gorgeously shot in black and white.

THE CAPTIVE - Based on the short story, "A Prisoner of the Caucasus," the film's intimate focus on a prisoner and his two ambivalent captors makes for a humane and powerful look at the realities of warfare.

MACHAN - Directed by Uberto Passolini (producer of **THE FULL MONTY**) and based on a true story, **MACHAN** tells the story of men in dire circumstances who find a wonderful way out.

BLUEBEARD - Watching Catherine Breillat's highly literary retelling of this 17th-century French story is like watching a fairy tale come to life, with all the attendant fright and fascination.

FIG TREES - John Greyson's doc-opera tells the true story of two AIDS activists – our own modern-day grand-scale narrative of personal heroism in the face of evil.

RAGING SUN, RAGING SKY - Let yourself be seduced by the masterful cinematography of experimental filmmaker Julian Hernandez's in this dreamy mythological homage to love, desire, and sexuality.

Josselyn Bossennec - Programming Intern

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MYSELF – Sonia an African immigrant living in the projects outside Paris, just wants to watch her daughter get married, but the cops arrest her son and her husband gambles away their savings in this darkly comic, deeply sympathetic portrait of a harried working mother. Freshest french film this year.

WELCOME – A smoothly crafted, emotionally affecting drama driven by powerful performances, Welcome focuses on illegal immigrants trying to reach England from Calais, and the risk taken by the French people who help them despite threats from the police. Winner of Berlin International Film Festival's Ecumenical Jury and Label Europa Cinemas awards.

OSS 117 CAIRO, NEST OF SPIES / OSS 177 : LOST IN RIO – Hubert Bonisseur de la Bath, aka agent OSS 117, is France's answer to James Bond, Maxwell Smart and Austin Powers. Huge successes in France, these comedies are just hilarious.

STELLA – Wryly-philosophical Stella, whose parents run a boisterous working-class bar, lands, by a fluke, in an exclusive Paris high school. Though well versed in soccer, mixology, and pop music, Stella soon realizes she lacks the requisite knowledge to survive on this alien planet. The last film with French Superstar Gerard Depardieu's son : Guillaume Depardieu.

SERAPHINE – This transcendent biopic charts the life of self-taught primitivist artist Séraphine de Senlis, who worked as a maid in early 20th-century France, and painted with everything she could find in her spare time.

MELODRAMMA HABIBI – Bruno, a French one-hit-wonder crooner, is slouching into a grudging retirement from music

when he gets an offer to sing for a fan in Lebanon. This crowd pleaser celebrates how music shapes our memories, both real and imagined.

KHAMSA – Franco-Tunisian writer-director Karim Dridi's latest is a poignant tale reminiscent of François Truffaut's **THE 400 BLOWS**. Thirteen-year-old Khamsa flees his foster family for the Marseilles Gypsy camp where he was born. Embraced by his old friends, Khamsa's innocence begins to vanish when they involve him in a series of increasingly serious crimes.

THE WEDDING SONG – Unfolding against the dramatic backdrop of the Third Reich's occupation of Tunis in 1942, this sensual and sexually frank film centers on teen friends and neighbors whose cultures and religions collide.

INJU, THE BEAST IN THE SHADOW – This elegant suspense thriller, based on a novel by the great Japanese crime writer Edogawa Rampo, is a tale of intellectual and erotic obsession that pits callow French novelist Alex Fayard against a diabolical Japanese mastermind. Screening with Oscar Nominee director Barbet Schroeder.

Clare Canzoneri, Programmer

RUMBA – colorful, dance-y, slapstick, comedy from the makers of **ICEBERG** – Dominique Abel and Fiona Gordon in this film make me happy to be alive

ALL TOMORROW'S PARTIES – an astounding amount of footage from hundreds of fans, artists and curators is beautifully pieced together to celebrate ten years of the All Tomorrow's Parties festival - with great performances from Portishead, Battles, Belle & Sebastian, Patti Smith, Nick Cave, Animal Collective, and others

SOUNDS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT – European kids compete for the top prize at the Junior Eurovision Sound Contest in this warmly comic "popumentary"

THE CLONE RETURNS HOME – astronaut Kohei Takakura has died in space and is cloned, but the clone has technical glitches that send him on a bizarre and beautiful journey in his search for a sense of "home"

THAT EVENING SUN – a gem of Southern cinema that ruminates on stubbornness and loss with strong performances by its ensemble cast, especially from Hal Holbrook – features great music by Michael Penn

WE LIVE IN PUBLIC – fascinating, fast-paced doc by Ondi Timoner ("**DIG!**") exploring the effects of our increasingly web-based lifestyle via the story of internet mogul Josh Harris

THREE BLIND MICE – three sailors on a 24-hour shore leave in Sydney – think a more realistic, brutal version of **ON THE TOWN** sans musical numbers and happy endings

SHORTSFEST OPENING NIGHT – a great introduction to ShortsFest 2009, now with Academy®-qualifying status! See an adorable addition to a herd of cattle in **THE HERD** and two love stories from a creative affection of **POST-IT LOVE** to the much different intensity of **LOVE**

THE NIGHTMARE FACTORY – vengeful Christmas trees? Check. Knit-animated Swedish, love triangle between a lumberjack, blind woman and a bear? Check.

THE FAMILY PICTURE SHOW – can be enjoyed by anyone – more fun fiber animation (**MAGGIE AND MILDRED**) and new adventures from Wallace & Gromit

Dan Doody, Programmer

SHORTSFEST OPENING NIGHT—whether it's an adaptation of Kurt Vonnegut's "Harrison Bergeron," a light-hearted ghost story starring Marianne Jean-Baptiste, a delirious dinner party, or two very different meditations on love from the UK, this package is the perfect primer on the diversity and power found in today's short films.

GRACE—Not since **ROSEMARY'S BABY** has motherhood been so frightful; a squirm-inducing, atmospheric chiller in which Jordan Ladd's maternal joys are short-lived following the miraculous birth of baby Grace.

THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD—Errol Flynn and director Michael Curtiz's beloved film is still the quintessential swashbuckler, and whether it's Kevin Costner or Daffy Duck, anyone who dons the green archer's tights brings immediately comparisons to Flynn's iconic performance.

MORRIS: A LIFE WITH BELLS ON—Another story about Englishmen in tights, with bells and hankies too; this mockumentary explores the ultra-competative, seamy underbelly of the traditional pub dance competition.

I SELL THE DEAD—featuring Ron Perlman & Dominic Monaghan, this Gothic Horror-Comedy about two Victorian-era resurrection men is a brilliant blend of Roger Corman, Hammer Horrors, and Sam Raimi's **EVIL DEAD** films.

SO LONG AT THE FAIR—Speaking of which, the man behind Hammer's most iconic fright flicks, Terence Fisher directed this fin-de-siecle-set Hitchcockian thriller in which Jean Simmons' brother and his entire hotel room disappear one fateful night.

WARLORDS—Set roughly during the same time period, but a half-world away, **WARLORDS** is a remake of the Shaw Brothers' **DYNASTY OF BLOOD** and stars Jet Li, Andy Lau, and Takeshi Kaneshiro in a beautifully shot epic, filled with swirling, panoramic battle sequences.

HANSEL AND GRETEL—a distinctly Eastern take on the traditional fairy tale that is endlessly inventive, not only with its kitschy, creepy visual style, but in its very translation of the tale from German folklore to modern-day Korea.

KAIFECK MURDER—Traveling through rural Bavaria, a photographer and his son stumble upon the village of Kaifeck, the scene of an infamous unsolved mass murder, and home to the loopy residents outside of Robin Hardy's **THE WICKER MAN**.

DEAD SNOW—Scandinavian snow bunnies meet Nazi Zombies, 'nuff said.

Ruth Hayler, Programmer

EVERY LITTLE STEP—Fabulous! Makes you laugh, makes you cry, makes you want to sing. I would never have dreamed such a terrific film could be made from this seemingly-limited subject.

\$9.99—Warped, unpredictable stop-motion animation, an Israeli-Australian co-production. I especially enjoyed the supermodel who likes her men really smooth.

NORTH FACE—A literal cliffhanger, with tremendous tension, as two rival teams attempt to climb the unconquered north face of the Eiger in 1936. Reminiscent of **TOUCHING THE VOID**.

DEPARTURES—This year's surprise Oscar winner for Best Foreign Film from Japan turns out to be a worthy winner. Unexpectedly tender.

STILL WALKING—Another wonderful Japanese drama, this one directed by Hirokazu Kore-eda (**NOBODY KNOWS**). Intergenerational conflict in a family gathering subtly reveals more and more as the story unfolds.

QUIET CHAOS—If you like Italian films, this will be YOUR ONLY CHANCE to see this excellent drama, which won 3 Donatello Awards this year. The U.S. distributor has only one print (we're getting it) and no plans to release it. Nanni Moretti plays a distraught father who decides to drop everything else and watch over his young daughter all day.

THE COUNTRY TEACHER—An appealing, but deeply flawed, main character kept my interest throughout.

TREELESS MOUNTAIN—Two young Korean sisters left on their own, hope for their mother's return. Touching, poetic.

And two more I haven't seen but am looking forward to:

SO LONG AT THE FAIR—Seldom seen 1950 British period film starring Jean Simmons. Fill in a gap in the career of a fine actress after **GREAT EXPECTATIONS**, **BLACK NARCISSUS**, **HAMLET AND BLUE LAGOON**, and before **ANGEL FACE**, **GUYS AND DOLLS**, **ELMER GANTRY** and **SPARTACUS**.

With Dirk Bogarde for a bonus.

FOREVER ENTHRALLED—Chen Kaige's latest spectacle, filled with romance, drama, and melodrama

Dustin Kaspar, Programmer

THE CLONE RETURNS HOME—A mesmerizing philosophical/science fiction poem that is both exquisitely composed and infinitely intriguing that is still being thought about a month later.

DEAD SNOW—Oops...we resurrected Nazi Zombies. Preceded appropriately by a fabulous German zombie hunting short.

DEFAMATION—A challenging and surprising doc that sees an Israeli travel the world to define anti-semitism in the 21st Century.

MAMMA MOO AND CROW—Gather all the kids you know and get them to a screening of this beautiful film. An adventurous cow and her curmudgeonly crow friend learn about friendship with many laughs and meaningful moments along the way.

MIAO MIAO—Sumptuously shot teen love triangle is a complicated depiction of the discovery of amorous feelings.

MY SUICIDE—Director spent 4 years collaborating with youth to create this affecting collage of perspectives about teen suicide.

NAK—Thai ghost legends mix surprisingly well with family films. It is a colorful musical feature with ghostly cameos and effective moments.

REMBRANDT'S J'ACCUSE—Looking at a single painting for 90 minutes might seem boring but cinematic provocateur Peter Greenaway's tour is like none other as each new historical and artistic revelation crescendos toward comprehension of what makes Rembrandt's Nightwatch stand the test of time.

SHORTSFEST OPENING NIGHT—I encourage everyone to explore at least one shorts program. The **OPENING NIGHT PROGRAM** contains an emotional spectrum that will resonate throughout the weekend.

TALHOTBLOND—This is a pot-boiler doc that keeps getting more jaw-dropping at every twist.

Helen Loveridge, Programmer

THE BEACHES OF AGNÈS – Snapshots from the remarkable life of a remarkable filmmaker.

BIRDWATCHERS – Immensely absorbing environmental drama set in Amazonia about the encroachment of modern life into tribal ways.

THE HIGHER FORCE – Cool humor from a cold country. Laugh-out-loud funny.

IN THE LOOP – Madly witty and incisive British political satire adapted from a hit BBC series, with a top notch cast of comedy actors.

INVOLUNTARY – One of the most interesting new directing talents to emerge in the last couple of years.

KHAMSA – My vote for best actor would go to the entire ensemble of kids in this searing drama set amongst the disaffected youth of Marseilles' immigrant population.

LA CIÉNAGA – Along with Pablo Trapero's **MUNDO GRUA (CRANE WORLD)**, this is one of the towering masterpieces of the Argentinean surge of the last years.

THE MAID – Striking Chilean film with a superlative central performance from Catalina Saavedra as maid Raquel, who, after 23 years of devoted service, has started to confuse her true role in the family.

QUIET CHAOS – Deeply affecting yet uplifting drama about bereavement, with the great Nani Moretti as the widower at the heart of the story.

WARLORDS – Big, bold. Everything you want from an Asian epic. Unmissable.

Anita Monga, Programmer

THE COUNTRY TEACHER – Beautifully complex and human-sized story of closeted gay teacher who moves to the middle of nowhere.

THE DESERT WITHIN – Guilt, religious madness, and a beautiful Mexican family. ¡Viva la cinema de Rodrigo Plá!

IL DIVO – Breathtaking political cinema. Bravo!

THE CONVERSATION – A rare chance to see this unqualified masterpiece on the big screen. If I were you, I wouldn't miss it.

DEADGIRL – With enough gruesome material to please the horror crowd, but with enough nuance and feeling to please... well...me.

FOOD, INC. – You are what you see!

PRODIGAL SONS – An extraordinary doc about an extraordinary family – a memoir with twists!

STILL WALKING – An exquisite film – as moving as any by Ozu. Korea-eda's masterpiece!

SUMMER HOURS – Lovely, moving, truthful, Oliver Assayas's gorgeous new film is a must.

SHORTSFEST WEEKEND – Some of the most innovative, exciting work in the festival will be exhibited here!

Stan Shields, Programmer

THE BABY FORMULA – a hilarious comedy about a lesbian couple who use an experimental scientific process to impregnate themselves with "female sperm."

DEADGIRL – perhaps the most complicated "coming of age" film I've ever seen!

FOUR CHAPTER – a classically beautiful tale that questions

both sacred and earthly pleasures.

AN ISLAND CALLING – a fascinating documentary that examines a society's politics and history to explore a murderer's motives.

I'M NO DUMMY – a funny and educational look at the history of ventriloquism and its amazingly talented practitioners.

THE KARAMAZOVs – Dostoyevsky's novel becomes a brilliantly updated, multi-tiered exploration of morality.

MANHOLE CHILDREN – an engrossing documentary that tracks the lives of three Mongolian "manhole children" living beneath their capitol city over ten years.

OPIUM WAR – one of the most topical and daring sophomore directorial efforts in recent memory.

TALHOTBLOND – a shocking true-crime tale of an internet love triangle, rife with deception and murder.

TRIMPIN: THE SOUND OF INVENTION – a revealing look at Seattle's own ingenious artist/inventor/engineer/composer.

Andy Spletzer, Programmer

ALTERNATE CINEMA – There is fun to be had in the doc about the pioneering underground filmmakers George and Mike Kuchar in **IT CAME FROM KUCCHAR**; there is raw sex in the archival films that form the base of **FILM IST. A GIRL AND A GUN**; there are economic realities in the documentary **CALIFORNIA COMPANY TOWN**; there is a safari in a filmmaker's backyard in **LIGHT YEAR**; there is a surreal adaptation of Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" in **BEKET**; documentary gets mixed up with fiction in **OUR BELOVED MONTH OF AUGUST**; and the short film program "Short in the Dark" is a fantastic sampler platter. I co-programmed Alternate Cinema with the NWFF's Adam Sekular, and we're both quite proud of it.

AT WEST OF PLUTO – I was skeptical when I read the description, and I was totally won-over once I'd seen the film.

BLIND PIG WHO WANTS TO FLY – One of my favorite films of the festival. Every time they play the song "I Just Called to Say I Love You" it means something new... and they play the song a lot!

BRONSON – Like Kubrick's "A Clockwork Orange," but funnier.

THE DARK HARBOR – Charming comedy about a lonely fisherman who finds a woman and her son hiding in his cupboard.

THE HIGHER FORCE – Very funny slacker mafia movie from Iceland, similar to what "True Romance" would have been like if Brad Pitt's stoner were the main character.

I SELL THE DEAD – I love this because it reminds me of watching old Roger Corman period horror films on TV when I was a kid.

NO PUEDO VIVIR SIN TI – An expression of hope in tough economic times as a homeless father does whatever he can to get his daughter back from the Taiwanese bureaucrats who think they know what's best for her.

NORTHWEST CONNECTIONS – There are so many strong films from around here, even beyond **HUMPDAY** and **THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF LITTLE DIZZLE**, that it's worth looking them all up.

YES I CAN SEE DEAD PEOPLE – Funny and genuinely creepy, this is like a Wes Craven movie from back when he made horror films.