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Miami International Film Festival lineup boasts mariachis, slackers and zombies

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Wilson Webb / Miami International Film Festival

Diane Keaton in "Darling Companion."

Mariachis, slackers, canines and zombies are about to invade South Florida, courtesy of the 29th Miami International Film Festival, which runs March 2-11.

A slate of more than 100 films from 35 countries was unveiled Tuesday by Miami Dade College, which produces the venerable event. Along with the usual emphasis on Ibero-American feature films, documentaries and up-and-coming directors, this year's festival features several new categories, including a spotlight on Quebec cinema, a celebration of American indies, a group of family-

oriented pictures and a trio of thrillers in a programming block titled "Mayhem."

Opening night brings *Mariachi Gringo*, the story of a Kansas teenager (Shawn Ashmore of *X-Men: The Last Stand*) who runs away to Mexico to become a mariachi singer. The closing night film will be Argentina's award-winning *Chinese Take-Away* (*Un cuento chino*), the story of a shopkeeper (the great Ricardo Darín) whose quiet life is changed after he befriends a Chinese immigrant.

Other festival highlights include:

Juan of the Dead (*Juan de los muertos*), a satirical horror-comedy from Cuba about a man who launches a profitable zombie-killing business after the dead start rising from the grave.

Darling Companion, director Lawrence (*The Big Chill*) Kasdan's first film since the 2003 Stephen King adaptation *Dreamcatcher*, about a woman (Diane Keaton) who loves her dog more than she loves her husband (Kevin Kline).

Jeff Who Lives at Home, the latest comedy from brothers Jay and Mark Duplass (*Cyrus*, *Baghead*, *The Puffy Chair*), starring Jason Segel as a 30 year-old layabout who still lives at home with his mother (Susan Sarandon) and Ed Helms as his unhappily-married brother.

About Face, the new documentary by Miami's Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, explores how women deal with aging through interviews with former supermodels (including Christie Brinkley, Christy Turlington and Jerry Hall) who are now between the ages of 50 and 80.

Under African Skies, a portrait of musician Paul Simon as he returns to South Africa to recount the legacy of his album Graceland, from Paradise Lost co-director Joe Berlinger.

Some Day This Pain Will Be Useful to You, an English-language drama from Italian director Roberto Faenza, based on Peter Cameron's novel, about a sensitive teenager (Toby Regbo) trying to make sense of the world around him. The supporting cast includes Marcia Gay Harden, Ellen Burstyn, Lucy Liu, Peter Gallagher and Aubrey Plaza.

The Diary of Preston Plummer, the shot-in-Florida drama about a man who falls for a woman with a troubled past, co-starring Robert Loggia, who will receive a career tribute at the festival.

World-class directors returning to the festival with their new films include David Trueba (Madrid 1987), Santiago Segura (the 3D action-comedy Torrente 4: Lethal Crisis), Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne (The Kid with a Bike), Jean-Marc Vallée (Café des Flore) and Terence Davies (The Deep Blue Sea).

Along with the return of the Ibero-American, short films and documentary competitions, the festival is introducing a new category, the Ibero-American Opera Prima, in which seven first-time filmmakers from Spain, Portugal and Latin America vie for a \$5,000 cash prize. In collaboration with the City of Miami Beach and the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau, the college will open a Festival Village space on Lincoln Road, offering free screenings, opportunities to meet visiting filmmakers and a stage for photos.

Last year's festival drew an estimated 70,000. "It's exciting to see the festival's reputation as an influential and unique player among U.S. and international film festivals become stronger and stronger," said executive director Jaie LaPlante.

"As a whole, the program makes bold statements about the world we live in and challenges audiences to think about our changing world," said Miami Dade College president Eduardo Padrón.

Tickets for the festival will go on sale in February. A complete schedule of films and events will be posted to www.miamifilmfestival.com

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