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Miami Dade College's Miami International Film Festival presents MIFFecito, a weekend's worth serving of films and festivities.

Jaie Laplante is hooked on caffeine. On a typical day, he'll have five or six shots of espresso — or, as they're known in Miami, *cafecitos*. On stressful days, he may have a few more.

But Laplante seems calm and eager when talking about the first MIFFecito, a weekend-long celebration of cinema presented by Miami Dade College's Miami International Film Festival. Inspired by mini-festivals put on year-round by institutions such as New York City's Lincoln Center, Laplante decided to do the same thing here. He and programmer Andres Castillo rounded up some of the films they had wanted to play in this year's festival and programmed them at the newly restored Tower Theater, 1508 SW Eighth St., Miami, to play this weekend.

"I always get a huge surge of energy during the festival, but then when it's over I crash, like you do after a sugar rush, knowing that I have to wait another year for the next one," Laplante says. "But when I saw these other mini-festivals taking place in other cities, Andres and I went after the movies we couldn't get the first time around."

Intended as an appetizer for next year's festival, which runs March 6-15, the lineup this weekend includes:

- The Italian satire *I Can Quit Whenever I Want*, an acidic comedy about a group of post-grads who, faced with their country's 43 percent unemployment rate, start their own unusual business.
- Mexican filmmaker Mariana Chenillio uses *Paradise* to explore our obsession with our body image when an overweight couple challenges each other to see who can lose the most weight.
- The highest-grossing film in Spain's history, *Spanish Affair* highlights the contrasts between

northern and southern Spain when a man from Seville pretends to pass as a Basque to win the girl of his dreams.

- Miami's Roberto Sanchez stars in *Lake Los Angeles* as a middle-aged Cuban man who works odd jobs while providing refuge for illegal Mexican immigrants.
- *Life Feels Good* centers on the true story of a 26-year-old Polish man born with cerebral palsy and his struggle to communicate with the rest of the world.
- Hailing from Chile, *Root* is an unusual road trip between an abused 20-year-old woman and a 9-year-old boy left orphaned after the death of his domineering guardian.
- In *Vara: A Blessing*, director Khyentse Norbu uses dance and music to explore India's brutal caste system, when a lowly Muslim falls in love with a Hindu girl, whose father has already arranged to marry a wealthy scion.

In addition to screenings, MIFFecito will offer special programs such as *The Laramie Project Retrospective Screening*, the 2002 HBO documentary about the murder of Matthew Shephard, followed by a conversation with playwright/author Moisés Kaufman. There will also be a master class, titled *The Art of Curation* with Thom Powers, the esteemed programmer for several festivals, including Toronto and Miami.

Laplante admits that just like with any new enterprises, he had initially fretted about the turnout. Would anyone come? The early signs look good.

"When you start something new, people are slow to respond," Laplante says. "But we've already had to add three additional screenings due to sell-outs, including the opening night film (*Behavior*), so I'm feeling very happy."



See & Do

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