

## Miami International Film Festival to showcase independent films from Cuba and Miami

BY RENE RODRIGUEZ - RRODRIGUEZ@MIAMIHERALD.COM

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'Wild Tales': The Oscar-nominated dark comedy from Argentina starring Ricardo Darín, will open the 32nd edition of the Miami International Film Festival. SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

Movie buffs, get ready to get your groove on: 14 world premieres, 22 North American premieres and 12 U.S. premieres are among the highlights of Miami Dade College's Miami International Film Festival, to be held March 6-15 at various venues around the city.

As previously announced, Argentina's Oscar-nominated dark comedy *Wild Tales* (*Relatos salvajes*), a collection of six interlocking short stories about revenge produced by Pedro Almodóvar, will kick off the festival. Closing night will bring the Spanish comedy *Sidetracked* (*Las ovejas no pierden el tren*), about a married couple (Raúl Arévalo and Inma Cuesta) forced to move in with their son during a financial crisis.

Executive director Jaie Laplante said this year's batch of 125 feature-length and short films was culled from 797 submissions as well as various festivals around the world.

"I'm proud of the rigor that went into the programmers' choices for the festival this year," Laplante said. "Each invitation was discussed and considered on two equally important levels: its artistic relevance, and its relevance and interest level for the Miami audience."

Instead of the traditional Career Achievement Tribute awarded to a particular actor or filmmaker, this year the festival will present an homage to independent Cuban filmmakers, focusing on four director/producers – Carlos Machado Quintela, Claudia Calviño, Jessica Rodríguez and Marcel Beltrán – who will introduce their latest projects. A week before the festival, starting Feb. 28, their previous films will be screened at Miami Dade College's Tower Theater in order to help Miami audiences contextualize their work.

"Cuba is in the news a lot recently, but our focus on the Cuban independent filmmaker – i.e. the filmmaker who makes their art by raising all their own financing – is something we've been talking about for a while," Laplante said. "...In Cuba, with the difficulties of access and communication, it's even more remarkable that this scrappy group of resilient filmmakers continue to produce such mature and resonant work."

Although the festival has often screened locally made films, this year's edition will place an extra emphasis on movies made in Miami by Miamians (or former Miamians), including *Dawg Fight*, a look at the underground backyard fighting circuit in Perrine by director Billy Corben (*The U, Cocaine Cowboys*); *Hot Girls Wanted*, a documentary about five young women trying to make the leap from the amateur porn industry to the professional big leagues, co-directed by former Miami Herald staffers Jill Bauer and Ronna Gradus; *The Strongest Man in the World*, the story of a Cuban-American construction worker who may in fact be the strongest man in the world, directed by Miami-based Kenny Riches; and several shorts including Jonathan David Kane's *Papa Machete*, about the art of Haitian machete fencing, which screened at the Borscht Film Festival in December and more recently played at the Sundance International Film Festival.

"I'm always looking for good films with Miami connections," Laplante said. "It's fun for the hometown crowd to see our beautiful city up there on the screen, and to find the stories from within that are as universally powerful as any of the international films they stand beside at this year's festival."

"There's a lot more Miami-themed or Miami-connected work than usual this year, and it's because the artists here are gaining confidence in their visions of the city, and going further with it. Our filmmakers are being recognized in international festivals like Toronto and Sundance, and winning Emmys and other awards, so naturally I'm fiercely committed to lionizing their films, too."

As usual, there will be several competition categories. The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation will fund Grand Jury Prizes totaling \$50,000 in feature-length and documentary competitions. The Jordan Alexander Ressler Foundation will award \$5,000 to the winner of their contest. The winner of the Lexus Ibero-American Opera Prima Competition (comprised of five first-time filmmakers from Latin America, Spain and Portugal) will come away with \$10,000, and the Park Grove Shorts Competition will earn the director of a competing short film \$2,500. New this year is "Miami Manifesto," a slate of films heavy on political content that will be followed by extended Q&A sessions and debates with their directors.

Other programming slates include showcases of current French and Asian cinema, retrospective screenings of two Orson Welles classics (*Citizen Kane* and *The Stranger*), several master-class seminars (including one with Cheryl Boone Isaacs, the president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences), and the return of Culinary Cinema, which pairs specific films with post-screening dinners at area restaurants.

Some more notable titles in the lineup include:

- *The Salt of the Earth*, a documentary portrait of the renowned photographer Sebastião Salgado, co-directed by Wim Wenders and Juliano Ribeiro Salgado.
- *Kurt Cobain: Montage of Heck*, about the life and career of the former lead singer of Nirvana, made with the cooperation of his survivors, including Courtney Love and Dave Grohl.
- *Everybody Leaves (Todos se van)*, an adaptation of the autobiographical novel by Cuban writer Wendy Guerra, about a little girl caught in a custody battle between her warring parents.
- *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence*, the critically acclaimed bleak drama from Norway about a pair of traveling salesmen, directed entirely in static camera compositions by Roy Andersson.
- *Innocent Killers (Asesinos inocentes)*, a Hitchcockian thriller from Spain about a cash-strapped university student whose psychology teacher offers him money to commit a murder.

- *In the Name of My Daughter*, the latest from French master André Téchiné, about a young woman who falls for an older man who is her father's business rival.
- *3 Beauties (3 Bellezas)*, the story of a former beauty queen in Venezuela who is obsessed with having her daughter follow in her footsteps, by whatever means necessary.
- *Tour de Force*, a German drama about a group of friends who go on an annual bike tour together, only this year one of them is hiding a secret.
- *The Liar*, the story of a woman living in dire straits in South Korea who creates a fantasy life for herself.
- *Kamikaze*, an edgy comedy about a terrorist planning to detonate a bomb on a flight to Madrid when a snowstorm waylays his plan and he's forced to spend a night at a hotel with his fellow passengers/would-be victims.

#### TICKET INFO

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Miami International Film Festival tickets for the general public will go on sale Feb. 13 (Miami Film Society members will get dibs, with tickets available Feb. 6). For a complete festival lineup, visit [www.miamifilmfestival.com](http://www.miamifilmfestival.com) (<http://www.miamifilmfestival.com/>) or call 305-237-3456.