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In Any Language: Must-See Foreign Films

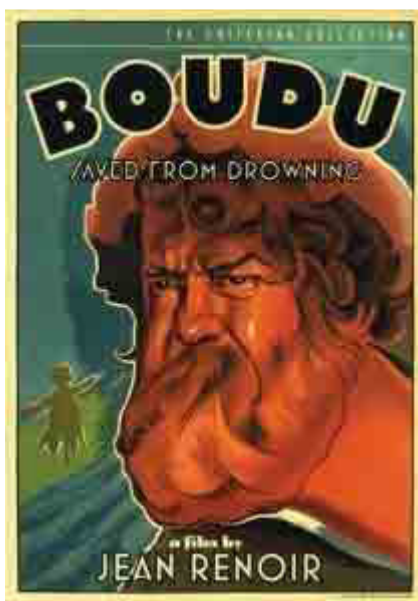
January 13, 2011

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – The Illinois Wesleyan University Spring 2011 International Film Series kicks off for the campus community this month. The series allows students to explore films from around the globe, and has inspired a question to be sent to professors: What are your ‘must-see’ foreign films? Here are some of their answers:

Associate Professor of German and Eastern European Studies Sonja Fritzsche

M (Germany, 1931)

I would have to say the German film Fritz Lang's *M*. Fritz Lang is perhaps the most famous German film director, and his films have influenced western film directors in many different genres (science fiction, spy thriller, murder mystery, film noir, myth/folk tale, etc.). Both Lang and Peter Lorre, the star of *M*, went on to work successfully in Hollywood during and after World War II. *M* was one of the first German sound films or “talkies” and employs sound and the absence of sound to create tension. The film itself included elements of Expressionism from the early twenties, New Subjectivity from the mid-to-late twenties, and also anticipated film noir. The editing was masterful. *M* still appeals to today's viewer, and gets under your skin in a way that most color films cannot. Finally, you will never be able to listen to Edvard Grieg's “In the Hall of the Mountain King” from Peer Gynt without whistling!!



Associate Professor of French Jim Matthews

Boudu sauvé des eaux (France, 1932)

I would choose *Boudu sauvé des eaux* directed by Jean Renoir in 1932 and starring the amazing Michel Simon. Can a morally challenged bookstore owner “save” a suicidal tramp?

Renoir takes on this question with humor, irony and grace, creating a world of gentle class conflict in which only the tramp is ultimately able to understand himself and others.

A delightful skewering of bourgeois ideals, this is a revealing film of French humor, compassion, and intolerance.

Associate Professor of Political Science Kathleen Montgomery

No Man's Land (Bosnia, 2001)

The one I seem to come back to again and again is the Bosnian film *No Man's Land*, directed by Danis Tanovic. I love this movie, because it manages to be at once visually beautiful and darkly funny, a satire about the absurdity and futility of war based on ethnic grievances. No side or actor in the Bosnian conflict is spared. There are the Serb and Croat combatants; each convinced that the other's people are responsible for the war. There are the outside actors meant to help end fighting over grievances they do not begin to understand: the international media hungry for a sound-bite-sized story, the blue-helmeted United Nations (U.N.) peacekeepers, derogatorily referred to as "the Smurfs," and the pompously detached U.N. High Commissioner who does not seem to notice the human tragedy unfolding in the field.



Associate Professor of French and Italian Scott Sheridan

Cinema Paradiso (Italy, 1988)

While some might list movie classics such as Fellini's *8 ½* (1963) or De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), or perhaps a relatively recent box-office success such as Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* (1998), the Italian film that I appreciate the most is Giuseppe Tornatore's 1988 *Cinema Paradiso* (known in Italian as *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso*). It's a nostalgic look at the experiences of a young boy growing up in post-WWII Sicily, as he finds friendship, his first love, and a deep appreciation for film. It's admittedly very sentimental, but the film is magical in the way it weaves memory and the metaphor of "film as life," while creating a self-reflexive space in which the viewer is invited to reflect on the many movies s/he has seen and their associations to specific real-life moments. Although I normally don't go for "cute," *Cinema Paradiso* is one of my favorite guilty pleasures mostly because of the ending, which gets me every time! If you haven't seen this amazing film, you must, and if you have seen it, see it again—it's worth seeing over and over.

Associate Professor of Hispanic Studies Cesar Valverde

Amores perros (Mexico, 2000)

Amores perros is Alejandro Gonzalez Iñárritu's debut film that tells three stories from the rough streets of Mexico City: a teen with an obsessive and destructive attraction for his brother's wife pits his dog against others to fund an escape; a yuppie who abandons his family to be with a supermodel deals with her physical deterioration; and an ex-guerilla turned hobo nurses a wounded dog, plans an assassination and faces ghosts from his past. This is a gritty and powerful urban film that touches on redemption, loyalty and violence; it is a much better film than Iñárritu's disappointing *21 Grams* or *Babel*, though he has bounced back with another gem in *Biutiful* (also highly recommended).



Adjunct Faculty Member Stokes Schwartz

Hawaii, Oslo

A Norwegian film from 2004, directed by Erik Poppe, *Hawaii, Oslo* is an interesting set of intersecting stories in modern, multicultural Norway. The Ames Library has a copy that I use in my Scandinavian and Nordic film course. It usually generates lots of discussion among my students.

The International Film Series, which is open to IWU students, will be presented by a University professor as part of a class currently being taught. A listing of films in the series is accessible on campus only at the International Film Series site: www.iwu.edu/IFS/.

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