

# On WFF #1: Of pipes and playfulness

Decider previews the Wisconsin Film Festival



These women aren't the only ones staring down a dry spell.

By John Wiedenhoefft March 16, 2009

**F**irst, a note: This post was supposed to be a comparison between two romantic comedies set in Eastern Europe (*Absurdistan* and *Kinnunen*) with decidedly different tones. Unfortunately, *Decider's Kinnunen* screener arrived sans subtitles (kind of like the *Absurdistan* trailer below). While the character study of a Finnish man who literally falls off of the boat in Estonia is partly about language barriers, *Decider* wasn't prepared to get that conceptual with it. (End note.)

***Absurdistan*** (April 2, **Chazen Museum Of Art**, 9:30 p.m.) is really a misnomer for German director Veit Helmer's coming-of-age film, which adds idyllic magic realism to a true story from an isolated modern-day village in Turkey. *Whimsystan* or *Irrepressistan* might have been a better title—any fan of Berkeley Breathed would feel right at home here. The women of the village are vivacious and hard-working. The men, however, spend most of their days sneaking out of work to gather at the teahouse, where they brag about their sexual prowess before returning home to make good on their boasts.

Protagonists Aya (Kristyna Malerova) and Temelko (Maximillian Mauf) wed when they are 8 years old, but the consummation of their marriage a decade later is interrupted by a village-wide water shortage. A battle of the sexes erupts over the men's failure to repair the town's broken water pipe and the women's subsequent decision to withhold lovemaking (insert euphemism here). It's up to the young lovers to set things right—you get the idea.

With a minimum of dialogue, purposeful overacting, and a judicious use of voiceover, the film takes on a comic-book feel. Mauf bounds across the screen with all the goofy-looking enthusiasm of an 8-month-old golden retriever, while Malerova could give Natalie Portman a run for her money in the graceful and nubile departments. Helmer's whimsical camera movements and affectionate way of laughing at his subjects don't hurt either. It's too bad *Absurdistan* is playing only once on the first night of the festival: Its playful pacing would make it a nice relief for any fest-goer who's fatigued later into the weekend.

