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Wisconsin festival nabs rare U.S. screening of Oscar-winning foreign film

By TOM ALESIA
608-252-6122
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Less than one week before the Wisconsin Film Festival begins, the 11th annual event added another movie — and it's one of the fest's most prestigious bookings ever.

Academy Award winner for Best Foreign Language film, "Departures," will have its first screening in the United States (and only third overall) since the film's Oscar win last month. Already one of the most honored films in Japanese history, the sentimental drama will be shown at 12:30 p.m. Friday and a few weeks before it makes its East Coast premiere at a renowned New York festival.

Madison native and UW-Madison graduate Stephen Jarchow — chairman of Regent Entertainment, which bought the rights to distribute "Departures" before the Oscar victory — arranged the screening. Jarchow will be featured in a post-film discussion at 3 p.m. to discuss his long career in the film business.

"It's a real thrill to be able to present the film in Madison," Jarchow said from his Los Angeles office.

Wisconsin Film Festival director Meg Hamel called the film "a brilliant story." It follows an unemployed cellist who lands a job preparing bodies for burial.

Tickets for the film go on sale at noon Sunday through wifilmfest.org. It will be screened at the 155-seat UW Cinematheque, 4070 Vilas Hall. "Departures" becomes the 199th film for the fest, set for Thursday to April 5.

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