

A Last-Minute Guide To Wisconsin Film Fest

Festival Runs Thursday Through Sunday In Madison

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MADISON, Wis. -- The 11th annual Wisconsin Film Festival runs through Sunday in Madison, and latecomers or procrastinators are in luck -- there are still tickets available for many intriguing films this weekend.

Just a week ago, the festival announced a last-minute, high-profile booking of "Departures," the 2009 Academy Award winner for Best Foreign Language film.

With the booking, the Wisconsin Film Festival will be the second U.S. film festival to show "Departures," an acclaimed Japanese film that has won dozens of awards, including 10 Japanese Academy Awards and Audience Awards at both the Hawaii International Film Festival and Palm Springs International Film Festival.

Getting "Departures" for the Wisconsin Film Festival is the latest notable achievement of the event that over 10 years has grown into possibly the largest campus-based film festival in the country.

And on Thursday, Meg Hamel, director of the Wisconsin Film Festival, announced a new film in the festival's lineup -- "Kisses." Hamel said the acclaimed Irish film replaces the screening on Sunday of "Special People," which has been canceled. ([Info about ticket exchanges here](#)).

The Wisconsin Film Festival runs from Thursday, April 2 to Sunday, April 5 in 10 theaters in downtown Madison. Nearly 200 films are scheduled over the four days. Tickets for films are \$7 or \$4 for students and can be purchased at the venue's ticket window on the day that the film is playing. ([More ticket info can be found here; see "Day-of-show ticket sales" section](#)).

When tickets go onsale in early March, many eager film-lovers snap them up well in advance of the festival. But this year -- to the benefit of procrastinators and latecomers -- there are many highly praised, buzzed-about and intriguing films that still have tickets available when advance ticket sales ended Wednesday evening.

Below are some film ideas for people who are looking to check out the fest this weekend but might not have purchased tickets yet. People can increase their chances of getting tickets by showing up at the venue's ticket window early, when it opens before the first film screening there for that day.

Just a few of the films that still have tickets available after advance sales ended:

Thursday, April 2

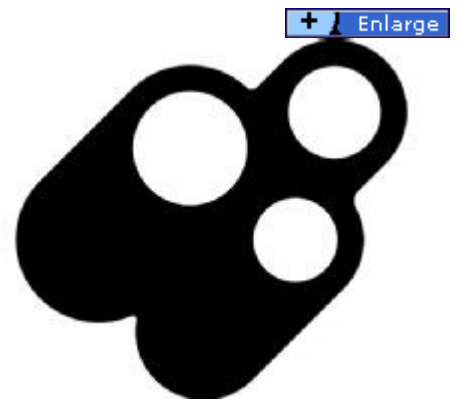
- **"Art & Copy" -- 6:45 p.m. at Wisconsin Union Theater.** This documentary "reveals the stories behind and the personal odysseys of some of the most influential advertising visionaries of our time and their campaigns, including Lee Clow (Apple Computer 1984, and iPod); Dan Wieden ("Just Do It"); Phyllis K. Robinson (who invented the "me generation" with Clairol); Hal Riney (who helped President Reagan get re-elected); and George Lois (who saved MTV and launched Tommy Hilfiger overnight). Directed by former Madisonian Doug Pray (Scratch, Big Rig, Surfwise), 'Art & Copy' captures the creative energy and passion behind the iconic campaigns that have had a profound impact on American culture," according to the festival guide. [More info about "Art & Copy."](#) Pray's a talented filmmaker whose excellent 2007 documentary ["Surfwise"](#) has to be seen to be believed.

- **"Goodbye Solo" -- 9:45 p.m. at Stage Door Theater (Orpheum).** Festival guide: "Solo is a Senegalese taxi driver in Winston-Salem, N.C. One day he picks up a fare: a tough old codger who also hires Solo for a specific trip happening in two weeks. Gregarious, generous, and hard to ignore, Solo tries to get the prickly William to open up. He's worried that something is wrong, for it seems like Williams has no friends or family. He takes William home to meet his wife and daughter, but after an argument at home Solo moves into William's motel room, and the two men continue their unlikely friendship." Roger Ebert says: "Wherever you live, when this film opens, it will be the best film in town." Director Ramin Bahrani's terrific film ["Chop Shop"](#) was a hit at the 2008 Wisconsin Film Festival. [More info about "Goodbye Solo."](#)

Friday, April 3

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● **"Departures" -- 12:30 p.m. at UW Cinematheque.** "Departures" (in Japanese with English subtitles) is the story of a cellist in an orchestra who loses his job and ends up working as a funeral professional, preparing deceased bodies for burial and entry into the next life. Winner of 2009 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language film, among other awards. The film isn't scheduled for a theatrical release in Madison until June 26 at the Sundance Cinemas Madison, so this is a chance for film-lovers to see it more than two months before its release. [More info about "Departures."](#)

● **"The Good Soldier" -- 9 p.m. at Bartell Theater.** This documentary "follows the lives of five men of different generations, from enlistment to combat to the aftermath of war. The passage from civilian to soldier goes quickly as the men undergo basic training and march off to war, whether it is 1944, 1966, 1991, or 2003. Once in country, the veterans tell of their alien surroundings, their connection to their comrades, and the ghastliness of their reality. Some were wounded, some lost their buddies, some lost their sanity as they tried to quench their intense thirst for revenge by killing the enemy and killing civilians. Smartly edited by Sikay Tang, these stories are accessible, engaging, and honest. One of the main soldiers interviewed is Staff Sergeant Will Williams, a 2nd Battalion vet of Vietnam, who lives in De Forest, Wis. and is now active in the Madison Area Peace Coalition," according to the festival guide. [More info about "The Good Soldier."](#)

● **"JCVD" -- Midnight at Orpheum Main Theater.** Those in the mood for an entertaining late-night movie can check out "JCVD," which looks to be a crowd-pleaser. Need convincing? Jean-Claude Van Damme plays himself in this movie. Festival guide: "An action-hero actor, now just tipping past his prime, has gone home to Europe. He's been working in Los Angeles for a while now, but losing a bruising custody battle to his ex has demoralized him. Time to return to the quiet, cultured life in Brussels, and nurse his emotional wounds. In the city he stops at a bank to get some cash, and BANG — A shot is fired, the hostages are taken, the cops are called, and everyone thinks that he, Jean-Claude Van Damme, did it. (WWJCVD?) Yes, the real Jean-Claude plays this too-close-to-be-coincidence character, directed by a very talented newcomer, Mabrouk El Mechri." [More info about "JCVD."](#)

Saturday, April 4

● **"Full Battle Rattle" -- 11 a.m. at Wisconsin Union Theater.** Festival guide: "Plagued by political assassinations and an organized insurgency, the U.S. Army's occupation of tiny Iraqi village Medina Wasl is a borderline disaster. Fortunately, these soldiers will get a second chance at bringing the peace: Median Wasl is part of a military training compound located deep in the U.S.' Mojave Desert. Designed to give cadets an immersive preview of the war experience, the base is a functional model of an Iraqi town, and employs refugee Iraqis to portray its citizens with Method-like dedication. Like a massive role-playing game, it's all heavily orchestrated, with elaborate back stories and shocking plot twists, but the specter of deployment looms large. At once a frontline combat doc and behind-the-scenes glimpse at one of the oddest theatrical productions going, 'Full Battle Rattle' portrays a 'big expensive Laser Tag game' with impossibly high stakes." [More info about "Full Battle Rattle."](#)

● **"The New Year Parade" -- 3:45 p.m. at Wisconsin Union Theater.** Winner of Best Narrative Grand Jury Prize at 2008 Slamdance and 2008 South by Southwest festivals, this debut film by Tom Quinn is getting lots of good buzz. Festival guide: "'The New Year Parade' follows Jack and Kat McMonogul over the course of a year as their parents separate and struggle with their decisions as past indiscretions are exposed. The family breakdown is set against the backdrop of Philadelphia's Mummers, one of the oldest American folk traditions. Since pre-revolutionary times, the working class of South Philadelphia have paraded on New Year's Day. Jack is a banjo player in the South Philadelphia String Band, where his dad is captain. After a crushing defeat in the New Year parade, the stress wears everyone thin with Jack trying to look after his younger sister. Just as fidelity is central issue in their divorce, Jack contemplates an almost greater transgression: moving to another club. Written with great tenderness and sensitivity and cast with a combination of professional and first-time actors (including the majority of the actual South Philadelphia String Band), this film authentically captures the heritage of the Irish and Italian neighborhoods where fathers and sons pass on the traditions that define their culture." [More info about "The New Year Parade."](#)

● **"Lightbulb" -- 8:15 p.m. at Wisconsin Union Theater.** "Two best friends, Matt and Sam, are creators of novelty gift items like the wristwatch that spins random lottery numbers. Their company isn't exactly successful, and the financial strain is being felt in Matt's marriage to Gina (who has been remarkably tolerant of Sam's get-rich-quick schemes, but has a limit.) Written by Mike Cram, an inventor who lived the life that provides the loose inspiration for the story, 'Lightbulb' is a richly atmospheric comedy that absorbs the color and character of Tucson. The three-member central cast succeeds in a balance of the bittersweet frustration of delayed dreams, and the effervescent hopefulness that ultimately drives each of them forward: Dallas Roberts, Jeremy Renner, and the luminous Ayelet Zurer are emerging actors that we will see more of in the future," according to the festival guide. [More info about "Lightbulb."](#)

● **"Idiots and Angels" -- 10:15 p.m. at Wisconsin Union Theater.** Those in an adventurous mood who want to see something completely different can check out this animated feature film that's definitely geared toward adults. Festival guide: "A bawdy, twisted fable about good and evil (but mostly evil), Bill Plympton's new animated feature imagines what happens when a pair of wings unexpectedly (obviously) on the back of a not-very-nice man. At first he tries to hack off the freakish things, but then fantasizes about the power, fame, and money that must surely be possible with such a unique feature. Although physiologically it doesn't feel right to say these wings have a mind of their own, they do cause the man to do good acts against his will. Plympton draws each animation cell by hand and had set up a webcam over his desk during production so viewers around the world could watch him sketch." [More info about "Idiots and Angels."](#)

●
"Ghajini" -- 10:30 p.m. at Orpheum Main Theater. Those wanting to see a wild Bollywood feature should catch this film. "For those who thought '[Memento](#)' would have been a better movie with a few more songs and a lot more ass-kicking, writer-director A.R. Murugadoss offers 'Ghajini,' an exuberantly excessive and unreasonably entertaining mash-up of musical-comedy romance, action-movie mayhem and psycho-thriller suspense. Even audiences accustomed to the anything-goes outrageousness of many Bollywood multi-genre masalas may be left slack-jawed and breathless after experiencing this singularly wild ride," writes Joe Leydon in Variety. [More info about "Ghajini."](#)

Sunday, April 5

●
"Tracks" -- 11:15 a.m. at Monona Terrace. One of the fun aspects of the Wisconsin Film Festival is getting the chance to see the work of Wisconsin filmmakers. "Tracks" won the 2009 "Wisconsin's Own" Jury Prize at the film festival. Festival guide: "A thoroughly Milwaukee production, 'Tracks' relies on the talents of many local actors and crew, including UW-Milwaukee professor Scott Foley as director of photography, and producer Niels Mueller ('The Assassination of Richard Nixon'). Director and writer Josh Rosenberg is a 2006 graduate of UW-Milwaukee. Synopsis: Cat's a fairly average student at Milwaukee's Shorewood High School. Her family is a typical suburban one: no hardships, but there is a lack of vitality and real understanding. She's a little innocent, and when an older student reaches out to befriend her, she jumps at the chance to experiment with something new. Claire is much more of a free spirit, left to fend for herself most days. She's daring and confident and a getting a bit of a raunchy reputation at school. She sets the bar pretty high with her independence, and it leads Cat into some precarious territory. There may be no one as lonely as a teenager, and this film explores many of the issues that high school students grapple with: drugs, sex, self-injury, family violence." [More info about "Tracks."](#)

●
"Kisses" -- 1:30 p.m. at Orpheum Main Theater. Festival guide: "On the fringes of Dublin, young Dylan runs away from home and Kylie decides to run away with him. Together they make their way to the magical night time lights of inner city Dublin. Director Lance Daly's vision of Dublin, as seen through the innocent eyes of our protagonists, is a kaleidoscope of magic, wonder and mystery. But as the night wears on, and Dublin takes on a darker character, the two kids have to rely on the kindness of strangers and their trust in each other to survive the night. Winner, Best Irish Feature Film, 2008 Galway Film Fleadh; 2008 Toronto, Locarno, Telluride, London Film Festivals." [More info about "Kisses."](#) *NOTE: This film replaces the screening of "Special People," which has been canceled. If you have a ticket to "Special People," you may use that ticket to go to "Kisses." No need to make any exchanges; just hang on to your original ticket and use it at the door. You may also exchange your "Special People" ticket for another available film ticket during the festival, at each individual theater box office. ([More info about exchanges here](#)).*

●
"The Rock-afire Explosion" -- 5:45 p.m. at Bartell Theater. Those who were children in the 1980s (or their parents) might remember Showbiz Pizza restaurants and the The Rock-afire Explosion, the animatronic musical band that played there. According to the festival guide: "A spectacular corporate demise during changing times (the Showbiz restaurants got converted into Chuck E. Cheese) threatened the memory of the motley musical crew that brought joy to the hearts of so many pizza-eating kids. And then came YouTube. A small but persistent fan group has been restoring the good name of the Rock-afire Explosion, salvaging parts and rebuilding complete band installations. The animals are reprogrammed to sing along to contemporary songs, and these have become online hits. At the heart of this effort is Chris Thrash, a car salesman from Phenix City, Ala., who purchased a Rock-afire Explosion, which is now housed in its own air-conditioned trailer in his back yard. In this film, you'll also meet Aaron Fechter, the inventor who created the animatronics and once had over 300 employees making rubber molds, airbrushing faces, and soldering the electronics that keep these animals singing. Go ahead, [check out the YouTube clips](#) and you too might be converted." [More info about "The Rock-afire Explosion" documentary.](#)

The Wisconsin Film Festival, which was established in 1999, brings a critically acclaimed program of motion pictures to Madison, emphasizing strong international and independent American narrative, documentary and experimental work. In 2008, attendance for the four-day Festival was just more than 30,000.

[2009 Wisconsin Film Festival Web site](#)

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