

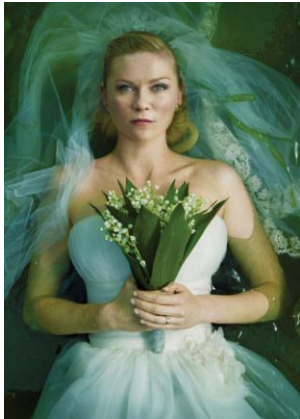
Bill's Guide to Week One of the 47th Annual Chicago International Film Festival

By Bill Stamets
Special for Films for Two®

My recommended films in Week One (in "must see" order):

- 1.) *Melancholia* is the latest film from naughty auteur Lars von Trier, the Dane who directed *Antichrist* and *Dogville*.

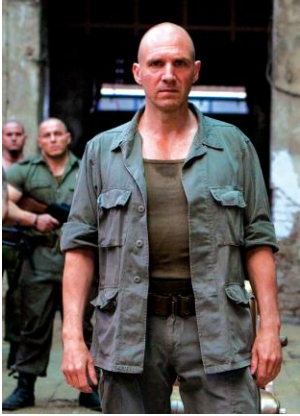
Kirstin Dunst and Charlotte Gainsbourg play sisters on an elegantly landscaped estate with an 18-hole golf course that's used as a posh resort destination. The film begins on the very long evening of a wedding reception for Dunst's character, a depressive advertising copywriter. Awful truths erupt from family members and business associates. Thomas Vinterburg's caustic *Celebration*, where a family fete implodes on another ancestral estate, comes to mind.



After the guests leave, the sisters' attention turns to a previously unknown planet christened "Melancholia" that is heading earthward. Now *Another Earth* comes to mind. That little noticed indie from last summer featured a similar spellbinding visual: a very large heavenly body looms in intimate proximity to our own. Von Trier is no stranger to apocalyptic sci-fi, as evidenced in his early *Epidemic*, but *Melancholia* is a sublime shoah that trumps anything in his nervy oeuvre.

- 2.) *Coriolanus* is the first outing of actor Ralph Fiennes as a director. Collaborating with screenwriter John Logan (*Gladiator*), Fiennes adapts Shakespeare's play about a Roman war hero who spurns the populist rite of brandishing his 27 battle scars as leadership credentials. More than his pride is imperiled in this ideological action film.

The Tragedy of Coriolanus updates easily, thanks in part to the cinematographer who also shot the gritty *The Hurt Locker*, *Green Zone* and *United 93*. Fiennes cites Ariel Sharon and Vladimir Putin when researching his role as Coriolanus. Fiennes played Lord Voldemort in two *Harry Potter* films and was nominated for an Oscar when he played the Nazi commandant "Amon Goeth" in *Schindler's List*. He has a sufficiently fierce mien to sell such lines by the Bard as: "Make you a sword of me" and "Anger is my meat."



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Playing the general's nemesis-in-arms, Gerard Butler (*300*) says he modeled his guerilla character partly after Chechen separatists. A further measure of realism came from the participation of the Serbian Army's counter-terrorism unit. Fiennes shot in Belgrade, as well as Montenegro.

What to see if *Coriolanus* proves so popular that you can't get a ticket? It's tangential, but try *Cinema Komunisto*, Mila Turajlic's documentary about the glory days of Tito-era filmmaking in the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Orson Welles and Yul Brynner once acted in military epics there. An opening title states: "This is the story of a country that no longer exists except in the movies."

3.) *Martha Marcy May Marlene* is an unnerving study of a young woman who flees a farm and phones her sister from a nearby village. She is not clear where she is. "Upstate, maybe," says Martha, who could have three other names. She has been out of touch for two years and cannot tell her sister much. We think we know that Martha was in a sex cult run by a Manson-like guitarist. She learned her newfound gardening skills there. That's what Martha's realistic flashbacks imply. Or are we witnessing spells of repressed memories, or a fantasy to cloak trauma?



After spending weeks in a summer lake house in New England, Martha gives her sister and brother-in-law more and more concern about her emotional health. Martha is a misfit in either family life-- the cult's or her sister's. Elizabeth Olsen delivers an indelible turn as the title character(s) in this a disquieting study directed by Sean Durkin. If this film is sold out, consider seeing Mark Jackson's *Without*, another interior study of a young woman in a rural setting.

Other strong dramas worth seeing may not come back to Chicago for theatrical runs. The festival may be your only chance to catch these stories of adolescents.

- *The Forgiveness of Blood* by Joshua Marston (the director of *Maria Full of Grace*) examines teen siblings mired in a blood feud circumscribed by 15th-century Albanian customs.
- *A Little Closer* by Matt Petock observes a single mom and her two boys, aged 11 and 15, during a Virginia summer of lyrical Eros.
- *Corpo Celeste* is Alice Rohrwacher's take on a 13-year-old Italian girl in her catechism class, where she learns "Feeling the Holy Ghost is like wearing wonderful sunglasses that allow you to see in a different way."

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