

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

By Bill Stamets
Special for Films for Two®

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

- 1.) *Pina*: German director Wim Wenders previously profiled Japanese film director Yasujiro Ozu, Japanese fashion designer Yohji Yamamoto and Cuban musicians.



His latest documentary introduces cinefiles to the choreography of German avant-gardist Pina Bausch. In his first use of 3-D cinematography, Wenders evokes the volume of the stage, even for performances staged in non-theatrical settings, including a tramway and an escalator.

Four different works are presented. Some are revisited via archival 2-D footage. Seeing various versions adds more figurative depth to our appreciation of Bausch's work than the 3-D adds literal depth to our onscreen perception.

Bausch's death during the making of the film may have lent an elegiac note to the laudatory interviews with members of her international company Tanztheater Wuppertal. They do not speak on camera during looking-into-the lens portrait sessions. The soundtrack excerpts their comments, apparently recorded off-camera, to underscore their role as voiceless dancers. Wenders channels Bausch's tactile and theoretical grasp of the body as metaphysical material for art.

- 2.) *The Descendants*: Alexander Payne (*Sideways*, *About Schmidt*, *Election*, *Citizen Ruth*) directs George Clooney as Matt King, an Hawaiian lawyer dealing with his wife hospitalized in a coma and their 10-year-old and 17-year-old daughters.



Payne and his co-writers start from Kauai Hart Hemmings' 2008 novel for a truly touching male melodrama, as Clooney's character reconciles his mixed emotions about his wife. She tests their love on life support. The legacy of his immediate family is linked to his extended family, a clan of King cousins who must part with a legacy of pristine property sought by resort developers.

There is a trailer for this film that I recommend you not see (if you have that chance). Not that it tells you everything. But it so distorts and dumbs it down that you'd probably decide to skip it.

- 3.) *Jeff, Who Lives at Home*: This gentle comedy observes an especially eventful day for the title's thirtysomething single guy, played by Jason Segel from the CBS TV series *How I Met Your Mother*.



He looks to M. Night Shyamalan's 2002 film *Signs* to steer him to signs orienting his own life. Watching an infomercial in his mom's basement, Jeff divines that a "Kevin" is his long-awaited lodestar. He follows various Kevins with uneven outcomes.

No relation to the fest's *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, this smart little drama detours for his mother, played by Susan Sarandon, handling a blind-siding office romance, and his brother handling his wife's life-derailing infidelity.

Jay Duplass and Mark Duplass—the brothers who brought us *Cyrus*, *Baghead* and *The Puffy Chair*—co-script and co-direct their best effort to date.

- 4.) *Here*: American film artist Braden King frames a romance-on-the-road between an American satellite-mapper and an Armenian photographer with two allusive elements.



He interlaces this scenic storyline with four or five passages when a "Storyteller" relates a Borges-like parable about cartographers and artists. Peter Coyote reads this on the soundtrack as lyrical, experimental-styled dashes of imagery grace the screen.

The blend of two narratives with Armenian landscapes and blooming bursts of single-framed and optically printed visuals makes *Here* among the most artful forays in the entire fest.

- 5.) *The Artist*: If you saw the two recent OSS 117 spy parody films set in Cairo and Rio with period touches galore, you will recognize the smug, congenitally mugging character created by Jean Dujardin.



Here he plays George Valentin, an American silent film star who mentors an extra named Peppy Miller (B er enice Bejo). Her career soars as his founders with the arrival of talking pictures.

Michel Hazanavicius directs this creamy black-and-white salute with all the retro sentimentality of fond looks back at classic studio silent-era cinema. Hazanavicius indulges these tropes with glee and no apology. His most fun comes with introducing sound effects into Valentin's sensorium.

Every year the festival sports an unofficial sidebar of self-conscious cinema, those meta-movies about actors, screenwriters, directors and even third-assistant directors, as in *My Week with Marilyn*. Besides this year's recommended documentaries *Cinema Komunista* and *From One Film to Another*, *The Artist* is a confection for nostalgists and Netflixers alike.

  Bill Stamets (10/12/11)—Special for Films for Two 

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