



## **EBERTFEST ANNOUNCES FINAL SLATE OF FILMS AND SPECIAL GUESTS FOR THE 2017 FESTIVAL**

*19<sup>th</sup> Annual Roger Ebert's Film Festival to take place April 19-23, 2017 in Champaign, IL*

**CHAMPAIGN, ILL – March 30, 2017** – The 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Roger Ebert's Film Festival co-founded and hosted by Chaz Ebert, also known as 'Ebertfest,' announced today the final slate of films in this year's festival. The additional lineup will include screenings of **BEING THERE** with cinematographer **Caleb Deschanel** attending; **DE-LOVELY**, with director and producer **Irwin Winkler** in attendance and followed by a performance of Cole Porter songs by **Jimmy Demers** and pianist **Donnie Demers**; **THE HANDMAIDEN**; **PLEASANTVILLE** including director **Gary Ross** appearing; **THEY CALL US MONSTERS** featuring special guests director **Ben Lear** and producer **Sasha Alpert**; and the short film **JULY AND HALF OF AUGUST** with writer **Sheila O'Malley** attending.

These films will accompany previously announced **ELLE**, **HAIR**, **HYSTERIA**, **MIND/GAME: THE UNQUIET JOURNEY OF CHAMIQUE HOLDSCLAW**, **NORMAN LEAR: JUST ANOTHER VERSION OF YOU**, **TO SLEEP WITH ANGER** and **VARIÉTÉ**.

Additionally, Sony Pictures Classics co-president **Michael Barker**, IDA Executive Director **Simon Kilmurry**, film critics **Scott Mantz**, **Matt Zoller Seitz**, **Brian Tallerico**, **Richard Neupert**, **Michael Phillips**, **Sheila O'Malley**, **Nell Minow**, **Matt Fagerholm** and **Sam Fragoso**, film executive **Barry Allen**, producer **Michael Butler**, producer **Michael Hausman**, University of San Diego Professor **Eric Pierson** and NCSU Professor **Dr. Brand Fortner** will be joining previously announced iconic producer **Norman Lear**, actors **Isabelle Huppert**, **Hugh Dancy** and **Robert Townsend**, directors **Charles Burnett**, **Rick Goldsmith** and **Tanya Wexler** as special guests set to attend, with additional other last-minute surprise guests.

Also in attendance will be **Ebert Fellows**, a group of emerging writers, critics, filmmakers and technologists mentored through various Ebert programs at Sundance, Hawaii, Telluride, Columbia College Links, the Chicago Urban League and the University of Illinois.

### **BEING THERE (1979)**

***Directed by Hal Ashby, 130 mins, DCP***

*Special Guest Caleb Deschanel, Cinematographer will be in attendance*

**BEING THERE**, starring Academy Award® nominee Peter Sellers, Shirley MacLaine and Academy Award® winner Melvyn Douglas, is the story of a simple, sheltered gardener who becomes an unlikely trusted advisor to a powerful businessman and an insider in Washington politics.

In his 4 star review, Roger Ebert called **BEING THERE**, “a rare and subtle bird that finds its tone and stays with it” and stated that the film “has the appeal of an ingenious intellectual game, in which the hero survives a series of challenges he doesn't understand, using words that are both universal and meaningless.”

### **DE-LOVELY (2004)**

***Directed by Irwin Winkler, 125 mins, Blu-Ray***

*Special Guest Irwin Winkler, Director and Producer will be in attendance and Jimmy Demers will be performing Cole Porter songs accompanied by Donnie Demers*

Irwin Winkler's 2004 musical biopic DE-LOVELY, starring Kevin Kline, Ashley Judd, Jonathan Pryce and Kevin McNally, is told as a series of flashbacks from a ghostly rehearsal for a stage musical based on Porter's life.

Roger Ebert championed the film with a 3.5 star review. In his critique, Ebert said, "DE-LOVELY is a musical and a biography, and brings to both of those genres a worldly sophistication that is rare in the movies. We're reminded how exhilarating the classic American songbook is, and how inarticulate so much modern music sounds by contrast. Kline plays Porter as a man apparently able to write a perfect song more or less on demand, which would be preposterous if it were not more or less true."

### **THE HANDMAIDEN (2016)**

***Directed by Park Chan-wook, 144 mins, DCP***

Directed by critically acclaimed Park Chan-wook, THE HANDMAIDEN, which is inspired by the novel *Fingersmith* by British author Sarah Waters, is a stunning love story and revenge thriller of two women, a young Japanese woman living on a secluded estate and a Korean woman who is hired to serve as her new handmaiden, who is covertly working with a conman to defraud her of a large inheritance.

Matt Zoller Seitz stated in his 4 star review that the film, "is voluptuously beautiful, frankly sexual, occasionally perverse and horrifically violent. At times its very existence feels inexplicable and yet all of its disparate pieces are assembled with such care, and the characters written and acted with such psychological acuity, that you rarely feel as if the writer-director is rubbing the audience's nose in excess of one kind or another." Seitz further says, "THE HANDMAIDEN stirs the senses by appealing to our gut feelings, our sense of morals and ethics, and our appreciation for the sight of great artists making magic as if it's the easiest thing in the world."

### **PLEASANTVILLE (1998)**

***Special Guest Gary Ross, Director will be in attendance***

Directed by Gary Ross and starring Tobey Maguire, Reese Witherspoon, Jeff Daniels, Joan Allen, William H. Macy, J.T. Walsh and Don Knotts, PLEASANTVILLE focuses on two siblings who end up trapped in a 1950s TV show, about a town where all the residents are outwardly perfect. While adjusting to their new surroundings, the brother and sister become more aware of bigger issues including racism and free speech.

Roger Ebert called PLEASANTVILLE "one of the year's best and most original films" in his 4 star review. Additionally, he commented, "PLEASANTVILLE is the kind of parable that encourages us to re-evaluate the good old days and take a fresh look at the new world we so easily dismiss as decadent."

### **THEY CALL US MONSTERS (2017)**

***Directed by Ben Lear, 82 mins, Blu-Ray***

***Special Guests Ben Lear, Director and Sasha Alpert, Producer will be in attendance***

The powerful documentary THEY CALL US MONSTERS is the directorial debut of Ben Lear, son of Emmy Award winner Norman Lear, which follows the lives of three teenage boys Juan, Jarad and Antonio who have been sentenced to decades in prison and ultimately questions whether serious juvenile offenders should be tried the same as adults, and sentenced to life without the possibility of parole. During their confinement they are given a means to look at their lives differently through a screen-writing course taught by Hollywood producers.

Matt Fagerholm gave the film a 3.5 star review on Roger Ebert.com and called the film an “invaluable nonfiction work.” Further in his review, Fagerholm says, “Though his abilities as a filmmaker are entirely distinctive, Lear shares his father’s gift for bringing dimension and context to people widely deemed by society as monstrosities” and punctuates by saying “There’s a considerable amount of catharsis in THEY CALL US MONSTERS but it is bittersweet at best.”

#### **JULY AND HALF OF AUGUST**

***Directed by Brandeaux Tourville, 11 mins, DCP***

*Special Guest Sheila O’Malley, Writer will be in attendance*

*Short Subject, played prior to THEY CALL US MONSTERS*

In his review, Matt Zoller Seitz stated, “The film captures how a certain kind of smart person talks: sincerely and passionately, but also in a way that flaunts their education and intellect, in hopes of salving old wounds and convincing the listener that the image they’re trying to put forth is accurate, and not just hype or wishful thinking.”

Ebertfest is a special event held in collaboration with the College of Media at the University of Illinois and will take place April 19-23, 2017 in Champaign, IL at the Virginia Theatre. Major filmmakers, stars, historians, critics and film-lovers from all over the world come to experience this annual celebration that includes films from lists Roger drew up over the first 15 years of the festival, as well as others selected by Chaz Ebert and Festival Director Nate Kohn based on Roger’s established criteria for an Ebertfest film.

Festival passes are available for \$150, plus processing, and for the first time, festival-goers will receive a discount when they purchase a four-pack priced at \$510 instead of \$600, or 15 percent off. Additionally, a small number of U. of I. student passes will be made available priced at \$100 each.

Tickets for individual movies will be available April 1. Admission is \$15 for adults and \$13 for students and seniors. All passes can be purchased through [www.ebertfest.com](http://www.ebertfest.com), [www.thevirginia.org](http://www.thevirginia.org) or at the Virginia Theater box office, 203 W. Park Ave., Champaign, 217-356-9063.

For additional information, please visit <http://www.ebertfest.com/>.

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