

FEST TRAVELER: COLCOA

When: April 20-26 Where: Directors Guild of America Theater Complex in Los Angeles Web: colcoa.org

FEST HIGHLIGHTS

All events take place at DGA Theater Complex, 7920 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles

MONDAY, APRIL 20

Opening-night gala: International premiere of "Someone I Loved," 7:30 p.m., Theater 1, followed by a discussion with co-writer/director Zabou Breitman



TUESDAY, APRIL 21

Happy Hour Talks: Meet the Delegation: French filmmakers talk about American cinema, 5:30 p.m., Theater 2

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22

West Coast premiere of "The Girl on the Train" (Andre Techine), 5:30 p.m., Theater 2

West Coast premiere of "With a Little Help From Myself" (Francois Dupeyron), 7:45 p.m., Theater 2

U.S. premiere of "The First Day of the Rest of Your Life," 8:30 p.m., Theater 1, followed by a discussion with writer-director Remi Bezancon



THURSDAY, APRIL 23

Happy Hour Talks: One-hour discussion with Costa-Gavras, 4 p.m., Theater 2 (preceded by a screening of Costa-Gavras' first film, "The Sleeping Car Murders" at 2 p.m.)

West Coast premiere of "Eden Is West," 8:30 p.m., Theater 1, followed by a discussion with co-writer/director Costa-Gavras

FRIDAY, APRIL 24

Happy Hour Talks: Young audiences and foreign film, Theater 2

L.A. premiere of "Mesrine: A Film in Two Parts," 5:15 and 7:20 p.m., Theater 2, followed by a discussion with director Jean-Francois Richet

SATURDAY, APRIL 25

L.A. premiere of "Seraphine" (Martin Provost), 8 p.m., Theater 2



GOODFELLAS: Cesar-winning, two-part mob epic "Mesrine" makes its L.A. bow; below, fest director Francois Truffart.

AHEAD OF THE REMAKES

L.A. French fest has history of pic preems that spur Hollywood interpretations

By ELSA KESLASSY

Traditionally positioned as a networking event for L.A. Francophiles and French expats, the City of Lights, City of Angels film festival might play a more crucial role than usual this year amid the global economic meltdown.

"We've become a financial backer for French films' promotion by allowing distributors and producers to launch their films in Hollywood in the best possible conditions," says fest director Francois Truffart. "If they had to rent the DGA at their own expense, they'd spend a fortune."

Despite recessionary times, the fest has actually increased by two films over last year, for a total of 50 features and shorts. Attendance is expected to climb from 12,000 in 2008 to 15,800 this year.

"We are in good health and still growing," says Truffart, who adds that while other fests are mostly supported by private sponsors, COLCOA is largely backed by the Franco-American Cultural Fund, with help from the Directors Guild of America, the Writers Guild of America West and a number of other industry sponsors. In fact, COLCOA attracts about 75% of its audience from the film biz and has operated at close to 90% capacity over the last few years.

"COLCOA is a great platform to promote an upcoming release," says Ed Arentz, chief of New York-based Music Box Films, the handler of COLCOA fest entry "Seraphine," which won seven Cesars, including picture and actress.

In fact, the Cesars, France's equivalent of the Oscars, play a prominent role at this year's COLCOA, with the sprawling, two-part gangster epic "Mesrine" (aka "Public Enemy No. 1"), honored for director and actor, also on tap.

"It's a win-win situation for us, since it helps us extend

our marketing dollars," adds Arentz about "Seraphine's" appearance at the fest before making its bow Stateside June 6.

The 13th edition of the fest will host more premieres than usual, including Daniel Auteuil starrer "Someone I Loved," which, in an unprecedented move, will open the event prior to the drama's May 6 bow in France. Truffart calls the romance a return to the more intimate, classic style of French drama after the fest opened with such crowdpleasers as "La Vie en rose" and the popular comedy "Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis" the last two years.

"Even if it doesn't just target professionals, COLCOA can sometimes provide surprising results and lead to interesting deals, notably remakes," says Gregoire Melin, topper at Paris-based sales house Kinology, which reps five pics at COLCOA, including "Tellement proche" and "Mesrine." "This is what happened with 'Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis': It opened the festival last year and eventually got Will Smith interested in doing a remake."

Although French comedies tend to be problematic to market to Stateside audiences, American directors and producers have been plowing into cult French comedies to come up with local remakes.

Most recently, DreamWorks announced "Dinner for Schmucks," the adaptation of the French cult laffer "Le Diner de Cons," with Steve Carell in the lead.

As Arentz points out, COLCOA and Unifrance's Rendez-Vous With French Cinema in New York complement better-known North American fests like Sundance and Toronto because they showcase the "hidden gems" of France, like Guillaume Canet's "Tell No One," which grossed \$6.2 million, tops for a foreign-language film in the U.S. in 2008.

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