KYRGYZSTAN

- **The Light Thief** (Svet-Ake) (Kyrgyzstan, 2010, 80 min, 35mm)
  
  *In Kyrgyz with English subtitles*

  Sat, Apr 02 | 4:00 PM, Stage Door Theater // Sun, Apr 03 | 1:00 PM, Stage Door Theater

  In the valleys of Kyrgyzstan, Svet-Ake (“Mr. Light”) is the village electrician, carrying his steel boot clamps with him wherever he goes, in case he needs to scramble up a pole to fix a failed line or a short circuit. Played with impish delight by the film’s director, Svet-Ake is respected in the community and also devilishly outside it, as seen when the film opens and he fiddles an old man’s electric meter to set it back a bit.

  His problems? After several daughters, he’s desperate for a son. A rich family is returning to the village intent on buying their way into power, and Svet-Ake doesn’t want to play by their rules. He’s also developing a rickety wind generator to give more independent power to the community. “Since the Kyrgyz sources of energy are mostly found across the border in Uzbekistan (a questionable decision following the partition of the Soviet empire), Kubat’s picture takes on added political significance. But its main strength lies less in politics and more in the relaxed simplicity of its procedure, its humorous touches and the natural demeanor of the villagers.” — Dan Fainaru, *Screen Daily*.

  Co-presented by the Global Film Initiative and is part of the Global Lens 2011 film series. For more information, visit www.globalfilm.org.

POLAND

- **Charcoal Burners** (Smolarze) (plays in Shorts: Thursday @ Play Circle plays with Drexciya)

  Documentary (Poland, 2010, 15 min, video)

  *In Polish with English subtitles*

  Thu, Mar 31 | 5:00 PM, Play Circle Theater

  Marek and Janina work in the Polish countryside, carefully stacking split wood in an enormous, elaborately constructed pile, to burn to make charcoal. The film, by Piotr Złotorowicz, a student at the Polish National Film School in Łódź, has little dialogue: possibly an artistic choice, but also Marek and Janina are folks of few words. Their beloved dog Roki, fur smudged with soot, and various yard critters also star in this gentle, observant documentary about a tradition and a small-scale business still very much a part of European life.
• **Aurora** (Romania, France, Switzerland, Germany, 2010, 181 min, 35mm)
  *In Romanian with English subtitles*
  Fri, Apr 01 | 8:00 PM, Madison Museum of Contemporary Art // Sun, Apr 03 | 3:45 PM, Madison Museum of Contemporary Art

“A black comedy worth of Samuel Beckett, *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* (WFF06) occupied the pole position in the Romanian New Wave, hitting the art-house circuit with the force of Godard’s *Breathless*. Five years later, director Cristi Puiu has returned with *Aurora*, a complex character study with a touch of gallows humor and incisive social observations. Elliptically observing the day-to-day life of a seemingly normal guy who will eventually commit violent acts, Puiu invites the audience to puzzle over his motives.

The director himself stars as the middle-aged Viorel, an enigmatic man who lives in a dingy gray Bucharest apartment. His travels around town at first seem unremarkable, but gradually build up to a character study of paranoia and intensity. We watch him from a distance, just as he occasionally spies on a family with young kids. Everyday details accumulate as he visits with his girlfriend, mother, and the workers who are fixing up his apartment, revealing simmering anger and disconnection.

“For all the viewer’s constant immersion in the specifics of Viorel’s activity, there’s the sense of constantly rubbing up against the unknowable, as both the character and the meaning of his activity and relationships remain as inscrutable as his tightly drawn stoic’s face.” — Variety.

*After Lazarescu. Aurora* is the second installment of Puiu’s planned series “Six Stories From the Outskirts of Bucharest.” 2010 Cannes, Karlovy Vary, New York, São Paulo film festivals.

• **If I Want to Whistle, I Whistle** (Eu Când Vreau Să Fluier, Fluier) (Romania, 2010, 94 min, 35mm)
  *In Romanian with English subtitles*
  Wed, Mar 30 | 8:45 PM, Stage Door Theater // Thu, Mar 31 | 5:30 PM, Stage Door Theater

Mere weeks away from the end of his four-year stay in a juvenile detention center, Silviu just needs to stay out of trouble — but a family visit starts a chain reaction that puts that simple goal perilously out of reach. Bullied by inmates with nothing to lose and floored by news that his absent mother has returned home and is planning to abscond with his younger brother, Silviu nurtures a simmering rage in an environment with no outlets.

Meanwhile, he falls for Ana, a pretty social worker tasked with helping him prepare for release into the outside world. Once Silviu determines that her interest in him is purely academic, the film takes an explosive turn. Director Florin Serban’s attentive study of the dead-end plight of underprivileged European teenagers calls to mind the work of the Dardenne Brothers (*The Son*, WFF03), especially in his ability to elicit fantastic performances out of young nonprofessional actors.

In a particularly crowded year for Romanian cinema (see *Aurora, Medal of Honor*, and *Tuesday, After Christmas*, playing at this year’s fest), Serban’s pent-up prison drama was selected as Romania’s entry for this year’s Best Foreign Language Oscar.

**Awards:** Jury Grand Prix Silver Bear, 2010 Berlin Film Festival.
Medal of Honor (Medalia de Onoare) (Germany, Romania, 2009, 105 min, 35mm)
In Romanian with English subtitles
Sat, Apr 02 | 3:30 PM, Orpheum Main Theatre

It’s 1995, and a letter arrives announcing that Ion I. Ion has been awarded a military decoration for a long-ago WWII heroic act. How wonderful, thinks the old pensioner, but what action were they thinking of? Willing to accept such an honor but intrigued to know exactly how it came to be, Ion looks for answers at the Veterans Association. Big mistake, as anyone who has seen more than one Romanian film from the past decade will understand. The bureaucracy is fearsome, but fruitful for the wonderfully dry Romanian sense of humor. Ion is determined, since being seen as a war hero might thaw the frozen relations with his wife (whom he lives with) and his son (emigrated to Canada), who haven’t spoken to him since some dust-up that happened six years ago. “(Victor) Rebengiuc is terrific as the gentlemanly retiree who never had an unpatriotic thought; ditto (Camelia) Zorlescu as his sturdy wife. Their scenes together, as they start communicating again, are warmly shaded by both thesps, and the pic’s finale adds a last, touching irony.” — Derek Elley, Variety.

Awards: Winner, Audience Award, 2009 Torino; Special Jury Award, Best Screenplay, Best Actor, 2009 Thessaloniki; Best Director, Best Actor, 2009 Transylvania film festivals.

Tuesday, After Christmas (Marți, După Crăciun) (Romania, 2010, 99 min, 35mm)
In Romanian with English subtitles
Sun, Apr 03 | 11:00 AM Orpheum Main Theater

The film opens with a man and a woman wrapped in sunlit sheets, enjoying the tenderness and attentiveness that comes from deep intimacy. Their small talk reveals that this loving couple is, in fact, a middle-aged man and his mistress. Adultery, a cinematic trope as durable (and dangerous) as car chases and shootouts, makes for especially riveting viewing in this understated Romanian melodrama. An otherwise responsible husband and loving father, banker Paul Hanganu falls for another (younger) woman.

It’s simple and insoluble, a familiar predicament rendered unique by director Radu Muntean’s rational, evenhanded approach — this is no hysterical symphony of slammed doors and smeared mascara. Instead, Muntean presents an equilateral love triangle where each corner’s emotions are considered and thoughtfully realized: the wife’s anguish, the mistress’s uncertain guilt, the cheating husband’s grief-tinged relief at finally having the truth out.

His actors rise to the occasion, often playing off each other in engrossing extended takes, resulting in three of the best, most nuanced performances of this year’s festival. The great delight in this film is appreciating the compassion the director brings to the scenario, appreciating the complexities of their emotions and the impossibility of unraveling such a knot without breaking. 2010 Cannes, Rio de Janeiro, and New York Film Festivals.
RUSSIA

- **How I Ended This Summer** (Kak Ya Provyol Etim Letom) (Russia, 2010, 130 min, 35mm)
  *In Russian with English subtitles*
  Fri, Apr 01 | 5:00 PM, Stage Door Theater // Sun, Apr 03 | 7:00 PM, Stage Door Theater

A suspenseful tale of paranoia and survival, *How I Ended This Summer* is set on a barren and isolated island in the Arctic Ocean, where its only inhabitants are Sergei, a gruff and experienced meteorologist, and his just-out-of-school intern Pavel. The two men work at a small meteorological station where they take readings from their radioactive surroundings and periodically report back to the mainland.

One day when Sergei is out, Pavel receives some grim news about Sergei’s family, but is, for some reason, unable to communicate it. As the secret slowly drives Pavel into madness, the landscape around them becomes more than an object of study, it is a formidable opponent that puts both men at peril. This film was hailed by the *New York Times* as, “a gripping survival drama [and] a merciless contemplation of the fragile human psyche under siege.”

**Awards:** The film won multiple awards at last year’s Berlin International Film Festival, including Best Actor, shared by its stars Dobrygin and Puskepalis, and Outstanding Artistic Contribution for its breathtaking cinematography.

*(For other films in Russian, see also "My Joy" and "My Perestroika," below)*

SERBIA

- **Tilva Rosh** (Serbia, 2010, 99 min, video)
  *In Serbian with English*
  Fri, Apr 01 | 2:15 PM, Chazen Museum of Art

“Bor, Serbia, was once the largest copper mine in Europe, now it is just the biggest hole.” Toda and Stefan are best friends, two guys hanging out with their skater buddies in the summer after high school. To pass the time and get a thrill, the group makes little videos of themselves doing daring, stupid teenage-guy tricks: riding a skateboard down the slag hill, jumping onto concrete from impossible heights, setting body parts on fire. *Tilva Rosh* (translated: red hill) is about their friendship and their futures, as Stefan plans to go to the university in the fall, while Toda insists that’s too ambitious a plan.

Following the aimless exploits of the loose gang, the film draws heavily from real life: cut into Ležaić’s film is footage from a homemade, hour-long tape that the director got his hands on, of Toda and Stefan (they play themselves) doing these actual dangerous stunts.

The director says, “I was impressed by a huge amount of unarticulated energy which erupted from them, and also by a complete lack of interest in actual social struggle going on around them. I remembered my own attitude from 10 years earlier, when I also lived in that same small town, and realized that it wasn’t much different from theirs — it was all about fun. I remembered how everything was much simpler, social rights, health insurance, politics...those were all terms from some other, boring dimension. So I wanted *Tilva Rosh* to be about that — waking the conscience you don’t want to wake, finding out about injustices you don’t care about, assuming social roles when you don’t want to participate, and about helpless struggle to save that carefree teenage world from any changes.”
• **Her Seat is Vacant** (plays in **Shorts: Friday @ Chazen**) plays with **Forever's Gonna Start Tonight** (Ukraine, USA, 2010, 17 min, video)  
*In Ukrainian, Russian, English with English subtitles*
Fri, Apr 01 | 6:15 PM, Chazen Museum of Art

Vira is a little late for work, but the other women in the New York tailor shop are forgiving. Vira is making arrangements for her sister’s funeral, and is also looking after her elderly Ukrainian mother. How awkward, then, when the hired musician shows up at the shop a day early. Vira must add another responsibility to her list, but maybe this one will lighten her heart. Director Bohdana Smyrnova was born in Kiev, Ukraine, and has an MFA in film from the Tisch School of the Arts.

• **Kalendar** (plays in **In Comparison**) plays with **Ray's Birds** (Ukraine, USA, 2008, 12 min, 16mm)  
Sat, Apr 02 | 11:30 am UW Cinematheque

“In 2006, U.S.-born filmmaker Naomi Uman returned to her ancestral homeland of the Ukraine. Taking up residence in the tiny, rural village of Legedzine, Uman created a series of films observing the rhythms and textures of a life not so far removed from what her ancestors had experienced one hundred years earlier. *Kalendar*, one of six films in the series, is constructed like a pictorial language lesson. This silent film is comprised of twelve chronological shots, each depicting seasonal details and events in the village.” — David Dinnell

• **(c) My Joy** (Schastye Moe) (France, Germany, Netherlands, Ukraine, 2010, 127 min, 35mm)  
*In Russian with English subtitles*
Sun, Apr 03 | 1:30 PM, Orpheum Main Theater

Don’t be fooled by the title: there is not a lot of joy to be found in *My Joy*. This powerfully grim parable is a road movie of sorts, tracing the epic, episodic journey of a long-haul truck driver into the darkest heart of the Russian outback. After taking a dirt road to circumvent a traffic jam, he encounters a motley series of misfits and outcasts that could have sprung from the minds of a neorealist Brothers Grimm.

In time, the trucker’s detours overwhelm the narrative, and the film veers freely between contemporary Russia and flashbacks to World War II, ultimately coalescing into a singularly menacing worldview. Treating Russia’s frostbitten outskirts as a vast national subconscious, writer/director Sergei Loznitsa uncovers a nightmare morality in the isolated tracts where modern civilization has yet to put up stakes.

Seen through the lens of cinematographer Oleg Mutu (*The Death of Mr. Lazarescu, WFF06*), the windswept landscapes and nocturnal woods seem almost sentient, enveloping the characters with the haunted grip of quicksand. As dark as it gets, the film retains a certain mythic authenticity: Lozintsa began his career as a documentary filmmaker, traveling extensively throughout Russia and collecting the eerie scraps of folklore that would form the foundation for *My Joy*. His cold, assured vision makes for an intimidating first fiction feature. 2010 Cannes, Toronto, New York Film Festivals.
OF INTEREST

• **(c) My Perestroika** Documentary (USA, United Kingdom, 2010, 88 min, video)
  *In Russian with English subtitles*
  Thu, Mar 31 | 5:15 PM, Chazen Museum of Art // Fri, Apr 01 | 8:15 PM, Bartell Theater

So, you’re a kid in the USSR, growing up to be a patriotic Young Pioneer. You sing the songs in praise of Lenin, you present bouquets when government ministers visit your school, and you wear that dapper red kerchief around your neck. This is the reality that you’ve been raised to believe in. And then, in 1991, the USSR breaks apart. Western influences trickle in (rock music!) and there are greater liberties in culture, business, travel, and religion. Robin Hessman’s acclaimed documentary brings us into the lives of five Moscow schoolmates who were brought up behind the Iron Curtain, witnessed the joy and confusion of glasnost, and reached adulthood as the world changed around them.

Through candid first-person testimony, revealing verité footage, and vintage home movies, Hessman, who spent many years living in Moscow, reveals a Russia rarely ever seen on film, where people are frank about their lives and forthcoming about their country. Engaging, funny, and positively inspiring, in *My Perestroika* politics is personal, honesty overshadows ideology, and history progresses one day, one life at a time. 2010 Sundance, Full Frame, Hot Docs, SilverDocs festivals; 2010 New Directors/New Films.

• **Forever’s Gonna Start Tonight** plays in *Shorts: Friday @ Chazen* plays with **Her Seat is Vacant** (USA, 2010, 16 min, video)
  *In Russian & English, with English subtitles*

Sonya is a 17-year-old Russian immigrant, more interested in Brooklyn clubbing than being with her dad in their stuffy, cramped apartment. He can’t stop bringing home rescued cats, and the landlady is starting to get ticked off. Sonya goes to the nightclub with her girlfriend, where they meet a pair of handsome guys, also part of the Russian scene in Brooklyn. Wanting to get away, wanting to let go, she looks for ways to escape into the sounds of pulsing dance beats. Director Eliza Hittman made this film while an MFA student at the California Institute of the Arts.

• **Everything Will Be Fine** (Alting Bliver Godt Igen) (Denmark, 2010, 90 min, 35mm)
  *In Danish with English subtitles*
  Sun, Apr 03 | 6:45 PM, Orpheum Main Theater

Danish director Christoffer Boe (*Reconstruction*, WFF04) has created a stylish, enigmatic puzzle of a film, stocked with some of Denmark’s best actors (no country has as high a talent-to-population ratio) and craftsmen. Three main things are happening: Jacob (Jens Albinus; *The Boss of It All*, WFF07) is having a hard time hashing out the script for his next movie, a war picture, and his producer (Nicholas Bro, *Dark Horse, Adam’s Apples*, both WFF06) is cracking the whip over him. Jacob and his gorgeous wife Helena are adopting a boy from the Czech Republic and she’s worried that something will go wrong.

Elsewhere, Ali is recruited by the Danish army to be an interpreter, and returns from his tour with damning photographs of Danish soldiers torturing prisoners. These threads intersect with bang when Jacob hits Ali with his car and the photographs fall into his possession. Jacob grows increasingly more paranoid and panicked, even for a man known to get obsessive over his work, and the story spins in complex ways as Jacob plunges deeper into the mystery. **[NOTE: a similarly titled film in the Festival is And Everything Is Going Fine, a documentary about the monologist Spaulding Gray.]**