

Diplomacy This Week

The EU film fest has it all

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It's a full house this year for the European Union Film Festival.

As the European Union membership has grown, so has this annual movie extravaganza. In its 28th year, the festival features films from 27 of 28 EU countries (alas Malta, a country of only about 400,000, doesn't have much of a film industry).

The film genres run the gamut from historical drama to psychological thriller, romantic comedy to documentary.

Tom McSorley has seen the festival's evolution. He's the executive director of the Canadian Film Institute, which organizes the event in collaboration with EU embassies.

He and the CFI programming team do a lot of scouting across festivals like Cannes and Berlin to pick the perfect pics. Curating is more of an art than a science, he says.

"The fundamental thing for me has always been: if I've enjoyed something and I think that it's worthy, I want to share it with somebody else. So you have to kind of go with your gut, in a certain way."

All screenings will be Ottawa premieres, and some of them are "quite daring" and would never otherwise see the light of day in distribution here, he said.

Part of the festival's goal is to "kick the door open a little wider," he said, and to show how diversified European filmmaking can be.

So, if he had to pick three that shouldn't be missed, which would they be?

They're not above the rest, but they're certainly worthy for various reasons, he said.

The French film *Grand Central* is a dramatic story of a love triangle set, oddly enough, at a nuclear plant. Gary, played by **Tahar Rahim**, takes a high-risk job in the plant and lives with other workers in a compound. He falls in love with Karole, who is played by French it-girl **Léa Seydoux** of this year's highly acclaimed *Blue Is the Warmest Color*, which won the Palme d'Or at Cannes. Problem is Karole is the wife of Gary's co-worker.

"It's also about what people will do and how desperate they are in these economic times to have a job, and will risk their health and safety for their job. So it's got some pointed political things to say."

Mr. McSorley said he's thrilled that Mr. Rahim will be at the screening.

His second pick, a German film called *Shifting the Blame*, will also feature a special guest drop-in as part of the screening. The film's producer, **Matthias Drescher**, will be in the house.

This one is about a young delinquent, Ben



Ben Graf, the angry inmate at the centre of the German film *Shifting the Blame*.



The French film *Grand Central* centres around a love triangle.

Graf, who ends up in an experimental rehabilitation centre with a social worker he once attacked. Except she doesn't know it was him because he was wearing a mask during the assault.

"It's fascinating to see how this character handles his own guilt and remorse, but also wants to make sure she doesn't find out," said Mr. McSorley.

Lest the big European film industries get all the glory, Mr. McSorley's last pick is the Croatian movie *Night Boats*, a "sweet and lovely" film about aging and memory in which two residents break out of a retirement home and recall their youth.

Smaller film industries like that of Croatia sometimes produce quirky, interesting and less commercialized gems because they're less driven by money, said Mr. McSorley.

The festival kicks off with a gala opening on Nov. 13 with the Lithuanian film *The Other Dream Team*, a documentary about the country's 1992 Olympic basketball team. It certainly takes you back to the awful fashions of the time. An image from the film shows the lanky team members sporting draw-string tied shorts and t-shirts. Lovely!

Films not in English have English subtitles and they are being shown at Library and Archives Canada on Wellington Street.

The new 'voice' of Africa

Jean Gauthier is excited about Africa.

The new head of the Canadian Council on Africa retired from the Canadian foreign service and could have left foreign relations for good. But he chose to stay connected to the continent, and is now back in a big way, having taken over last week as the CEO and president of CCAfrica.

Mr. Gauthier replaces **Lucien Bradet**, who had headed the private-sector membership-based group since its creation in 2002.

He's got big shoes to fill—Mr. Bradet was a fixture of the Ottawa diplomatic scene—but he's up for the challenge. He speaks animatedly about African opportunities, asking, pausing, and then answering his own questions.

Some African countries are more economically stable and growing at a better speed than the BRICS, he said.

"Africa is a continent of tomorrow, and if we wait too much, we'll miss the boat."

It's like a train leaving a station, he said. At first it departs slowly.

"Africa is leaving the station right now, and we still have time to get on board."

A career diplomat, he spent part of his career stationed in the Middle East and North Africa in places like Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. He happened upon CCAfrica in the latter part of his career, while working in the African Great Lakes Region and as deputy high commissioner in Nigeria. He took a one-year cooling-off period after retiring in 2012, but CCAfrica drew him back to foreign policy.

"I needed a bit of a challenge, intellectual challenge," he said, seated in his downtown Ottawa office.



Canadian Council on Africa president and CEO Jean Gauthier.

"I kept informed [of] what was going on. I got further interested in CCAfrica because of the interest I have with the private sector, but also because it represents something, it's doing things in which I believe."

Government needs the private sector, and vice versa. But he says they need a link to connect the lawyers, courts, agreements, and all the other aspects of international trade.

"There's a need for somebody—I don't want to say to be the lobbyist—but to be at times the voice of the private sector within the private sector, and the voice of the private sector...to the government."

One of his top aims is to serve his more than 200 members well. They represent a broad cross-section of industries from the extractive sector to education.

Nordic Noir delights

Halloween in Ottawa was a dark and stormy night, but thankfully no pot boilers were on the bill at the Norwegian embassy where the Ambassador **Mona Elisabeth Brøther** hosted a book salon with two rising stars of Nordic Noir crime writing.

The room was lit by candles and filled with Ottawa authors like journalist **Stephen Maher** who published his first

novel, a political thriller, last year and is currently working on his next book; CBC arts reporter and writer **Sandra Abma**; and Swedish Ambassador **Teppo Tauriainen**, whose country's authors **Steig Larsson** and **Henning Mankell** gave birth to the bleak and haunting genre which is so popular in crime fiction now.

Both guest authors, who were in town for the Ottawa International Writers Festival, took the old adage 'write what you know' seriously. **Thomas Enger**, a former sports journalist, has already sold the film rights for his series about a scarred journalist, haunted by his past and driven to solve dangerous mysteries. The second author, **Jorn Lier Horst**, was until a few months ago still a working chief inspector in Norway with 10 published novels starring an inspector as his protagonist.

Both authors joked that their embassy, which normally is expected to profile the best attributes of Norway, would be hosting writers who dwell only on the dark underbelly.

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