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Amfest Offers Feast of American Films in English

By Alyssa Ahluwalia

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Soderbergh's film looks at the life of actor and monologuist Spalding Gray.

Moscow's fifth annual American Film Festival kicks off this Wednesday with the premiere of the highly anticipated film, "The Social Network."

Since its inception, the festival's mission has been to give Muscovites the opportunity to witness independent American films that would otherwise slip through the cracks among the box-office blockbusters that so heavily dominate the Russian movie houses.

"This is a project derived from pure enthusiasm and passion for cinema," said American Film Festival director Leonid Alexandrovsky. "We have to remember that cinema is not only about the movies that go to the multiplexes."

Alexandrovsky said that two types of American film reach the Russian public: Popcorn-cinema blockbusters designed to rake in the big bucks and art-house films "tailor made" for

European critics' tastes.

"In my opinion, the real — the most interesting — and true American cinema slips away from the Russian public. The films we've chosen to premiere are real American movies that are made by independent American filmmakers specifically for its public, and not with any other audience like a European film festival in mind."

Ten films will debut at the Formula Kino theater. All the films will be shown in English with Russian subtitles.

The films on offer range wildly in subject and mood, from "Howl," which sees James Franco play Beat Generation poet Allen Ginsberg as he faces an obscenity trial over his poem of the same name, to a concert movie of The White Stripes group, to Edward Norton and Robert de Niro in the highly praised "Stone," about a convicted arsonist trying to manipulate his parole officer.

One film that would never make a local mall multiplex is Steven Soderbergh's "And Everything is Going Fine," a documentary that reviewers say paints a vivid and tragic portrait of New York actor Spalding Gray, who committed suicide in 2004.

"In my opinion, [Soderbergh] is the most exciting American filmmaker today because he never conforms to any one genre, concept or idea," Alexandrovsky said. "One year he will do a big budget movie starring Brad Pitt, but then his next project may be aimed at a small audience of only 400-500 people."

The festival will also debut big-name films such as "The Social Network" and Julia Roberts on a journey of self discovery in the generally panned "Eat, Pray, Love." Directed by David Fincher (whose list of film credits includes dark and stylish movies like "Seven," "Fight Club" and "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button"), "The Social Network" dramatizes the life of Facebook's young founder Mark Zuckerberg.

"This is the movie of this fall. It's got great reviews and to me, it falls into the concept of the festival perfectly because this is a movie about 'new America' and the creation of a universal phenomenon." Alexandrovsky said. "There's talk that Facebook is an 'imaginary community'... but for some this is the only real community. The life outside is just an imaginary one."

Amfest runs Oct. 6 to 12. Formula Kino Gorizont. 21/10 Komsomolsky Prospekt. Metro Frunzenskaya. Tel. 795-3795. www.amfest.ru

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