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French Film Festival Tours Round Russia

By Olga Kuzmina

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Juliette Binoche won't be there in person — although she sent her regrets — but she will be on screen with a dozen more film stars as the French Film Week begins Sunday at Pioner Cinema before it goes on tour passing through a total of 17 Russian cities.

The mini festival brings a selection of France's most-acclaimed films from the past five years as well as a retrospective of Binoche's best films. All the films are being shown in French with Russian subtitles.

Director Vincent Garenq will kick off the festival by presenting his first feature-length film, "Baby Love," a burlesque comedy about a gay couple that decides to adopt a child.

Variety magazine called it "a stirring portrait of one man's relentless quest to become a dad."

"Baby Love" will play again Monday, followed by a Q&A session with Garenq.

Pioner hopes that the film will have the same effect as last year's festival opener, when

“God’s Office” directed by Claire Simon sparked a long and heated debate after its showing.

“Simon’s film about abortion sparked a passionate discussion between the director and the audience that continued on at the cinema cafe for another two hours,” said Pioner spokesman Roman Krupnov.

Among the films to look out for are Phillippe Ramos’ “Captain Ahab,” an imaginative prequel to “Moby Dick” that received the best production award at the Locarno film festival; Andre Techine’s “The Girl on the Train,” featuring the ever ageless Catherine Deneuve; and Phillipe Lioret’s “Welcome,” a drama about a 17-year-old Kurdish immigrant trying to get to his sweetheart in London, which was named the best film of 2009 in France.

“These are films for everyone. They pack theaters back home,” said film critic and festival program director Boris Nelepo. “But at the same time, they are bold films that are not restricted by norms of genre.”

Budding film connoisseurs will enjoy Jacques Demy’s 1970 cult fantasy “Donkey Skin,” a classic love story surprisingly reminiscent of Soviet-era fairytale films, Nelepo said. He also recommended the dark animated movie, “The Killer of Montmartre.”

The Binoche retrospective contains five films made between 1985 and 2002, which provide a great look at her range and give a grand overview of French filmmaking from the last 20 years.

Films showing include “Rendez-vous,” the dark examination of love that made her a star and “Three Colors: Blue” from Krzysztof Kieslowski’s haunting “Three Colors” trilogy. Binoche herself will not be there, but when the cinema spoke to her, she did say she was sorry she couldn’t come, Krupnov said.

French Film Week runs Sunday to June 5. Pioner Cinema, 21 Kutuzovsky Prospekt. Metro Kutuzovskaya, Kievskaya. Tel. 240-5240, www.pioner-cinema.ru.

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