

NEW YORK

Nine to Watch

Simplifying Tribeca.

- By [Sara Cardace](#) , [Bilge Ebiri](#) & [Logan Hill](#)
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The Tribeca Film Festival is back—and slowly learning from its many mistakes. After raising ticket prices to \$18 last year, the fest will settle for a slightly better \$15 (and less). After spreading itself too thin, it will cluster most of its screenings in Tribeca and around Union Square. Most important, the bloated festival has once again trimmed its often-spotty lineup, from its peak of almost 200 features to a mere 120. But are they any good? Well, we've seen more than half of the festival's films and found at least nine sure bets. Tickets go on sale April 19.

Gunnin' For That #1 Spot

Filmmaker Adam Yauch's first non-Beastie Boys project is a funky-up, fast-paced doc that uses 2006's "Elite 24" all-star game at Harlem's Rucker Park to highlight eight high-school superstars (likely lottery picks Michael Beasley and Kevin Love, and top Brooklyn prospect Lance Stephenson, among them). It's as much a snapshot of the contemporary basketball scene as it is a love letter to the famed uptown court. The soundtrack is, predictably, killer. —S.C.



(Photo: Courtesy of Oscilloscope Laboratories)

Kassim the Dream

Kief Davidson's gorgeously shot documentary gives us horror mixed with hope: Ugandan boxer Kassim Ouma was kidnapped and forced into guerrilla warfare as a child, deserted the Ugandan Army as a young man, and then came to America, where he battled his way toward becoming a boxing champion. Kassim is both relentlessly upbeat and totally unable to shake his murderous past. The film provides no easy judgments—just the conflicted, charismatic figure at its center. —B.E.



(Photo: Nicolas Johnson/Courtesy of Urban Landscapes Productions)

The Wackness

Hometown director Jonathan Levine's debut (a Sundance Audience Award winner) is an inebriated, thumping paean to being a white hip-hop head on the Upper East Side in the summer of 1994. Child star Josh Peck breaks out of kiddie TV to play a deadbeat teen who courts Olivia Thirlby and trades pot for therapy—when he isn't selling it out of an Italian-ice cart. Thankfully, the buzzed-about make-out session between Mary Kate Olsen and Ben Kingsley is, like most of the film, more sweetly goofy than crude. —L.H.



(Photo: Jojo Whilden/Courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics)

Elite Squad



(Photo: Jose Padilha/Courtesy of The Weinstein Company)

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The big winner at Berlin this year, José Padilha's social drama-cum-action epic is equal parts *City of God* and *Delta Force*—with all the breathtaking contradictions and possibilities that implies. Following two security-squad buddies, this account of a ruthless war against drug lords in Rio's slums is very violent and not at all politically correct. Padilha's film has already sparked controversy in its homeland and at other fests; now it's New York's turn. —*B.E.*

Fire Under the Snow

Makoto Sasa's timely documentary traces the Chinese occupation of Tibet as seen through the eyes of Buddhist monk Palden Gyatso, who was imprisoned for 30 years and brutally tortured. Gyatso's unwavering faith in the face of horrific circumstances would make for essential viewing in itself, but it couldn't be more relevant now: News coverage that takes you right up through the current global strife over the 2008 Olympics in Beijing bookends his story perfectly. —*S.C.*



(Photo: Tiffany Ryan/Courtesy of Imakoko Media)

The Secret of the Grain

Abdellatif Kechiche's deserving César Best Picture winner is a family epic in miniature. An aging French-Arab dockworker is laid off, then attempts, with the help of his large and contentious family, to open a couscous restaurant inside an old boat. What begins as a shapeless, immersive look at immigrant life in France gradually becomes a surprisingly deft piece of neorealist suspense, building up to the restaurant's heartbreaking opening night. —*B.E.*



(Photo: Loic Malavard/Courtesy of Pathe Renn Productions)

Profit Motive and the Whispering Wind

Inspired by lefty Howard Zinn, John Gianvito's haunting experimental documentary takes us on a silent, meditative journey through the forgotten gravestones, memorial plaques, and other landmarks of America's underground history. We're not talking the Jefferson Memorial here. Gianvito foregrounds abolitionists, organizers, poets, and victims—from Sojourner Truth to Sacco and Vanzetti to Cesar Chavez. —*B.E.*



(Photo: John Gianvito/Courtesy of Traveling Light Productions)

My Winnipeg

Canadian auteur Guy Maddin's fevered "docufantasia" recasts his hometown's history through the lens of his own family's story and his sordid imagination. The film takes the maverick filmmaker's patented blend of silent-movie aesthetics and dreamy, wink-wink narratives and gives it all an intensely personal spin. With detours into scandalous melodrama as well as digressions on Canadian hockey, the result is Maddin's funniest and most touching film to date. —*B.E.*



(Photo: Courtesy of IFC Films)

Boy A

Theater vet John Crowley's Irish drama is a fresh, gritty cover of an old familiar standard: Con becomes ex-con, adjusts to life on the outside. The script by the woefully underrated Mark O'Rowe (*Intermission*) is a tight leash linked by sharp surprises—and rising actor Andrew Garfield (wasted in *Lions for Lambs*) is held taut by the tough Brit character actor Peter Mullan, as his hard-ass caseworker. —*L.H.*



(Photo: Ed Miller/Courtesy of The Weinstein Company)

April 23 through May 4

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