

Polish Film Festival in Rochester 2026

October 20 – November 8, 2026

Presented by the Skalny Center for Polish and Central European Studies, University of Rochester

Program at a Glance

Date	Time	Film	Venue
PART I: CLASSIC POLISH CINEMA			
Tue, Oct 20	7:30 PM	THE WILDCAT (1921), starring Pola Negri, dir. Ernst Lubitsch. Silent film with live piano by Philip Carli	Dryden
Thu, Oct 29	7:30 PM	ASHES AND DIAMONDS (1958), dir. Andrzej Wajda. Wajda centennial	Dryden
GRAND OPENING			
Tue, Nov 3	7:30 PM	HEEL (Good Boy / Dobry chłopiec), dir. Jan Komasa. Opening reception with live jazz follows	Dryden
PART II: CONTEMPORARY POLISH CINEMA			
Wed, Nov 4	7:00 PM	HOME SWEET HOME (Dom dobry), dir. Wojciech Smarzowski	Little
Thu, Nov 5	7:00 PM	GORKY RESORT (Pojedynyek), dir. Łukasz Palkowski	Little
Fri, Nov 6	7:00 PM	THE ALTAR BOYS (Ministranci), dir. Piotr Domalewski. Golden Lions 2025	Little
Sat, Nov 7	7:00 PM	UKRAINIAN DAY: INGA , dir. Krzysztof Kopczyński, and ASH AND CRAYONS , dir. Evgeny Afineevsky. Panel discussion follows	Little
Sun, Nov 8	7:00 PM	CLOSING NIGHT: THROUGH THE WALL (Przez ścianę), dir. Maciej Sobieszczański. Golden Lions 2026. Closing reception follows	Little

Dryden Theatre, George Eastman Museum, 900 East Avenue, Rochester, NY 14607 · tickets at [eastman.org](https://www.eastman.org)

The Little Theatre, 240 East Avenue, Rochester, NY 14604 · tickets at [thelittle.org](https://www.thelittle.org)

Tickets can be bought online or at the box office before each screening. All films are shown in their original language with English subtitles. Everyone is invited to the opening and closing receptions.

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About the Festival

For nearly thirty years, the Skalny Center for Polish and Central European Studies at the University of Rochester has brought the best of Polish cinema to Rochester. This year's festival unfolds in three parts.

Part I presents two classics at the Dryden Theatre. We celebrate Pola Negri, Poland's first great international film star, with *The Wildcat*, a silent comedy by Ernst Lubitsch that has never before been shown at the Dryden, accompanied live on the piano. We also mark the centennial of Andrzej Wajda, born in March 1926, with *Ashes and Diamonds*, the masterpiece that defined the Polish Film School.

The **Grand Opening** on November 3 brings *Heel*, known in Poland as *Dobry chłopiec* (Good Boy), a darkly funny thriller by Jan Komasa, who has twice been a guest of our festival. The evening continues with a reception and live jazz, and everyone is invited.

Part II offers five evenings of new Polish cinema at The Little Theatre, including both of the last two winners of the Golden Lions, Poland's top film prize: *The Altar Boys* (2025) and *Through the Wall* (2026). The program ranges from an unflinching portrait of domestic violence to a World War II thriller, a warm and funny coming-of-age story, and a true love story born in a Stalinist prison. Saturday, November 7, is Ukrainian Day, with two documentaries about children whose lives were changed by the war, followed by a panel discussion with the filmmakers. The festival closes on Sunday, November 8, with a reception with Polish food by Polska Chata of Rochester.

Part I: Classic Polish Cinema

Dryden Theatre, George Eastman Museum · 900 East Avenue · 7:30 PM

The classic program is curated by the Dryden Theatre at the George Eastman Museum, which has paired the festival's new films with classics of Polish cinema for more than a decade.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 7:30 PM

THE WILDCAT (Die Bergkatze)



Germany, 1921 · 79 min · silent, with live piano accompaniment

Directed by Ernst Lubitsch. Written by Ernst Lubitsch and Hanns Kräly. Starring Pola Negri, Paul Heidemann, Viktor Janson, Wilhelm Diegelmann, and Edith Meller.

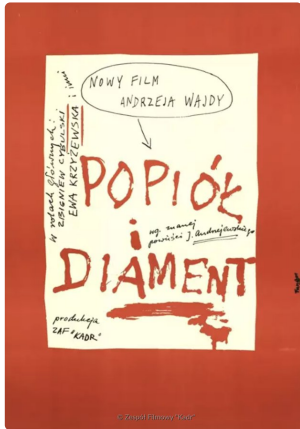
Introduction and live piano accompaniment by **Philip Carli**.

We open the festival with Pola Negri, born Apolonia Chałupiec in Lipno, Poland, who became one of the first great international stars of the silent screen in Berlin and Hollywood. In this broad farce about the military and marriage, made years before Lubitsch's famous "touch" took shape, Negri plays Rischka, the fiery daughter of a robber chief high in the snowy mountains, who runs her father's gang with no mercy. When the dashing Lieutenant Alexis is transferred to the nearby fort, Rischka ambushes him and steals his clothes. The commander's daughter soon sets her sights on him, but Alexis cannot stop thinking about the wildcat.

Lubitsch fills the film with style, from an extravagant ball to masks that change the shape of the image on the screen to shift its mood. The film was restored in 2000 from the original negative; its lost intertitles were reconstructed from surviving censorship records. This is the first time *The Wildcat* has been shown at the Dryden.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 29, 7:30 PM

ASHES AND DIAMONDS (*Popiół i diament*)



Poland, 1958 · 103 min · 35mm · Polish with English subtitles

Directed by Andrzej Wajda. Written by Jerzy Andrzejewski and Andrzej Wajda, based on Andrzejewski's novel. Starring Zbigniew Cybulski, Ewa Krzyżewska, Wacław Zastrzeżyński, and Bogumił Kobiela.

Screened to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Andrzej Wajda's birth.

Wajda's first true masterpiece and the conclusion of his war trilogy takes place on the day World War II ends in Europe. Maciek, a young former Home Army soldier played by Zbigniew Cybulski, is ordered to assassinate a communist party official arriving in a small town. During one long night in a provincial hotel, he falls in love with the barmaid Krystyna and begins to doubt the fight he has given his life to.

Rather than a simple thriller, Wajda made a film noir and a portrait of a lost generation, often compared to *Rebel Without a Cause*. Cybulski, in his dark glasses, became an icon and was called the Polish James Dean. The film depicts with remarkable courage the uneasy political reality of postwar Poland and remains one of the greatest Polish films ever made. Screened from a 35mm print from the George Eastman Museum collection.

[Watch the trailer](#)

Grand Opening

Tuesday, November 3, 7:30 PM · Dryden Theatre, George Eastman Museum · 900 East Avenue

Following tradition, the festival officially opens at the Dryden Theatre. After the film, everyone is invited to an opening reception with live jazz and food and drinks with Polish accents.

HEEL (*Good Boy / Dobry chłopiec*)



Poland, United Kingdom, 2025 · 111 min · in English

Directed by Jan Komasa. Written by Bartek Bartosik and Naqqash Khalid. Starring Stephen Graham, Andrea Riseborough, Anson Boon, Monika Frajczyk, and Kit Rakusen. Produced by Jerzy Skolimowski, Ewa Piaskowska, and Jeremy Thomas.

Please note: in Poland and at festivals the film is called Good Boy (Dobry chłopiec). In the United States it is released by Magnolia Pictures as Heel, the title you will see on the Dryden Theatre website.

Nineteen-year-old Tommy lives a reckless life of partying, drugs, and violence. One night he is abducted by a stranger named Chris and wakes up chained in the basement of an isolated house. Chris and his mysterious wife, Kathryn, have decided to turn him into a “good boy” through a forced and highly unconventional rehabilitation. Made to read books and learn proper manners, Tommy is drawn into the family's strange life, while thinking of only one thing: how to escape.

This black comedy-thriller is a subversive tale of freedom and control from Jan Komasa, director of the Oscar-nominated *Corpus Christi* and one of the boldest Polish filmmakers of his generation, who has twice been a guest of the Rochester Polish Film Festival. The film is produced by the legendary Polish director Jerzy Skolimowski. It premiered at the 50th Toronto International Film Festival in September 2025.

Awards at the 51st Polish Film Festival in Gdynia, 2026: Best Screenplay (Bartek Bartosik and Naqqash Khalid), Best Editing (Agnieszka Glińska), Best Actor (Anson Boon), Audience Award, and Best Casting (Nina Gold, Martin Ware, and Paulina Krajnik).

[Watch the trailer](#)

Part II: Contemporary Polish Cinema

The Little Theatre · 240 East Avenue · November 4–8 · 7:00 PM

All films are in Polish or Ukrainian with English subtitles.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 7:00 PM

HOME SWEET HOME (*Dom dobry*)



Poland, 2025 · 108 min

Directed and written by Wojciech Smarzowski. Starring Agata Turkot, Tomasz Schuchardt, Agata Kulesza, Maria Sobocińska, and Andrzej Konopka.

When Gośka meets Grzesiek online, she is sure she has finally found Mr. Right. He is crazy about her, showers her with flowers, and proposes in Venice. This must be love, right? But the perfect picture soon starts to crack, and their home becomes the most dangerous place in Gośka's life. A film about the limits of love that you will not be able to forget.

Wojciech Smarzowski is one of Poland's most uncompromising filmmakers, known for unflinching portraits of the country's darker side in *The Dark House*, *Clergy*, and *The Wedding*. In *Home Sweet Home* he turns to domestic violence. It

was the highest-grossing Polish film of 2025, with more than 2.3 million admissions, and Agata Turkot won the Polish Academy Award for Best Actress. The film also received awards at the Warsaw Film Festival, the Polish Film Festival in Gdynia, the Polish Film Festival in Prague, and the Polish Film Festival in North America.

Content note: the film depicts domestic violence.

[Watch the trailer](#)

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 7:00 PM

GORKY RESORT (Pojedynek)



Poland, Ireland, Ukraine, Cyprus, 2026 · 113 min

Directed by Łukasz Palkowski. Starring Jakub Gierszał, Aidan Gillen, Julia Pietrucha, Bogusław Linda, Tomasz Kot, Anna Próchniak, and Mateusz Kościukiewicz.

It is 1939, and the world is descending into chaos. Thousands of eminent Poles are sent to Soviet prisons, where they become targets of a large-scale plan of indoctrination. An ambitious Soviet agent makes it a point of honor to break one of them: a young, world-renowned pianist respected by his fellow prisoners. His surrender could lead many others to defect. A stealthy game of manipulation, threats, and promises begins. Some captives believe they will soon return home; others plan a deadly escape.

This large-scale World War II thriller from the director of Gods brings together leading Polish actors with Irish actor Aidan Gillen, known for Game of Thrones. It won the Audience Award at the Two Riversides Film and Art Festival in 2026.

[Watch the trailer](#)

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 7:00 PM

THE ALTAR BOYS (Ministranci)



Poland, 2025 · 106 min

Written and directed by Piotr Domalewski. Starring Tobiasz Wajda, Bruno Błach-Baar, Mikołaj Juszczuk, Filip Juszczuk, Kamila Urzędowska, and Tomasz Schuchardt. From the producers of the Oscar-nominated Corpus Christi.

Fed up with the indifference of adults and the Church toward injustice around them, four teenage altar boys launch their own plan of moral renewal. Armed with teenage rebellion and their own reading of Scripture, they wire a confessional to learn their neighbors' secrets. Masked like Zorro and as ambitious as Robin Hood, they set out to help those in need and punish those who have sinned. But their mission turns into a dangerous game, and the boys find themselves walking a fine line between good and evil.

The Altar Boys was the big winner of the 50th Polish Film Festival in Gdynia, taking home eight awards, including the Golden Lions for Best Film, Best Screenplay, and the Audience Award. Full of warmth and humor, it is a coming-of-age story and a film about faith as a source of strength for doing good.

[Watch the trailer](#)

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 7:00 PM

UKRAINIAN DAY: INGA and ASH AND CRAYONS

Saturday, November 7, is dedicated to Ukraine, to honor the remarkable courage and sacrifice of the Ukrainian people in defending their nation. This year's program is devoted to children whose lives were changed by the war. It is the only evening of the festival with a panel discussion.

INGA



Poland, 2025 · 28 min · Documentary
Directed and written by Krzysztof Kopczyński.

On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. On that same day, Inga, from a village near Kyiv, turned five. The film is a portrait of her family, who fled to Warsaw with their pets and made a new home there, on a street named after the mythical Daedalus, who escaped the labyrinth on wings of wax. Inga loves blowing out birthday candles because then she can make a wish. Her parents are blind, and Inga often guides them, but she cannot go with her father when he returns to Ukraine.

[Watch the trailer](#)

ASH AND CRAYONS



USA, Ukraine, 2025 · 108 min · Documentary · Ukrainian with English subtitles
Directed and written by Evgeny Afineevsky. Also shown as Children in the Fire.

Ash and Crayons is the heart of Ukrainian Day. It follows Ukrainian children whose childhoods were taken by the war: children who survived missile strikes, lost their parents, or were forcibly deported to Russia. Among them is Roman Oleksiv from Vinnytsia, who was badly burned in a Russian missile strike in July 2022 that killed his mother. After dozens of operations and long rehabilitation, he has returned to school and to his music lessons. Another is Yana Stepanenko, who lost both legs in the missile attack on the railway station in Kramatorsk. Afineevsky filmed many of the children at Unbroken, the national rehabilitation center in Lviv.

The film is not only about suffering. The children still speak of music, school, and dreams, and we watch them rebuild their lives through art, sports, and friendship: running on prosthetic legs, dancing, and performing on stage. Live footage is woven together with animation created by Ukrainian artists. The title is a metaphor for resilience: even from ashes, one can still create. According to the filmmakers, more than 20,000 Ukrainian children have been forcibly deported or transferred to Russia since the full-scale invasion began.

Ash and Crayons has been shown at the Vatican, the UK Parliament, the Italian Parliament, the Council of Europe, and the US Congress. It received two awards at the Monte-Carlo Television Festival in 2025 and was honored at the Cinema for Peace gala during the 2026 Berlin International Film Festival, where Roman Oleksiv received the Honorary Dove award. Rochester audiences will see the film before its North American theatrical release on November 20, World Children's Day.

About the director. Evgeny Afineevsky is an Israeli-American filmmaker born in the Soviet Union. He fell in love with filmmaking as a boy, when he washed dishes for a year to earn a Super 8 camera, and at 18 he left the Soviet Union alone for Israel. His documentary Winter on Fire: Ukraine's Fight for Freedom, about the Revolution of Dignity on the Maidan, was nominated for an Academy Award in 2016. He went on to make Cries from Syria; Francesco, a portrait of Pope Francis; and Freedom on Fire: Ukraine's Fight for Freedom, about the full-scale Russian invasion. Ash and Crayons completes his trilogy about Ukraine. He has documented the country for more than a decade, often working in war zones, always looking for hope amid suffering.

Panel discussion and audience Q&A after the films

- Evgeny Afineevsky, director of Ash and Crayons
- Prof. Krzysztof Kopczyński, director of Inga, University of Warsaw
- Michael Sawkiw, President, Ukrainian Congress Committee of America
- Prof. Olena Prokopovych, Nazareth University
- Prof. Randall Stone, Director, Skalny Center for Polish and Central European Studies

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 7:00 PM

CLOSING NIGHT: THROUGH THE WALL (*Przez ścianę*)



Poland, 2025 · 120 min

Written and directed by Maciej Sobieszczański. Starring Maria Dębska, Jakub Gierszał, Agnieszka Grochowska, and Arkadiusz Jakubik.

At the darkest time of Stalinist terror in Poland, two young political prisoners, Wiesia and Jerzy, are held in neighboring cells. They begin to talk in Morse code, tapping through the wall, and those conversations become their only escape from the brutality of prison. Without ever seeing each other, they fall in love and fight to be together.

The film is based on a true story. Wiesława Pajdak and Jerzy Śmiechowski met this way in a Warsaw prison in 1947; years later they married and spent more than half a century together. Through the Wall won the Golden Lions for Best Film at

the 51st Polish Film Festival in Gdynia in 2026, along with awards for cinematography and from the journalists and art-house cinemas.

[Watch the trailer](#)

Closing reception. After the film, join us for a reception with Polish food prepared by Izabela and Janusz Tarłowski of Polska Chata in Rochester. Everyone is welcome.

The Polish Film Festival in Rochester 2026 is presented by the Skalny Center for Polish and Central European Studies at the University of Rochester.

For more information, please contact: **Anna (Ania) Michas**, Program Coordinator, Skalny Center for Polish and Central European Studies, University of Rochester · amichasb@ur.rochester.edu