The Nation

World Film Festival: good exposure for independent films

For cash-strapped movie-makers, a film festival is the best venue to exhibit, market and sell their films.

The Nation-sponsored World Film Festival, noted for its promotion of independent cinema, has debut features this year by three Thai directors, short films by local indie directors and many independent productions from throughout the world.

"Film festivals are the only outlet for makers of short films like us," said young Greek director Dimitris Apostolou, whose romantic tale "Anastasia", to be screened here, has been shown in nearly 40 festivals worldwide.

It cost the director €17,000 (Bt799,000) to make the movie, and he received a third of that from the Greek Film Centre, but only after its success on the film-festival circuit. Based on the success of this film, he received a third of the €40,000 budget for his next short film, "In the Shadows", from the Cypriot Culture Ministry.

The much-talked-about moving Aids film from India, "My Brother Nikhil", is the debut feature of another talented director, Onir, who garnered a budget of 22.5 million Indian rupees (Bt18.44 million) from his family and friends, including the main actor in the film.

The film has been screened at several festivals around the world, and the critical praise it received helped its commercial release in India.

The 40-million-rupee budget of Onir's next film was a loan from the industry, and the director hoped to recover costs through screening fees on the film-festival circuit as well as a commercial release.

The Swiss film "My Name Is Eugene" is unique, because it was made with a huge budget of 6 million Swiss francs (Bt177 million).

"That is double the budget of a normal film made in my country, even films in Germany which cost 4 million to 5 million Swiss francs," said producer Andi Huber. "Of course, it's nowhere near the multimillion budgets of Hollywood movies."

Huber said the film cost so much because it was a road movie set in the 1960s and had to be shot all round the country. However, it went on to become Switzerland's biggest hit, earning as much as 8 million francs.

Huber, who has a business degree and worked in a bank before heading top Swiss production-houses like Condor Films and Konta Productions, admitted there were no ready recipes for box-office hits.

"From my experience, children's movies, romantic tales and horror dramas have big markets," said the Berne resident, who has become so smitten with Thailand that he plans to live here awhile and check out the scope for joint productions.

In the meanwhile, he hopes "Eugene" will get a Thai release and is already planning marketing campaigns in case it does.

Lekha J Shankar, special to the Nation

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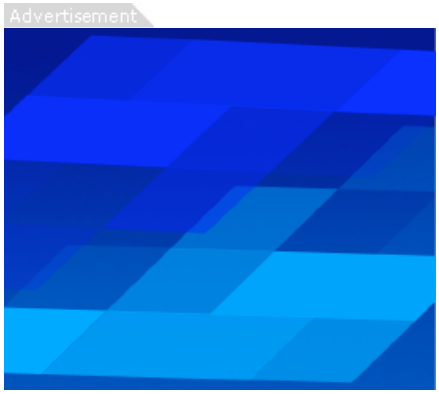

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