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BIFF to honour Hema Malini

This year's Bangkok Film Festival focuses on Asian cinema, including Bollywood, and a highlight will be a retrospective of Hema Malini movies. LEKHA J. SHANKAR

Opening film: Children of Glory

More than 100 films from 30 countries will feature in the Bangkok International Film Festival (BIFF) that is finally scheduled, after a lot of delay, to be held here from July 19-29, in eight swanky theatres of the plush SF cinema complex at the ne w Central World Mall.

This year's festival focuses on Asian cinema and will feature movies and stars from Asia, rather than Hollywood.

One of the highlights is a 'Tribute' to Hema Malini, still hugely popular in Thailand, who will be attending the festival with daughter Ahana. Five of her movies will be screened: 'Sholay,' 'Lal Pathar,' 'Dillagi,' 'Khushboo' and 'Baghban.'

"A Retrospective speaks volumes of one's work, and as it's the first time for me, I'm excited," says the actor, adding that Bangkok is one of her favourite holiday destinations.

Impressive Indian package

According to Chief Officer of the festival, Chattan Kunjara Na Ayudhya, there is great interest am meet Hema Malini, and he expects the screening of 'Sholay,' which she will attend, to be sold out. There is also an impressive package of Indian films.

Chattan says, "A celebration of Asian Cinema, at this year's festival, would be incomplete without significant representation from Bollywood."

Among the Indian films on show, will be the 2006 blockbuster 'Rang de Basanti,' Vishal Bharadwaj's riveting version of Shakespeare's Othello, 'Omkara,' and also the debut film of US-trained director Rajnesh Domalpalli's 'Vanaja,' which went to many foreign festivals.

Hema Malini, who will attend the event.

There was some controversy, when the opening animation film, 'Persepolis' (about a young girl's experiences during the Iran revolution) was removed because the Iran Embassy protested, and has been replac of revolution. This one is set in Hungary (during the Soviet occupation) and is called 'Children of Glory.'

The Asian cinema section has a large package of new, independent movies from China that creat festivals around the world such as 'Tickets,' 'Getting Home' and 'Lost in Beijing.' Then there is 'Time' by well-known Korean director Kim ki Duk, the much-talked-about 'Go Master' from Japan, and 'Sankara' from Sri Lanka, about a Buddhist monk drawn by earthly desires that grabbed attention at last year's Kerala festival.

BIFF is one of the few film festivals that has a special section on the cinema of the 'Asean' region and this year, there is a diverse range from the area.

These include 'Dancing Bell' from Malaysia, about an ethnic Indian family's struggles in that country, 'The Rebel,' an action film from Vietnam, 'Love for Share,' a daring story on polygamy by Indonesia's best-known woman-director Nia Dinata, and 'Bet Collector' from Phillipines which won its actor Gina Pareno an award at last year's Osian Festival in India.

There are 12 Thai films on view in the Thai Panorama section, including the hit horror film, 'Alone' (which may be re-made soon in the U.S.), the mega historical 'Naresuan,' the Cannes-entry 'Ploy,' which is in the Competition section of the Osian Cinefan festival in Delhi, and a unique love-story between a tra woman, 'Me Myself.'

The Cinema of the World section has award-winning movies. Among these are the notorious tale of a 'gay' threesome, 'Short Bus' from the U.S., 'The Red Road,' 'Belle Toujours' by Portugal's director Manuel de Oliviera and 'Free Zone' by Israeli Director Amos Ghitai.

The documentary section has some unique films shot in Asia, including 'Mystic Ball,' made in Myanmar and 'Sleepwalking through the Mekong' made in Cambodia. A rare selection of movies from the Spanish master Luis Bunel, including his famous version of 'Belle Toujours' is a highlight of the festival.

The Lifetime Achievement Award will be given to Ray Harry Hausen, the special effects wizard-pr such as 'Jason and the Argonauts.'

Short films

The new Competitive Short Films section has nearly 30 films from around the world, including 'In the Shadow' by talented Greek director Dimitris Apostolou, 'Ah Ma' from Singapore and '3 Minutes' from Thailand. There is one Short Film from India, 'July Boys.' It is about the setting up of an Indo-American IT start-up company in Bangalore.

Among the Jury, in the three competitive sections, are two from India — Bina Paul of the Kerala Film Festival, and the Delhi film critic, Namrata Joshy.

The other activities include a three -day Producers Workshop, a unique clay animation workshop from Okinawa and panel discussions on topical subjects such as censorship, rating and anti-piracy. An important feature is the Film Market, organised by the Thai Film Federation for the first time, which expects to give a boost to local cinema as well as those of the region.

This year's budget has been reduced to 81 million baht as compared to the earlier one of 200 million baht.

Despite the cut, there is much to savour and enjoy at this event.

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