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Global slices for Bangkok film buffs

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There will be a mix of old classics and new Indie movies at the World Film Festival of Bangkok (October 11-23).



DOCUMENTARY: Sydney Pollack

More than 70 films from 30 countries will be screened at this year's World Film Festival of Bangkok (October 11-23), sponsored by the *Nation* paper.

As in the earlier years, the festival aims to bring a mixture of old classics and new indie films to Thai audiences.

Among the old classics, are the rarely seen 'early' movies of Italian maestro Bernardo Bertolucci and Polish master Krzysztof Kieslowski.

These include 'The Spider's Strategem' and 'Grim Reaper' of the former and five 'shorts' of the latter.

The closing film of the festival is a new version of the 'silent' 1925 Russian classic, 'Battleship Potemkin,' set to music last year by the Pet Shop Boys!

The opening film is 'The Banquet' from Hong Kong, which premiered at Venice, starring Chinese actress Zhang Ziyi, playing Hamlet's mother in an exotic Asian version of the Shakespearean drama.

Among the new indie movies are iconic Taiwanese Director Tsai Ming Liang's latest, 'I Don't Want To Sleep Alone.' There is also an interesting documentary from Bhutan about a deejay who wants to start a night club in that tradition-ridden country, without success, and shifts to India instead.

The Festival Director Kriengsak.Silakong, an avid Indian movie buff, visited the Kerala and the Osian-Cinefan festivals, to choose three arresting films.

These include 'Herbert,' the first feature of New York-trained Suman Mukhopadhyay, which captures with warmth and sensitivity the social and political upheavals of Kolkata through the eyes of a simple youth, Herbert.

Stage-actor Subashish Mukherjee plays the difficult role with impressive ease.

'Tale of 3 Friends' is another Kolkata tale by TV journalists Sudeshna Roy and Abhijit Guha. It is a rare example of a well-made comedy, that centres round the dreams, desires, foibles of three urban youth, whose struggles in Kolkata are reflective of any metropolis. As Director Sudeshna says, "The film has

quintessential Bengali elements but there is also a universality about it."

'My Brother Nikhil' by debutant Director Onir will also be screened. It caused a controversy in India because of its 'gay' protagonist, but it is essentially a moving tale about AIDS, with a powerful performance by talented actor Sanjay Suri.

The Competition Section has many films that have created waves at the top festivals of the world.

Nanni Moretti's Cannes-entry, 'The Caiman,' is the one most film-buffs are looking forward to watching. It is based on the life of the media-controlling former German Prime Minister Bertolusconi, who lost the elections after the film was released in Germany.

The recent ouster of Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (also notorious for his control of the media), makes this film pertinent for the Thai audience.

Another important film is 'Feast of the Goat' from Peru, based on a sweeping novel by well-known author Mario Vargas Llosa. It centres round a dictatorship regime in the Dominican Republic, which makes for riveting viewing.

An unforgettable drama is Samir Nasr's 'Seeds of Doubt,' about the devastating impact of 9/11 on the happy marriage of a German-Arab couple.

The film created waves at the Osian-Cinefan Festival just like another disturbing marital drama, 'Climate' by brilliant Turkish Director Nuri Bilge Ceylan.

The Asian Contemporary Section includes 'Cease-fire', the latest drama of Iran's best known female Director Tahmineh Milani. She was on the Jury of the Kerala Film Festival and will be at the Bangkok festival too. So will be the vivacious Turkish actor Meltum Cumbul, whose movie 'Lovelorn,' an arresting romance between an elderly taxi-driver and a bar-girl, made by iconic Turkish Director Yavuz Turgill, won her the Best Actress Award at the Palm Springs Festival.

Documentaries have had a strong place at this event and there are many big names this year. 'Basileirinho' by filmmaker Mika Kaurismaki, 'Konig's Sphere' by German Director Percy Adlon, 'Grizzly

Man' by Werner Herzog and 'Sketches of Frank Gehry' by Sydney Pollack.

The Short Film category has also been one of the strengths of the event, and this year there are many award-winning 'shorts' including the love story, 'Anastasia' by talented Greek Director Dimitris Apostolou. There are many award-winning Thai 'shorts' too, a genre in which this country has an increasing number of talents.

There will also be a poster-exhibition by the celebrated New York-based Polish designer Rafal Olblinski whose sensational works have been compared to Dali and Andy Warhol.

Last but not the least, is the 'Produire au Sud' Film Workshop that was started last year with much success. Here, seven talented producer-director duos from SE Asia, will submit their scripts to three French film professionals, who will train them to develop and market the script for international audiences.

The best script will be sent to the well-known Nantes Festival in France, where the duo will get a chance to interact with European funding agents. Last year the Thai film duo got more than 50 % funding for their new film.

The World Film Festival of Bangkok may not have the sweep and charisma of the Osian-Cinefan or Kerala Film Festivals in India, but it is important in Thailand for setting new trends and improving tastes in a country still smitten by Hollywood.

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