

THEMES AND FOCUS AREAS

FOCUS AREAS

FRENCH FOCUS

While the French have always had a strong presence at DIFF, 2009 is a particularly fine year to focus on French cinema, given the slew of excellent films available for selection this year, covering a gamut of styles and themes. Laurent Cantet's gritty and realistic *The Class*, winner of the Cannes Palmes d'Or, sits alongside the period drama *Coco Before Chanel*, Anne Fontaine's sumptuous film about the legendary designer (played beautifully by Audrey Tautou). Rachid Bouchareb, a festival favourite, returns with *London River*, a prize-winner in Berlin, which takes a tender look at two parents from very different backgrounds searching for their respective children following the London underground bombings in 2005. Philippe Lioret's masterful *Welcome* is about getting to London – a young Iraqi refugee arrives in Calais determined to swim the channel in order to meet his true love. It is impossible, but a meeting with a swimming instructor provides him with hope. Julie Delpy who charmed with her 2007 directorial debut *2 Days In Paris*, returns with the very dark *The Countess* in which she herself plays a legendary countess who is said to have bathed in the blood of virgins in order to preserve her looks.

France is also heavily involved in co-productions and this year French co-productions include *Three Monkeys*, the new masterpiece by the Turkish director Nuri Bilge Ceylan, *The Absence*, a powerful tale of filial responsibility by Senegal's Mama Keita, the legendary Dardenne brothers' *Lorna's Silence* (Belgium) and the Palestinian films *Salt Of This Sea* by Annemarie Jacir and *Pomegranates and Myrrh* by Najwa Najjar. Together these films show French cinema in fighting form.

The French Focus is supported by Unifrance, The French Institute of South African and the French Embassy.

INDIAN VISIONS

From India, the festival is proud to present several new talents. The fine actress, Nandita Das is well known for her sublime performances in, amongst many others, *Fire*, *Earth* and *Before The Rains*, and she makes her directorial debut with *Firaaq*, a powerful condemnation of religious violence. Also a debut, *The Damned Rain* by Satish Manwar is a stirring film about Indian farmers driven to suicide by debts and drought. The third Indian debut is very different. The hilarious Tamil Western *Quick Gun Murugan* by Shashanka Ghosh is wickedly clever and riotously funny, as we follow our vegetarian hero Murugan as he tries to save the world from a non-veg villain. Alongside these striking new talents, we have two established filmmakers. Priyadarshan is well known for his



commercial hits, but his *Kanchivaram* is a politically-charged and poetic film about a poor weaver who is determined to marry off his daughter in a silk sari, even if that means he has to steal a single thread each day for many years.

The great Bengali filmmaker, Rituparno Ghosh, will present the World Premiere of his new film *After Words*, starring Bipasha Basu and Prosenjit, which looks at the troubled relationship between a reckless poet and his anxious wife.

.....

AFRICA IN MOTION

Fittingly for its 30th edition, DIFF 2009 opens with the Durban film *My Secret Sky (Izulu Lami)*, Madoda Ncayiyana's debut feature, a moving film on the life of street children, featuring some incredible performances by the child actors.

The festival also proudly presents the debut feature of a great new talent, 25-year-old South African Oliver Hermanus, who brings the World Premiere of his *Shirley Adams* to DIFF. Set on the Cape Flats, *Shirley Adams* is an unflinching portrait of a mother determined to make some sort of life for her paralysed son.

Also from Durban is the charming *For Better For Worse*, a romantic comedy by Naresh Veeran and starring Raeesa Mahomed as the young Indian professional whose mother is determined to get her married. *Intonga* by JJ Van Rensburg is the inspirational tale of a young boy who develops confidence through boxing. In Revel Fox's *Long Street*, also a World Premiere, a talented young singer struggles to escape her life of drug addiction and finds inspiration in a singer who has survived her share of strife. Busi Mhlongo gives a powerful performance as the inspirational songstress.

Two South African co-productions that have made waves around the world also appear at the festival. Steve Jacobs' adaptation of JM Coetzee's *Disgrace* has won awards around the world, while Anthony Fabian's *Skin*, based on the true story of a girl who looks black being born to white parents in apartheid South Africa, has been a worldwide festival hit.

From elsewhere on the continent, the festival features Kenyan Wanuri Kahiu's assured feature debut, *From A Whisper*, which looks at the repercussions of the terrorist attack on the US Embassy in Kenya. Mama Keita's *The Absence* is set in Senegal and focuses on the return of a successful scientist from Paris who finds that his sister has turned to prostitution and that all is not well in the land of his birth.

Legendary Nigerian director, Tunde Kelani, makes his first visit to DIFF with *Arugba*, his penetrating study of tradition and corruption in contemporary Nigerian society.

Africa and South Africa are also well-represented in the documentary selection at this year's festival. Ramadan Suleman returns to DIFF with *Zwelidumile* his exceptional portrait of one of South Africa's most exceptional and unsung fine artists. In the impeccably researched *Cemetery Stories*, Malian director Cherif Keita traces the connections between the legendary first president of the ANC, John Dube, and Americans William and Idabelle Wilcox, a pair of long-forgotten 19th-century renegade missionaries. The absolutely harrowing *Iseta: Behind The Roadblock* tells

the story of the only known footage of actual killing in the Rwandan Genocide, an incredible fact considering the genocide left almost one million people slaughtered. *The Manuscripts of Timbuktu*, by Zola Maseko, is a poetic and visually stunning docu-drama about the history of these legendary manuscripts and the city of Timbuktu as seen through the life of one of Africa's greatest scholars, Ahmed Baba. The powerful and Sundance-winning *Rough Aunties* reveals Amanzimtoti-based Operation Bobbi Bear, a diverse group of women bound together by a commitment to helping abused children. *Sacred Places (Lieux Saints)* is Jean-Marie Teno's (Cameroon) compelling meditation on filmmaking, art, African cinema, identity, globalisation, popular culture, and business in contemporary Africa.

The short film form is an ideal medium in these resource-strapped times for cinema. DIFF again provides a platform for African and South African filmmakers and, in seven carefully programmed and themed packages, includes an incredible 39 South African and 10 African short films. Keep an eye out for the Durban Short Film Challenge which invited local filmmakers to make a five minute film in two weeks around two themes. The 12 winners have won a screening at DIFF. Other highlights include Akin Omotoso's fantastic *Jesus and the Giant*, which was shot on a digital stills camera with over 7 000 photographs stitched together to form movement, and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Sharing Day*, a musical drama on the response of the youth to the impact of HIV on their communities.

.....

PALESTINIAN PERSPECTIVES

Palestine has been much in the news as peace constantly eludes the region. Despite the harshness imposed on ordinary Palestinian people, Palestine is a hotbed of creativity, expressed convincingly here in the form of three very different feature films. Najwar Najjar's *Pomegranates and Myrrh* begins with the arrest of a Palestinian farmer on dubious charges and marries the political with the emotional as the farmer's wife grows closer to a handsome young choreographer who is working with her dance troupe. Annemarie Jacir's *Salt Of This Sea* has a Palestinian-American visit Palestine to find that the money in her grandfather's bank account has disappeared. She sets out to rob the bank, and falls in love in the process. Rashid Masharawi's patient *Laila's Birthday* follows for a day a Palestinian judge who is forced to work as a taxi driver to make ends meet.

.....

WAVESCAPES SURF FILM FESTIVAL

Wavescapes Surf Film Festival exhibits the culture of wave riding at its most expressive and creative. Wending our way across the world to surf a wealth of waves this year, the programme offers a foamy mixture of topics, from a cinematic interrogation of the minds of pro surfers in a quick-fire burst of adrenal overload on the world championship tour to the premiere of the home-grown movie *A Perfect 10*, the story of 10 years of Red Bull Big Wave Africa from the jaws of the Dungeons slab. Check you on the lawns at the Bay of Plenty, Sunday 26 July, or at Suncoast Casino, Monday 27 July to Friday 1 August. www.wavescapes.co.za



SPOTLIGHT ON SPORTS

DIFF presents three extraordinary feature documentaries on sporting icons. *Tyson*, directed by the acclaimed James Toback, is a stylistically inventive and intimate portrait of a completely mesmerizing Mike Tyson. In *Maradona By Kusturica*, two-time Palme D'or winner Emir Kusturica celebrates the incredible story of Diego Maradona. Utterly revealing, this is a must for soccer fans. *Reg Park – The Legend* is a candid portrait of the three-time Mr Universe who is one of the greatest bodybuilders ever to have participated on the world stage and directed by South African Richard Noseworthy. The 2010 Soccer World Cup is arguably the most momentous occasion in South Africa since the end of Apartheid. The documentary *Fahrenheit 2010 – Warming Up For The World Cup In South Africa*, examines in critical detail the organising of the event and questions its relevance to ordinary South Africans.

MUSIC ON FILM/FILMS ON MUSIC

The strong music strand in this the festival includes Emma Franz's compelling *Intangible Asset No. 82* about a jazz drummer and his search for an elusive South Korean grandmaster musician. Roger Lucey's *Aria Del Africa* is about the resurgence of interest in opera amongst young African singers. *Nora*, a performance film of the life of dancer Nora Chipaumire, features music by Zimbabwean legend Thomas Mapfumo. *The Silver Fez* is a captivating look at the intense rivalry of the Cape Malay music scene. Two Senegalese legends Yande Codou and Youssou N'dour can be seen in *Yandé Codou*, *The Griot Of Senghor* and *Youssou N'dour: I Bring What I Love* respectively. 80-year old Yandé Codou Sène is one of the last remaining singers of polyphonic Sérère poetry. *I Bring What I Love* chronicles N'dour's tribulations and eventual triumph when his religious album, *Egypt*, that was at first branded blasphemous in Senegal, wins a Grammy award and full acceptance.

ECO-LENS

The global climate crisis informs five documentaries in this year's festival. The Foster Brothers' epistemologically revolutionary *The Nature Of Life* addresses climate change from a unique African perspective and showcases innovative local solutions. *H20IL* examines the massive oil sands extraction project in Canada and the destructive effect it has on water resources. Water, or the lack of it, also informs *The Lake That Was*, which traces Iran's Lake Urmia from its heyday as a tourist destination to it's present demise. *Poison Fire* is an indictment of almost fifty years of oil exploitation and environmental destruction in the Niger Delta. The other Foster Brothers' film in the festival, *Ice Man*, documents the extraordinary physiological and psychological journey of Lewis Pugh's record-breaking long distance swims in the freezing waters of both the south and north poles, the epicentres of the destructive effects of climate change. *Its Up 2 U* is a critical look at the profiteering Western agrarian industry. A must see is the multiple-award winning *Saving Luna*, about a baby killer whale who, separated from his family, seeks human social interaction – much to the Canadian government's disapproval. An insightful and moving look at the ethical dilemmas of bridging the gap between species.

