

AROUND TOWN

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2009

Golden Horse seeks new pastures

With more than 200 movies screened over an extended period of three weeks, Taiwan's biggest annual film festival aims to stay on top of the game by wooing younger audiences and providing forums for industry professionals

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER

FESTIVAL NOTES:

WHAT: 2009 Golden Horse Film Festival (2009台北金馬影展)
WHEN: Until Nov. 26
WHERE: Shin Kong Cineplex (新光影城), 36 Xining S Rd, Taipei City (台北市西寧南路36號) and Vie Show Cinemas, Xinyi District (信義威秀影城), 18 Songshou Rd, Taipei City (台北市松壽路18號)
ADMISSION: NT\$230 per screening, NT\$200 for students with ID and people with disabilities, available through ERA ticket outlets or at www.ticket.com.tw
ON THE NET: www.goldenhorse.org.tw

Twenty-nine years have passed since the inception of the Golden Horse Film Festival (台北金馬影展) in 1980. For a leading cinema showcase approaching 30, remaining attractive to younger generations of festivalgoers is a must if it wants to avoid the glue factory.

Event organizers say Golden Horse retains its vigor through theme-oriented programs and specially curated sections that reflect individual curators' viewpoints, are connected to current events, and remain relevant in a changing world.

"Older festivalgoers may only see films by directors they know, but young audiences go to a movie for all kinds of reasons. As curators, our job is not only to introduce quality works but to bring in new ideas," said Wen Tien-hsiang (聞天祥), executive director of the Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival Executive Committee (台北金馬影展執行委員會), which is responsible for all of the festival events including the Golden Horse Awards.

"We can't dwell in 1980s and 1990s while our audiences have already embraced the aesthetics of the 21st century," he added.

Aside from the usual screenings of big-name directors' latest works and award-winning movies from the international film festival circuit, Golden Horse is showing more and more movies under a bulging variety of categories and sub-categories. These range from the popular Rock 'n' Roll Apocalypse section to this year's expanded Wonderland segment featuring movies that are outrageous, weird and X-rated.

Wen says the segments are a way to create "niche markets" within a comprehensive film festival so festivalgoers can easily find movies that interest them. For example, audiences looking for extreme viewing experiences can go to tomorrow's Night of the Vampire, which screens three vampire flicks from South Korea, Japan and the UK from 11:50pm to 6:10am.

This year the festival takes a look inside Taiwan's movie industry, with Mark Ping-bing Lee (李屏賓) as one of the filmmakers in focus. Years of working with such Taiwanese directors as Hou Hsiao-hsien (侯孝賢) and Wang Tung (王童) have made Lee a prominent international cinematographer. Koreeda Hirokazu from Japan, Gilles Bourdos of France and several other directors who have worked with Lee will attend the event to pay tribute to the respected artist, while *Let the Wind Carry Me* (乘著光影旅行), a documentary about Lee, will make its world premiere at the festival.

Golden Horse regulars will notice that the number of this year's filmmakers-in-focus programs has expanded from the standard two to six. This move is part of Wen's plan to foster diversity by drawing attention to film professionals other than directors, including Indian composer A. R. Rahman, French actress Isabelle Huppert and Mark Ping-bing Lee.

An influential pioneer of American independent cinema, John Cassavetes, whose works have never been systematically screened at a film festival in Taiwan, has been chosen to serve as an interesting comparison to such local filmmakers as Cheng Yu-chieh (鄭有傑) and Leon Dai (戴立忍), who, like Cassavetes, work both as actors and directors.

"Since Taiwanese cinema has gone completely independent [as opposed to studio moviemaking], Cassavetes can be a very good example for local filmmakers," said Wen. "He is adept at creating intensity through simple devices and using the language of independent filmmaking to establish a dialogue with genre cinema."

Now a regular part of the festival, the Classics Restored program screens several digitally restored oldies including an astonishingly beautiful *The Red Shoes* (1948), which, Wen said, looks as if someone had used a transparent cloth to dust time off the celluloid.

The section's main aim is to raise awareness of film preservation, which seems more of a pressing issue when one realizes that only a single Taiwanese oldie has been digitally restored by the Taipei Film Archive (電影資料館).

Though less visible to ordinary festivalgoers, this year's Golden Horse Film Academy (金馬電影學院) sports a faculty that sounds too good to be true: Hou Hsiao-hsien, Ang Lee (李安), Tsai Ming-liang (蔡明亮), Mark Ping-bing Lee, recording artist Tu Dui-chi (杜鵑之) and editor Liao Ching-sung (廖慶松). Sixteen young filmmakers from Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, Malaysia and Myanmar have been selected to learn from these masters during the two-week program. The students' finished works will be shown at the festival on Nov. 25.

Meanwhile, 25 television and film projects have been selected for the Film and TV Film Project Promotion (金馬創投會議), which establishes connections between project producers, directors and prospective investors.

Both the Film Project Promotion and Film Academy are part of plans to make Golden Horse more than just a film festival and awards ceremony.

Asked if there were any surprises at this year's festival, Wen said that there are two movies from Serbia that really blew him away. One, *Tears for Sale*, begins its black-comic tale in a mountain village where all the men have died. The other is *The Life and Death of Porn Gang*, about a troupe that performs sex shows as it tours from town to town.

"It makes you wonder what's happening in Serbia," said Wen.



Air Doll

From the maker *Still Walking* comes *Air Doll*, a live-action adaptation of Yoshiie Goda's *Blow-Up Doll* manga. With cinematography by Mark Ping-bing Lee, the whimsical flick centers on an adult blow-up doll that comes to life and experiences what it's like to be human. Director Koreeda Hirokazu will attend question-and-answer sessions and hold a lecture on Nov. 24 at Vie Show Cinemas in Taipei's Xinyi District.



I Killed My Mother

Twenty-year-old Xavier Dolan turns adolescent frustration and anger into a film that won three awards at the Directors' Fortnight at Cannes earlier this year. Don't worry, there isn't any matricide. Dolan's feature debut has been selected as Canada's submission for the Best Foreign Language Film award category at the Academy Awards next year.



Kinatay

Filipino director Brillante Mendoza's controversial movie *Kinatay* was received with hisses and applause at this year's Cannes Film Festival. The flick follows a young police cadet as he descends into criminality. Audiences should prepare themselves for graphic violence that includes beating, rape, murder and dismemberment. The 49-year-old director took home the best director award at Cannes.



Villa Amalia

Isabelle Huppert plays a happily married pianist who goes into self-imposed exile after seeing her man kissing another woman. Director Benoit Jacquot will attend the event, while Huppert, one of the festival's featured filmmakers, may or may not visit Taipei. The festival's organizers temporarily cancelled the actress's lecture and question-and-answer sessions, but said there's still a good chance that she will show up.



Amreeka

In director Cherien Dabis' Cannes-winning debut feature, a Palestinian single mother and her teenage son leave their hometown amid the fallout of the US-led war on Iraq and embark on a turbulent journey to new lives in Illinois. Humor and warmth are abundant in this story of displacement and struggle.



Inferno

Said to be inflamed by the success of *81/2*, French director Henri-Georges Clouzot set out in 1964 to make an ambitious film about jealousy and madness. The project was aborted, and the footage was locked away for decades, until French archivist Serge Bromberg got a hold of the surviving 185 cans of film negative. *Inferno*, the resulting documentary, is infused with Clouzot's bewitching and sometimes ghostly images that linger on the then 26-year-old legendary beauty Romy Schneider.



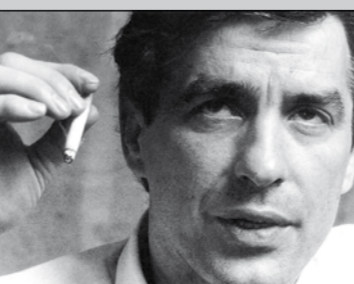
The Life and Death of a Porn Gang

Marko is a film school graduate who tried his luck with horror films and the porn industry but failed miserably. Frustrated, he assembles a troupe of junkies, transvestites and porn actresses and starts a touring live porn show. Shocking and original, the film challenges many taboos — such as murder, group sex, and bestiality.



Sweet Rush

The latest work by Polish master Andrzej Wajda, *Sweet Rush* is a self-referential film that focuses on a middle-aged woman still mourning her two long-dead sons when she is suddenly taken with a young man. The film is grouped in the festival's Spotlights section, which features new works by celebrated directors including Theo Angelopoulos, Raoul Ruiz and Jane Campion.



Thirst

South Korea's Park Chan-wook, maker of the celebrated *Vengeance* trilogy, ventures into vampire territory but with none of the genre's conventional baggage. The story centers on a priest-turned-vampire who has an affair with his best friend's wife. *Thirst* and two other vampire flicks will be shown together at a marathon screening that starts tomorrow night at 11:50pm at Shin Kong Cineplex.

From left: Directors Tsai Ming-liang and Hou Hsiao-hsien, cinematographer Mark Ping-bing Lee, Indian composer A. R. Rahman, and American independent cinema pioneer John Cassavetes.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GOLDEN HORSE