

## AROUND TOWN

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## Brazil on the big screen

This year's Taipei Film Festival features a lineup of 150 works, from feature films and documentaries to animations and shorts, with a focus on the cinema of South America's biggest country

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Left and above: *The Hour of the Star*.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TAIPEI FILM FESTIVAL

from the 1950s to the present day.

Among the festival's rare finds is *Rio, 40 Degrees* (1955) by Nelson Pereira dos Santos, which illustrates the complexity of social relations through a semi-documentary portrait of five peanut vendors in Rio de Janeiro. Santos' black-and-white feature debut is often regarded as the first major work of Cinema Novo, a Brazilian new wave movement that flourished in the 1950s and 1960s.

Cinema Novo's directors are noted for using the country's impoverished hinterland and urban slums as settings for critiques and commentary on imperialism and neocolonialism. Glauber Rocha's *Earth Enraptured* (1967) and *Antonio das Mortes* (1969) are two Cinema Novo magnum opuses that allegorically portray the political scene after Brazil's 1964 coup ushered in an era of authoritarianism that forced many artists into exile.

Festival curator Jane Yu (游惠貞) said this year's Brazilian program presented a challenging task. The less-than-systematic preservation of films in Brazil meant it took more time and effort to track down certain movies. Brazil's enthusiasm for football also presented an obstacle when organizers tried to invite the country's filmmakers to Taipei. "You [get] responses like, 'It's World Cup month. Is there any way you can re-schedule your festival?'" Yu said.

Another central feature of this year's festival is a retrospective for what would have been the 100th birthday of Chinese actress Run Lingyu (阮玲玉). The silent movie star made 29 movies before she took her own life in 1935 at the age of 25. The festival's program features Run's eight surviving movies on loan from the Beijing Film Archive (北京電影資料館).

Run's legendary life was immortalized half a century after her death in Hong Kong director Stanley Kwan's (關錦鵬) *Center Stage* (阮玲玉, 1992), featuring Maggie Cheung (張曼玉) as Run. Kwan's film will also be screened at the festival.

To make Run's silent movies more accessible to

contemporary audiences, special screenings of three selected films will be accompanied by live music performances and a *pien shih* (辯士), or onstage narrator, a job from the silent movie era that involved explaining the movie and commenting on the plot.

Taipei Film Festival organizers faced criticism two years ago when they decided to focus on feature-length films at the Taipei Awards, an annual competition and an important platform for young filmmakers in Taiwan. The disputed changes included more award categories for feature-length films and limiting the top prize of NT\$1 million, previously open to all types of film, to feature-length works.

In response to the criticism, the Taipei Film Festival changed the rules this year and made all feature, documentary, animation and short works eligible for award categories including best director, best cinematography and best editing, as well as the coveted top cash prize.

"Our film committee members think the festival should maintain its spirit, which encourages openness and creativity," said festival director Hu Yu-feng (胡幼鳳).



*Women Without Men*.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TAIPEI FILM FESTIVAL

## FESTIVAL NOTES

**WHAT:** 12th Taipei Film Festival (2010 台北電影節)

**WHEN:** Through July 15

**WHERE:** Taipei Zhongshan Hall (台北市中山堂), 98 Yanping S Rd, Taipei City (台北市延平南路98號), Taipei Shin Kong Cineplex (台北新光影城), 4F, 36, Xining S Rd, Taipei City (台北市西寧南路36號4樓) and Governor Cinemas (台北總督影城), 219, Changan E Rd Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市長安東路二段219號)

**ADMISSION:** NT\$200 or NT\$180 for students and people with disabilities, available through ERA ticketing outlets or online at [www.ticket.com.tw](http://www.ticket.com.tw)

**ON THE NET:** [www.taipeiff.org.tw](http://www.taipeiff.org.tw)

## FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TAIPEI FILM FESTIVAL

## The Hour of the Star

Born in 1932, Brazilian director Suzana Amaral has made only three feature films. But each of them is deemed a masterpiece. *The Hour of the Star* (1985), completed when Amaral was 53, is an honest account of a 19-year-old woman's misadventures in Sao Paulo. The film went on to win multiple awards, including the best actress gong for Marcelia Cartaxo at the Berlin Film Festival in 1986. Amaral's *A Hidden Life* (2001) and *Hotel Atlantico* (2009) are also screening in the festival's Directors in Focus section.



## Little Toys

*Little Toys* (小玩意) is a collaboration between actress Ruan Linyu (阮玲玉) and director Sun Yu (孫瑜), a key figure in Chinese silent cinema known for his poetic films. In the movie, Ruan plays a mother driven to madness by the cruelty of war. A special screening of the movie, with accompaniment by the Taipei Symphony Orchestra (台北市立交響樂團), takes place on Thursday at Taipei Zhongshan Hall (台北中山堂). Tickets cost NT\$450.



## Dust in the Wind

The festival's new Classical Digital Restoration section showcases three digitally restored masterpieces of Taiwanese cinema: the late Edward Yang's (楊德昌) 1986 *The Terrorizers* (恐怖份子); Hou Hsiao-hsien's 1986 *Dust in the Wind* (戀戀風塵); and Tsai Ming-liang's Venice Film Festival-winning *Vive L'Amour* (愛情萬歲, 1994). Inspired by scriptwriter Wu Nien-chen's (吳念真) autobiographical story of his childhood in a small mining village in Taipei county, Hou's *Dust in the Wind* bulges with many of the auteur's signature images.

## Women Without Men

Based on Shahrnush Parsipur's novel of the same title, *Women Without Men* tells the tale of four women whose lives cross paths when a CIA-backed coup overthrows the democratically elected Iranian government in 1953. The film is the feature debut of internationally renowned Iranian visual artist Shirin Neshat. The 53-year-old won the Venice Film Festival's Silver Lion best director award last year for this film, which is being screened as part of Taipei Film Festival's New Talent Competition section, an international contest open to filmmakers who are on their first or second 35mm movie. Twelve works from 11 countries are this year competing for cash prizes totaling NT\$900,000.

## The Well

Indian director Umesh Vinayak Kulkarni's *The Well* is a meditative contemplation on the way children understand death and handle grief. The film centers on two adolescent cousins and best friends Sameer and Nachiket, who play games and go swimming together while the rest of the family prepares for a wedding in the countryside. The merriment is soon shattered when Nachiket is found drowned in a well. More unsettling is the question of whether Nachiket's death is an accident or suicide. Sameer, broken and lost, embarks on a lone quest for meaning and self-discovery. The film is being screened in the festival's Generation Next segment.



## Hand in Hand

Selected for the Taiwan Awards' documentary category, *Hand in Hand* (牽手) by directors Yen Lan-chuan (顏蘭權) and Juang Yi-tzeng (莊益增) examines Taiwan's pro-democracy movement from a fresh and intimate perspective. The film centers on the love story between doctor Tien Chao-ning (田朝明) and his wife Tien Meng-shu (田孟淑), two prominent figures of the *dangwai* (黨外, outside party) movement. The directors won the Taiwan Awards' top prize in 2005 with *Let It Be* (無米樂), a surprise commercial success that shone the spotlight on the plight of elderly rice farmers in Tainan County.

