

AROUND TOWN

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PAGE 13



Viewers in the driving seat

To strengthen its role as a year-end film carnival, the 2008 Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival is geared toward general audiences

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE GOLDEN HORSE FILM FESTIVAL

From 2006's focus on documentary filmmaking to last year's youthful and rebellious spirit, curators' and programmers' proclivities have determined the form of previous Taipei Golden Horse Film Festivals (台北金馬影展). Not this year: The festival's lineup of 145 films was designed to please moviegoers of all ages and interests.

"In recent years, we have seen the international film festival circuit become geared towards a more commercial form of cinema that treats the audience as the principal element... Golden Horse picks up on this trend by focusing on audiences rather than a few curators," said festival program director Patrick Jia (嘉世強).

This viewer-friendly approach is reflected in the choices for this year's retrospective program. One notable addition, though less recognized on the international stage than Akira Kurosawa and Yasujiro Ozu, is revered Japanese director Kon Ichikawa. From his chilling anti-war film *Fires on the Plain* and the Cannes-winning *Odd Obsession* about lust and sexuality, to detective thriller *The Inugami Family* and *The Makioka Sisters*, an exquisitely produced family drama based on Junichiro Tanizaki's novel of the same title, Ichikawa has a proven ability to roam from genre to genre.

Another prominent contributor on this year's roster is Jean-Pierre Melville. Similar to Ichikawa in that they were both influential figures appreciated by critics and audiences alike, Melville was regarded as a major influence on the French New Wave and best remembered for his film noir *Le Samouraï* that gave Alain Delon his immortal onscreen role as a tragic heroic hitman.

Golden Horse has put together an admirably extensive retrospective program on the French maestro that will screen 10 of the 14 films Melville made as well as the French documentary *Code Name: Melville*, which will receive its world premiere at the festival, and *The Killer* (喋血雙雄) by John Woo (吳宇森), who cites Melville's work as the chief inspiration for his gangster flicks.

To help festivalgoers navigate through the lineup, the films have been organized into more than 12 thematic sections.

In the Non-Fictional Cinema category, the combination of big-name directors and popular subject matter is expected to draw big audiences. *Shine a Light* documents the musical union of Martin Scorsese and *The Rolling Stones*, *Encounters at the End of the World* is Werner Herzog's latest installment in his ongoing search for ultimate beauty and a strong contender for next year's Academy Awards, and *Man on Wire* is a highly stylish and cinematic memoir of Frenchman Philippe Petit's 1974 adventure crossing between the twin towers in New York City on an illegally rigged wire.

Contrary to common belief, American independent productions are among the most difficult to come by at film festivals as they rely on distribution networks rather than the art-house circuit. To its credit, the Golden Horse's Made in USA program will screen eight critically acclaimed independent films that are unlikely to go on general release in Taiwan. Among the most popular are Sean Penn's *Into the Wild* and *Lars and the Real Girl*, which tells a wacky story about the love between a shy young man and his sex doll.

Three documentaries about the so-called "war on terror" critically assess US foreign policy. Focusing on the chaos that has engulfed Iraq is *No End in Sight*, while the Silver Berlin Bear-winning *Standard Operating Procedure* and Oscar-winning *Taxi to the Dark Side*

detail the torture and murder of prisoners in Afghanistan, Iraq and Guantanamo Bay and the systematic abrogation of human rights that links them.

This year's festival shines the spotlight on the surging international enthusiasm for fantasy cinema that deals with the weird, subversive, erotic and fantastical. This category includes major winners at Europe's most prestigious fantasy film festival, Spain's Festival de Cine de Sitges, such as *Surveillance*, *Eden Lake*, *Let the Right One In* and *Chaser*.

As there is no international animation film festival in Taiwan this year, the Golden Horse has expanded its animation program by featuring Russia's animation luminary Aleksandr Petrov, as well as changing its popular international digital short competition to a digital animation competition, which selected and will screen 21 shorts out of 183 entries from around the world.

Having made five shorts (all will be screened at the festival) during his 20-year career to date, internationally acclaimed Petrov is best known for his paint-on-glass animation, a technique that requires delicate artistry and meticulous procedure. Petrov seeks inspiration from literary greats such as Ernest Hemingway, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Ivan Turgenev. Amalgamating the classical ethos with stupendous imagination and visual splendor, his sublime art leaves an indelible impression on viewers.

The reclusive Petrov is scheduled to discuss his works in person.

For festival regulars and film buffs, Golden Horse is screening the latest works by Wim Wenders, Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, Ermanno Olmi and Philippe Garrel.

World cinema films in the festival lineup include Tunisian-born director Abdel Kechiche's award-winning *The Secret of the Grain*, which stands out for its handheld cinematography and tells a cross-cultural story of a Franco-Arabic family, and Cannes-winning *Gomorra*, a violent adaptation of the book of the same title by Italian journalist Roberto Saviano, who is threatened by mafia godfathers and granted a permanent police escort for uncovering the Camorra's machinations in Naples and Caserta.

The first French production to walk home with the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Festival in 20 years, *The Class* utilizes a unique storytelling approach. Entirely set behind the school gate, the film explores the state of public education in France through a high school teacher's struggle with his students of mixed cultural and social backgrounds. Director Laurent Cantet is scheduled to hold a question-and-answer session at the festival.

Fifty screenings have already sold out and advanced ticket sales exceeded a record-breaking NT\$10 million two weeks ahead of the festival.

On the Net: tghff2008.pixnet.net/blog

FESTIVAL NOTES:

WHAT: 2008 Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival (台北金馬影展)
WHEN AND WHERE: Thursday to Nov. 21 at Vieshow Cinemas Sun (日新威秀), Vieshow Cinemas Xinyi (信義威秀), and Shin Kong Cineplex (新光影城), Nov. 24 to Dec. 4 at Vieshow Cinemas Durban (德安威秀影城) in Taichung
TICKETS: NT\$230 per screening or NT\$200 for students in Taipei; NT\$200 per screening or NT\$180 for students in Taichung, available through ERA ticket outlets or online at www.ticket.com.tw. Tickets for Taichung screenings go on sale on Nov. 13
ON THE NET: www.goldenhorse.org.tw

[HALLOWEEN]

Freakin' out on freak night

Halloween is here, and there are plenty of events that go bump in the night

BY ALITA RICKARDS
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

Bands in costumes are nothing new. Death-metal Goth-rockers Chthonic (閃靈) and metalheads Anhelion (幻日) rival Kiss with white-and-black paint obscuring the identity of bandmembers. Expat acts such as Point 22 (22) in tennis whites and Public Radio in prison stripes follow in the footsteps of former expat group Milk, which, like Nirvana, wore dresses.

As Gene Simmons said in his best-selling book *Kiss and Make-Up*:

"[W]e needed to keep pushing the visual appeal of the band. We weren't content to just stand there and strum our guitars. That wasn't enough. We wanted to make a big splash."

Even if wearing makeup and silly outfits is only a gimmick, tonight is the one night when it's completely justified.

All Halloween's Eve has become a huge event in Taipei. Costumes are available all over, from the crowded streets of Ximending to mom-and-pop shops.

And there are plenty of parties to dress up for. One of the more

interesting, *Nightmare in Paris* (驚魂夜巴黎萬聖派對), is offering an NT\$10,000 prize for best costume. After the huge success in July of the Campo party at Paris Night Club (夜巴黎舞廳) — which was a disco parlor 40 years ago — and the Spin revival there earlier this month, tonight's extravaganza promises a ghoulishly good gathering. Equally vintage are the drink prices: beer and spirits for NT\$100.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15
MORE HALLOWEEN COVERAGE ON PAGE 15



PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES

HALLOWEEN PARTY INFORMATION:

NIGHTMARE IN PARIS: From 9:30pm to 4am at the Paris Night Club (夜巴黎舞廳), 5F, 89, Wuchang St Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市武昌街二段89號5樓), above the IN89 (Hoover) movie theater in Ximending. Tickets are NT\$444 before 10pm; NT\$666 after. Both prices include one drink

METAL MASSACRE: Starts at 8pm at The Wall (這牆), B1, 200, Roosevelt Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市羅斯福路四段200號B1). Call (02) 2930-0162 or go to www.thewall.com.tw for more information. Tickets are NT\$500 in advance; NT\$600 at the door. Both prices include one drink

JUNGLE HALLOWEEN: Begins at 10pm at VU Livehouse, B1, 77, Wuchang St Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市武昌街二段77號B1). Call (02) 2314-1868 for more information. Tickets are NT\$400 and include two free drinks