



\* *Monsoon Shootout* and *Bombay Talkies* will be screened at Cannes. Even the inaugural film, Baz Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby* (below), has an Indian touch to it with an appearance by Amitabh Bachchan.

# The Indian connection

Two Hindi films will be screened at this year's Cannes Film Festival to mark the centenary of the country's cinema. And two legends will walk the Red Carpet. **By Gautaman Bhaskaran**

**T**he Cannes Film Festival will screen two Indian movies this year to mark 100 years of the country's cinema. Amit Kumar's *Monsoon Shootout* will be shown out of competition in a midnight screening at the Festival's 66th edition, which begins on May 15. The other Indian work is *Bombay Talkies*, helmed by Anurag Kashyap, Dibakar Banerjee, Karan Johar and Zoya Akhtar. This will be part of a special tribute to India.

Kashyap figures on the credits of both films. While *Monsoon Shootout* is co-produced by Anurag Kashyap Films, one of the four segments in *Bombay Talkies* has been directed by him. Both works are in Hindi.

*Monsoon Shootout*, which stars Vijay Varma, Nawazuddin Siddiqi, Tannishtha Chatterjee, Neeraj Kabi and Geetanjali Thapa, plays out against the monsoon-lashed gritty urban landscape of Mumbai. A thriller, it traces the

lives and dilemmas of a rookie cop, Guru, and a suspected gangster, Shiva.

*Bombay Talkies'* four stories have very different plots. While Banerjee will talk about a failed actor, struggling to make a living after his father's death, Kashyap narrates the experiences of a man who migrates to Mumbai from a small town to fulfil his dying father's last wish.

Johar's work deals with the extra-marital relationship of a happy urban wife whose life goes into a spin after she meets a new colleague at her office. Akhtar, on her part, focusses on a 12-year-old boy from a middleclass family who is inspired by a movie star to follow his dream.

Even the inaugural film, Baz Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby*, has an Indian touch to it with an appearance by Amitabh Bachchan. Both Bachchan and South Indian superstar, Rajnikanth, will walk the Red Carpet on the opening night. Rajnikanth will present a trailer of

his *Kochadaiyaan* presumably at the Cannes Market.

Finally, Indian actress-director Nandita Das will be part of the Cinefondation Jury, chaired by New Zealand's celebrated Jane Campion. Das was part of the main international jury a few years ago.

Reports also talk of an invitation to actress Aishwarya Rai to attend the Festival; she has been a permanent presence there, in any case.

With India churning out a huge number of movies akin to an automated factory line, the Festival could not have had an easy time shortlisting and finally zeroing in on the two entries. Reviews would tell us whether Cannes made the right choice. *Bombay Talkies* will reportedly open in India on May 3, a good two weeks or so before it plays at Cannes. So, many of us would have seen it before it is shown on the Croisette, and formed our opinion.

Beyond India, the Festival – which will close on May 26 with Jerome Salle's *Zulu*, a whodunit set during South Africa's apartheid era – had to grapple with a humungous number of submissions, 1858 features (against 1,670 in 2009 and 1,769 last year)! A mere 47 films made it in the various official sections. One can, then, imagine how difficult the selection must have been.

One slot in A Certain Regard reads Anonymous; probably this means a surprise movie, à la Venice. A few more films will be added, as the Festival Director, Thierry Fremaux, remarked last week.

Talking about what is already in, Fremaux said in his opening remarks at the April 18 Paris Press conference where he announced the list: "We've aimed for a selection which is joyous and generous, full of first-timers as well as confirmed auteurs, re-discoveries and surprises ... you'll find people whose presence will surprise you and others whose presence will reassure. There are lots of filmmakers who arrive in Official Selection for the first time and plenty who have presented movies at Cannes before ..."

Two of the 19 films in Competition are by former Palme d'Or winners: Steven Soderbergh's colourful biopic *Behind the Candelabra* and Roman Polanski's *Venus in Fur*. Soderbergh was not too keen on a Competition slot, but the Festival convinced him to have it there, because of "the quality of his work and also because, as you know, he has announced that it is his final movie ... given that his first feature (*Sex Lies and Videotape*) was shown and feted here with the Palme d'Or, we thought it was another good reason to invite it to Competition. We said, 'Say yes!'"

and his reply was 'Yes,'" recounted Fremaux with a smile.

The others in Competition – known as returnees, for they have been there earlier – are Nicolas Winding Refn's *Only God Forgives*; Ethan and Joel Coen's *Inside Llewyn Davis*; Arnaud Desplechin's *Jimmy P. (Psychotherapy of a Plains Indian)*; James Gray's freshly re-titled *The Immigrant* (formerly *Lowlife*); Chadian Mahamat-Saleh Haroun's *Grigris*; Jia Zhangke's *A Touch of Sin*; Takeshi Miike's *Shield of Straw*; Alexander Payne's *Nebraska*; and Paolo Sorrentino's *The Great Beauty*.

France's Francois Ozon, whose *Swimming Pool* competed in 2003, will be back on the French Riviera with his *Young and Beautiful*.

Cannes has been often criticised because of its fondness/loyalty for old-timers, directors who kept coming back. They are termed "habitués". But Fremaux had no regrets. "People always comment that there are a lot of 'habitués' in the selection," he said. "It's true, and even I don't really like the term 'habitués'; but all I can say is that we love having these so-called 'habitués'; these important auteurs, come back with their latest artistic works."

(This is something Indian festivals can learn. An important helmer must be invited with his work, and then audiences and critics can judge it.)

There have been some surprise inclusions in Competition.

Tunisian-born French director Abdellatif Kechiche will vie for the first time with *Blue is the Warmest Colour*. The Dutch movie, *Borgman*, by Alex Van Warmerdam is the first feature from the Netherlands to get into Competition in 38 years. Also, nobody expected Mexican helmer Amat Escalante's *Heli* to be in here. He had won the FIPRESCI (International Critics) Prize for *Sangre*, screened in the 2005 A Certain Regard.

Bruni-Tedeschi is the only woman director in Competition with her *A Chateau In Italy*, although there are six female filmmakers in A Certain Regard including Sofia Coppola who will open the selection on May 16 with *The Bling Ring*.

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