

A cocktail of cops and cinema

11:26 PM

May 02
2017

THE JURY: 70th Cannes Festival jury.



By Gautaman Bhaskaran

The world today is being terrorised. And the upcoming Cannes Film Festival — all set to celebrate a milestone of 70 summers — cannot but be jittery about the state of security across the globe, Europe increasingly so in recent times.

France has borne the brunt with newspaper cartoonists being killed in their Paris office and other attacks in the city. A few weeks ago, a gunman shot dead a policeman and critically wounded two others before pulling the trigger on himself.

So, the thousands of men and women who would troop into Cannes in the days of the Festival, which begins on May 17, would have to brace themselves — like they had to last year — to go through a rigid security drill. Frisking and getting their bags checked before each screening were what happened in 2016.

However, prospective visitors to the seaside resort of Cannes do not seem to be afraid. I saw this even last year, when snipers or sharpshooters had taken up positions on just about every rooftop. Also, hundreds of cops could be seen on the streets, and I was told that hundreds more had been roped in disguised in plain clothes or as restaurant waiters, cab drivers and so on.

Happily, the 12-day festival in May 2016 rolled through without any mishap, and a few days into screenings, people seemed at ease, showing absolutely no sign of nervousness. The police were largely responsible for this calm. They were extremely friendly with visitors, giving them a smile and chatting up with them. The men in uniform mingled so easily with the crowds that the cops provided not only a sense of safety but also a feeling of friendship.

Given this 2016 record — almost impeccable in the way with not a single incident of unpleasantness being reported between the police and people — I am certain that Cannes will, once again this year, witness the usual crowds. "Of course, we are going to Cannes, you can't play into the hands of terrorists who are trying to scare us," a German executive was quoted as having quipped to the media the other day. He added that he trusted the French authorities. "They would ensure the safety of all us".

Here are some other voices reported in the press.

A French movie producer said: "There were so many policemen everywhere last year. It was really felt, and they were on the alert. If someone targets the festival, the cops are prepared ... The world is unsafe, but I don't feel 'unsafe' in Cannes."

"I think no matter where you go these days you have to at least be aware of the general threat," said one American film buyer. "I think Cannes is super aware and so they will be extra vigilant."

"Last year, security was tight and we saw constant army presence throughout Cannes and I'm confident this year would be the same," said Gianluca Chakra, managing partner at the Dubai-based Middle East distributor Front Row Filmed Entertainment. "I'd be more scared to wander into a US high school than to strolling down La Croisette in Cannes."

Roman Polanski's new movie

For Roman Polanski, who has been facing some of his gloomiest days since he was charged with raping a minor girl in the US many, many years ago with the legal battle showing no signs of ending, the news of his latest work, *Based on a True Story*, being picked by the Cannes Film Festival could not have been more exciting. The movie will play out of competition.

Polanski, who gave us that magnificent film called *The Rosemary's Baby*, has now created a thriller with Eva Green essaying a mysterious woman — who tries to involve herself in the life of a celebrated author, portrayed by Polanski's wife, Emmanuelle Seigner.

Based on a True Story is inspired by a novel with the same name penned by Delphine De Vigan. A review of the book (which I have not read) in *The Guardian* has this to say: "The narrator is a writer named Delphine; she lives in Paris with her two teenage children, is in a relationship with a well-known journalist called François, and has recently achieved success with an autobiographical novel about her family,

resulting in strained relationships with relatives who did not welcome the exposure. Thus far, the details correlate with what is known of the author. But this is fiction — isn't it?

"The real De Vigan's previous book, *Nothing Holds Back the Night*, overtly addressed the fraught boundary between memoir and fiction and the question of the author's licence to invent; *Based on a True Story* takes the idea a stage further. In the novel, Delphine is crippled by writer's block after the double-edged response to her last book (never explicitly named here); she begins to receive poison pen letters, apparently from a member of her family accusing her in vicious terms of lying and exploitation. As her crisis progresses towards severe depression, Delphine encounters the enigmatic L at a party. L is intimately familiar with Delphine's work; an admirer who quickly insinuates herself into Delphine's life"

The review goes on to add that for a psychological thriller the book is slow. The question now is, will Polanski be able to infuse greater thrill and excitement into his celluloid work?

Be that as it may, while Polanski will be happy to be at Cannes this May, there are other factors which will be troubling the 83-year-old master of the medium. One, Cannes has slotted his work at the fag end of the Festival when most people would have gone. Two, while Polanski's lawyers continue to fight for his return to America — which he left 40 years ago and has since then been living in different parts of Europe — the US has refused to grant the director any special treatment on its soil. This means that there is still a possibility of Polanski having to spend time in prison.

Beyond all this, I am not sure about the treatment Polanski will get at Cannes. True, he did not face any hostility when he went to the festival in 2013 with his *Venus in Fur*. But, but, let us not forget that the world is now getting increasingly intolerant, and I saw this ugliness last year at Cannes when Woody Allen's estranged son, Ronan Farrow, wrote an article in *The Hollywood Reporter* about his father's "sexual abuse". Personally, I felt that *The Hollywood Reporter* should not have carried the story then. The timing was completely inappropriate. Cannes should not be made into a platform for trading allegations and counter-allegations.

It is a venue for cinema, pure cinema —where one can experience the sheer joy of motion and movement.

**Gautaman Bhaskaran has been to Cannes for 27 years, and is still excited about being there this May. He may be e-mailed at gautamanb@hotmail.com*