

## Ishmael's Ghosts to open Cannes

May 16  
2017

10:08 PM



ON LOCATION: A break during the shooting of Ishmael's Ghosts.



By Gautaman Bhaskaran

After 27 summers — and mind you that is a very long time — I find that I am still not tired of the Cannes Film Festival, whose 70th edition will begin unspooling on May 17. Which is today. For years, I have had this feeling that I would sooner or later get bored with — what many describe Cannes as — a huge circus. But, believe it or not, as my plane would circle over Nice, the airport for Cannes, and finally land in a touchdown which is dramatic, because the runway kisses the Mediterranean Sea, I would find my excitement rising. Admittedly, Cannes is set most picturesquely in the mist of mountains and the ocean, and everything is just hauntingly beautiful there — from the men and women to the chirpy cafes and the tree-lined boulevards.

But most captivating of all is the cinema that Cannes presents time and again, and in all my years there, I do not remember any occasion when I have returned home disappointed. And I am sure this year is going to be no different, and a glance at the titles has pushed me into a delirious high.

Opening later than usual because of the French presidential election, Cannes will kickstart with a local work by Arnaud Desplechin's *Ishmael's Ghosts*. Mathieu Amalric is a movie director who finds himself in a terrible dilemma when his former flame turns up. Not quite alive, but as a ghost! And the poor helmer's work goes haywire, and he runs away to his secluded family home. But life as a recluse is not going to solve his problem. With Marion Cotillard, Charlotte Gainsbourg and Louis Garrel, *Ishmael's Ghosts* promises to inject all the thrill that a Festival needs to begin flying.

Here are some of the titles whose stories seem seductive enough to get my footfall into the auditorium.

Fatih Akin's (who gave us the gripping *The Cut* on the 1915 Armenian genocide) *In The Fade* is set in the middle of a German-Turkish community in Hamburg. A tale of revenge and retribution, the film opens with a bomb explosion, and a woman who loses her family embarks on a tit-for-tat plan. I am told that the blast has been shot most realistically in the famous red-light district of St Pauli.

Sofia Coppola (remember her poignant *Lost in Translation*) will arrive in Cannes with *The Beguiled*. The background here is the American Civil War, and the director takes us with the help of her stars, Kristin Dunst and Nicole Kidman, into a girls school in Virginia. There young women are sheltered from the devastation outside. But when a young wounded soldier takes refuge in the school, a tempest brews with the girls vying for his attention. They are overcome with jealousy, rivalry and sexual tension.

Michael Haneke's *Happy End* discusses the European refugee crisis through the trials and tribulations of a rich family living in Calais. I really wonder what the title denotes, because the Austrian auteur has never been known to give us joyous fare. His *Funny Games*, that came early on in his career, was such a horridly gruesome psychological plot that saw people in the auditorium puke. Even Haneke's later works, like *Cache*, *The White Ribbon* and *Amour* have all been sadistic in some way or the other. Societal brutality, suicide and mercy killing are some of the subjects that the director has subjected us to. But no critic can deny that his works have been extremely insightful, and, yes, powerfully portrayed. *The White Ribbon*, for instance, mirrors how a small community in a German village begins to grow impatient with children — indicating the kind of diabolic times the nation was about to witness.

Naomi Kawase's Japanese movie, *Radiance*, keeping in tune with her style of fictionalising documentary, zeroes in on Misako, who passionately writes film versions for the blind, and at a screening, she meets Nakamori, a great photographer who is slowly losing his sight. And together they discover the fabulous world that they had never seen even with their eyes fully open.

Wonderstruck by the American helmer, Todd Haynes, is a riveting narrative about a man and a woman who run away from home looking for that elusive something which they feel is absent in their lives. Based on Brian Selznick's 2011 novel with the same name, the film has Julianne Moore as one of the principal characters.

### Netflix and Cannes:

Controversy has become such an integral part of a movie festival that without it, one begins to feel somewhat unexcited and even listless.

And the Cannes Film Festival is no stranger to squabbles and strife.

This time around, Cannes has declared a war on Netflix — a mighty entertainment streaming site that is being increasingly patronised by the public and small makers with big dreams. And of all the blazing rows that the Festival has been a part of, the Netflix controversy appears to be the most explosive. Cannes is now pitted against the American film and television giant, and this, as some aver, may well pierce the very heart of the contemporary cinema industry.

A statement issued by the Festival said it would ban Netflix from sending any of its titles to the main Competition — come 2018 — if it did not adhere to French laws.

Netflix, which is organising one of Cannes' biggest parties on May 18, is often seen as caring little for the big screen, because its money-spinner is the small screen. This clashes with rigid French rules — which in order to safeguard the interest of theatre owners, state that movies released in the cinemas cannot be televised for three years. Netflix disagrees with his.

In these days of rampant piracy and illegal downloads — not to forget an audience forever in a hurry to watch the latest fare — Netflix may have a point, which Indian producers, distributors and exhibitors have also been actively mulling over. In Japan, for instance, a film can be shown on television three weeks or so after its theatrical opening.

At Cannes, there are two Netflix movies vying this year for the prestigious Palm d'Or — Okja directed by Bong Joon-ho and The Meyerowitz Stories from Noah Baumbach. Some of the celebrated actors like Tilda Swinton, Emma Thomson and Dustin Hoffman will be seen in these works.

But soon after the Cannes premiere, these two films will be streamed on Netflix. Indians can also watch them or so one is told.

Well, whatever this be, the fact remains that Cannes is serious about not allowing Netflix into the Competition arena again if the company refuses to abide by the French law.

The Cannes statement said: "The Festival de Cannes is aware of the anxiety aroused by the absence of the release in theatres of those movies in France.

"The Festival de Cannes asked Netflix in vain to accept that these two films could reach the audience of French movie theatres and not only its subscribers. Hence the Festival regrets that no agreement has been reached.

"Cannes is pleased to welcome Netflix and its investment in film-making, but the Festival wants to reiterate its support to the traditional mode of exhibition of cinema in France and in the world.

"As a consequence, Cannes has decided to adapt its rules to this unseen situation until now: any movie that wishes to compete in Competition at Cannes will have to commit itself to being distributed in French cinema theatres." The new rule will apply from next year. Despite this, it must be said here that ventures like Netflix have emerged as a boon to the small, struggling filmmaker. Liberal on profits, Netflix does not insist that every work it produces must make money. No regular movie production house will ever agree to this.

And apart from Netflix, houses like Amazon hold out immense promise of a model which gives the freedom for a creative person to play around with his or her ideas, experiment and step into risky terrain. Call it artistic liberty, and rightly so.

*\* Gautaman Bhaskaran will be covering  
the 70th Cannes Film Festival from May 17 to 28, and may be e-mailed  
at gautamanb@hotmail.com*