

Cannes entry for Jodie Foster's Clooney-starrer Money Monster

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The film's poster. Right: Celebrated Japanese director Naomi Kawase will chair the Cinefondation and Short Films Jury at the 69th edition of the Cannes Film Festival.



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By **Gautaman Bhaskaran**

The buzz about the Cannes Film Festival has begun. With the Festival, undoubtedly the queen of all, set to roll on May 11, some of the titles that will or may play there are being tossed around.

Jodie Foster's *Money Monster* with that irresistible George Clooney (last seen in the Berlin opener, *Hail! Cesar*) and Julia Roberts (best known for her earlier *Pretty Woman*, *Sleeping with the Enemy* and *Erin Brockovich*), has got a berth at Cannes, according to *The Hollywood Reporter*. Also, for Roberts, this will be her first ever trip to the Festival with a movie.

Money Monster from the Sony stable will ensure that there is at least one major Hollywood studio in attendance at the French Riviera. Now, arthouse fans will grumble about major film festivals' obsession with big American studios, but rightly or wrongly, it is they who bring in the top stars and the much needed glamour. Every festival needs these as much as they must have in their selections a good package of meaningful titles. Cannes has managed to do this with splendid ease.

Money Monster may not be the opening night movie, but is most likely to screen on May 12, because the Foster thriller will hit the cinemas in North America on May 13.

Foster — whose *Beaver* also debuted at Cannes in 2011 — has worked out a gripping piece of

narrative in *Money Monster* where Clooney portrays a television personality, Lee Gates, (reminded me of Clooney's 2005 historical drama, *Good Night, and Good Luck* where he essays a co-producer of a television show during the early days of broadcast journalism in the 1950s). Gates runs into trouble when he is taken hostage by a viewer (Jack O'Connell), who alleges that he has been ruined financially. Roberts is the executive producer of Gates' show and his lover.

And, it is quite probable that Woody Allen's latest work, untitled as yet, will be part of the Cannes' official selections. It is a romantic comedy set in the 1930s, and stars Jeannie Berlin, Steve Carell, Jesse Eisenberg, Blake Lively, Parker Posey, Kristen Stewart, Corey Stoll and Ken Stott.

A website has this to say about the plot: "A girl and a boy in the most classy years of New York. A father of a girl and a mother of a boy in the deep America". Enough to seduce critics and others to troop into the Cannes' screening.

In any case, Allen is a delightful storyteller, and I have been an avid fan of his cinema, though I have had some problem accepting his sense of justice and fair play. Look at *Match Point*, where the protagonist, a tennis coach, murders his mistress when he finds her inconvenient for his marital happiness and financial status. And the man goes scot free!

Well, be that as it may, Allen has been a real regular at the Riviera. His *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*, *You Will Meet A Tall Dark Stranger*, *Midnight in Paris*, *To Rome with Love* and *Irrational Man* — among a host of others — have been at Cannes.

So, one presumes that Cannes will invite Woody this year too.

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Naomi Kawase

The celebrated Japanese director, Naomi Kawase, will chair the Cinefondation and Short Films Jury at the 69th edition of the Cannes Film Festival.

Kawase is one of those helmers whose career has been closely intertwined with the Festival. In 1997, when she was barely 27 years old, she became the youngest winner of the Festival's Camera d'Or for her movie, *Suzaku* — which sketches the despair of a family in the mountainous region of Nara after a railroad project that was to have employed the father is cancelled leaving him and his dependants in economic depravation.

Kawase's early accolade at Cannes led to still greater recognition. Four of her subsequent films went on to compete for the top Palm d'Or at the Festival: *Shara* in 2003, *The Mourning Forest* in 2007, *Hanezu* in 2011 and *Still the Water* in 2014.

Last year, Kawase's *Sweet Bean* (or *An* in Japanese) opened the A Certain Regard, the most important sidebar of the Festival. Here she focusses on those marginalised by society and how they struggle to find a place under the sun. The work is based on Durian Sukegawa's novel with the same title and it tells the bitter-sweet story of a 76-year-old woman who finds it difficult to get a job because she once had leprosy. However, one fine day, luck smiles and she is employed by a small eatery that specialises in bean paste goodies, and the old woman's recipe is so hot that the shop becomes a great favourite of the locals.

Unlike most of her other movies that were set in Kawase's native Nara, *Sweet Bean* unfolds in Tokyo.

The helmer, who grew up in rural Nara, had an unhappy childhood. Her parents split, her father abandoned her, and she was raised by an aunt with whom she had a love-hate relationship. Two of her documentaries talk about her father and her aunt, who suffered from

dementia in her old age.

Even Kawase's features are pretty autobiographical and they have been heavily inspired by the rural landscape of the hilly Nara and the attitude of the simple folks there.

In 2013, Kawase was part of the Steven Spielberg-chaired international jury at Cannes.

Kawase's work goes beyond direction. In 2010, she opened the International Nara Film School, which helps promote the work of young moviemakers — a commitment that she will be keen to uphold during her presidency of the Cinefondation and Short Films Jury.

As she said in a note soon after she was selected by Cannes this year, "short movies are exceptionally difficult, facing the question of how much of a story can be experienced in their short duration, while they also contain myriad possibilities yet unseen. And among films created by students there will be the discovery of hidden brilliance like a gemstone, which makes me very much look forward to participating in this jury, a journey of adventure."

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