



* *The Great Gatsby* will premiere in the US rather than at this year's Cannes Film Festival. Could this affect its box-office appeal?

Cannes opener not to be world premiere

By Gautaman Bhaskaran

An exciting — if not the most exciting — feature about the Cannes Film Festival is its opening movie. It is invariably a world premiere which none would have seen, except perhaps the film's producers and director. And nobody else could set eyes on it before it screens on the Festival's inaugural day.

Yes, journalists have always had the distinct privilege of watching the opening movie some hours before its gala evening screening, which is held in the presence of a large number of celebrities, including the juries and the film's cast and crew. Of course, by the time this gathering settles in the plush theatre, websites would have carried the first reviews of the movie, including reports of the press conference addressed by the film's director, producer and cast soon after the media screening.

However, Cannes — whose 66th edition will unroll on May 15 — will break this tradition when it opens with Baz Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby*. For the movie will hit North American theatres on May 10, five days before the start of Cannes. The Festival has — at least for the past 10 years — reserved the inaugural slot for a work that has not been shown elsewhere.

And an opening film has usually benefitted enormously from premiering on the glitzy Cannes Croisette (beach front). Movies that have opened the Festival over the past few years are often critically acclaimed and have gone on to be nominated for Oscars, Golden Globes, and other awards. The 2012 opener, Wes Anderson's *Moonrise Kingdom*, bagged

a Best Original Screenplay Oscar nomination and a Best Musical or Comedy Golden Globe nod.

Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*, which kick-started the 2011 Cannes, earned the Best Picture and Best Director Oscar nominations and won the Best Original Screenplay Oscar as well as the Best Screenplay Golden Globe. It also snagged the Best Musical or Comedy and Best Director Golden Globe nods.

The Festival has also earned exciting mileage out of screening a movie on the first night that has not been seen by anybody. For the viewer, including a critic, it has always been such a thrill to watch a work that none had seen before.

But cinema today is a highly commercial venture, and producers/studios are not inclined to gamble on a festival opening slot if they have a chance for an earlier theatrical release. *The Great Gatsby* producer, Warner Brothers, has, according to reports, refused to shift the May 10 date, because the summer is crowded with several of the studio's releases.

And Cannes, on its part, has decided to overlook tradition and run *The Great Gatsby* on May 15. There is a risk in this. If the film is slammed by critics in North America, some of excitement that a Cannes opener generates can disappear.

However, *The Great Gatsby*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Tobey Maguire, Carey Mulligan and Amitabh Bachchan (as Meyer Wolfsheim), will have its international premiere coinciding with the Cannes start date.

A few reasons have been thrown about for Cannes choosing *The Great Gatsby* despite the premiere issue. Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge* opened the Festival in 2001

to favourable reviews (though I had called it “sans soul”). And Francis Scott Fitzgerald — whose iconic novel forms *The Great Gatsby*'s story — wrote the final chapters in a villa close to Cannes.

This is a nostalgic connection.

Festival Director Thierry Fremaux tweeted: “Fitzgerald in his time essentially invented the Cote d'Azur (French Riviera, where Cannes lies) and that the author and his wife were amorous fans of The Carlton Hotel in Cannes as well as the Hotel du Cap in nearby Antibes”.

The movie's illustrious star cast could have been another reason for Cannes' decision. DiCaprio, Maguire and Mulligan among others as well as Luhrmann himself (not to forget Bachchan) will walk the Red Carpet — much to the joy of shutterbugs and guests.

After all, what is a film festival without glitter. Cannes firmly believes in it: even in its jury compositions there is always the glamour quotient. Aishwarya Rai is one example who comes to my mind readily. There was Sharon Stone too once.

Yet, an opening movie without a world premiere tag is unprecedented. Hollywood works which have opened the Festival in recent times — last year's *Moonrise Kingdom*, *Midnight in Paris* (2011), *Robin Hood* (2010), *Up* (2009), *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008) and *The Da Vinci Code* (2006) — were all world premieres.

In 1999, *Star Wars: Episode I — The Phantom Menace*, did not get the opening night slot, despite Cannes being interested in it, because George Lucas and 20th Century Fox decided to premiere it at New York.

The Great Gatsby is therefore all set to create history at Cannes.

It is about the life and times of millionaire Jay Gatsby (DiCaprio) and his neighbour,

Nick (Maguire), who recounts his encounter with Gatsby at the height of the Roaring Twenties, a period marked by a cultural edge in some of the major cities in the West brought about by sustained economic prosperity.

Often general economic wellness produces the urge and mood and climate for increased artistic and cultural activities. We have seen this even in India where years of economic affluence — as in Mughal times and during the earlier Hindu reigns — have led to a great architectural boom. Artistic activities have flourished as well.

The British basket

A “dauntingly large crop” of British movies will reportedly be in the running for Cannes. Two reasons are being cited for this. Incidentally, many UK films are set to pop of the cans in time for Cannes, and British producers/directors no longer seem to be keen on a Berlin launchpad.

Here are some of the movies which one hopes will make it to the Croisette: Jonathan Glazer's *Under The Skin*, Richard Ayoade's second directorial effort, *The Double*, Clio Barnard's *The Selfish Giant*, John Michael McDonagh's *Calvary* and Ben Wheatley's *A Field In England*.

Also attracting a Cannes buzz are films from newcomers — Destiny Ekaragha (*Gone Too Far*) and Paul Wright (*For Those In Peril*).

Then there are the big names like Ralph Fiennes' *The Invisible Woman*; Jonathan Teplitzky's *The Railway Man*; Roger Michell's *Le Weekend*; Stephen Frears' *Philomena*; Lenny Abrahamson's *Frank*; Anton Corbijn's *A Most Wanted Man*; Kevin Macdonald's *How I Live Now*; Ron Howard's *Rush*; Oliver Hirschbiegel's *Diana*; Amma Asante's *Belle*; Pascal Chaumeil's *The Long Way Down*; Ruairi Robinson's *The Last Days On Mars*; Dexter Fletcher's *Sunshine On Leith*; Stuart Murdoch's *God Help The Girl*; Hossein Amini's *The Two Faces of January*; and Richard Raymond's *Desert Dancer*.

Good for Britain, but I thought that this was the year of the country's former colony!

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