



✳ From left: Kate Capshaw, Steven Spielberg, Robert De Niro, Grace Hightower, Daniel Day-Lewis and spouse Rebecca Miller arriving at the 85th annual Academy Awards at the Dolby Theatre at Hollywood & Highland Center in Los Angeles, California last month. Spielberg is returning to Cannes as Jury President after 31 years.

Hollywood to the fore with Spielberg at Cannes

India may be in the limelight at the French film festival

this year, but it could nevertheless get overshadowed by the US, writes **Gautaman Bhaskaran**

India will be the country of focus this year at the Cannes Film Festival. The Festival's 66th edition, which begins on May 15 at the ever scenic French Riviera happily sandwiched between the sea and the mountains, will celebrate 100 years of Indian cinema.

The National Film Festival of India (NFFCI) will be co-sponsoring the Market Party along with Marche Du Film on May 16 that is in many ways a grander affair than the opening night party itself.

For one, the food is far more sumptuous, and with India in the fray there, the spread is bound to be more native and delicious than French and fastidious. In fact, of all the parties and dinners I have attended at Cannes in all these years, it is the Indian get-togethers that have topped a foodie's list of favourites. Even Europeans have agreed with this.

All this is fine, but what about cinema. Is Cannes going to get some sensitive, sensible stuff from India this year? This is, to use a time-worn, cliché, a million dollar question. As a leading Delhi journalist and Cannes veteran quipped the other day, "otherwise, we would be left with camels and elephants ... Do not be surprised to see a camel sharing

a seat next to you on your flight to Cannes!"

Sadly, India has become a joke, a big joke. As much as a foreigner would tell you that he loves Bollywood's song and dance formula, he would invariably rubbish it in private conversations with his own fellowmen. An important reason for this is the overdose of Hindi cinema. Those in charge of selections must accept the blame for this.

Despite my suggestions for a long time to the top brass at Cannes that they visit southern India and see its cinema, it has never happened. These men fly down to Mumbai from Cannes, and watch some Bollywood/Hindi movies before finalising their selections. Somehow, the South finds itself as the poor, neglected cousin of Bollywood and its big bucks.

There can be another reason why Cannes tilts towards Bollywood. Its presentation is very similar to that of Hollywood, and American cinema knows how to narrate a story, how to engage and ensnare you with its superb script, photography, acting and editing. Non-Bollywood films — generally — are poor in all these. Tamil cinema may be high in some areas, but tends to look crude and lacks finesse.

As for Indian art cinema, much of it is

listless and lacks the kind of energy we see in, for instance, a Pedro Almodovar or Ken Loach or Mike Leigh or Steven Spielberg work.

Spielberg's *Lincoln*, a captivating portrait of the man who abolished slavery in the US, is currently a huge success in his own country as well as in France, where it has already been seen by over a million people. The movie got Daniel Day-Lewis his third Oscar for Best Actor. Day-Lewis, who portrays Abraham Lincoln, has accomplished a feat that none has.

Now Spielberg will chair the Festival's top international jury which will give away several Palm d'Ors. He takes over from last year's jury president, Italy's Nanni Moretti.

"As they say across the Atlantic", averred Gilles Jacob, President of the Festival, "Steven Spielberg is a Cannes 'regular': *Sugarland Express*, *Colour Purple*. But it was with *E.T.* that I screened as a world premiere in 1982 that ties were made of the type you never forget. Ever since, I've often asked Steven to be Jury President, but he's always been shooting a film. So when this year I was told "ET, phone home", I understood and immediately replied: "At last!"

Spielberg said: "The memory of my first

Cannes Film Festival, nearly 31 years ago with the debut of *E.T.*, is still one of the most vibrant of my career. For over six decades, Cannes has served as a platform for extraordinary movies to be discovered and introduced to the world for the first time. It is an honour and a privilege to preside over the jury of a Festival that proves, again and again, that cinema is the language of the world."

Spielberg, who was born in Ohio in 1946, was a film enthusiast from a very age. One of his first shorts, *Amblin*, got him through the doors of Universal Television, which produced his first movies. Success came very quickly. *Duel* (1971), originally made for television, proved to be such a hit that a feature length version was released in theatres soon after. And the first movie he made for cinema, *Sugarland Express*, was selected for the Cannes Film Festival in 1974 and won the Best Screenplay prize.

Thereafter, Spielberg had a series of international successes: *Jaws* (1975); *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) and *E.T.* (1982), which closed the Festival.

But it was his 1993 *Jurassic Park* that renewed the Hollywood entertainment genre creating new ties with themes of adventure and sci-fi. The abundant imagination that characterises Spielberg has him say of himself "I dream for a living", a dream that combines boundless curiosity, a delight in innovation and a virtuoso talent for directing.

Spielberg has also surprised us with his more intimate and socially engaging cinema: *The Colour Purple* (1986), *Empire of the Sun* (1987) and *Schindler's List* (1993), which brought him the highest accolades as well as a clutch of Oscars, including one for Best Director. And now, *Lincoln*.

His 40-year career with 27 movies has been an amazing canvas of dream and reality reflecting history, racism, human endurance, hope and peace.

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