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Tokyo Film Festival: Clint Eastwood's Cry Macho is a

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Legendary actor and filmmaker Clint Eastwood's film Cry Macho opened the 34th edition of the Tokyo International Film Festival on Saturday.

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GAUTAMAN BHASKARAN

Forty films later and 91 years young, American actor-director Clint Eastwood seems to be saying never say die, and his latest adventure, set largely in Mexico, Cry Macho, opened the 34th edition of the Tokyo International Film Festival today. With several Oscar nominations and a couple of wins apart from many other awards, Eastwood's work is a road movie and a poignantly sweet one at that. Heart warming and helmed with great care and love, Cry Macho also has him playing the lead. And unlike some of the Indian stars, who are bent on essaying characters much, much younger than their own age (Dev Anand was a classical example), Eastwood does not do that. He is an old man in this Tokyo title, a former Rodeo star, who falls prey to alcohol and drugs after an automobile accident in which he loses his wife and kid. But we are not privy to this, except for a brief passing reference.

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Macho is a hen, a full-grown one that acts as a watch dog to its keeper, teenage Rafo (Eduardo Minett), who had fallen on bad ways after his parents split and come away to Mexico to stay with his mother. But abused by her lovers ("She would bring in a new man every night and expect me to address them as uncle", the teenage boy quips in one of the scenes), he prefers staying out on the streets with his pet Macho, earning money by letting the bird into the cock-fight arena.

After years, his father, a rich Texan ranch owner (Dwight Yoakam), pines for his son and wants him back. And who else does he ask for help but Eastwood's Mike Milo. When he protests — because that would mean literally

kidnapping the boy from his mother, who has a retinue of goons and a police force to back her – the ranch owner says: “You owe this to me, Mike. I gave you a life when you were down”. So, Mike agrees, though rather reluctantly, not quite realising what was waiting to happen.

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Mike crosses the border, meets up with Rafo and cajoles him to come away to America. He tempts the boy with a sweet truth. The father is rich and has lots of horses in a sprawling ranch. The teen loves animals, and we can see that by the way he cares for his hen. “His name is Macho, call him that”, he admonishes Mike during the long and treacherous road trip the two take to cross the border. Chased by the mother’s henchman and cops, the two have quite an eventful run. Their car is stolen, and they land in a small Mexican village and spend the night in a church, when a middle-aged widow, Marta (Natalia Traven), with a few grandchildren running an eatery, spots them and taken them in. Both Mike and Rafo get on famously with the family, and there are some charming sequences, one not so, when the gangsters attack Mike and Rafo. But then Macho, true to its name, comes to the rescue!

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Cry Macho is set in the 1980s, and the screenplay by Nick Schenk and N Richard Nash (based on a 1975 novel by the same name by Nash), has been around since about then. As much as there is an old-world charm about the film, it also appears trapped in some convenient plot points. Mike, despite his age, is actually the Macho. He keeps losing his cars on the journey, but finds another quite easily, and he even manages to strike a punch on one of the bad men. He is quite a handyman: fixes things and even provides veterinary care to some animals in the village. And Marta flips for him.

The rest is easy to guess, but Cry Macho is, at the end, a feel good work. Set in the warm Mexican landscape, it is always on the move, but does not feel hurried or impatient. Fifty years after Eastwood made his debut feature, Play Misty For Me, the man is still in command of his craft. He knows exactly what to do, and where to add the crowd-pleasing lines. And Cry Macho translates into a wonderful exercise in human relationship. Subtle and soft, this title is an absolute treat to watch, and the Festival could not have chosen a better work to herald 10 days of movies and magic.

The film can be watched on BookMyShow Stream.

(Author, Commentator and Movie Critic Gautaman Bhaskaran has covered the Tokyo International Film Festival for several years)

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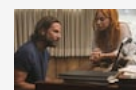
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