

Venice went ahead with an entirely physical version in September – although with fewer titles and a lesser number of delegates. A friend and fellow journalist, Xan Brooks, who writes for The Guardian, told me that Venice was very, very strict with its safety protocol. One could just not remove his mask, even during the screenings.



Cannes is of course a much larger affair with 4500 media men and women alone, and there is a much higher number of industry professionals who throng the Market, arguably the biggest in the world, where millions of dollars worth of buying and selling happens.

In fact, one of the key attractions of the Festival is its Market, and this is of course apart from the films that are screened. The Festival could have made a prince out of a pauper, and vice-versa. Incredibly, the Market has seen growth even during the dark days of depression, such is the love for the magic of movies.



Cannes has often been called the platform for pure cinema, but it has also been the venue where many, many directors were discovered, and the Festival takes great pride in this. Apart from Satyajit Ray whose first work, Pather Panchali, was first appreciated and celebrated in 1956, there were at least two other Indian helmers who also found their place in the world of cinema there. Shaji N. Karun's debut feature Piravi on the infamous Rajan case in Kerala and Mira Nair's Salaam Bombay on street children found its very first admirers on the French Riviera.

I, in my almost 30 years at Cannes, discovered many, many international gems there from Ken Loach to Mike Leigh and Bong Joon-Ho, (whose Parasite went from the Festival to clinch an Oscar in 2020) to Emir Kusturica to Naomi Kawase and dozens of others. I am sure many other Cannes regulars would have found directors they would have never heard of before stepping on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea.



So, it goes that Cannes is very, very important, and although Venice is inching towards the French event, the Italian affair has found itself limited by it lack of a significant market. However, in recent years, Venice has proved to be a useful launch pad for Oscar hopefuls with many titles making it to the Academy Awards.

Finally, one must take note of also two things here. First, the shift in Cannes dates will have a cascading effect on other festivals. For example, the Czech Republic's Karlovy Vary International Film Festival is working towards July 2-10, 2021 dates. Probably, this will have to be pushed forward. But with Venice starting on September 1, Karlovy Vary may well be in a fix.

Second, the UK and much of Europe are reeling under the pandemic with stringent lockdowns in place. North America is also in a deep pit.

The question is will all these countries -- valuable sources of movie production -- shape up to a modicum of normality before Cannes kicks off on July 6? Although the vaccines against the virus have begun to roll and may well make a difference in transmissions rates, none can ignore or brush aside this question mark.

Yes, it may need some sort of miracle to get the world back on its feet in the next few months. And yes, miracles do happen. Let us keep out fingers crossed!

(Gautaman Bhaskaran is a movie critic and author of the biography of Adoor Gopalakrishnan)





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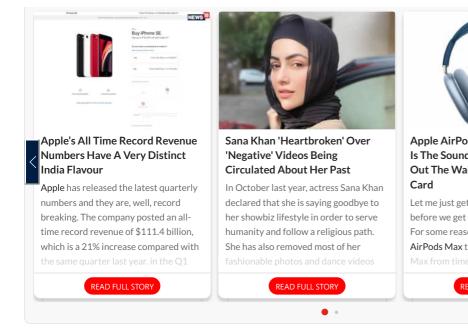
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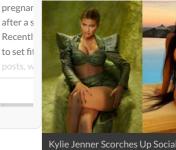
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