

Red Sea Film Festival begins on a note of glamour



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Over the years that I have been covering movie festivals across the globe, I have begun to realise that for an event of this kind to make a mark in the media and among the guests it must have a healthy cocktail of glamour and content. The Venice Film Festival understood this years after it thought it must compete with Cannes – which went big time with allure. And obviously film companies made a beeline for the Festival on the romantic Riviera that saw many hearts unite and break. Grace Kelly was one who found her love there with the Prince of Monaco. There was also scandal as there was unforgettable cinema and parties. In the last few years, Venice, which unfolds on the picturesque island of Lido, has been learning this.

In the Middle East, despite Cairo, which has been around for ages, the festival at Dubai sparkled with its glamour and decent cinema. Abu Dhabi tried but fell a trifle short. Now with both these festivals having closed down, the Red Sea International Film Festival (RSIFF) has picked up this trick, and its fourth edition, which is now on at the Saudi city of Jeddah, surprised me by inviting many actors and actresses. Quite a few from Hollywood and Bollywood (Farhan Akhtar and Aamir Khan to name two).

Apart from celebrities like Spike Lee (who chairs this year’s jury), Emily Blunt, Vin Diesel, Mona Zaki and Aamir Khan (who were given Festival awards), we also had the acclaimed Egyptian director Karim Shenawy (whose *The Tale of Daye’s Family* set the 10-day Festival rolling on Thursday (5 December) along with his cast, Badr Mohamad, Haneen Mohamad, Islam Mubarak and Aseel Omran, as well as producer and writer Haitham Dabbour.

Leewas accompanied by the members of his jury— renowned Egyptian moviemaker Abu Bakr Shawky (*Yomed-dine*), celebrated Turkish actress Tüba Büyüküstün (*Black Money Love, Rosso Istanbul*), Academy Award nominated British actress Minnie Driver (*Good Will Hunting, The Serpent Queen*) and critically acclaimed and veteran actor/producer Daniel Dae Kim (*Lost, Hawaii 5-0, Avatar: The Last Airbender*).

The Tale Of Daye’s Family tells the story of a 11-year-old Nubian boy with albinism, who has a beautiful voice but faces adversity due to his appearance. Abandoned by his father and bullied by peers, he dreams of following his idol, singer and actor Mohamed Mounir. When he gets a chance to audition for ‘The Voice’, Daye and his family begin a journey from Aswan to Cairo that turns into a road of perils.

Jomana-AlRashid, chairwoman Red

Sea Film Foundation, which organises the Festival, said: “We’re thrilled to be welcoming the global film community to our New Home of Film in Al Balad as we celebrate the beginning of the RSIFF. Tonight’s ceremony highlights captivating movie-making from the Arab region in our opening night film, alongside the impact and work of our three trailblazing Honourees. Our Foundation’s key aim is to elevate moviemaking from across the Arab, African and Asian regions by providing support through our Fund, Souk and Labs, and a global stage with our festival, and we’re looking forward to diving into our programme that will screen 122 projects from 85 countries in 49 languages from a host of exciting and talented filmmakers.”

Mohammed Asseri, interim CEO of the Red Sea Film Foundation added: “It’s been an incredible experience to kick off the proceedings of our fourth edition, my first as acting CEO, with *The Tale Of Daye’s Family* this evening. The film is a poignant and compelling result of a collaboration between Saudi Arabia and Egypt, encapsulating the power of connection and cultural exchange and underscoring our commitment to showcasing the best of Arab cinema.”

The writer is a senior movie critic and author, who is covering the Red Sea International Film Festival

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