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Curtains come down on DIFF

ZOE SINCLAIR (Staff Reporter)

18 December 2007

Stars walked down the red carpet, movies from all corners of the world were screened and ideas exchanged as another edition of Dubai International Film Festival came to a close here



EIGHT DAYS of red carpet glamour, celebrities and beautiful movies brought the Dubai International Film Festival (DIFF) to a close on Sunday evening with the controversial movie *The Kite Runner* and its Afghan stars.

DIFF began with sparkle and ceremony as some of the world cinema's finest stars, including George Clooney, Sharon Stone and Gloria Estefan strode the red carpet on the opening night on December 9.

Through the week, an amfAR (Aids research foundation) event at Bab al Shams drew Michelle Yeoh, Dita von Teese, Rachel Bilson, Hayden Christensen, Kenneth Cole and host Sharon Stone, and later in the week the Madinat Jumeirah saw a parade of Indian stars; Naseerudin Shah, Rahul Bose, Mira Nair, Shabana Azmi and Arab stars; Sayed Badreya, Tony Shaloub, Amin Matalqa, Mohammed Khan,

impress their fans as they too walked the red carpet and spoke of their latest endeavours.

Gala screenings including Michael Clayton, AmericanEast, Whatever Lola Wants, Aids Jaago and The Darjeeling Limited saw Dubai residents turn out in their finest to mingle with the stars and be the first in the Middle East to see the acclaimed movies.

But DIFF was also an opportunity for smaller scale movies albeit with a big heart through programmes such as The Cultural Bridge, The Cinema of Asia, The Cinema of Africa and The Cinema of the World.

Screen on the Green and Rhythm and Reels, held at Dubai Media City Amphitheatre were popular with Dubai residents who turned out to see films including Emilio Estefan's 90 Millas followed by a performance from Gloria Estefan which proved a big hit, and Across the Universe on Saturday evening.

Stories from across the world

When the Road Bends... Tales of a Gypsy Caravan was one of those films shown at Screen on the Green and director Jasmine Dellal spoke about her movie during DIFF.

Dellal said that an old fantasy and romantic notion of the gypsies still existed but also that this was accompanied by prejudice against the Romani people.

Drawing the audience in with Gypsy music from around the world, Dellal told the tale of the gypsy



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people, their troubles and their common culture.

Dellal also could draw from her many backgrounds including Iraqi, American and English but questioned, "When do we get to be seen as a human rather than a label?"

For others like the crew behind *Surya*, from *Eloquence to Dawn*, a film which traces a tale from different storytellers across ten countries from Belgium to Vietnam, the message of 'Bridging Cultures Meeting Minds' should be approached without the barrier of a concept.



Horse symbolism

But it was Ning Cai, director of *Season of the Horse*, who possibly best put his finger on the pulse of DIFF.

The well-known actor in China, grew up in Mongolia where his parents were nomadic herdsman and he saw first hand the gradual deterioration of his culture as modernisation and urbanisation encroached.

His movie, *Season of the Horse*, was an exploration of the horse and its health representing the health of Mongolian culture.

In the movie Cai plays the role of a stubborn herdsman who eventually recognises the lack of grazing land and sells his horse as an attraction in a noisy discotheque.

"The Mongolian horse symbolises the people's energy but now the horse's mind has become a little confused and disturbed, so it has also hibernated," he said.

Fascinated by the DIFF motive, an Arabian horse, he hoped Dubai's culture would keep strong with cinema playing a vital role in this.

As the audience gave *The Kite Runner* a resounding applause, despite the movie dealing with the controversial topic of homosexual rape, some in the audience rose to their feet to cheer the actors, author and child Afghan actors one more time. DIFF thus closed a resounding success and true to its motto.

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