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Miffed Over MIFF in Moscow

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By Andrei Muchnik

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A couple dozen people crowded at the entrance to the movie hall where the screening of "Marie and the Misfits," a French dramedy and one of the competitors in the official program of the Moscow International Film Festival (MIFF) was about to begin. The heat was stifling and the organizers kept saying that there were not enough seats for everyone. Some people left, but others kept waiting and were rewarded with a chance to sit on one of the steps.

Then a commotion erupted: a French jury member's seat was occupied. The person who took his place didn't speak English or French, and the jury member kept grumbling "merde." After an intervention from organizers, the jury member reclaimed his rightful seat, but everyone felt somewhat unwelcome.

The festival closed last Thursday, and the main winners were Iranian director Reza Mirkarimi, who received the top Golden George award for "The Daughter"; Farhad Aslani, who played

the main role inthe same movie and won the best actor award; and fifteen-year-old Therese 'Teri' Malvar, who won best actress for her performance in Ralston Jover's "Hamog."

I have to confess that I have not seen these movies; I gave up on MIFF after two days. It was just too hard to deal with. Take the pass system: There were several types of passes, which gave the holder access to a certain number of tickets, but they were almost impossible to redeem because there was always a line at the press center. Moscow is a big city, but do we really have that many journalists writing about cinema?

Then there was the schedule, which often had little to do with reality. I came to see one movie only todiscover that it was being shown in the Chopard VIP lounge, decorated in black with massive security guards hovering over tables covered with caviar hors-d›oeuvres. I was told the screening was byinvitation only. Too bad the schedule didn't say that.

As a result, there is very little international coverage apart from photos from the opening and closing and a list of winners. This year's coverage focused on Daniel Radcliffe of "Harry Potter" fame lying down on the red carpet in front of Rossiya concert hall, reprising his most recent role of a corpse.

At this point, MIFF's concept and agenda are not clear. There are hardly any world premieres of foreign films, but the festival is not trying to promote Russian cinema to an international audience either. There are too many special programs with names like "Sex, Food, Culture, Death" and various retrospectives that eclipse the main competition.

Once MIFF was attended by stars like Federico Fellini and Elizabeth Taylor and was a real event in the world of cinema. Now it's a minor event even by Russian standards. Maybe by next year the organizers will decide what they want the festival to be — and hire better administrators.

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