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Oscar Contender Andrei Zvyagintsev Feted in Hollywood

By Ali Sar

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Director Andrei Zvyagintsev and Producer Alexander Rodnyansky on the red carpet at the Hollywood AFI Festival. **Ali Sar / MT**

HOLLYWOOD--Not many foreign film directors are easily recognized at public events here. But an exception is Russian moviemaker Andrei Zvyagintsev.

At the American Film Institute's annual festival fans approach him for his autograph, ask to take pictures with him and compliment him on his work.

A newspaper reviewer showers him with praise for "The Return," one of Zvyagintsev's earlier films. He definitely seems to enjoy this popularity.

The Moscow native is here with his producer Alexander Rodnyansky introducing audiences to "Loveless," their current drama representing Russia in the upcoming Oscar and Golden Globes competitions.

Unlike Zvyagintsev's "Leviathan," this film hasn't been harshly condemned by authorities. It slyly critiques his home country as it focuses on the failed institutions in and of the Russian state.

When asked about financial support of his projects from Russian arts and culture agencies, he smiles and asks The Moscow Times, "You're kidding, right?"

The Golden Globe-winning drama "Leviathan," which was strongly attacked by authorities, was an Oscar favorite until the last moment of the contest.

"We have a shot at capturing the Oscar this time," Rodnyansky told The Moscow Times, adding, "We came very close with our previous entry 'Leviathan'."

"Loveless" screened for a packed opening audience at the American Film Institute gala with both Zvyagintsev and Rodnyansky introducing the film and later interacting with the audience.

"We strongly believe that while Andrei is a true Russian artist, his work is universal. 'Loveless' speaks about the most universal values of humanity, about love and family as well as about the state of lovelessness that seems to plague every society nowadays," Rodnyansky told the audience.

The story revolves around a Russian couple going through a bitter divorce. They are temporarily brought together after their 12-year-old son goes missing.

The film has been critically-acclaimed at various European venues. "It grossed more than $2 million in Russia," Zvyagintsev said.

The Russian director's exposure to North American audiences will continue when a retrospective at MoMA (New York's Museum of Modern Art) will celebrate the prolific filmmaker's career.

The showings will include "The Return," "The Banishment," "Elena," "Leviathan" and "Loveless" as well as three short subjects, he told The Moscow Times.

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