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A Moscow Film Festival to Remember

An ode to Harvey Weinstein and other surprises

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Festival head Nikita Mikhalkov talking about life, cinema, and the matriarchy. **Courtesy of MIFF**

The 40th Moscow International Film Festival (MIFF) was held in April this year to avoid the crush of the World Cup in June and July.

This wasn't the only novelty of the festival. Audiences heard bizarre speeches, watched surprising new versions of old films, and saw films from a country that had never participated in MIFF before.

Harvey Weinstein and the Matriarchy

The first notable event was the press-conference by Nikita Mikhalkov, the festival's president. After a rather standard run-down on the films in the festival —212 movies from 67 countries for 21 competitions and special programs — and a welcoming speech to first-time MIFF participant Sri Lanka, Mikhalkov launched into a speech about the future of film-

making.

“I think the era of the matriarchy lies ahead. More and more highly professional films are being made by women directors. And they touch upon problems that may be unfamiliar to men. They are told from the point of view of women,” Mikhalkov said.

And then he immediately expressed his complete support for producer Harvey Weinstein, accused of harassment by dozens of Hollywood actresses.

“I can only envy Weinstein. When you don't have the looks of Alain Delon but are loved by such beautiful women...I'm not saying what they loved him for, but this whole situation is obscene. A woman does it when she looks good, and then, when she loses her box office appeal, she uses the incident to remind people about her... it is very unpleasant,” he said.

Mikhalkov also said that three months before he had wanted to give an award to Weinstein for his contribution to world cinema. “He has had a hundred nominations for Oscars and gotten a few dozens of statues. But we decided not to do it,” Mikhalkov said.

Special Programs That Were Truly Special

This year the special programs were the most popular parts of the festival.

At the main venue — the Oktyabr Theater complex — there was always a long line in front of the hall where the Ingmar Bergman retrospective was being held. Meanwhile, the big hall reserved for the main competition films – movies released in the last year – often remained half-empty.

The most original screening was at the Tretyakov Gallery. The film was “Prostitute" by Oleg Frelikh, a black and white silent film made in 1926. An international band of two Norwegians and one Russian musician accompanied the film with electronic music, an analogue violin, percussion and melodic female vocals. It made the film suspenseful at the right moments and seemed to wrap the audience in its hazy sound.

And it worked. The characters got a new lease on life thanks to this modern and complex musical accompaniment. The group will repeat their performance at the Rodina Cinema in St. Petersburg on Friday (May 4).

The Envelopes, Please

The jury for the main competition was headed by the Italian producer Paolo del Brocco this year. Jury members were Russian director Anna Melikyan, American actor John Savage — who starred in the recent Russian basketball drama “Three Seconds” — German actress Nastassja Kinski and Chinese director Lyan Tsiao.

The French actor Samy Naceri, famous for his roles in the “Taxi” franchise, headed the short film jury. He told the audience that he’d been living in Russia for the last ten months working on plans to shoot a comedy called “Crab” about a prison warden.

Last October Naceri, who has a criminal past himself, visited a detention center for juveniles in Simferopol (Crimea) to try to inspire teenagers to change their lifestyle.

The best film award went to the Russian entry “The Lord Eagle” by Eduard Novikov. It tells the story of an old couple in the taiga of Yakutia in the 1930s. One day an eagle lands at their house, and the old couple don’t have the heart to chase it away. The bird ends up living in their home next to their icons.

Alexander Kott was awarded the prize for best director for his drama “Spitak” about the deadly earthquake in Armenia 30 years ago that left 25,000 dead and half a million homeless. Music for the film was composed by Serj Tankian, former front-man of the band System of a Down who now creates soundtracks.

Yang Ge received the special jury prize for her debut “Nu” about searching love and sex in Moscow. Kieran Charnock was named best actor for his role in New Zealand's “Stray.” Giovanna Mezzogiorno received the best actress award for her work in the Italian film “Naples in Veils.”

“The Cleaners,” a German-Brazilian co-production, got the prize for the best documentary, and another co-production, the Palestinian-Lebanese film “Bonbone” (Candy), was winner in the best short film category.

The much-beloved actor Oleg Tabakov, who passed away this year, was posthumously awarded a prize in recognition of his outstanding contribution to world cinema And Nastassja Kinski was awarded a special prize for outstanding achievement in acting and devotion to the principles of the Stanislavsky's school.

And then Mikhalkov and del Brocco clapped the clapperboard with the number 40 and officially closed the festival.

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