



For Immediate Release

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Tiger Award winner heads feature line-up

Six feature films from six countries will compete for Best Narrative Feature at the 12th Bermuda International Film Festival, March 20-28. Tickets for the Festival go on sale March 11 both online at www.biff.bm and at the BIFF Box Office at 53 Front Street, Hamilton.

An international panel of jurors – to be announced next week - will choose the winner of the Mary-Jean Mitchell Green Award for Best Narrative Film which also carries a \$5,000 cash award. The award is open to first- or second-time feature directors. The six films are also eligible for the \$3,000 Bacardi Audience Choice Award, as voted by filmgoers.

Among the contenders are *Be Calm and Count to Seven* by Ramtin Lavafipour of Iran which won one of the three coveted VPRO Tiger Award at the recent International Film Festival in Rotterdam, Holland.

Moscow, Belgium, a Flemish-Dutch film by Turkish director Christophe Van Rompaey, won three awards at International Critics Week 2008 in Cannes, including Best Screenplay and the Grand Rail D'Or for Best Film.

Cold Lunch is a strong debut from Norwegian Eva Sørhaug that won the The Slovak Television Award at the 2008 Bratislava International Film Festival, Slovakia.

The line up is completed by three critically-acclaimed films from the Bahamas (*Rain*), Sweden (*Ciao Bella*), and Canada (*West Of Pluto*).

Festival Director Aideen Ratteray-Pryse: “This year’s features line-up is particularly impressive with films that have shown strongly at many of the world’s major film festivals such as Berlin, Rotterdam, Toronto and Venice. We’re delighted to be able to bring films of this quality to Bermuda and we’re sure local audiences will enjoy what are six of the best independent features currently on the international festival circuit. Take advantage of this

opportunity to see *Be Calm and Count to Seven*, which is banned in Iran and, also, take note of a “first” for BIFF – a film from Bahamas.”

The six features in competition at BIFF are:

Be Calm and Count to Seven

(d. Ramtin Lavafipour, Iran, 89 minutes)

Farsi with English subtitles

This lyrical first feature, shot in a style of documentary realism that is poignant and, at times, gently humorous, tells the intertwined stories of inhabitants of a remote fishing village in southern Iran. With no fish left in the sea, the villagers smuggle goods and sometimes people. Teenager Moto’s father has left on a smuggling trip and not yet returned. To help his pregnant mother and a sister who, it emerges, was abandoned by her husband, Moto smuggles too. This involves wild speeding boats that are beached recklessly so that silent chador-clad women can unload and hide the goods – just ahead of chasing police! Meanwhile, the middleman keeps a casual eye on Moto, while engaging in increasingly worrisome phone calls with his wife in Tehran. Just as village life is in transition, Moto is changing and maturing too. He stops waiting and fatefully decides to seek his father. *Be Calm and Count to Seven* is an accomplished observation of life and character that will grab your attention and tug at your heart.

Ciao Bella

(d. Mani Masserat-Agah, Sweden, 91 minutes)

Swedish with English subtitles. *Film contains nudity and teen sexuality.*

Charming and full of humour, this delightful romantic comedy by first-time director Mani Masserat-Agah focuses on Swedish attitudes towards immigrants and foreigners with a funny and thought-provoking story about young love, sex, ethnicity and the fear of being an outsider.

Like the director, Mustafa (Poyan Karimi) is a Swede born in Iran. Still a virgin at 16, his prospects don’t look good when his girlfriend leaves him -- and he often hears casually racist remarks directed his way. His salvation comes in the form of the Italian team visiting the big youth soccer tournament in Gothenburg.

Accepted into their fold, he re-invents himself – and is suddenly a girl magnet. Meanwhile, beautiful Linnea (Chanelle Lindell) is desperately searching for a stylish and passionate guy like those she met on holiday in Italy. Who knows what would have become of her had she not met Massimo, the most romantic Italian in the world?

Cold Lunch

(d. Eva Sørhaug, Norway, 90 minutes)

Norwegian with English subtitles

Eva Sørhaug's memorable debut feature follows a disparate group of characters in Oslo. *Lonsj* (Cold Lunch) takes an unflinching yet compassionate look at what happens when a social safety net collapses for reasons other than poverty or neglect. In fact, all of the film's characters come from middle-class – or at least comfortable – homes. Like the creations of Todd Solondz and Lucrecia Martel, Sørhaug's characters are largely moral idiots, surrendering responsibility for their own actions. But even when their behaviour is appalling, it still possesses a grim humour. All of them are fabulously ill-equipped to deal with the circumstances into which they have been thrust. But it is ultimately Heidi's abject failure as a parent that is most troubling. Directing with a maturity rarely seen in a first feature, Sørhaug deftly balances a critical view of her own characters with considerable empathy. We never lose sight of these troubled souls' basic humanity. We may not like them that much, but we recognise each one of them.

Moscow, Belgium

(d. Christophe Van Rompaey, Turkey, 102 minutes)
Flemish-Dutch with English subtitles

Belgium has a reputation for dullness (*In Bruges*) but this delightful film also proves that it's a place where unlikely love can flourish. Sometimes you just have to love a crotchety middle-aged woman, especially when she's played with the kind of salty charm Barbara Serafian injects into Matty, the conflicted heroine of the smart, touching *Moscow, Belgium*. Working a menial job, raising three kids and waiting for her husband to snap out of his mid-life crisis, Serafian's Matty is a pissed-off spitfire who spews bile at nearly everybody she meets, particularly eccentric truck driver Johnny (Jurgen Delnaet), who accidentally dings her car. Matty's verbal assault on Johnny is comic gold that borders on the cruel, which sparks Johnny's interest despite Matty being 10 years his senior.

What follows is a sweet mix of comic romance and family drama that never fully veers into the conventional trappings that typically make such descriptions induce cringes. The two leads have infinite chemistry, and both Serafian and Delnaet deliver charismatic performances that skimp neither on laughs or genuine emotion. The characters register because they feel real, and what we get is a pleasing story of lost souls finding their paths, a warts-and-all look at love, and a cantankerous old broad for the ages.

Rain

(d. Maria Govan, Bahamas, 93 minutes)

Rain is a young teenager who was raised by her grandmother in the Bahamas. . When the elderly woman dies, Rain seeks out her mother in Nassau. The boat passage that carries the young heroine from her island serenity to the inner-city is both literal and metaphorical. Upon landing in Nassau's harbour, Rain meets her mother Glory (Nicki Micheaux) for the first time. The realities of both her new home and new caregiver are so far from those of her former idyll that it takes time to adjust. Glory is no longer the young, ambitious girl at the top of her academic class, but a drug addict living in The Graveyard, an area from which “no one ever

gets out”. With a strong visual aesthetic and an even stronger cast, Rain shakes off our postcard perceptions of Bahamian life to show us the beauty and dark complexity that lies between Ragged Island and the Nassau few tourists see. That it does this with depth, delicacy and nuance makes for a rewarding audience experience, and marks Govan as a talent to watch.

West of Pluto

(d. Henry Bernadet and Myriam Verreault, Canada, 95 minutes)

French with English subtitles

West of Pluto is a zany and dramatic portrait of 24 hours in the lives of 12 teenagers living in the suburbs of Quebec City. On a day when the kids are giving hilarious class presentations on their hobbies, Pierre-Olivier is coming to grips with the fact that Pluto has lost its status as a planet; Jerome is trying to express his feelings for the girl he loves; Nicolas and Steve are attempting to name their hopeless punk band; Emilie is organising a party for the girls that you just know is headed for disaster. In this mix are all the things teens experience for the first time: infatuation, drugs, sex and alcohol. In a raw and authentic manner – probably because the filmmakers auditioned and improvised with students from their old high school, rather than trained actors – the kids are confronted with the opinions they have about themselves, their friends and their situations. *West of Pluto* is funny, sad and very real.

Tickets to BIFF 2009 will go on sale March 11 at 10 a.m. both online at http://www.biff.bm/box_office/tickets.html as well as at the Festival’s physical box office, at 53 Front Street, Hamilton (next door to MAC). Tickets for UnWrapped!, the Festival launch party featuring hot Manhattan band Peculiar Gentlemen and Sugar Shack Burlesque, will also go on sale on March 11.

The mission of the Bermuda International Film Festival is to advance the love of independent film from around the world, and create a community welcoming to filmmakers and filmgoers.

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