

cinema



* Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris* is likely to make headlines at Cannes 2011... especially as it stars French first lady Carla Bruni-Sarkozy (seen here a scene from the film with Owen Wilson).

Cannes spells out its charms

By Gautaman Bhaskaran

Once upon a time, the Cannes Film Festival seduced thousands through not just the sun and surf, but also gloss and glamour. Often, these diverted and distracted attention from the event's dark patches. And some of the sheen and shimmer were so salacious that the black clouds over the French Riviera parted to let the rays of the summer sun shoo away the gloom.

As for instance, in the 1950s when a young bikini clad Brigitte Bardot frolicked on the beach with Kirk Douglas, the paparazzi had a virtual feast on their camera rolls. It was Jane meeting Tarzan all right. A greater feed for the gossip columns was starlet Simone Silva in a transparent top and a mini skirt running into the arms of Robert Mitchum, who was in the middle of a photo shoot.

Cannes does not need a Simone to tease, for it now strips something else to get thousands of people into Cannes every year, a whopping 4,500 alone being men of the media!

It peels skin off information, letting us peep into one layer at

a time. The 'disrobing' begins as early as January for a festival that opens mid-May.

Three months ago, we were told that the renowned American actor (director and producer as well), Robert De Niro, will head the Cannes jury for its 64th edition running from May 11 to 22. He will be the third American since 2008 to be placed on that chair: Sean Penn in 2008 and Tim Burton in 2010 were the other two.

Though one may argue that Cannes is getting increasingly Americanised, it would be difficult to run down any one of these three jury presidents, certainly not on grounds of merit.

Let us take De Niro. Two of his movies won the coveted Palm d'Or, Cannes' top prize. They were Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* in 1976 and a decade later, *The Mission* helmed by Roland Joffe. De Niro is a brilliant performer, and his amazing method-style helped him portray a character with conviction.

In two of his most famous transformations he put on 60 pounds as boxer Jake La Motta in Scorsese's *Raging Bull*, and lost all his fat to play the mean looking

psychopath also in Scorsese's *Cape Fear*.

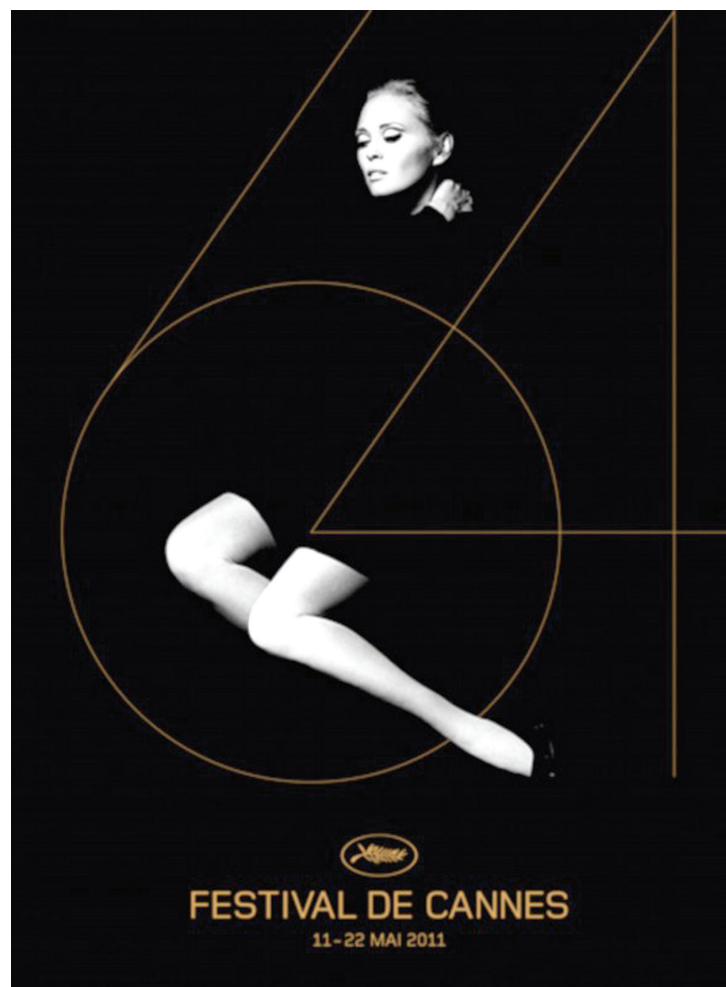
With a couple of Oscars to his credit, and eight of his films having screened at Cannes, he has, all his life, worked for perfection. He learnt to drive a taxi and play the saxophone, and got into the skin of a sexually charged, jealous boxer whose anger pushed him beyond the ring.

Away from cinema, De Niro has not had much excitement. Except for one (maybe more that we do not know about) messy scandal he got into at Paris in 1998, when he was questioned about his possible involvement in a prostitution affair. He denied it, and asked what was wrong even if he were to have had paid sex. He swore never to return to France. He gave back his Legion of Honour and asked his friends to stay away from the Festival.

But time heals, and De Niro returns to Cannes. Triumphantly.

Soon after the announcement of De Niro being appointed the jury president came the news of the opening movie.

It will be Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*, and a high point of it will be Carla Bruni's part in it. The French First Lady has always raised eyebrows, and when Allen was shooting his film in Paris, the papers were filled with all kinds



* The official poster of the Cannes Film Festival this year.

of news about her. Some said she gave the diminutive director from Manhattan a tough time. He pooh-pooed that.

Whatever be the truth, I am sure *Midnight in Paris* would arrive on Cannes's beachfront, Croisette, with pulsating exhilaration. It is bound to be a high-profile opener with French President Nicolas Sarkozy, probably watching his wife on the screen. But the paparazzi better behave itself, for Sarkozy is known to lose his cool, particularly in matters concerning Carla.

Allen's bond with Cannes goes way back. The Brooklyn-born helmer presented *Manhattan* out of competition in 1979. Since then, he has had 10 pictures at Cannes, including the 2005 *Match Point*, the 2008 *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* and last year's *You Will Meet a Tall Dark Stranger*. He won the Festival's international critics' prize in 1985 for *The Purple Rose of Cairo*.

Midnight in Paris, which was shot last year in the romantic French capital, brings together a broad international cast, including Owen Wilson, Rachel McAdams and Marion Cotillard, as well as Kathy Bates, Adrien Brody, Carla Bruni-Sarkozy, Gad Elmaleh and Léa Seydoux.

In recent years, Allen has been paying tributes to different cities. His gripping, though somewhat morally and legally debased *Matchpoint* was shot in London, capturing the flavour and essence of the city's stiff upper-lipped elite class.

We saw in it how a tennis player's craving to be part of this group led him to crush his love.

Vicky Cristina Barcelona, set in the sunny Spanish city, sat more lightly on our shoulders, taking us though the lives of four people — an artist and his fiery wife and two

young tourists. It was truly a fun work.

"*Midnight in Paris* is a wonderful love letter to Paris", declared Thierry Frémaux, the Festival's artistic director. "It's a movie in which Woody Allen takes a deeper look at the issues raised in his last films: our relationship with history, art, pleasure and life. His 41st feature reveals once again his inspiration."

The movie about a family travelling to Paris on business has Carla playing a museum director.

And, now for yet another layer being stripped off. A buzz has been created as a run up to the official announcement of the films to play at Cannes.

The European probables are Denmark's Lars von Trier with *Melancholia*, Belgium's Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne with *The Kid With a Bike*, Italy's Nanni Moretti with *We Have a Pope*, Italian director Paolo Sorrentino with *This Must Be the Place*, Finland's Aki Kaurismäki with *Le Havre* and Scotland's Lynne Ramsay with *We Need To Talk About Kevin*.

From America, we could have Gus Van Sant with *Restless* and Terrence Malick with *Tree of Life*.

The other favourites are Philippine director Brillante Mendoza with *Captured*, Turkish Nuri Bilge Ceylan with *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia*.

Finally, what about India? An eerie silence that will be broken on April 14 when Frémaux's press conference in Paris will strip the last layer off the festival, which runs from May 11 to 22.

(Gautaman Bhaskaran will be covering the Cannes Film Festival for the 21st year this May, and may be contacted at gautamanbhaskaran@yahoo.in)