

# cinema



\* Austrian director Michael Haneke (centre) with French actors Emmanuelle Béart (left) and Jean-Louis Trintignant after being awarded with the Palme d'Or for his film *Amour* (Love) at the 65th Cannes film festival on Sunday.

## Rain-soaked Cannes saves itself with great films

By Gautaman Bhaskaran

**T**he Cannes Film Festival threw a couple of surprises this time. In all my 22 years that I have been at Cannes, I do not remember seeing the city battered so heavily by rain and wind.

Seven days out of the 12 that the festival stretched to were so wet that it literally took the zing out of the world's most celebrated movie showcase. With the famed Red Carpet soaked to its skin, so to say, stars, though protected by a canopy of plastic and giant umbrellas, could not quite get their poses right for the shutterbugs. Even the big awards night was not spared, with thunder and lightning adding to discomfort and gloom.

But, the redeeming feature of the festival was not just great cinema but also recognition for it. In many years, the jury, led by the master Italian director, Nanni Moretti, saw eye-to-eye with critics. The favourites of the key-punchers were also the picks of the jurors, at least largely so.

Critically acclaimed films — *Amour* (Love), *The Hunt* and *Beyond the Hills* — clinched several prizes. Austrian helmer Michael Haneke's *Amour* took the top Palm d'Or for Best Picture, and deservedly so.

*Amour* is certainly his most tender, though no less discomfiting than his earlier works. Obviously so, for it directly talks about ageing, disease and death, reminding us, sometimes gently, sometimes harshly, about our own mortality. In a dramatically unexpected end, Haneke's movie may be throwing up ideas for those in a predicament similar to the lead couple.

George and Anne are elderly musicians absolutely devoted to each other, a devotion that continues when she falls seriously ill and is paralysed. George knows that it can only be

downhill after this, and though he is attentive and caring, his final act will come as a shock to audiences — the Haneke touch, cold and cruel, but brilliantly executed.

Haneke said in one of his interviews that "My impression is that it's something that is dealt with, though more as a political theme — there have been several films and TV shows about the fate of the elderly. I didn't do this because I thought it was an important theme, although of course it is. I make my movies because I'm affected by a situation, by something that makes me want to reflect on it, that lends itself to an artistic reflection. I always aim to look directly at what I'm dealing with. I think it's a task of dramatic art to confront us with things that in the entertainment industry are usually swept under the rug".

Yet, *Amour* is not as dark as some of Haneke's earlier films. His 1997 *Funny Games* could not have had a more misleading title. It was just not funny. A psychological thriller in which two boys play sadistic games with the lives of a holidaying German family, the work caused utmost revulsion. Even at Cannes, where it was seen by seasoned and hardened critics, the movie led some to puke! Such was its power to churn our insides out. Haneke's 2009 *The White Ribbon* in black and white was also a black tale — about a northern German village just before World War I whose community hides beneath its veneer of respectability unmistakable traces of political and religious terrorism, seeds that ultimately led to the great catastrophe. The film won the Palm d'Or.

The Jury Prize went to yet another critics' favourite, Ken Loach's *The Angels' Share*. The highly regarded British director has screened 11 of his films at Cannes. No other helmer holds this record. What is more, all his 11 movies played in the coveted Competition, with his 2006 *The Wind that Shakes the*

*Barley* clinching the top Palm d'Or. Loach has made comedies like *Looking for Eric*, thrillers like *Hidden Agenda* and *Route Irish*, and epic period pieces like *Land and Freedom* and *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*. His stories have been gripping and driven by endearing characters.

This year, his *The Angels' Share* was part of the 22-film Competition lineup. This movie, coming out of a partnership between Loach and writer Paul Laverty, is one of the best from the director's stable. It is warm, it is witty and, despite the moral issues it throws up that I had a problem with, *The Angels' Share* ends on a note of hope and happiness. About Britain's generation of young men and women struggling to find their bread and butter, Loach's work often seems like a fairy tale that ends well. And it is peppered with delightful humour, sweet sentiment and fair play. As one critic said "*The Angels' Share* deftly balances heartbreak and hilarity to offer a cheering, feel good ray of hope from what often seem like the bleakest of lives."

One of these lives is Robbie (wonderfully performed by newcomer Paul Brannigan). He easily flies off the handle, shirks responsibility and has always been made to feel that he is no good. But there comes one defining moment, so to say, in his life, when he becomes a father. The girl is not his wife, but he loves her. Sentenced to community service for a vicious assault, Robbie meets a kind hearted social worker, who introduces the young man to the joys of fine malt whisky. Robbie discovers he has a talent to spot the subtle nuances of the drink, and in what appears like the good fortune of fate, life shows him a way out of his dreary and desperate state.

Also on the critics' hot list, Mads Mikkelsen won the best actor trophy for playing a schoolteacher falsely accused of molesting his friend's little girl in Thomas

## A waste of money?

**N**ow for some brutal attack, reported in *The Times of India*. Producer Sheetal Talwar has described the India Pavillion and the India Party (with the tag Incredible India) "as a farce and waste of the Indian government's precious money."

Talwar avers: "We're a joke at Cannes. Every year we hear of this or that film going to Cannes. The fact is, hardly any Indian movie ever makes it to the competitive section. Even this year, apart from Ashim Ahluwalia's *Miss Lovely* (which screened in the A Certain Regard section), the other films that you hear about being at Cannes are outside the official lineup (Anurag Kashyap's *Gangs of Wasseypur* and Vasanth Bala's *The Peddlers*). You only have to go through Cannes' official programme to realise the truth of what I am saying."

Talwar was truly disgusted by the splurging at the India Party. "Every year I come here and I see the Indian government's money being wasted by the so-called Indian Pavilion. What does this pavilion achieve every year at Cannes? According to me, zilch. Every year members of the Indian movie industry travel business class to Cannes, party with one another and go back without making any difference to global cinema... The National Film Development Corporation of India funds the India Party. I believe they spend Rs1 crore [Rs10mn] on the party alone. What does the party achieve in terms of getting us global recognition?"

Talwar's ranting — though not far off the mark — was drowned by the sound of hundreds of "ghungrus" (anklet bells) that the corporation gave away as gifts. Probably it wanted the sweet chime of the bells to assuage the anger that some felt at the way India conducts itself at Cannes.



\* Ken Loach with the Jury Prize for his film *The Angels' Share*.

Vinterberg's highly praised *The Hunt* (written about in my earlier column). The Best Actresses (sharing the prize) were Cosmina Stratan and Christina Flutur in Cristian Mungiu's *Beyond the Hills* (also discussed earlier), set in a remote monastery, where one of the girls tries to draw her best friend away from the monastic life. Mungiu also won the Best Screenplay Award.

What disappointed critics was the Grand Prize for Matteo Garrone's *Reality* (from Italy about the current obsession with achieving celebrity status), and the Best Director Award to Mexico's Carlos Reygadas for *After Darkness, Illumination*.

The question is, was Moretti under some kind of compulsion to give at least one prize to an Italian work?

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