

# cinema



\* Samuel John who plays the main role of Melu in the Punjabi film *Anhey Ghorhey Da Daan*, to be shown at the Venice Film Festival.

## The news on the Rialto

Venice's Lido will soon transform into an isle of magic and movies, writes **Gautaman Bhaskaran**

India seems to be out of the radar of major film festivals in Europe. If the nation of a billion-plus population and a thousand-plus-movies-a-year has been trying to break into Cannes Competition for years, India has been as unsuccessful at Venice too.

The 68th Venice International Film Festival, to run from August 31 to September 10, may have selected three Indian movies, two in the Orizzonti or New Horizons Section and one as a special tribute, but the directors of these works are not really from the country's happening brigade.

One of the Orizzonti's Indian entries is Amit Dutta's *Sonchidi* (Golden Bird). His earlier films, *Aadmi ki Aurat aur Anya Kahaniyan* (2009) and *Nainsukh* (2010), have screened at Venice, and he is said to be a favourite of Festival Director Marco Mueller, whose last year this is, unless he gets an extension.

Strangely, Dutta has never been to Venice, and leads, I am told, a reclusive existence in Jammu. Few have his telephone number, and I have never been able to talk to him.

Besides, he makes a kind of cinema that is highly experimental, and difficult to understand in one viewing. In a festival, there is no time for a second see. With no theatrical releases, Dutta's cinema disappears after every Venice.

*Sonchidi*, if one were to read the synopsis, appears like a tale of

fantasy. Two travellers are looking out for a flying craft, which they believe can help them escape from the cycle of birth and death. And as they wander around trying to find this magic machine, which one of the travellers feels is made by a mad engineer he had known in his childhood, the two record their memories, dreams and fears in a Dictaphone and a notebook.

Dutta says in a note that the movie "has been constructed like a diary and made by a group of friends on almost zero budget..." So, they were not bound by any conditions.

But Dutta and his friends must understand that film is a commercial medium by its very definition, and the very purpose is defeated if a movie is not seen or, worse, understood by those other than the helmer himself.

For me there is a more serious issue involved here. These films that play on the festival circuit represent India — as others do other countries — and it is imperative that they fulfil a certain obligation. At least they should not be viewed as some kind of joke or puzzle thrown at an audience and a critical media that assemble at any major festival.

The other Indian movie in Orizzonti is a debut work by Gurvinder Singh in the Punjabi language, *Anhey Ghorhey Da Daan* (Alms for the Blind Horse). This and Dutta's work will be part of the Orizzonti Competition.

Produced by the National Film Development Corporation of India, *Anhey Ghorhey Da Daan*, is in a way a tribute to the late Mani Kaul, who was the movie's creative producer. In fact, the film's inclusion in Venice was made known at a recent memorial meeting for Kaul in New Delhi — several days before the Festival announced its official lineup on July 28 in Rome.

*Anhey Ghorhey Da Daan* purports to be a poignant look at the suffering and humiliation of some of India's working classes. Singh said that the "movie tries to evoke the effect of years of subordination of the struggling classes reflected in the macrocosm of events spinning beyond their control. It's about silent witnesses devoid of power to change or influence the course of destiny, about the invisible violence of power equation and simmering discontent seen on their faces".

Scripted by Singh and based on a novel by Gurdial Singh, the film is set in a Punjab village and traces the trials of a small family of father, his wife, son and daughter as it gets caught in a vicious web of events.

Venice will pay tribute to Kaul, who passed away in July, by showing one of his best works, *Duvidha*, a brand new print made from the original 1973 copy. The movie, which fetched the New Indian Cinema director the National Award for Best Direction, is based on a gripping folklore from Rajasthan about a



\* Ryan Gosling in *Ides of March*, directed by actor George Clooney.



\* John Reilly, Jodie Foster, Kate Winslet and Christoph Watz star in *Carnage*. Roman Polanski's adaptation of Yasmina Reza's *God of Carnage*.

ghost which falls in love with a beautiful, new bride.

Years later, Amol Palekar remade *Duvidha* as *Paheli* with Shah Rukh Khan playing the ghost and Rani Mukherjee the bride. A lot of gloss was added to the remake, and in a way, the Rajasthan landscape seemed to come alive in all its resplendent colours.

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To be held on the island of Lido, off Venice and by the Adriatic Sea, the Festival will open with George Clooney's *The Ides of March*, as part of the main Competition vying for the Golden Lion Awards.

Clooney, who has written and directed *The Ides of March*, is also playing an important part in it along with Ryan Gosling, Philip Seymour Marisa Tomei and Evan Rachel Wood will among others.

Based on Beau Willimon's work *Farragut North*, Clooney's film unfolds bang in the middle of American Democratic primaries in Ohio for the presidential elections. Deceit and corruption in American politics form the core plot with Clooney essaying Governor Mike Morris and Gosling his press secretary.

*The Ides of March* is the fourth movie helmed by Clooney after *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* (2002), *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005, also at Venice competition) and *Leatherheads* (2008).

Venice will close on a lighter note with a comedy, *Damsels in Distress* by American helmer Whit Stillman.

Stillman, who gave us *Metropolitan*, *Barcelona* and *The Last Days of Disco*, journeys this time into the world of American youth. Distributed by Sony Pictures Classics and produced by Westerly Film Production, *Damsels in Distress* is a hilarious romp through a shabby American university by three pretty girls, sexy, dynamic and principled. But when they fall in love, their romantic entanglements begin to threaten their friendship and peace.

Interestingly, the Festival will be marked by a strong English language cinema, which can double up as a platform for the coming awards season. Equally interesting is the

fact that for the first time since WW II, every feature in the Festival's three main sections will be a world premiere.

"Out of my eight years directing Venice, this selection is the one closest to my vision," Mueller told *Variety*. "While there's no shortage of pure auteurs and even experimental fare, the Competition is characterised by high-profile movies with an elevated entertainment value, and, in some cases, a clearly commercial conceit... It confirms the importance for producers and distributors of Venice as a launching pad."

Roman Polanski, David Cronenberg, William Friedkin, Todd Solondz, Abel Ferrara, Tomas Alfredson and Steve McQueen will showcase their latest creations in the Festival that also boasts of a strong Asian presence and an excellent European selection. Polanski has adapted Yasmina Reza's play *God of Carnage* into *Carnage*, starring John Reilly, Jodie Foster, Kate Winslet and Christoph Watz (that great actor from *Inglorious Basterds*). Viggo Mortensen will play Freud and Keira Knightley a patient in the Cronenberg psychodrama, *A Dangerous Method*.

Friedkin will sail to the Lido with *Killer Joe*, starring Matthew McConaughey as a cop-cum-hitman, Solondz will unspool his black comedy, *Dark Horse*, with Selma Blair, Mia Farrow and Christopher Walken, and Ferrara will present his apocalyptic *4:44 Last Day on Earth*.

Some of the Festival's European offerings are Andrea Arnold's *Wuthering Heights* (UK), *Shame* (UK) by Steve McQueen, *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, (Italy) by Tomas Alfredson., *The Exchange*, (Germany) by Eran Kolirin and *Alps*, (Greece) by Yorgos Lanthimos.

From Asia we have *Seedig Bale*, (Wei Te-sheng, Taiwan), *Himitsu*, from cult Japanese helmer Sion Sono and Ann Hui's *A Simple Life*, about the relationship between a young man and his servant.

(Gautaman Bhaskaran has covered the Venice International Film Festival for a decade, and may be contacted at [gautamanbhaskaran@yahoo.in](mailto:gautamanbhaskaran@yahoo.in))