

Christina Aguilera | So, where's the Cannes Film Festival being held this year?

The Delhi 2010 Games are the most expensive Commonwealth Games in history with a budget of close to two billion dollars.

# East meets West

New York's Indian film festival is bigger and richer than before, as distributors look for Bollywood films that are a bright spot for the US film industry, writes **Uttara Choudhury**



Tahaan (above), set in Kashmir, is the centrepiece of the festival, while Drawing With Chalk (left) is a mid-life coming-of-age story

The buzz preceding New York's Indian film festival was strong enough to pre-sell \$500 tickets to the opening night screening of *Today's Special*, helmed by Aasif Mandvi.

The popularity of the festival reflects the maturing of the affluent population of 2.5 million Indian Americans. "It is wonderful to see the festival grow as the community itself grows more confident, more diverse and more original," said Booker prize winning author Salman Rushdie.

The Mahindra Indo-American Arts Council Film Festival (MIAAC), which kicks off on Wednesday, offers up over 50 films the organizers describe as "Bollywood, not Bollywood at all and something in between."

## TANDOORI TALE

Mandvi's *Today's Special*, a lively New York food comedy, stars Naseeruddin Shah and Madhur Jaffrey.

"Asif spent 10 years working on the screenplay. We kept doing readings; I kept playing his mother and we aged in the process. It was a heck of a journey to make this film," Jaffrey told *The Mag* while lunch-

ing on a *chicken tikka* roll at a sneak-peak of the film at New York's Aicon Gallery.

Lillian LaSalle, producer of *Today's Special*, said the "feel-good family drama" about a second-gen Indian-American chef trained in haute cuisine who is forced to take over his family's failing *tandoori* joint would be released in US theatres in 2010. The film is likely to spark buyer interest at the festival.

This year's festival lineup includes an eclectic mix of contemporary Indian cinema, Bengali films and a Kashmir sidebar. As the film festival continues to seek new styles of filmmaking, the programmers are also hoping to stumble across the next great filmmaker. This time the festival places a bold bet on Santosh Sivan whose film *Tahaan* has been selected as the festival's centrepiece. In Sivan's film, set in Kashmir, an eight-year-old boy is asked to commit a terrorist act. Last year, this slot was occupied by Fox Searchlight's *Slumdog Millionaire* which chose the festival as the place for the New York premiere of the film.

## KASHMIRI BACKDROP

"*Tahaan* is a stunning, fable-like film with universal appeal for family audiences, art

house audiences — really anyone who loves beautiful cinema and storytelling" said Eric Beckman, President of GKIDS Entertainment and the US distributor of *Tahaan*.

"Sivan's cinematography captures the beauty of Kashmir with shimmering lakes, snow-capped mountains and Sufi singers, providing a fairytale backdrop as the film explores the regional conflict through the eyes of a young child," added Beckman.

The festival also highlights Sona Jain's *For Real* which shows a six-year-old child fighting desperately to keep her parents together. "The little girl uses fantasy to deal with reality. It is unusual to see a normal movie about normal people with normal problems. It hurts even more," says Hollywood actress Sarita Choudhury, who plays the troubled child's mother.

Gifted actor Adil Hussain, who plays the male lead in the film, holds up his end of the drama. "The material is very sensitive. It deals with a man-woman relationship but the real impact is on a child. It's a movie adults must watch," said Hussain who also teaches at the National School of Drama (NSD) in Delhi and the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) in Pune.

## AMERICAN FILMMAKERS

The festival also showcases American filmmakers talking about mixed marriages. Actor and musician Todd Giglio and his childhood friend Christopher Springer maxed out their credit cards and drained their savings to make a movie structured loosely on their own lives. *Drawing With Chalk* is a mid-life, coming-of-age story. The filmmakers not only live a few miles apart in Westchester County, but are married to two Indian sisters. It comes as no surprise then that the film's protagonist Jay, a wannabe rock star, is married to an Indian girl called Jasmin (played by the ebullient Pooja Kumar). Jay struggles to balance his dreams with his responsibilities to his wife Jasmin and son Bryan. "The film was inspired by our own struggles, but is not autobiographical," says Giglio, 40, who roughed it out in Hell's Kitchen as a young actor trying to make it in New York. He has directed and acted in *Drawing With Chalk*.

Other festival highlights include the Lavrenti Lopes starrer *Kissing Miss Jones*, a Woody Allensque film about a kiss which changes everything, *Bollywood Beats* and *The Endless Wait*. [thinksgiving@gmail.com](mailto:thinksgiving@gmail.com)

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## Last week's best



A great actress of yesteryears. Her movie, *The Emergency of 1975*, is very famous.

— Abraham Thomas

This must be the movie poster for 'The Pranab Da's Code'.

— Meherzad Karanjia

All time Congress blockbuster, running for past 50 years.

— Shailesh Kumar

The above three winning caption writers will each receive a copy of *The Strain*, published by Harper Collins India.

## 'I turned to Mumbai to understand why rich US kids are so unhappy'

Filmmaker Tracey Jackson plunked her 15-year-old daughter in Mumbai, to teach in a slum school, for her film *Lucky Ducks*

### Uttara Choudhury

Over the course of two years, writer-filmmaker Tracey Jackson turned the camera on her own life and family, taking a hard look at why privileged children are so un-

happy and the most dysfunctional in the world. Jackson filmed *Lucky Ducks* while travelling from New York to California, Montana to Mumbai interviewing experts, gurus and people who were grappling with raising their own children.

"I started with the question 'why is today's upper middle class youth so un-



happy, when they have more than any generation?" I wandered through many doors and learned many facts, I wanted to make a film with answers and charts and graphs. But, the film that came out was a very personal story about my mother, my daughter and myself," said Jackson.

"I sought the advice of experts and gurus, and ultimately plunked my 15-year-old daughter for

three weeks in Mumbai. She was forced to live in a small flat which she shared with four or five people and worked in a slum school," she said.

Did the Mumbai slum school experience change her daughter? "Life is changing her," quipped Jackson. The filmmaker says she ultimately found her own answers; "I saw that like many questions the answers were inside me all along."

Filming *Lucky Ducks* had a strong impact on Jackson's 24-year-old camera person who opted to spend seven months in Mumbai teaching slum children.

IT'S ABOUT TIME DESIGN PENETRATED PUBLIC SPACES, MICHAEL FOLEY, DESIGNER OF THE BATON FOR COMMONWEALTH GAMES 2010, TELLS SHRABONTI BAGCHI

# TRUE COMMONWEALTH OF DESIGN



When FoleyDesigns in Bangalore won the contract to create the Commonwealth Games baton for the 2010 games in December 2008, managing director and chief designer Michael Foley already had a plan in place. He wanted the baton to be representative not just of Indian design values but also carry a tangible piece of India with it, while, at the same time, be as much about technology as good aesthetics.

Michael Foley, a National Institute of Design graduate who headed Titan Design Studio for many years and is often counted as one of India's top 10 product designers (with top-notch business and design magazines doing the ranking), is quick to point out that creating the baton was very much a team effort. While quite a few members of the FoleyDesigns team were involved in the project, also collaborating were Titan Industries and Bharat Electronics Ltd.

The baton, which took pride of place at the Commonwealth ceremony in London recently when it was handed over by the British Queen to Indian President Pratibha Patil, has turned out to be an authentic representative of old and new India. Made of 18-carat gold and aluminum, 664 mm in height and weighing in at 1,900 grams, the baton is helical in shape with gold leaf patras engraved on its body, the patra (leaf shape) being an ancient Indian motif.

The team at FoleyDesigns also hit upon the idea of making the baton truly representative of India by enclosing soil from all Indian states in it. Abrasive manufacturers Carborundum Universal was responsible for layering the baton with thin sheets of soil collected by the Indian Army. The baton is also capable of lighting up in the flag colours of all the 70 countries it passes through. Athletes carrying the Bluetooth-enabled baton can also record their messages, images and sounds on it. The location of the baton can be tracked throughout its journey through an embedded GPS system.

Foley is justifiably proud of being associated with

this mammoth project. "I travelled to London for the ceremony and it was quite a thrill watching it being handed over by the Queen to our President," says Foley. "We decided to pitch for this project not just because of the prestige associated with it but because it's a matter of pride for India. We wanted to do the best job possible," he adds.

As Titan's design head, Foley created watches, sunglasses and lifestyle products and was behind some of the company's most talked-about brands such as Titan Edge, the world's slimmest watch, and Fastrack, the youth brand that became a best-seller across age groups. While he worked independently as well during his years at Titan, he finally gave up his full-time job to set up his own design studio a couple of years ago. "I was eager to explore other design categories," says Foley.

While FoleyDesigns has worked on projects as varied as interiors of restaurants (Civet, F Bar and Lounge) to designing stores (Enamor, Fastrack) and lifestyle accessories (Tanishq, Innoviti), Foley is very excited about designing for public spaces. He believes there has been a silent design revolution in India with homeowners becoming more and more conscious about their style sensibilities, but he feels this has the potential to extend beyond our immediate surroundings.

"Now design has to go beyond homes. It has to penetrate public spaces," he says. "There's so much scope for innovation and great design in our public spaces, be it bus-stops or park benches," adds Foley, who finds working on lighting systems most exciting and who designed the tree-shaped, fractals-inspired streetlights in Cubbon Park.

Currently, FoleyDesigns is ideating on waste disposal and expects to complete a prototype within the next few months and approach the city's civic agencies. And don't think that means some fuddy-duddy, boring old garbage-maker. If Michael Foley's behind it, expect a technological marvel that is strong on both form and functionality.

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