

Crystal Globe contenders defy easy trend spotting

Will Tizard

It's surprising what Karlovy Vary's feature films in competition can tell you about the state of the world: Last year they conveyed to audiences a widespread European anxiety over urban life, aging and the economy, among other things.

"This year, it's harder to spot an overarching theme that's on the mind of the world's filmmakers," says KVIFF Program Director Julietta Sichel. "There is no unifying moment, theme or character," she says of this year's 14 Official Selection films.

"But that may just be the result of deliberately seeking out diversity," she adds. "We try to present as rich a picture of contemporary cinema as possible. No two films are alike, either in style or in topics."

Content and themes aside, the films also convey a varied – and impressive – range of filmmaking technique and approach. The chilling style of films like the French-Belgian *Distant Tremors*, which explores witchcraft in Africa, and Denmark's police story *Terribly Happy*, to name just two, are certainly distinctive and atmospheric.

"In terms of style," says Sichel, "the entire competition selection is quite remarkable even though it does not necessarily mean that each film brings something completely new into the world of cinema – it is more that the filmmakers we focus on work in a very clever way with already existing motifs and styles."

She contrasts the "dark drama with comic elements" of Hungarian-Swedish-Irish co-production *The Investigator* or the "almost Fargo-like" *Terribly Happy* to stories of people "looking for happiness and their place in the life" such as the characters of Czech entry *Night Owls*.

Meanwhile, a film like *Dr. Aleman* takes viewers into the world of Latin American crime gangs through the misadventures of a naïve young European physician.

Such characters studies make for a rich offering this year, Sichel says: "Characters dealing



Czech director Petr Zelenka's masterful Dostoevsky adaptation *Karamazovs*.

with social predicament in their lives like those in *The Shaft*, characters taken by surprise by such things as chance or destiny in Amy Redford's U.S. entry *The Guitar* and Croatian psychological drama *Behind the Glass*."

Others make use of striking settings, which become almost characters in themselves, such as in Czech writer-director Petr Zelenka's adaptation of a Dostoevsky tale, which takes place in a steel mill, *The Karamazovs*. A more intimate, perhaps claustrophobic setting pervades the Spanish drama about a struggling marriage, *Pretexts*, while the glitzy, fast-paced world of the media and its conflicting demands drives the characters and story of France's *True Enough* and Italy's *Early Bird Catches the Worm*.

Far off, exotic and perplexing lands also make for dramatic backdrops in films like the European-Indonesian co-production *The Photograph*, Russian-Bulgarian war film *Captive* or Senegal-set *Distant Tremors*.

This last group of films illus-

trates another trend that KVIFF is witnessing more and more each year: films that are conceived through the coordinated financing and production of multiple countries (*The Photograph* is a multi-hyphenate drawing on the talents and coffers of France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden and Indonesia).

"Co-productions seem to be very common for lots of different reasons, finances naturally being one of the most important factors," Sichel explains. "Some films get a very 'international' touch because of it, which is unfortunately not always good for the film." The example of a character who "goes to a certain country just because they were one of the co-producers" who required a few shooting days there to justify putting up backing – even though the plot could easily do without it – is a hazard of such deals, of course.

But, Sichel points out, "Some films stay the same no matter how many co-producers they had," which is the case with *The Photograph*. It "looks like

year is the strength of European filmmaking, which tends to dominate the Official Selection entries more so than in the recent past, when Middle Eastern, South American and more Asian films were in the running.

"Asian films are in quite a crisis at the moment," says Sichel, something borne out by a look at the programs of other film fests. And while many from other continents were considered, "our European candidates seemed much stronger." Africa and South America do still get significant screen time, of course, in the films like *Distant Tremors* and *Dr. Aleman*.

Czechs can take particular pride in the strength of their film output this year, as well, with two locally made features in competition for the Crystal Globe. Interestingly enough, the last time this happened, in 2002, Petr Zelenka was also one of the contenders – in fact, he won the grand prize for *Year of the Devil*, beating out Zdeněk Tyc's *Brats*.

This time around, his creative re-thinking of the Dostoevsky classic "The Brothers Karamazov" goes up against Michaela Pavlátová's tale of modern Czech urban angst, *Night Owls*. As the screenwriter of the latter, Irena Hejdrová, can attest, it's clear that good films – and film ideas – can come from anywhere. Hejdrová, who has covered KVIFF for years as a working journalist for news website Aktualne.cz, says she doesn't think of Zelenka as a competitor. "I liked his *The Karamazovs* very much. Fortunately the movies are so different that they will not blur into one Czech mess – they are distinguishable and I think of his movie as I do about every other film in the Official Selection."

Still, her screenwriting breakthrough is something she should be able to take some pride in: "Night Owls" nosed out would-be contenders that KVIFF staffers have seen at festivals over the past year including Madrid, Rome, Paris, Copenhagen, Montreal, Tokyo, Seoul, Vienna and Munich, among the many other countries covered by national festivals.

FACES

Documentary Films in Competition will be well represented today by *Everything is Relative* director Mikala Krogh and screenwriter Mogens Rukov. You may also spot director/producers



Mikala Krogh

Alex Buono and Tamsin Rawady (*Bigger, Stronger, Faster**), director Christina A. Voros or producer Sergei Krasikau (*The Ladies*). Producer Rasa Miskinyte is also here with *The Bug Trainer*.

From the East of the West - Films in Competition section you may run into director Marina Razbezhkina (*The Hollow*). Lithuanian film *The Collectors* has been brought to the festival by its director Kristina Buožyte, producers Aidan Avizinis and Ieva Norvilienė, director of photography Feliksas Abrukauskas, actor Marius Jampolskis and actress Gabija Ryskuviene. Producer Karolina Rozviudė and legendary actress Danuta Szafarska are here with Polish film *Time to Die*. *Vogelfrei* directors Janis Kalejs and Janis Putnins also arrived at the festival today.

Those interested in independent film can watch out for directors Ari Gold (*Adventures of Power*) and Matthew Klinck and actor/producer Thomas Michael

(*Hank and Mike*). Northern Irish drama *Peacefire* is being represented at KVIFF by its director Macdara Valley, producer Chris Martin



Macdara Valley

and actor John Travers. Director/producer Kim Byung-woo and director of photography Kim Ji-Hoon are here with *Written*.

The Horizons section brings directors Austin Chick (*August*), Salvatore Mereu (*Sonetáula*) and Tom McCarthy (*The Visitor*). Director Jiří Vejdělek has two films in the Czech Films 2007-2008 section, *Little Girl Blue* and *Roming*. Czech actresses Marie Doležalová, Petra Nesvačilová and Sandra Nováková are here with their film *Dolls*.

Industry insiders will want to talk to Vincent Maraval, head of the cinema co-production, acquisition and distribution company the Wild Bunch (*Buddha Collapsed Out of Shame*). While director Richie Mehta is here with *Amal*, also in the Another View section.

OFFICIAL SELECTION FILMS IN COMPETITION

Behind the Glass (Croatia)
July 6, 8pm, Grand Hall – Thermal
July 7, 10am, Espace Dorleans Cinema

Captive (Russia, Bulgaria)
July 9, 8pm, Grand Hall – Thermal
July 10, 10am, Espace Dorleans Cinema

Distant Tremors (Belgium, France)
July 7, 8pm, Grand Hall – Thermal
July 8, 10am, Espace Dorleans Cinema

Dr. Aleman (Germany)
July 8, 5pm, Grand Hall – Thermal
July 9, 1pm, Espace Dorleans Cinema

The Early Bird Catches the Worm (Italy)
July 5, 8pm, Grand Hall – Thermal
July 6, 10am, Espace Dorleans Cinema

The Guitar (USA)
July 11, 8pm, Grand Hall – Thermal
July 12, 10am, Espace Dorleans Cinema

The Investigator (Hungary, Sweden, Ireland)
July 10, 8pm, Grand Hall – Thermal
July 11, 10am, Espace Dorleans Cinema

The Karamazovs (Czech Republic, Poland)
July 9, 5pm, Grand Hall – Thermal
July 10, 1pm, Espace Dorleans Cinema

Night Owls (Czech Republic)
July 7, 5pm, Grand Hall – Thermal
July 8, 10pm, Espace Dorleans Cinema

The Photograph (Indonesia, France, Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden)
July 11, 5pm, Grand Hall – Thermal
July 12, 1pm, Espace Dorleans Cinema

Pretexts (Spain)
July 8, 8pm, Grand Hall – Thermal
July 9, 10am, Espace Dorleans Cinema

The Shaft (China)
July 10, 5pm, Grand Hall – Thermal
July 11, 1pm, Espace Dorleans Cinema

Terribly Happy (Denmark)
July 5, 2pm, Grand Hall – Thermal
July 6, 10pm, Espace Dorleans Cinema

True Enough (France)
July 6, 5pm, Grand Hall – Thermal
July 7, 1pm, Espace Dorleans Cinema

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