

# Calling cineastes

**EVENT** Look out for The Chennai International Film Festival from December 14 to 23

The Chennai International Film Festival is here again (14-23), adding colour to the city that's bursting with December music, dance and poetry festivals. The 60 films of CIFF's first year have doubled in number to 124 films from 42 countries in 2008. Cineastes in Chennai are lucky. They can watch many of the packages screened at the IFFI Goa, Kolkata and Trivandrum International Festivals this year at Woodland and Pilot theatres, and the Film Chamber of Commerce.

The festival scores in its opening and closing films. The inaugural film, "The Lives of Others" (German), won the Oscar as the Best Foreign Film 2007. The closing film, "Naalu Pennugal", is by none other than Adoor Gopalakrishnan, who will introduce this new film at the venue.

## Focus on France, Hungary

The CIFF's Country Focus on France and Hungary form a contrast in moods and tones, as French films, however profound in theme and treatment, refract a certain luminosity, while East European Hungary is known for delving into the darker psyche. The 10 French films include timely Christmas stories with a difference. In "Gamblers" (Frederic Ballekjian), Vahe is on the edge of a precipice as the day approaches. In "Quand tu descendras du ciel" (Eric Guirado), the poor boy gets hired to decorate the town's Christmas trees. Ironic humour surfaces in "Zim & Co" (Pierre Jolivet) where, in the classic "Bicy-



**INSPIRED BY MYTH** From "Sopyonje"

cle Thief" style, a man finally finds a job which requires a car and driving licence – but has neither. In "Not Here to be Loved" (Stephane Brize), a policeman finds a new passion when he learns to tango!

Hungary's fare? "Vagabond" has the protagonist trying to break away from underworld tentacles. "Temptations" is the stuff of fables – the mother and the whole community predict a brilliant career for the boy who only wants to go in search of his alcoholic father, and falls in love with a gypsy girl. From sheep to folk singer "Hukkle" follows human and animal residents in a village – where the idyllic hides the sinister. "Konjec"

has life beginning after age 70 for two comrades who launch a career of robbery. "In the Shadows" shows how the arrival of puppet theatre transforms the life of a little boy.

Retrospectives honour Kenji Mizoguchi (Japan), Julio Medem (Spain) and Im Kwon-Taek (Korea). Mizoguchi's neo-realist films evolved a new genre with his wide-angled, "one-scene-one-shot" method. Their density is drawn from a life of shadows – a sister sold as a geisha, attack by his call girl friend, adoption of fascist ideals, and public dismissal as obsolete. European revaluations restored his reputation, now rest-

ing on films like oppression of women in "The Story of the Last Chrysanthemum", and a morality story recast in "Sansho the Bailiff", and the Silver Lion (Venice) winning "Ugetsu", all part of the CIFF package.

With his mixed racial origin and training in athletics, psychiatry and surgery, Julio Medem (Spain) is celebrated for evolving his personal cinema. "Cows", "The Red Squirrel", "Earth" and the documentary "Skin Against Stone", where he traces the Basque nationalist movement, are among acclaimed films that Chennai will see.

Korea's past influences Im Kwon-Taek's search for identity in Korea's present. Part of the New Wave which drew international attention to Korean cinema, Kwon Taek won the country's first Best Director award in Cannes for "Chihwaseon" and an Honorary Golden Bear in Venice. Inspired by the myths and legends of his country, as in "Sopyonje" and "Chunhyang", he is invariably modern in approach.

Chennai gets to see IFFI's Indian Panorama, and also "The Wall" (Taiwan) which won the Golden Peacock in 2007. Directors from Austria, Greece and the Philippines will introduce their films in Chennai and answer queries at 'Meet the Director' sessions. Fans of the Balkans and East Europe have much to catch up with at the Fest, while 6 Iranian films add to the spectacle.

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