

## **Berlin/Cannes/Sundance/Toronto/Venice**

The Big Five may be the largest and richest and most commercial (does anyone leave Sundance without a goodie bag?), but because of funding, industry impact, savvy marketing and, most of all, artistic vision, they have managed to continue as the touchstones of the fest calendar.

Berlin -- born of Marshall-Plan politics after WWII -- caters to political, edgy, sometimes too-arty films, with at least one Hollywood picture thrown in for glamour's sake, and rightly so, given the city's rich history.

Cannes remains the grande dame, showcasing glossy Hollywood pics, Oscar hopefuls and the best of foreign-language fare -- granted, with a deep love of certain auteurs.

Sundance may have lost its scruffy image on its way to becoming a media-hipster paradise (for those on the West Coast, think Silver Lake; New Yorkers, think Tribeca/Soho), but there's no doubt that it showcases the best of U.S. independent cinema.

Toronto's hefty schedule still leaves room for serious studio pictures testing award-season waters, and its user-friendly screening schedule and the rabid local film fans who sell out every screening give marketers a true gauge for their fare.

Stars, serious pics, a breathtaking setting and the gravitas that comes with being around for so long lend Venice its elegance and credibility, despite some artistic and management hiccups over the years.

## **Adelaide**

Adelaide, while not as huge or as old as its cousin in Melbourne, has been held three times, every two years, since its launch in 2002, but manages to program an interesting slate. It gets lots of funds from the state government of South Australia, Australia's smallest mainland state and home of Rolf de Heer, Scott Hicks and Rising Sun f/x house. Fest also has part-funded pics and exhibits a knack of choosing good ones ("Ten Canoes," "Look Both Ways," "The Tracker," "The Home Song Stories"). It next unspools in 2009.

## **AFI**

As a rule of thumb, steer clear of the competition films and aim for the potential Oscar contenders and foreign fare at this early November fest in Hollywood. In partnership with the American Film Market, this festival serves as a clearinghouse for distributorless product and is shaping up to be a buzz builder for foreign-language Oscar submissions.

## **Annecy**

The timeless art whose stars never age or ask for residuals has gone in and out of commercial favor over the decades, but Annecy has stubbornly championed international animation since 1960. Once an every-two-years event, the Gallic fest went annual in 1998. The gorgeous lakefront town near Geneva hosts rabidly attended screenings as well as a hopping market. Congenitally unpretentious fest honcho Serge Bromberg knows animation past and present so thoroughly, it's scary.

## **Avignon**

So intimate it resembles a series of master classes among friends, the former French-American Film Workshop celebrates its 25th anniversary next summer. Intrepid founder and programmer Jerry Rudes, a transplanted Texan, made Provence the unlikely epicenter of auteur-driven Gallic and Yank fare back when the term "indie" was new. Competitive since 1991, Avignon now welcomes European pics. Participants bond over communal meals catered in the city square outside the Vox Cinema. Compact and unpretentious event consistently attracts topnotch shorts.

## **Cairo**

The Middle East's only A-list festival, Cairo prides itself on launching the best of local fare as well as hosting international entries in competition. Though not as rich as some new Mideast fests, Cairo officials stress that it's not about glitz, it's about the filmmakers.

## **Camerimage**

Cinematographers are given the rock-star treatment at Camerimage, the festival dedicated to celebrating the art and craft of lensers. Situated in Lodz, Poland -- a mixture of 19th-century elegance and drab, Communist-era architecture -- Camerimage cherry-picks from some of the best cinematographic statements of the year in its competitive feature lineup while boasting wall-to-wall panels, press conferences and master classes presided over by world-class d.p.s and helmers. The event's intimacy allows attendees to mix with talent in a highly accessible atmosphere where there are no velvet ropes and VIP lounges.

## **Capetown**

A must stop for a first look at new African cinema, fest -- which runs concurrent with the Sithengi Film and TV Market -- also encompasses a talent campus and a plethora of development and financing initiatives that also draws industryites from around the globe looking to do business with and in Africa.

## **Cinema Tout Ecrans**

A rare beast among fests in that it gives equal billing to highbrow TV dramas, TV docs and arthouse features, Cinema Tout Ecrans unspools in picturesque Geneva. Events include cerebral debates on lengthy written essays, often highly political in content. Speakers with raggedy beards and raging rhetoric give the fest the feel of a campus in revolt -- it's like the '60s never ended. Most events take place in the faded glory of the Maison des Arts du Gruetli, which makes it easy to socialize.

## **CineVegas**

Sin City's well-publicized morph from pure gambling mecca (after an ill-fated family-friendly makeover attempt) to cultural/lifestyle magnet left only one entertainment stone unturned: film. Enter CineVegas, which prides itself on adhering to the naughty nightlife image cultivated by Nevada's desert oasis. With ample support from the Vegas tourism infrastructure and solid programming that has endeared it to Hollywood and indie filmmakers, CineVegas is poised to celebrate its 10th anniversary in 2008 in ... what else ... style!

## **Clermont-Ferrand**

The "Cannes of short films" overruns a university town in the shadow of active volcanoes, attracting such devoted audiences that the closing ceremonies are performed three times in a row in order to seat 4,500 spectators. The hyphenated city considers the event so vital that it built a permanent year-round headquarters for the programmers. The winter fest's accompanying market is a marvel of organization.

## **Courmayeur Noir**

Dedicated to spooks, thrills, mysteries and murder, this dark fest unspools as blankets of white Alpine snow coat the ground and neighboring ski slopes. Celebrating genre movies and books, it also has recently included TV and youth sidebars in its fold. Elmore Leonard, John le Carre, J.G. Ballard and other lit and pic luminaries have schussed over to the fest, and fans can sip hot spiced wine in between screenings.

## **Cottbus**

Established in the eastern German city of Cottbus in 1991 -- shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall -- the fest provides a unique window on modern Eastern European and Central Asian film while maintaining a cinematic tradition that characterized the Soviet era, which left a discernible mark on East German filmmakers and moviegoers alike.

## **Dubai**

Once an unfocused fest unspooling in an architecturally astounding setting, Dubai has matured and set its focus on celebrating filmmaking in the Arab world by establishing its Muhr Awards. That doesn't mean it has abandoned Hollywood stars: The richness of the fest, combined with the lure of Dubai itself (shopping, luxury, indoor skiing) still draws the rich and famous. This year, AIDS research org amfAR is tapping into all that cash with a Sharon Stone-hosted charity auction.

## **Edinburgh/London/Raindance**

This triumvirate of Brit fests make uneasy bedfellows, barely acknowledging each other's existence, yet serving similar constituencies. Early-autumn Raindance, the love child of provocateur Elliot Grove, caters to the grittier, weirder end of indiedom and has a particular penchant for rock 'n' roll-themed pics. Despite its Cinderella status, it attracts an unusually large share of industry support.

Summer's Edinburgh targets the glossier portion of the arthouse repertoire. Its strongest card is the British Galas section, which unspools the U.K.'s juiciest pics. The recent change in artistic director, with Hannah McGill taking the reigns, is being followed by a shift to an earlier slot, from August to June. This will test the loyalty of London-based industry players and critics, who may resent being separated from Edinburgh's world-renowned arts fest in August.

Late-autumn London favors the upper end of the budget spectrum, with a heavy sprinkling of Hollywood glamour. Richer than the others, thanks to backing from the Times newspaper and the British Film Institute, and blessed with an efficient and seasoned team led by artistic boss Sandra Hebron, it also benefits from sitting at the start of the awards season, which makes it an attractive event for kudos-seekers.

## **Fajr**

Iran's Fajr Film Fest is the barometer of Iranian cinema. Held every year in early February, the state-affiliated fest is the most comprehensive domestic showcase for Iranian cinema. The types of films approved to compete in the official selection are often an indication of the latitude afforded to Iranian filmmakers by the authorities at any given time. Recent years have seen the addition of an international market designed to attract buyers and sellers, including American, to the Tehran jamboree.

## **Ghent**

Movie music is the soundtrack for the Ghent fest, as artists such as Gustavo Santaolalla, Gabriel Yared, Ennio Morricone and Craig Armstrong, among others, have graced the historic Flemish town with concert performances and talks. Since 1985, when Ghent launched its focus on music, it has grown in importance to tuneheads, and in 2001 it established the World Soundtrack Awards.

## **Guadalajara**

Mexican and Latin American cinema get full attention in this beautiful and historic city's festival. The Guadalajara market also has added a dimension that draws industryites worldwide looking for hot properties and new talent from Latin America.

## **Hawaii**

A celluloid bridge across the pan-Pacific region, the island fest is dedicated to Asian films and prides itself on its "East meets West" philosophy. Plus, with its base as one of the premier vacation spots in the world (with screenings on the beach!), discovering new filmmakers is as easy as the aloha lifestyle.

## **Heartland**

Having risen from a fest of nice people presenting nice films to nice people, Heartland has grown in influence, establishing the Truly Moving Pictures seal of approval that can be found on many a DVD box. It may seem a bit red state-ish to stage a festival celebrating the human spirit, but the programming is neither partisan nor fusty and attracts some 18,000 looking to be entertained by pics such as "August Rush," one of this year's entries.

## **Jerusalem/Haifa**

Jerusalem focuses on the best of Israeli cinema -- and there's been a lot lately burning up the fest circuit -- as fest topper Lia Van Leer also runs the Jerusalem Cinematheque, making her a local biz institution.

Haifa, Israel's oldest fest at 23, zeroes in on Mediterranean pics, with an emphasis on Palestinian filmmakers, even though most of the Arab world boycotts the event. Still, director Pnina Blayer has her pick of top films from Tunisia and Morocco.

## **Karlovy Vary**

In addition to being one of Europe's oldest film fests as well as Eastern Europe's biggest and most important one, Karlovy Vary has developed a reputation for being the youngest major festival on the international circuit. The audiences are so young and the theaters so packed with youthful film lovers that it's hard to imagine a filmmaker immune to the charms of 1,300 kids (that's the capacity of the Grand Hall) grooving on your latest offering. From experimental oddities to Hollywood blockbusters, the fans are open and enthusiastic, and that includes those who regularly pack the Variety Critics' Choice sidebar of new Euro cinema, a fixture at KV for 10 years.

### **Los Angeles**

Angelenos get a first glimpse at the summer's top indies while up-and-coming helmers rub elbows with industry players. Sponsored by Film Independent, LAFF steers clear of studio product (this year's "Transformers" being a rare exception) to feature-quality American and foreign entries. True festgoers will have seen most of it before on the circuit, but locals enjoy access to many highly anticipated pics.

### **Mar del Plata**

Exiting artistic boss Miguel Pereira breathed new life into the once-decrepit Argentinian fest over the past five years, attracting leading film biz folk and up-and-coming filmmakers from across Latin America as well as a high quotient of international talent, thanks to its status as the Continent's only FIAPF A-grade fest. Now with a new -- yet aging -- creative boss, filmmaker Jose A. Martinez Suarez, 82, and a shift next year from its traditional March slot to November, it faces an uncertain future. Fest lays on a rolling program of social gatherings at the seaside resort's top eateries and hotels for the select few.

### **Marrakech**

With a king who loves cinema, Marrakech truly has it made. The events program, led by prexy Prince Moulay Rachid and director Melita Toscan du Plantier, reflects Morocco's position between Europe and the Middle East, with world preems of local pics bowing next to Western fare. Fest can always be counted on to draw starry juries and panelists.

### **Mise-en-scene Genre Festival**

For star wattage, this little festival in Seoul devoted to short films can rival even major events like Pusan. With judging panels including Korea's best-known directors and actors, this event has made its mark both as a well-attended celebration of small-scale genre cinema and a breeding ground for new talent.

### **Nantucket**

An idyllic island off the coast of Massachusetts, Nantucket not only offers gorgeous beaches, delicious pots of steamers and a summer crowd of moneyed vacationers but also an emphasis on the written word. Screenplay readings, storytelling events, panels and free screenings on the beach mark this fest as a writer's dream.

### **Palm Springs/Palm Springs Intl. Festival of Short Films**

With an emphasis on the best of foreign films, the Palm Springs fest exploits its early-January position to offer what seems like every foreign-language movie vying for an Oscar slot -- a rich treat for appreciative local auds.

Short films also get the royal treatment in the desert, with tons of local press coverage, knowledgeable auds and the best of global talent in competition.

### **Pordenone Silent Film Festival**

Tired of movies looking like videogames rather than celluloid projections of men and women? Come to the Pordenone Silent Film Fest in northern Italy, now in its 26th year. The gold standard for silent film presentation, complemented by the world's finest musical accompanists, Pordenone is the autumn destination for programmers, academics and enthusiasts from around the globe. This year's highlights: retrospective "The Other Weimar"; a tribute to Rene Clair; and the original Roxie Hart pic, 1927's "Chicago."

### **PiFan**

Asia's biggest fantasy fest takes place in a concrete-filled suburb of Seoul that, with its frenzied development and artificial indoor ski slopes, seems an oddly appropriate place to watch the latest in horror and science fiction. With eclectic programming and the occasional organizational scandal to shake things up, PiFan is never boring.

### **Pusan**

Asia's leading festival attracts both swarms of young, cheering cinephiles and crowds of older (and only slightly less enthusiastic) industry folk. PIFF's greatest strength is still its informal, charged atmosphere, where it is easy to meet new people and the socializing goes on until the early hours. Bring plenty of business cards.

### **Pyongyang**

The Everest of film fests for circuit connoisseurs, the biannual PIFF -- not to be confused with its South Korean cousin in Pusan -- celebrated its 10th anni in September 2006 with dancing majorettes and traditional songs.

Expect an eclectic lineup of some 80 fellow guests from Europe and Asia (from filmmakers to official delegates), daily tour programs including a trip to the DMZ, comfortable accommodation in the 47-story Yanggakdo Hotel next to the fest's multiplex center, and some 40 features (old and newer) from everywhere except the U.S.

Eateries in town serve tasty Korean barbecue, powerful soju and hearty naengmyeon (cold buckwheat noodle soup).

Invitation only: Stateside passport holders, don't even bother applying.

### **San Sebastian**

The sea, the scenery, the food: great reasons to go to the San Sebastian fest, but the biggest festival in the Spanish-speaking world offers up some deeper artistic credibility. Featuring Spanish-language art films, upscale big-name directors, emerging talent and a nice cash prize for tyro directors, organizers have also added more industry events and a sidebar for films from the Maghreb and Arab worlds.

### **Santa Barbara**

With a strong lineup of Oscar-contending films -- both domestic and foreign -- this jewel of a California coastal town sells out screenings and always draws heavyweight filmmakers, stars and producers for panels and galas.

### **Sao Paulo Intl. Film Festival/Rio Intl. Film Festival**

Shunning the red carpet in favor of cinephilia, the Sao Paulo fest draws serious students of film and huge crowds with its emphasis on the auteur. Its cousin in flashy Rio de Janeiro world preems Latin American pics with an emphasis on Brazilian fare while also staging a multimedia market on the Copacabana beach -- a great place for movie mavens to do business, if they can concentrate amid the famed spot's temptations.

### **Sarajevo**

Launched, with a touch of Central European black humor and hope, in 1995 during the wartime siege of the city that became the poignant and tragic symbol of the Balkans conflict, Sarajevo has steadily risen on the international scene to become the most important meet in the former Yugoslavia -- its only regional rival is the better-endowed Thessaloniki fest.

Its focus on local filmmakers is its strength -- with organizers launching CineLink, a regional co-production market -- while international and local filmmakers and celebrities flock to the Bosnian capital every year.

### **Seattle**

Few film fests are as integral to their home communities as Seattle. The numbers alone tell an impressive story: more than 400 films (with some 200 of them features) screening across 25 days. While not a major industry outing, the Northwest regional film fan base provides enough of a draw to pull in more than 200 filmmakers and industry professionals. Is it the coffee? The region's abundance of high-tech coin? The sidetrips to clubs in search of new bands? Whatever the reason, SIFF has become in its 33 years one of America's most important city festivals, and locals can't get enough of this event's nearly entire month of edgy, smart film programming.

### **Sitges**

With its 40th birthday this year, Sitges, Europe's biggest fantasy-film fest, is genre geekdom in the sun. The Mediterranean glints outside its Melia Hotel headquarters. Guests can rub black T-shirted shoulders with Guillermo del Toro, a regular. Quentin Tarantino is a three-time visitor. John Carpenter even set his "Cigarettes Burns" here. The fest world preems pics from a burgeoning local Barcelona chiller industry, and a clutch of Spanish distribution deals go down each year in the bar.

### **Skip City**

Japan offers one of the most dynamic new showcases for digital cinema with this fest. The money, nearly \$200,000 in competition prize cash, comes courtesy of key sponsor Sony, but that's only part of the fest's cutting-edge appeal. All the movies are shown using the latest 4K digital cinema projector, which is then projected on a huge screen. There's also a digital content market developing at Skip City and a young filmmakers section called Camera Crayon, showcasing digital auteurs ages 5-18.

### **Sofia**

It's fair to assume that Bulgaria isn't the first stop on most film lovers' calendars of annual film events, but Sofia has distinguished itself over the past dozen years by programming smart, sharply focused sections on various national cinemas as well as highlighting the emerging talents of Eastern Europe. That may explain why, over the years, the festival has attracted such programming committee members as Emir Kusturica, Krzysztof Zanussi, Lone Scherfig, Terry Jones and Wim Wenders. Fest director Stefan Kitanov has never veered from his rock-music roots, and live music -- which was central to the fest in its early days -- is still very much on the agenda. Included is the music of Kitanov himself, who is one of the three festival programmers (including Stefan Laudyn of Warsaw and Stefan Urhrik of Karlovy Vary's Forum of Independents section) known as the Film Festival Band, whose live-rock sets are now a highlight of many top Euro film fests.

### **South by Southwest**

Technically, the 10-day, Austin-based film fest is a local event, of greatest interest to Texans who wouldn't otherwise have access to the lineup of indie pics, many of which debut at other fests around the country. But SXSW also has made its share of noteworthy discoveries, often in the nonfiction department ("Bush's Brain," "Spellbound"). The concurrent music fest, the largest in the country, is reason enough to attend.

### **Telluride**

The buzz for awards starts here in this ski town nestled in the gorgeous Colorado Rockies. Only major festival to keep its lineup and guests secret until opening night (although leaks are rampant), that culty exclusivity -- and the high level of quality pics that unspool there year in and year out -- make Telluride a must-stop on the calendar for film lovers and industryites, who often get their first peeks at prestige pics there.

### **Thessaloniki**

What started out as the low-key "Week of Greek Cinema" in 1960 has over the years transformed into the Balkans' primary showcase for the work of new and emerging filmmakers as well as the leading film festival in the region. For 10 days in mid-November, some 70,000 people attend screenings of more than 150 pics, where parallel events such as concerts and art exhibits give the festival in the vibrant northern Greek city a must-attend attitude.

### **Tribeca**

Launched in the wake of 9/11, this massive Gotham-based May festival has been gradually migrating from its downtown roots to central Manhattan. Though it has yet to establish its viability as a film market, Tribeca aims to be everything to everybody in New York, its programs ranging from small indie films ("Transamerica") to high-profile Hollywood releases ("Spider-Man 3"), and from provocative world cinema to free family screenings.

### **Udine**

The wildly popular fest in northeast Italy unspools the largest selection of Asian films outside of Asia, and fanatics get the first glimpse on the Continent of all manner of Asian fare from arthouse to genre to animation. Fest gleefully sticks its finger in the eye of "serious" cinema and Hollywood fat cats, celebrating all Asian genres and drawing 50,000-plus hip, savvy cinephiles to this ancient town near the Slovenia border.

## **Warsaw**

It may have its roots in the democracy movement of the 1980s, but as the Warsaw Film Festival draws closer to its silver anniversary (it's 23 this year), the focus is on international film arts and the role of Eastern Europe in both the creative and business aspects of film. Fest director Stefan Laudyn has steadfastly moved the fest forward, bringing prestigious filmmakers from all over the globe and has pioneered partnerships with Western-based firms such as Film Finders, leading to the creation of a small but essential market.