

Fajr Intl. Film Festival gives you a cinema of all flavors

Written by Mehr News Agency
Saturday, 27 April 2019 14:02 -



After four years of having organized the international section of Fajr film festival as an independent event from its national section, one could now say with confidence that Tehran has come a long way in such a short span of time with its biggest international cinematic event and now is quite proud of it.

The Fajr International Film Festival has already proved its worth and credibility, establishing itself not just as a domestic venue for the Iranian festival goers who wish to experience a different kind of cinema, but also as a wider arena for hundreds of people around the world, who become guests for a two-week period to a diverse selection of movies from places that they have little to no exposure to. Fajr gives you a taste of high-quality, non-commercial movies from heterogeneous cultures, places that you have never been to, countries that you have had a stereotypical view on, or have been completely misinformed about.

This year, the overall screening program, comprising 11 sections, had as many as 109 titles from 75 countries from near and far – distance or culture wise – from Russia, Turkey and China all the way to Egypt, Denmark and Argentina. The international competition section, called ‘Cinema Salvation’, included 15 feature films and 15 short films, with a jury panel of seven notable figures in the film industry.

Personally, I found this year’s lineup to have a more coherent structure compared to the previous edition; selected movies generally had solid executions, breath-taking cinematography, award-worthy acting, and most importantly, thought-provoking, smooth-flowing subject matters, which made them both ‘festival-worthy’ and ‘audience-friendly’.

Movies such as ‘Erased’, a Slovenian-Croatian-Serbian production directed by Miha Mazzini, or ‘Before the Frost’ by Danish filmmaker Michael Noer, kept the audience on the edge of their seats, breathless with anticipation, with their tense, solid unfolding of the events, at the same time as they painted a spectacular image of the sociocultural context of a particular period of time in a specific part of the world.

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While Fajr is not a themed festival, more focused on diversity of representation instead, many movies in this year's lineup shared a number of characteristics in common: children, adoption or future generations; environment; strong female characters; rejection of conventions and refusal to submit to a higher power; moving tales based on true stories, and characters with free, fighting spirits that didn't give up, that kept looking for solutions in the face of challenges and dire situations.



My personal favorites in the International Competition section were 'Erased' and 'Before the Frost'. 'Erased', the story of a Slovenian woman whose identity was erased, along with 26,000 others, in the wake of the country's independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. Refusing to be 'invisible', she did everything she could to get her identity, as well as her newborn baby, back, even going so far as to expose herself on national TV. 'Erased' was both informative of a historical incident that is possibly unknown to many people around the world, and it was at the same time a breathtaking story of a strong-willed character that kept pushing forward against a hostile tide.

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