

No Dancing Around Trees

There's a new breed of Indian cinema in town. They have songs but they might not have lead actors dancing around trees. They are helmed by young directors who meld the best of Bollywood, Indian theatre and folk traditions along with international filmmaking styles to come up with award winning films that are taking their place amongst the best in the world. And Singaporeans are asking for more.



Judging by the success of Indigo — a festival of contemporary Indian films that don't usually make it to big or small screens here — that was organised last year, audiences here are ready for films that go beyond Bollywood.

While a whole generation of Singaporeans has grown up watching popular Hindi and Tamil films on television screens, Indigo filled a huge gap in Indian cinema offerings here — there hadn't been an Indian film festival here in 21 years.

Encouraged by the response, Indigo is back with its second edition between 18–25 August 2004 with another set of eight critically acclaimed Indian films. Most are Singapore premieres.

The young directors that are the focus of Indigo 2004 combine arthouse sensibilities with modern and urban themes to come up with features that are winning fans and awards worldwide.

They tackle an India different from Bollywood's black and white outlook and larger than life theatrical style — an urban, modern India that is still rich in technicolour glory.

One of these is Santosh Sivan, India's answer to Christopher Doyle, who with his background as cinematographer to some of India's best directors such as Mani Ratnam ('Raja') and now Gurinder

Chadha ('Bride and Prejudice'), brings gorgeous visuals to the table. One of Sivan's earliest directorial ventures was 'Malli', a feature that looks at the world through the wide-eyed innocence of a child. It won raves for the sensitive handling of its environmental awareness subject.

The band of young directors also includes a woman who has been making waves: Kavita Lankesh, whose father was the publisher of the well-known Lankesh Patrike weekly in Karnataka, also features a child who counters his move from the village to the city with escapism in 'Deveeri'.

Mahesh Mathai, on the other hand, is a cross-over from advertising. His film 'Bhopal Express' is a bittersweet tale that follows a newlywed couple on the eve of the tragic gas disaster that struck the city in 1984.

Indigo's diaspora pick last year was Uganda-born Mira Nair's Monsoon Wedding. This year, the focus is on British-Asian director Asif Kapadia, whose acclaimed debut feature 'The Warrior' set in the stunning desert sands of Rajasthan won a slew of awards and even came close to being nominated as the UK's nomination to the Oscars.

To end it all on a high note is a laugh-riot that shows alternative doesn't mean serious. Widely acknowledged as one of the funniest films ever to come out of India, 'Jaane Bhi Do Yaaron' was made by a bunch of young film enthusiasts who are now fixtures in the Indian entertainment industry. Directed by Kundan Shah, the film follows two bumbling scandal sheet photographers who witness a murder of the police commissioner and set out to find the killer. The hard-hitting satire is a rollicking chase in which everybody chases everyone else and everyone chases the corpse.

While the film plays in Hindi with English subtitles, it has easily crossed borders and cultures all over the world. And there are many more entertaining and serious titles to choose from, all of which go beyond Bollywood.

Sangeetha Madhavan and Anand Rego
Indigo Organising Committee

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INDIGO Indian Film Festival is on from 18–25 August at Golden Village Plaza Singapura. Tickets from GV Plaza Singapura box office, online at www.gv.com.sg or through AXS stations islandwide.