

How AFI Fest honors trailblazing women along with its gala premieres

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

By Bob Strauss, Los Angeles Daily News

The 30th AFI Fest hits Hollywood Boulevard Thursday with, appropriately enough, a strong emphasis on movie history.

Of course, the American Film Instituteâ??s L.A. film festival will also bring its usual program of glitzy award season premieres, fantastic foreign and independent productions, new discoveries and live talent from all over the world to the Chinese Theatre complex and other venues along the boulevard by the time it concludes on Nov. 17.

But from its opening night gala premiere â?? Warren Beattyâ??s ode to Howard Hughesâ?? Hollywood of the 1950s *Rules Donâ??t Apply* â?? to the local bow of acclaimed contemporary musical *La La Land* and even a 75th anniversary restoration of the greatest film of all time, *Citizen Kane,* AFI Fest 2016 will be honoring the past while looking toward the future.

â??Showing *Rules Donâ??t Apply* and *La La Land* together is almost like fish in a barrel,â?• notes the festâ??s director of programming, Lane Kneedler. â??Theyâ??re about our town.â?•

And then thereâ??s the eventâ??s most beloved tradition: Once again this year, AFI Fest will be free to the public.

â??Thereâ??ll be a few other things that are special,â?• festival director Jacqueline Lyanga understates about the 30th anniversary edition. â??Weâ??re featuring three trailblazing women from cinema history; Ida Lupino, Anna May Wong and Dorothy Dandridge; weâ??ll be showing their films in our Cinemaâ??s Legacy section.â?•

Asked if the honoring of pioneering actress-turned-director Lupino and early Asian- and African-American stars Wong (an L.A. native, by the way) and Dandridge indicated an emphasized diversity theme this year, Lyanga provided perspective.

â??For us, it really represents the scope and the range that is showcased at AFI Fest,â?• she explains. â??Across the program, we have a remarkable amount of diversity in terms of women (33 of the nearly 120 features and shorts were female-directed) and in terms of filmmakers and artists and actors of color. Itâ??s not something thatâ??s special, actually, for this year, itâ??s something that weâ??ve seen in the programming year after year. We just look for great work; we donâ??t look for specific quotas.â?•

Among the splashier stuff theyâ??ve come up with, AFI Festâ??s programming team has added



Natalie Portman portrays Jacqueline Kennedy in the Kennedy biopic, *Jackie.*

the Natalie Portman-starring Kennedy biopic *Jackie,* a tribute to Annette Bening with a screening of her upcoming *20th Century Women,* another tribute to French national treasure Isabelle Huppert with her Paul Verhoeven-directed *Elle* and, for closing night, Mark Wahlbergâ??s Boston Marathon bombing docudrama *Patriots Day* to its Galas list.

The festivalâ??s Special Screenings section offers the first local glimpses of other upcoming hot properties such as the Robert De Niro-starring *The Comedian,* Jessica Chastainâ??s showcase as a high-powered D.C. lobbyist *Miss Sloane,* M. Night Shyamalanâ??s latest creepfest *Split,* acclaimed German comedy and Oscar entry *Toni Erdmann* and the premiere of Disneyâ??s animated Polynesian spectacular *Moana.*

â??â??Moana is going to be a fantastic evening,â?• Kneedler promises. â??Weâ??re going to have all of Hollywood Boulevard Moanaâ??d-out that night.â?•

Anticipated international auteur films making their L.A. debuts at AFI include Cristian Mungiuâ??s *Graduation* from Romania, Brit Ken Loachâ??s Cannes Film Festival prize-winner *I, Daniel Blake,* Spanish bad boy Pedro Almodovarâ??s latest *Julieta,* Pablo Larrainâ??s Chilean biopic *Neruda,* Iranian Oscar-winner Asghar Farhadiâ??s *The Salesman,* South Koreans Kim Ki-dukâ??s *The Net* and Hong Sang-sooâ??s *Yourself and Yours* and the Philippinesâ?? Lav Diazâ??s Venice Film Fest winner *The*

Woman Who Left.

And many, many more. Plus a lot of stuff even the most devoted followers of the international movie scene probably havenâ??t heard about. There are films from 46 countries at AFI this year.

â??One of the goals of the festival is to contextualize the year in cinema as best we can, in a place where people who are in the industry, the filmmakers, the general public, the cinephiles, the movie fans, everyone can come together and talk about movies,â• Lyanga explains. â??And, also, to not only think about the films that have won awards and are known about and lauded at Sundance, Berlin, Cannes or Telluride, but to bring to light films that we think are incredible that may have been off the radar. Thatâ??s part of what youâ??ll see in our New Auteurs, American Independents and World Cinema sections.â•

Some titles Kneedler and Lyanga advise checking out include the American indies *Always Shine* by Sophia Takal, *Busterâ??s Mal Heart* by Sarah Adina Smith and starring *Mr. Robotâ??s* Rami Malek, and the Kris Avedisian-directed and -starring *Donald Cried.* They also suggest sampling Brazilâ??s *Kill Me Please,* Kenyaâ??s *Kati Kati,* the French/Qatari co-production *Divines* and the Austrian/Italian *Mister Universo* amid the bounty of imported offerings.

The festival also will host a technology showcase, panels with the yearâ??s outstanding indie and documentary talents, family- and student-oriented programs and, in case you need more classic movie connections, documentaries on filmâ??s ultimate samurai Toshiro Mifune and mother/daughter icons Debbie Reynolds and Carrie Fisher.

For the full schedule, to reserve tickets and all other stuff, go to afifest.afi.com.

(Source: http://www.presstelegram.com)

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hollywoodglee