



23RD VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

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DRAGONS & TIGERS TURNS ITS LENS TO NEW ASIAN CINEMA

Vancouver, BC (August 25, 04) – Festival Director **Alan Franey** and programmer **Tony Rayns** today announced that the 23rd annual Vancouver International Film Festival will feature a total of 43 features, 5 mid-length films, and 47 shorts in the Festival's cornerstone **Dragons & Tigers: The Cinemas of East Asia** program. Again presented this year thanks to the generous support of **Brad Birarda**, the always-anticipated Dragons & Tigers program is one of the preeminent showcases of East Asian films in the world, this year featuring 16 International Premieres, 13 North American Premieres, 9 Canadian Premieres, two English-Canadian premieres, and one World Premiere.

“Our aim with the *Dragon & Tigers* series is to celebrate the continuing excellence and innovation of East Asian cinema, and in particular to introduce new talent to the West. We are perennially gratified that Vancouver audiences are very responsive to not only the already recognized titles but to the cutting-edge films and young talent that our veteran programmer Tony Rayns cares so deeply about,” says Festival Director Alan Franey.

“The tendency of recent years which has seen our selection shift away from mainstream commercial and art-house features towards more independent work continues this year,” commented **Dragons & Tigers** programmer Tony Rayns. “This is partly because more of the commercial and art-house titles are reaching distribution in western countries, but the main reason is that the indie sector continues to be livelier and more rewarding than the mainstream. China is especially strong this year.”

Of special note is the surfeit of Dragons & Tigers shorts, including new short films from regulars Bong Joon-Ho, Yu Lik Wai and Sogo Ishii produced by the Jeonju Film Festival in South Korea, the **TWENTIDENTITY** shorts made for the Korean Film Academy, alternative animé from Japan, and a welcome return of the Cop Festival program, curated by Shinozaki Makoto. “The reason is that these shorts include some of the most impressive filmmaking of the year,” Rayns continues, highlighting work from Japan's Hirabayashi Isamu (**TEXTISM**, winner of the Grand Prix at the Image Forum Festival) and Thailand's Aditya Assarat, “a coming talent who clearly is going to be making important features in the near future.”

A TRIBUTE TO LEE SUNG-GANG

This year we are also pleased to honour the great Korean animator Lee Sung-Gang with two special screenings. Part One of our tribute is a screening of his 2001 feature, **MY BEAUTIFUL GIRL, MARI**, winner of the Grand Priz at the Annecy Animation Festival. It concerns a 12-year-old boy living with his mother and grandmother in an isolated fishing village who tries to escape into a parallel world. Part Two of the tribute comprises a selection of the shorts and music videos he has made. **ONURI AND OTHER SHORTS** includes his music videos for the band Rainy Sun *Ocean* (co-directed with Nam Ji-Woong of *Teenage Hooker* fame), his animated sequence for Jang Sun-Woo's *Bad Movie* and his latest short, *Onuri*, based on a Jeju Island creation myth.

DRAGONS & TIGERS COMPETITION FOR YOUNG ASIAN CINEMA

For the eleventh year running, the Dragons & Tigers Award for Young Cinema, which includes a prize of \$5,000 to the film's director courtesy of sponsor Brad Birarda, will be awarded for the most creative and innovative first or second feature-length film by a new director from Pacific Asia. Previous winners of the award returning with new films out of competition this year are Kore-eda Hirokazu (**NOBODY KNOWS**), Jia Zhangke (**THE WORLD**), and Hong Sang-Soo (**WOMAN IS THE FUTURE OF MAN**), who will serve as a distinguished juror for this year's competition.

The films in this year's competition are:

THE BIG DURIAN (Amir Muhammad, Malaysia) *Canadian Premiere*

FADE INTO YOU (Chegy, South Korea) *International Premiere*

THE FOLIAGE (Lu Yue, China) *Canadian Premiere*

GOOD MORNING, BEIJING (Pan Jianlin, China) *North American Premiere*

THE SOUP, ONE MORNING (Takahashi Izumi, Japan) *International Premiere*

THE OVERTURE (Itthi-sunthorn Wichailak, Thailand)

SOUTH OF THE CLOUDS (Zhu Wen, China) *North American Premiere*

SPLENDID FLOAT (Zero Chou, Taiwan) *International Premiere*

SUND@Y SEOUL (Oh Myung-Hoon, South Korea) *North American Premiere*

2004 DRAGONS & TIGERS PROGRAM BY COUNTRY

CHINA

BAOBER IN LOVE (Li Shaohong) *English-Canadian Premiere*

Like Betty Blue without the misogyny, Li Shaohong's psychedelic romance takes one wild and crazy (but damaged) girl—the wonderful Zhou Xun from *Suzhou River*—and watches her transform the life of a bored salaryman. But then she bolts and leaves him bereft...

DELAMU (Tian Zhuangzhuang) *Canadian Premiere*

Tian Zhuangzhuang takes High-Definition cameras along the perilous Chinese and Tibetan trails of the "Tea-Horse Route" and comes back with stunning reportage. Incredible landscapes, amazing people, and ways of life about to be obliterated.

THE FOLIAGE (Lu Yue) *Canadian Premiere*

A completely fresh take on the *zhiqing* phenomenon, the city kids (ex-Red Guards) sent by Mao to China's remotest regions to "learn from the people" in the late 60s. A sexual triangle provokes jealousy, pain and finally violence. Stars Liu Ye (from *Lan Yu*) and the wonderful Shu qi. Directed by Lu Yue (*Mr. Zhao*). Dragons & Tigers Award Nominee.

GOOD MORNING, BEIJING (Pan Jianlin) *North American Premiere*

A young woman is held captive in an apartment with other women and forced to provide sexual services to various male clients. Meanwhile a man spends the night criss-crossing the city with a hard-bitten private detective, trying to buy the freedom of his kidnapped wife. A powerful first feature by Pan Jianlin. Dragons & Tigers Award Nominee. With two visually remarkable short films from Japan: Hirata Takahiro's *The Trains* and Goshima Kazuhiro's *Z-Reactor*.

GREEN HAT (Liu Fendou) *Canadian Premiere*

Winner of two top prizes at the Tribeca Festival in NYC, Liu Fendou's amazing debut feature examines male impotence from two radically opposed perspectives: a bank robber jilted by his girlfriend and a cop whose wife is having an affair. Sexually candid, formally inventive.

INCENSE (Ning Hao) *North American Premiere*

Grand Prix winner at the Tokyo FILMeX Festival last year, Ning Hao's debut is a wry black comedy about a village priest determined to raise the money to repair the Buddha image in his temple—who betrays all his own moral principles, one by one, in the process. A fine satire on China's new materialism.

THE NARROW PATH (Cui Zi'en) *International Premiere*

The doyen of Queer Chinese Cinema, Cui Zi'en comes up with a strange and fascinating fable about freedom, conformity and intimidation. A naked man walks along an endless country road, joined by another... and then more. Eventually they encounter a group of tough guys who object to their nudity, and a confrontation develops. With Tsugita Jun's short *Friends* (Japan), about friendship, jealousy and enmity between men.

SOUTH OF THE CLOUDS (Zhu Wen) *North American Premiere*

Not as angry or abrasive as Zhu Wen's debut *Seafood*, but easily one of the finest Chinese films of the year. A pensioner in northern China takes the trip to the tropical south which he should have taken 40 years earlier—only to find himself trapped in a gently erotic fantasy. With Tian Zhuangzhuang in a cameo as a very laid-back chief of police. Dragons & Tigers Award Nominee.

TANG POETRY (Zhang Lu) *North American Premiere*

A thief has retired from crime because a nervous disease makes his hands shake. His mistress/apprentice tries every way she can think of to tempt him to tackle "one last job." Their obsessive-compulsive behaviour is counterpointed by some of the most famous classical poems from the Tang Dynasty. A wryly funny indie by Zhang Lu, made at the height of last year's SARS epidemic in Beijing.

THE WORLD (Jia Zhangke, China)

Set in and around a "World" theme park which features scale reproductions of the Eiffel Tower, the Taj Mahal, the pyramids, etc., Jia Zhangke's new film looks at the phoney cosmopolitanism of China today and the desire of so many Chinese to emigrate. Its core is the relationship between Tao, a dancer at the park's shows, and Taisheng, one of the security guards.

HONG KONG

MCDULL, PRINCE DE LA BUN (Toe Yuen) *North American Premiere*

Created by Alice Mak, the little pig McDull is emblematic of Hong Kong people: hard-working, self-sacrificing and deeply pragmatic. This second McDull feature (again directed by Toe Yuen) blends social satire with fantasy: the story of McDull's missing father McBing, also known as the Prince de la Bun.

INDONESIA

ARISAN! (Nia diNata) *Canadian Premiere*

Lively satire on the emotional travails of the Jakarta smart-set, notable for being the first Indonesian movie to take gay male characters seriously. A successful young architect, desperate to keep his gayness hidden from his domineering mother and two close gal-pals, suddenly finds himself in a romance.

JAPAN

L'AMANT (Hiroki Ryuichi) *International Premiere*

Hiroki Ryuichi follows up *Vibrator* with another provocative foray into gender politics. Three men, all middle-aged losers, club together to honour the wishes of their late mentor: they buy a year from the life of a schoolgirl to do with her as they like. But she may be tougher than they are...

CAFÉ LUMIÈRE (Hou Hsiao-hsien)

Narrow in focus but suggesting volumes, Hou Hsiao-Hsien's first Japanese film (made to mark the century of Ozu's birth) meditates on time, history, parenthood, pregnancy, coffee—and railways. Mysterious and haunting.

THE COMPLETE JAPANESE SHOWA SONGBOOK (Shinohara Tetsuo)

International Premiere

Shinohara Tetsuo adapts and transcends a notorious novel about gang warfare between a group of young droogs with a thing for the greatest hits of the 60s and a group of refined and well-connected middle-aged ladies. Tit-for-tat retaliation escalates off the scale in a fabulous black comedy. Stars Matsuda Ryuhei (*Gohatto*) and Ando Masanobu (*Kids Return*).

COP FESTIVAL RELOADED *International Premiere*

After last year's ambiguous triumph, a further selection of gripping cop stories, including Suzuki Kosuke's *Hairwig and the Angry Cop* and Honda Ryuichi's near-pornographic *Love Juice Cop*. Guest appearance: Miike Takashi. With Shinozaki Makoto's *Nobody's Home* (Japan): a remake of his early short about a girl who finds something very nasty on her video answering machine.

DEATHS AND TRANSMIGRATIONS *International Premiere*

Probably the most electrifying program of non-mainstream shorts ever presented by the festival, comprising Hirabayashi Isamu's knockout *Textism* (Japan), which starts as a murder mystery and ends as a kind of snuff movie; Kim Gok and Kim Sun's *Light & Class* (South Korea), a post-Sokurov film about a mother, a son and the decay of communism; and Chen Chieh-Jen's *Lingchi: Echoes of a Historical Photograph* (Taiwan), which recreates and reflects on a Qing Dynasty execution.

FLOWER AND SNAKE (Ishii Takashi) *International Premiere*

Ishii Takashi (director of *Gonin*, *Black Angel*, etc.) tackles the most famously Japanese sado-masochist novel by Oniroku Dan, the one about the society wife who is kidnapped and forced to star in a private show for jaded voyeurs. No great sexual surprises, but Ishii's florid style turns this into the *Titanic* of s-m exploitation.

IMAGINATION PRACTICE (Various Directors) *International Premiere*

A selection of seven "alternative animé" shorts from Japan's indie sector, ranging in style from Tsuji Naoyuki's *A Feather Stare in the Dark* (line animation; the sex of angels) to Onitsuka Kentaro's *Blooming Ink Tale* (pixilation; a vignette from the war between men and women). Wonderfully imaginative work.

IZO (Miike Takashi) *North American Premiere*

Miike Takashi resurrects a notorious assassin from the mid-19th century and sends him on a murderous journey through time and space, killing everyone in sight. The low-born Izo is the very spirit of negation: can anything stop him? The huge catalogue of guest stars includes "Beat" Takeshi, Mornoi Kaori and Matsuda Ryuhei.

NOBODY KNOWS (Kore-eda Hirokazu)

Kore-eda Hirokazu's Cannes prize-winner is about a group of four hardy kids (two of them still infants) abandoned for weeks on end in a rented Tokyo apartment by their unmarried mother. Not a re-run of *Lord of the Flies* but a tale of resilience and youthful dreams. Sad, of course, but also heartening.

THE SOUP, ONE MORNING (Takahashi Izumi) *International Premiere*

Kitagawa suffers panic attacks, so he quits his job and stays home, supported by his girlfriend Shizu. She tolerates the situation for a time, but gradually realizes that he has joined a cult religion... Superbly acted and daringly conceived first feature by Takahashi Izumi. Dragons & Tigers Award Nominee. With Oki Chieko's *Grainy Days* (Japan), a woman's first-person account of her dreams of escape from a dead-end job.

PINK RIBBON (Fujii Kentaro) *World Premiere*

Sex movies have a special place in Japanese pop culture. Many famous directors started out making them, and some sex films have built up huge cult reputations. Fujii Kentaro's exhaustive documentary explores the history of the genre (with plentiful clips) and interviews Kurosawa Kiyoshi, Wakamatsu Koji and many others about their sex-film experiences.

TONY TAKITANI (Ichikawa Jun) *North American Premiere*

The first ever feature adapted from the writings of Murakami Haruki. Tony Takitani (great stage actor Issey Ogata, last on screen in Edward Yang's *A One and a Two*) is an illustrator specializing in mechanical drawings who doesn't realize how lonely he is until he marries Eiko (Miyazawa Rie, *The Cabbie*). But she has an alarming clothes-buying habit... A brilliantly stylized film, directed by Ichikawa Jun. With *Penis*, *Helmut*, *Cockroach* and *Kakashi* (Japan), four splendid early shorts by Hirabayashi Isamu, the director of *Textism*.

TSUBURO (Yamada Masafumi) *International Premiere*

Sci-fi indie feature (somewhat in the vein of *Tetsuo*) by Osaka-based filmmaker Yamada Masafumi. After some unknown catastrophe, a nurse wakes in a wrecked hospital room with a taciturn man named Tsuburo who has a strange apparatus embedded in his back. They seem to be trapped together... With *Sayonara*, *Sayo-u-nara* (Japan), an electrifying movie about suicide cults by Hirosue Hiromasa (the lead actor in *The Soup*, *One Morning*).

MALAYSIA

THE BIG DURIAN (Amir Muhammad, Malaysia) *Canadian Premiere*

Amir Muhammad emerges as a major talent with a documentary (or is that mockumentary?) which finds keys to Malaysia's deep-rooted problems in the real-life case of a soldier who ran amok. With Amir's earlier shorts, *Lost*, *Friday*, *Checkpoint*, and *Pangyau*, each one a witty and sardonic personal vignette.

MIN (Ho Yuhang) *North American Premiere*

Min is a 20-year-old Chinese girl who was adopted by Malay parents; she decides one day to look for her birth mother and embarks on an enigmatic journey. Ho Yuhang's prizewinning indie feature is told in still, quiet images which reveal their meaning only slowly. With two shorts by an outstanding new director from Thailand, Aditya Assarat: *Motorcycle* and *Waiting*.

PHILIPPINES

WOMAN OF THE BREAKWATER (Mario O'Hara) *North American Premiere*

Mario O'Hara's latest is a group portrait of the down-and-outs who make homes of sorts alongside the Manila Bay breakwater, a ramshackle community of beggars, scavengers and hookers. Like a raunchier equivalent of Kurosawa's *Dodes'kaden*, held together by ballad-commentaries from the Visayan singer Yoyoy Villame.

SOUTH KOREA

ARAHAN (Ryu Seung-Wan) *North American Premiere*

Ryu Seung-Wan (director of *Die Bad*) hits his commercial stride with a slam-bang martial-arts actioner. A gormless young cop and a cool check-out girl need to attain enlightenment fast to tackle the recently unleashed Master of Absolute Evil. The great Ahn Sung-Ki stars as their teacher.

DIGITAL SHORT FILMS BY THREE FILMMAKERS (Bong Joon-Ho, Yu Lik-Wai, Ishii Sogo) *International Premiere*

Three digital films commissioned by the Jeonju Film Festival in Korea: Ishii Sogo's *Mirrored Mind* (Japan) on an actress experiencing a crisis of identity; Yu Lik-Wai's *Dance Me to the End of Love* (China) with a nervous love story from the future; and Bong Joon-Ho's brilliant *Influenza* (South Korea) in which a tragic life-story unfolds through CCTV footage.

FADE INTO YOU (Chegy, South Korea) *International Premiere*

Indie filmmaker Chegy's debut feature offers a succession of mysterious events which may or may not add up to a storyline. Each episode is easy to watch and enjoyable in itself, but the connections remain elusive and tantalizing. Dragons & Tigers Award Nominee. With Chegy's earlier short, *Rest in the Light*.

REPATRIATION (Kim Dong-Won) *Canadian Premiere*

Kim Dong-Won's magisterial documentary starts from the release of long-term political prisoners in 1992 (they were communist sympathizers in the fascistic South Korea of the 1960s) and then explores the filmmaker's attempts to befriend and understand these men and their circle of friends and supporters in the rapidly changing context of the 1990s. A film of great candour, this is the most searching account of modern Korean politics ever made.

SPYING CAM (Whang Cheol-Mean) *International Premiere*

Two men stay locked up together in a cheap hotel room, rarely going out. Are they gay, as the cleaning women assume? Or is something more sinister going on? And what does Dostoyevski's *Crime and Punishment* have to do with it? An intriguing new feature by Whang Cheol-Mean, the godfather of Korean indie filmmaking. With *Principle of Party Politics* (South Korea): a comedy about radical filmmaking by the Kim brothers.

SUND@Y SEOUL (Oh Myung-Hoon, South Korea) *North American Premiere*

Drawn from real-life stories found in the tabloids, Oh Myung-Hoon's debut feature is a collage of strange events and relationships gone wrong. Sex-for-money, changed locks and phone numbers, missing terrapins... Dragons & Tigers Award Nominee. With *Warm Swamp* (South Korea), the latest film by Park Chan Ok, director of *Jealousy Is My Middle Name*.

TWENTIDENTITY *International Premiere*

The Korean Academy of Film Arts celebrated its 20th birthday last year by inviting twenty of its graduates to make digital shorts. Our program is a selection of ten of them, including brilliant work from such directors as Park Ki-Yong, Hur Jin-Ho, Min Gyu-Dong, Kim Tae-Yong and Bong Joon-Ho.

WOMAN IS THE FUTURE OF MAN (Hong Sang-Soo) *North American Premiere*

Heonjun, just back from film school in the US, looks up his old friend Munho, now a university teacher, and they find their thoughts turning to Sunhwa, a girl they both once dated. But they remember her very differently, and their trip to visit her has unforeseen consequences. Hong Sang-Soo's latest finesses his characteristic mix of deadpan comedy, psychological probing and formal play.

TAIWAN

BEAR HUG (Wang Shaudi) *International Premiere*

Wang Shaudi takes apart a typical middle-class divorce—from the point of view of the emotionally neglected son and the resentful relative who's dragged in as a babysitter. Cruelly funny and sweetly sentimental, sometimes both at the same time.

THE MISSING (Lee Kang-Sheng) *Canadian Premiere*

Multi-award-winning debut by Tsai Ming-Liang's regular actor, Lee Kang-Sheng. An old woman spends the day frantically searching for her grandson when he goes missing in the park. A teenage boy squanders his day in a video game arcade and gets home to find that his grandfather has gone missing. Could the two disappearances be linked?

SPLENDID FLOAT (Zero Chou) *International Premiere*

Roy is a Taoist priest working in Taipei, mostly officiating at funerals. By night he becomes Rose, one of four drag queens touring the countryside in a splendid float, putting on lip-synch shows. A visually exquisite debut by Zero Chou, director of last year's gay-bar documentary *Corner's*. Dragons & Tigers Award Nominee. With Royston Tan's *Cut* (Singapore): a musical protest against the censorship in Singapore of the director's feature *15*, shown in the VIFF last year.

TAIPEI 21 (Alex Yang) *North American Premiere*

Jean and Hong have been together for seven years when Jean puts down the deposit on an apartment for them to share—and thereby sets in motion the process that will end their relationship seven days later. Alex Yang's second feature (the first was *The Trigger*) tries to pinpoint the new mood of anxiety that has overtaken the young generation in Taipei.

THAILAND

THE ADVENTURES OF IRON PUSSY (Apichatpong Weerasethakul/Michael Shaowanasai) *Canadian Premiere*
Special agent Iron Pussy goes undercover to crack a drug ring. Screamingly camp mix of romance, Buddhist piety, mild political satire and torch songs, all given a retro twist by co-director Apichatpong Weerasethakul. With *Whatever Happened to Ms Machiko?* (Japan), Shirakawa Koji's jolly musical about a girl with deficient gaydar.

BAYTONG (Nonzee Nimbutr) *English-Canadian Premiere*

A change of pace for Nonzee Nimbutr: a Buddhist monk in northern Thailand is forced to leave his temple and move to the Muslim south to become a surrogate parent to his orphaned niece. A gently comic picture about a grown man belatedly learning the ways of the world.

BEAUTIFUL BOXER (Ekachai Uekrongtham) *Canadian Premiere*

You couldn't make it up: Thai boxer Nong Toom fought his way to a championship—to finance his sex-change from his winnings. Ekachai's bio-pic (starring real-life 22-year-old champ Asanee Suwan) is funny, sincere and ultimately touching.

THE MACABRE CASE OF PROMPIRAM (Manop Udomdej) *International Premiere*

Memories of Murder, Thai-style. Manop Udomdej recreates the police investigation into a rape-murder which took place in the town of Prompiram in 1976. Despite obstruction from higher up, the enquiries are thorough—and they reveal a truly shocking secret.

THE OVERTURE (Itthi-sunthorn Wichailak)

Village boy Sorn has a remarkable musical skill playing the ranad-ek, a bamboo xylophone; he overcomes setbacks and obstacles to become a court musician and eventually an upholder of Thai traditions during the Japanese occupation in the Pacific War. Itthi-sunthorn Wichailak's bio-pic combines beautiful recreations of early-20th-century Thailand with the most thrilling sequences of musical performance imaginable. Dragons & Tigers Award Nominee.

TROPICAL MALADY (Apichatpong Weerasethakul)

Apichatpong Weerasethakul's new film (Prix du Jury, Cannes) is actually two films in one. The first is a straightforward gay love story: a soldier falls for a country boy, and their relationship grows almost scarily intense. The second is a phantasmagoria: a soldier hunts a shape-shifting man-beast through the dense jungle—or does the beast hunt him? Are these two versions of the same story? Or does each complete the other's meaning? Sexy and intense.

The 23rd annual Vancouver International Film Festival runs from September 23 to October 8. More than 150,000 patrons are expected to attend 500 screenings of over 300 films from 50 countries at 10 Vancouver screens: Cineplex Odeon Granville Cinemas (7 screens); the VISA Screening Room at the Vogue Theatre; The Ridge; and the Pacific Cinémathèque.

All box offices open September 4 for VISA cardholders. Cash sales begin September 11. The fastest way to buy advance tickets is at www.viff.org, 24 hours a day, or through the VISA Charge-by-Phone line at 604-685-8297, open noon to 7pm. There are two advance ticket outlets, the Pacific Centre Kiosk (Granville and Georgia) and City Square Mall (Cambie and 12th, mezzanine level). For festival information, call the Starbucks Hotline at 604-683-FILM (3456) starting September 2, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., or see the website.

The line-up will be announced at a press conference on September 1, 10:30 am at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Georgia.

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