



2010

IFFLA

WHEN INDIA SPARKLED UNDER THE LA SKY

THIS YEAR'S INDIAN FILM FESTIVAL OF LOS ANGELES WAS ALL ABOUT FILMS(!), FUN, FOOD AND FAMOUS STARS. FROM MEETING THE BEAUTIFUL-AND-STRONGER-THAN-EVER LISA RAY TO DANCING TO THE BEAT OF THE DHOL, NEHA SARIN SHARES WITH US HER UNIQUE CULTURAL EXPERIENCE AT THE 8TH EDITION OF IFFLA.

There were butterflies in my tummy, as I braced myself for the red carpet experience – one that had always seemed to be a scene in a faraway land. But now that I was here, it seemed too close for comfort. On my way to the venue, the suave ArcLight Cinemas, located at the famous Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood, it started drizzling. Within minutes it was pouring heavily. Travelling with one of the organisers of the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles (IFFLA), whom I had befriended while desperately trying to register myself last minute, I hoped the rain wouldn't dampen the evening.

A few last minute glitches did crop-up at IFFLA this year, but were handled smoothly by the people behind the scenes, all dressed for the occasion in traditional Indian attire. The red carpet was rolled out in an open courtyard but it had to be dragged indoors, thanks to the untimely rains. As the evening progressed, and expensive perfume filled the air, hordes of known and deserving faces sashayed down the carpet. As they smiled and posed, members from the media hurriedly shot questions at the celluloid heartthrobs even as the furious clicking of the cameras drowned the Indian music in the background. Amongst the first few to show up were Mary Murphy ("So You Think You Can Dance"), Jeff Doucette ("Desperate Housewives") and Aditya Bhattacharya ("Raakh Redux"). Christina Marouda, IFFLA's Executive Director and the creator of this magical event, carrying an off-shoulder black gown with absolute finesse, and Arnold Peter, IFFLA's Chair of Board, in an elegant embroidered black suit, mingled and exchanged pleasantries with their guests.

The public broke into smiles when Omi Vaidya walked in with his wife. I asked him a quick question about his favourite line in "3 Idiots" and he grinned and replied, "It's the last scene, when I had to be really, really mean; after all you can't talk like that with Aamir Khan!" Anjoo Khosla, a short-filmmaker, pointed out that India perceives the movies which have returned from prestigious festivals, like IFFLA, differently. As I was pondering over what she just said, I spotted the most awaited celebrity of the evening – Lisa Ray. Even though she was sporting a shaven head, she looked truly stunning and sparkled



IFFLA'S OPENING NIGHT – Top: (Left to Right) Arnold Peter, Mary Murphy, and Christina Marouda; Right: Actress Lisa Ray and composer Amritha Vaz ("Cooking with Stella")

Below – (Left to Right): Recipient of IFFLA Industry Trailblazer Award, Ashok Amritraj with Overture Films CEO Chris McGurk; Right – **CLOSING NIGHT WINNERS:** (Left to Right) Actor Samrat Chakrabarti, director Laxmikant Shetgaonkar, director Terrie Samundra, Kranti Kanade and Vinitha Chandran



like a real star. Within moments, her bulky bodyguard became extra alert as scores of friends and fans attempted to meet her. About 10 months ago, Lisa Ray was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a very rare form of cancer. Having defeated the disease, Lisa looked radiant and strong, and I patiently waited for Ray to get free from her concerned friends, and a bunch of star-struck fans who wanted a picture with her. Since nobody seemed to have enough of her – she politely and patiently obliged the numerous requests for snaps – I marched right up to her. Rescuing her and introducing myself in the same breath, I asked her if she had to cook in her film “Cooking with Stella”. To which she smiled and said, “Oh! I have just come back from India and even though I love eating the spicy Goan *khana*, I’m not the cook in the movie; Seema Biswas and my co-star Don McKeller are. It’s a very sweet film.” I asked about where she drew her strength from, and she replied, “I was back in India, and the amount of love you get there helps a lot. Plus, I die for the *ghar ka khana* – it’s almost therapeutic!” I was barely getting settled in the conversation, when we were interrupted and she was ushered into the auditorium where the screening of “Cooking with Stella”, the opening film of the festival, was to begin. I followed suit. And later, we proceeded to the post-event gala, at a nearby hotspot, where American-Indians satiated their cravings for desi *khana* and rekindled their love for India over wine, Bollywood music and live *dhol* (a rare sight in the States!).

Over the following few days, the Festival showcased 33 films from five countries. Besides, the IFFLA 2010 Industry Leadership Awards honoured people like Uday Shankar, CEO of Star India and Sanford Panitch, President of Fox International Production. Ashok Amritraj, CEO of Hyde Park Entertainment got IFFLA’s Industry Trailblazer Award. The closing night saw Jury

and Audience Choice Awards, following which the closing film, “The Waiting City”, starring Radha Mitchell, was screened.

To cut a long story short, the IFFLA 2010 was a tasteful treat for serious cinema enthusiasts and popcorn lovers alike! And it left me with a warm fuzzy feeling, which was perhaps nostalgia spiked with love for movies and all things Indian! **isi**



THE IFFLA AWARDS WENT TO...

AUDIENCE CHOICE AWARD:

BEST SHORT: “KUNJO”. DIR: TERRIE SAMUNDRA

BEST DOCUMENTARY: “THE SUN BEHIND THE CLOUDS: TIBET’S STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM”. DIR: RITU SARIN AND TENZING SONAM

BEST FEATURE: “HARISHCHANDRACHI FACTORY”. DIR: PARESH MOKASHI

GRAND JURY PRIZE:

BEST SHORT: “GAREEB NAWAZ’S TAXI”. DIR: RITESH BATRA

SPECIAL MENTION, SHORT: “WAHID’S MOBILE BOOKSTORE”. DIR: ANJOO KHOSLA

BEST DOCUMENTARY: “AT MY DOORSTEP”. DIR: NISHTHA JAIN

SPECIAL MENTION, DOCUMENTARY: “NERO’S GUESTS”. DIR: DEEPA BHATIA

BEST FEATURE: “MAN BEYOND THE BRIDGE”. DIR: LAXMIKANT SHETGAONKAR

SPECIAL MENTION, FEATURE: “COOKING WITH STELLA”. DIR: DILIP MEHTA

