



## Armenia Susanna Harutyunyan

'The Apricot Revolution' was the title of David D'Arcy's article on Armenian cinema, published in *Screen International* on 25 July 2008. It highlights the importance of the Golden Apricot International Film Festival (GAIFF), which was founded five years ago. The festival has been seen as a revolution in overcoming the deep crisis of national film production in Armenia and in the integration of Armenian cinema within the global film community.

As D'Arcy states: 'At the Golden Apricot ... international cinema is meeting the culture of this small nation whose diaspora reaches from the former Soviet Union to Paris, Santa Monica and Toronto. Armenia does not have much film production today ... But it did have its own active studio under the Soviet system, and its film culture runs deep.'

In addition to a wide range of international titles, the festival played host to an ever-expanding film market, offering a gateway to an entire region's cinematic output. There was also a masterclass by acclaimed Canadian-Armenian filmmaker Atom Egoyan and a tribute to Californian-Armenian dramatist and author, William Saroyan.



Narine Mkrtchyan & Arsen Azatyan's *The Return of the Prodigal Son*

The festival also hosts a unique programme called 'Armenian Panorama', where new national film production, as well as films made globally by filmmakers of Armenian origin, are presented. The festival is growing into a major platform for Armenian directors and unlocks the doors for Armenian films to gain access to leading international festivals.

The world premiere of Narine Mkrtchyan and Arsen Azatyan's **The Return of the Prodigal Son** (*Anarak Vordu Veradardze*) took place at the 13th Pusan International Film Festival in South Korea. That festival, along with Rotterdam, are partnered with the Golden Apricot in a 'sisterhood agreement' that was signed in 2007, an arrangement that should guarantee wider coverage of Armenian films in the future.

**Border** (*Sahman*), the new film by GAIFF director Harutyun Khachatryan, will receive its premiere at the 38th Rotterdam Film Festival in late January 2009. This docu-drama surveys the landscape after the country's war with Azerbaijan in the late 1990s, from the perspective of a she-buffalo. The financing for the film came from various sources, including state funds, an Armenian and Netherlands co-production deal with Hubert Bals Fund participation, and other co-production deals. Such deals are typical for local Armenian features produced during the last year, but state support remains a vital source, as it sometimes covers a significant part of their budgets.

In 2009, the state subsidies for the national film industry will be about US\$1.9 million. Although subsidies appear to have increased over the last year, the amount allocated for

film production is the same (US\$825,000 for feature films; US\$365,000 for animated films; and US\$290,000 for documentaries). However, the state subsidy for the participation of Armenian films in festivals and the presentation of domestic product at leading film markets has increased. From early next year, the state will launch a new programme targeted at the development and support of alternative ways of distribution across all regions in Armenia. The programme, headed by the National Centre of Cinema and entitled 'Movie-theatre on Wheels', aims to reconnect audiences countrywide with its national cinema. This relationship had eroded over the last decade and it is hoped that this new programme will generate great interest amongst the population.

**Bonded Parallels** (*Khchechvatz Zugahernen*), the long-awaited feature debut by Hovhannes Galstyan, had been delayed for two years due to underfunding during post-production. The film presents two storylines, taking place during different time periods, but sharing one common theme: the fate of two heroines – mother and daughter. Shooting took place in Armenia and Norway. It was co-produced with partners from France and Norway, and features an international cast of actors from Armenia, France, Norway and Syria.

Mikayel Dovaltyan's **Landslide** (*Soghank*) is a fantasy-thriller, an unusual genre for Armenian cinema. A sudden landslide swallows up the film's protagonist and sucks him underground. What kind of life, if any, is under there? What does this underground world look like? Strangely, life appears to differ very little in this alternate world.

Suren Babayan's **A Nude** (*Bnord*) is expected to be completed by early 2009. Acclaimed Armenian actor Jean-Pier Nshanian, who has recently starred in a number of local films, plays a mentally unbalanced man whose inner turmoil results in his loss of identity, which he compensates for by an increasing obsession with spying on a stranger's family.



Director Harutyun Khachatryan speaking at the 4th Golden Apricot International Film Festival

### The year's best films

**Border** (Harutyun Khachatryan)  
**The Return of the Prodigal Son** (Narine Mkrtchyan and Arsen Azatyan)  
**Bonded Parallels** (Hovhannes Galstyan)

### Quotes of the year

'Donata and I had the greatest time in Yerevan and in your country. Consider us firm friends of your festival. We'll spread the word!' WIM WENDERS, *talking about the 5th Golden Apricot International Film Festival.*

'It is very powerful and full of primal emotion. In a sense, it is at the very essence of what cinema can give the viewer – a direct experience of life through a purely visual immersion into sensory worlds.' ATOM EGOYAN, *commenting on Khachatryan's Border.*

### Directory

All Tel/Fax numbers begin (+374)

**Armenian National Cinematheque**, 25A Tbilisyan Highway, 375052 Yerevan. Tel: 285 406. filmadaran@yahoo.com.

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