

Futuristic Abu Dhabi offers filmmakers hefty rebate

LOS ANGELES, July 29, (RTRS): A bustling metropolis rising from desert sands. A city cradled by the warm, blue waters of the Persian Gulf. An economic powerhouse of great wealth. Jaw-dropping architecture at every turn. This is Abu Dhabi, second-largest city (the largest is Dubai) of the United Arab Emirates and its capital - as well as capital of the Emirate of Dubai. Tourists and businesspeople have many reasons for going there; filmmakers are attracted by its rebate of up to 30% on qualified spend.

Attractions include the unique steel-and-glass silhouette of the Etihad Towers, the beauty of the Emirates Palace hotel, and Ferrari World, the world's only Ferrari-branded theme park. Specifically, the incentive consists of a cash rebate of up to 30% on qualified spend. Maximum rebates available for feature films are \$5 million; for TV shows and series the maximum is \$1 million.

For post-production only, there's a maximum rebate of \$250,000 for feature films and \$150,000 for TV programs and series.

A minimum of only one day shooting in Abu Dhabi is required. The minimum spend for features is \$200,000; for TV programs or series it's \$50,000. The minimum spend for post-production only is \$70,000 for features and \$15,000 for TV projects.

Recent projects shot in Abu Dhabi include "War Machine" (2017), "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" (2015), "Furious 7" (2015), "Deliver Us From Evil" (2014) and "The Bourne Legacy" (2012).

"Women Who Score," a 12-minute film by Sara Nesson, available online, documents a remarkable concert — and a huge dilemma.

The concert took place last summer in downtown L.A., where Grand Performances hosted a night of film and TV music by 20 composers — a diverse collection of classical- and jazz-influenced works. What was unusual was that all of the composers were women. And therein lies the dilemma.

Showcased

The concert, performed by a 55-piece orchestra and 30-voice choir, showcased the work of a segment of the music community that, for sheer numbers, statistics show, ranks woefully behind every other creative field in filmmaking.

Nesson, whose "Poster Girl" was a 2011 Oscar nominee for documentary short, heard about the event from her "Poster Girl" composer, Miriam Cutler. Nesson remembers Cutler's recording session as "the most incredible, euphoric experience of the entire process, hearing the music bring my film to life."

So she set out to record the concert, sponsored by the Alliance for Women Film Composers. Canon Burbank and the Emergence program of North Hollywood-based The Camera Division donated cameras and lenses for cinematographer Eve Cohen, and Cohen and Nesson shot two days of rehearsals, backstage interviews and the concert itself, at-

tended by 1,500 people.

"The whole industry is struggling right now with the lack of diversity," Cutler says in "Women Who Score." "Nowhere is it more evident than among composers for film. The smallest of percentages of women are involved in scoring films. That's not because they're not interested; it's because they can't get through the initial gatekeepers."

Cinema Slate has acquired all North American rights to Rodrigo Reyes' migrant worker drama "Lupe Under the Sun" and plans a winter theatrical release, Variety has learned exclusively. "Lupe Under the Sun" is described by filmmakers as a neorealist parable of an aging migrant worker living in California who longs to return to his home country of Mexico. The film won the Best Narrative Feature Film award at the 2017 Brooklyn Film Festival and a Special Mention from the Los Angeles Film Festival World Fiction Jury.

The movie is a Grumpy Squared Production, produced by Su Kim, Inti Cordera, Justin Chin and Pablo Mondragon. The executive producer is Pau Brunet.

The film was made with the support of the Canon Filmmaker Award from Film Independent and the Mexican Film Institute.

"Lupe Under the Sun" was made with a cast of nonprofessional actors, real farmworkers and authentic locations.

Film

Variety



This image released by The Weinstein Company shows Jeremy Renner (left), and Gil Birmingham in a scene from 'Wind River' which opens in the US on Aug. 4. (AP)

Film

Clooney, del Toro and Aronofsky films in fest lineup

Thrillers terrorise Venice festival

ROME, July 29, (Agencies): The oldest film festival in the world is going big on nail-biters this year with thrillers dominating the race for Venice's coveted Golden Lion award, organisers said Thursday.

Stars George Clooney, Matt Damon, Michelle Pfeiffer, Robert Redford and Jane Fonda are expected to be among the A-listers spotted posing on the red carpet or hopping into gondolas at the gala's 74th edition.

This year the festival, a key launchpad for heavyweight Oscar contenders, has gone big on US flicks in particular.

Hollywood heavyweight Ethan Hawke will star in director Paul Schrader's "First Reformed", a spine-chiller about members of a church who are tormented by the deaths of loved ones — and harbouring a dark secret.

It goes up against hotly-awaited "mother!" by Darren Aronofsky, the US director behind the 2010 psychological horror film "Black Swan". Starring Jennifer Lawrence, the film tells the tale of a couple thrown into turmoil by uninvited guests.

And Britain's Martin McDonagh — best known for 2008 black comedy "In Bruges" — will hope to suitably unnerve the jury with thriller "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri", starring Frances McDormand as a middle-aged mother who challenges police after her daughter is murdered but no killer is found.

It's not all white-knuckle suspense: the beachside festival on the Lido island, which runs from July 30 to August 9 and is set to feature 21 world premieres, will kick off on a lighter tone.

Oscar-winning US director Alexander Payne's latest sci-fi comedy "Downsizing" will open the show, starring Matt Damon as a man who realises he would have a better life if he shrank, and Kirsten Wiig as his indecisive wife.

Damon also stars in Clooney's new flick "Suburbicon", a dark comedy written by the Coen brothers and set in 1959, in which he plays a father of a suburban family that discovers the neighbourhood's dark underbelly of violence.

Teaser pictures released by Paramount show a very blonde Julianne Moore co-starring in Clooney's sixth directorial effort.

Chief juror Annette Bening and her panel of experts

— including filmmakers Michel Franco and Edgar Wright and actress Rebecca Hall — are likely to be already lusting after the latest by Mexican fantasy master Guillermo del Toro.

The Cold War-era love fairytale story "The Shape of Water" by the man behind "Pan's Labyrinth" (2006) stars Sally Hawkins as a custodial worker in a government laboratory who discovers and smuggles out a top-secret experiment.

Explores

Two documentaries are also in the running: Frederick Wiseman's "Ex Libris, New York Public Library" and Ai Weiwei's "Human Flow", which was filmed in 23 countries and explores the staggering scale of today's global migration issue.

Tunisian-French director Abdellatif Kechiche will bring "Mektoub, My Love: Canto Uno", a 1980s coming-of-age story, while Italy's Paolo Virzi will premiere "The Leisure Seeker", starring Helen Mirren and Donald Sutherland.

Out of competition but by no means less eagerly awaited, Britain's Stephen Frears will debut "Victoria & Abdul", about Queen Victoria's unlikely friendship with a young Indian clerk, starring Judi Dench, Ali Fazal and Eddie Izzard.

"Exorcist" director William Friedkin delves into the story of a real-life exorcism with his documentary "The Devil and the Father Amorth" while Netflix reveals its first Italian original series "Suburra", about gangsters and politicians in Rome.

Last but not least, US greats Robert Redford and Jane Fonda will be celebrated with Golden Lion lifetime achievement awards.

While the Cannes Film Festival in May did not have any studio pics, the Venice lineup this year looks set to bolster the Lido's growing reputation as a launching pad for awards-season titles.

Fox Searchlight will also launch two Golden Lion hopefuls from the Lido, where they are in the main competition: Del Toro's Cold War-era fantasy "The Shape of Water" and dark thriller "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri", directed by Martin McDo-

naugh ("In Bruges"), which stars Frances McDormand as a feisty middle-aged mother who challenges a small-town police chief, played by Woody Harrelson, after her daughter is murdered and no killer has been found.

Universal International will bow "Victoria and Abdul," a period piece by director Stephen Frears about the real-life friendship between a young Indian Muslim clerk and Queen Victoria, played by Judi Dench. Frears and Dench also collaborated on Oscar-nominated "Philomena," which launched from Venice in 2013. "Victoria and Abdul" is out-of-competition.

Another British entry — which will compete — is Andrew Haigh's Oregon-set "Lean on Pete," which stars Charlie Plummer ("Granite Flats") as a teenager who takes a summer job with a washed-up horse trainer, played by Steve Buscemi, and befriends a failing racehorse, New York-based distributor A24 ("Moonlight") will release "Lean on Pete" in North America.

Amazon Studios will launch competition entry "Human Flow," Chinese artist Ai Weiwei's take on the global refugee crisis. The movie was filmed in 23 countries over the course of more than a year.

After announcing the lineup, Barbera pronounced himself "97% satisfied in the sense that there are only maybe two or three films that we wanted to have for the festival, and we couldn't because they will go to other festivals."

As is often the case, many of the English-language entries at Venice will also screen in Toronto and Telluride. But Venice and Telluride are likely to be sharing as many as eight titles this year, which is unprecedented. Most, if not all, of these will screen in Venice first.

Italian titles competing are Paolo Virzi's English-language dramedy "The Leisure Seeker," starring Mirren and Sutherland as a runaway couple on a cross-country journey, and Andrea Pallaoro's "Hannah," starring Charlotte Rampling as a woman struggling with her identity after her husband is imprisoned. Both clearly have international elements, Barbera noted.

Netflix will be in Venice with its first Italian original show, "Suburra," about mobsters and politicians in present-day Rome. The streaming service will also screen its Errol Morris series "Wormwood," which is not a world premiere.

LOS ANGELES: Lydia Hearst is set to star in the film "Beautiful" after optioning the movie rights to Katie Piper's memoir of the same name, sources tell Variety.

"Big Sur's" Orrian Williams is producing the film. No writer is attached at this time.

The true story follows Piper, a young and beautiful woman who was on her way to fulfilling her dream of becoming a model when a mysterious man she met on Facebook turned her life into a nightmare.

Gersh is currently packaging the property to shop to studios and financiers.

Piper's documentary "Katie: My Beautiful Face" earned her a BAFTA nomination and was shown in 15 different countries around the world. She was the subject of an episode of "20/20" and has appeared on CNN.

Piper now runs her own charity, the Katie Piper Foundation, which is dedicated to raising awareness about the plight of burn victims and others with disfigurement injuries. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: Bryce Dallas Howard is attached to make her directing debut on an adaptation of the Matthew Quick novel "Sorta Like a Rock Star," sources tell Variety.

Howard has directed a handful of short films as well as an M-80 music video starring Lily Collins, but this would mark her full-length debut.

The film is currently in early development and without a distributor, but sources say if the film moves forward she would direct.

Originally set up at Fox Searchlight, the story follows an optimistic high school student, Amber Appleton, who secretly lives in her mom's school bus during her senior year after an altercation at home.

Lee Stollman and Ellen Goldsmith-Vein of Gotham Group and Wyck Godfrey and Marty Bowen of Temple Hill will produce.

Oi Parker penned the most recent draft of the script. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: Nick Offerman will star in Brett Haley's upcoming musical drama "Hearts Beat Loud" opposite Kiersey Clemons.

Park Pictures, Burn Later Productions, and Houston King Produc-

tions also announced on Thursday that Ted Danson, Sasha Lane, Blythe Danner, and Toni Collette are also joining the cast. Offerman will play the daughter of Clemons' character as they form a songwriting team during the summer before she leaves for college.

"Hearts Beat Loud" will include four original songs and a score by Keegan DeWitt. Offerman and



Howard



Gooding

Clemons will both sing in the film. The movie will be produced by Houston King, Sam Bisbee, and Sam Slater. The executive producers include Franklin Carson, Paul Bernon, David Bernon, Theodora Dunlap, Jackie Kelman Bisbee, Lance Acord, Danny Rifkin, Frank Brenner, and Offerman. Amy Jarvela and Rowan Riley are co-producing.

The drama will shoot in New York City in August. WME is handling sales. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: Stuntman Pete Antico has gained endorsements for his candidacy for SAG-AFTRA president from Cuba Gooding Jr., Andrew Dice Clay, Mickey Rourke, Danny Aiello

and Michael Madsen. Variety has learned exclusively.

Antico is one of five candidates seeking the post along with current president Gabrielle Carteris, national board member Esai Morales and independents Robert B. Martin, Jr and Marilyn Monrovia. Ballot went out this week to about 144,000 members and must be returned by Aug 24. (RTRS)