

Bollywood and Beyond

By Leena Prasad



Movies (l-r); *Upaj: Improvise*; *The Auction House*; *Liar's Dice*; *Fandry*; *Radhe Radhe*

The traditionally stylized precision of kathak dance and the modern street-influenced freestyle American tap dancing might seem worlds apart. The rapid foot movements, however, hint at a kinship between the two forms. Master kathak dancer Chitresh Das and the African American tap dancer Samuels Smith fused their talents into a live show called India Jazz Suite. Their collaboration is documented in the film *Upaj: Improvise*. This and other films can be seen at the upcoming 3rd i's South Asian International Film Festival (SFISAFF) occurring in November in San Francisco and Palo Alto.

The festival is the 12th annual foray, by the 3rd i organization, into presenting a view into the contemporary South Asian soul. The festival celebrates stories that are usually not represented by the contemporary Bollywood film formulas. Since this year's theme is music and dance, 3rd i goes beyond the usual music and dance extravaganzas of a typical Bollywood film and examines the use of music with a thoughtful lens.

This year's theme of "Bollywood and Beyond" is just that, an homage to Bollywood films that goes deeper than Bollywood into the examination of how music and dance enhance the stories that a narrative film, fictional or non-fictional, can excavate. Blending live interaction into the film atmosphere, a lecture about two Bollywood

legends, *Battle of the Bollywood Maestros: R.D. Burman vs. A.R. Rahman*, confronts the differences in their styles. R.D. Burman is a household name in India and known for integrating international music into Indian movies. Rahman has won an Oscar and international acclaim for scoring *Slumdog Millionaire*. This powerful lecture is led by Los Angeles based tabla artist Robin Sukhadia and Bollywood musician Manjoj Shailendra. Musical performances follow the lecture.

A sumptuous visual and musical feast awaits the viewer in the movie, *Radhe Radhe: Rites of Holi*. In addition to showcasing the colorful gaiety of the festival of colors, the movie is a devotional paean to the goddess Radha. Scored by acclaimed jazz musician Vijay Iyer, the music pays homage to Stravinsky's ballet *Le Sacré du Printemps*.

In its tradition of giving a wide berth to independent films, 3rd i showcases a 1948 classic, *Kalpana*. This auto-biographical dance-drama documents the story of Uday Shankar and his wife Amala. Shankar, brother of the famous musician Ravi Shankar, is a pioneer in the Indian dance world. Amala is a well-known and respected performer. They use dance as the language in which the story is communicated to the audience.

The central theme of this year's film festival is dance and music but 3rd i is known for presenting a multi-layered program. In a documentary that follows two brothers'

attempts to modernize a family-owned auction house, *The Auction House*, explores a generational chasm brought about by India's leap into globalization. There is another family film, a study of the South Asian place in American politics, and several short films. The short films showcase emerging South Asian media artists who live in the Bay Area and a panel discussion with the filmmaker follows the film.

A few award winning films explore sociological topics and round out this year's lineup. *Liar's Dice* dramatizes the psychological aspects of migrating from villages to cities. This narrative film screened at the Mumbai International Film Festival and the Sundance Film Festival and won two National Film Awards. Another award winning film, *Fandry*, is a romance set within Hindu caste conflicts. *Fandry* has won the Mumbai Film Festival's Grand Jury Prize and the Indira Gandhi award.

Covering roughly 15 programs, which include documentary and narrative films, the 5-day festival features independent filmmakers from the United States, South Asia and the South Asian Diaspora. ■

November 6-9. *New People*, 1746 Post St., San Francisco and *Castro Theaters*, 429 Castro St., San Francisco. November 15 at the *Aquarius Theater*, 430 Emerson Street, Palo Alto. Tickets and passes, ranging from \$10-\$125. www.thirdi.org.

