

Article

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**Cannes Film Festival: 73 Years of History**

***2020 is a Milestone for the Cannes Film Festival, which saw its 73rd edition cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. A first in its history? Not really. Flashback on the history of a Festival which quickly became the most prestigious in the world.***

We are in the 1930s, Jean Zay, the then Minister of National Education and Fine Arts, at the request of Philippe Erlange, agrees to organize a politically independent film festival. The goal is to counter the Venice Film Festival and its fascism. Some cities are then cited as Biarritz, Vichy, Nice, Algiers, Aix-les-Bains, and Ostende in Belgium. Finally, the city of Cannes is chosen.

September 1939 is the date that will be used for the first edition of the Cannes Film Festival. Everything is ready, actor Fernandel will be the master of ceremonies, Louis Lumière President of the jury. The ceremony is planned at the Casino de Cannes. The selection is ready, the guests start arriving in August, the parties are organized. Unfortunately,

on September 1, 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Poland, France went to war and the Cannes Film Festival is stillborn!

It was therefore necessary to wait until September 20, 1946 for the first Cannes Festival in its history to take place. As in the 1939 edition, the parties are organized from August, and few people are really interested in the films presented. At that time, each country was entitled to send a film that they deemed most appropriate to represent the country. Hence this appellation, still in force, of “official selection”. India had chosen *Neecha Nagar* by Chetan Anand who will win the International Festival Grand Prix. Note that there were eleven Grand Prix to be awarded, one prize per country. The first prize for female interpretation in the history of the Festival will be awarded to French actress Michèle Morgan for *La Symphonie Pastorale* by Jean Delannoy while René Clément with *La Bataille du Rail* will win the International Jury Prize and the staging award. France is therefore the winner of this first edition.

While an agreement had been concluded between the Venice Film Festival and the Cannes Film Festival, which would only take place every other year, the 1947 edition still took place. Indeed, given the success of the first edition, the organizers, faced with pressure from producers, could not keep their agreement in front of the Venice Film Festival and the second edition of the Cannes Festival will take place from 12 to 25 September 1947.



In 1948 and 1950, the Cannes Film Festival did not take place. Officially for lack of budget, the French state calls on the war effort and finds it indecent to organize such a cultural event when the Second World War has left its mark. But unofficially, it is said that these two cancellations are related to the agreement between Venice and Cannes since the festival was to take place every other year.

It was during the 1950s that the Festival began to stand out to become the most prestigious and important Festival in the world. First of all, it will no longer take place in autumn but rather in spring and more precisely in April. Then, the creation in 1955 of the *Palme d'Or*, the *Palme* being the emblem of the city of Cannes. This first *Palme d'Or* will be awarded to the film *Marty* by American director Delbert Mann. Note that the *Palme d'Or* was abandoned between 1964 and 1974, to be replaced again by the Grand Prix of the Cannes Festival. The *Palme d'Or* will return in 1975 to be up to date.

In 1959, the world of cinema discovered a new

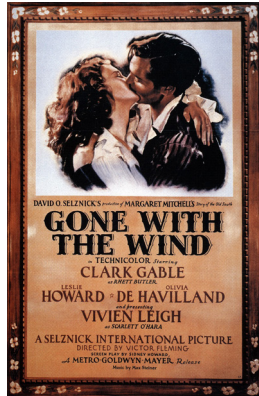
prodigal, it came from film criticism, one can read his often-sharp criticisms in “Les Cahiers du cinema”. It was François Truffaut who, in 1959, won the award for directing for *Les 400 coups*, a film which had also become cult. The Cannes Film Festival is on the page, it opens up to different cinematographic movements and in particular to the Nouvelle Vague in France.



In 1960, the Cannes Film Festival decided once and for all that it would take place at the beginning of May for a period of 15 days. The late 1950s and early 1960s marked the creation of the Film Market, which would facilitate the sale and purchase of films around the world. Most of the films we see during the year were purchased during the Cannes Film Festival. The 1960s also saw the creation of “Critics’ Week” which gave first and second films a chance. The greatest directors of today have been discovered in this section.

It was not until 1966 that a female President of the jury was seen. This is Olivia De Havilland whom we have seen, among others, in *Gone with the Wind*. But the most significant event of this decade happened in May 1968. Some young filmmakers such as Roman Polanski, Jean Luc Godard, Claude Lelouch, François Truffaut, Louis Malle, Jean-Pierre Léaud joined the student movement and the Festival de Cannes quickly became the scene of political confrontations. Reluctantly, the organizers were forced to stop the demonstration on May

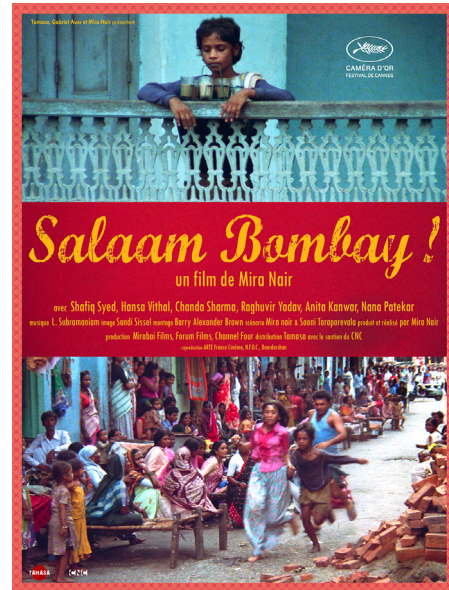
19, 1968. In 1969, after “The Critics ‘Week’”, “The Directors’ Fortnight” was born. The goal of this new section is to discover new talents. Today, the greatest directors have been there.



The 1970s were given a new general delegate in the person of Gilles Jacob. In addition to the official selection, he will create a new category called “Un Certain Regard”, a sort of anteroom of the official selection. He will also create the *Caméra d’Or* prize, which rewards a first work broadcast in all the selections on the Croisette, namely the official selection, the “Un Certain Regard”, “La Quinzaine des Réalisateurs” and “La Semaine de criticism “. India will twice win the *Caméra d’or* (1988 with *Salaam Bombay* by Mira Nair and in 1999 with *Marana Simhasanam* by Murali Nair). And finally, it will reduce the number of films in selection and the number of days of festival which will then go from 15 days to 13 days and which today has gone to 11 days of competition.

Since 1975, the Cannes Festival has taken its final form: the *Palme d’Or* has become the supreme award, the official selection is established by a Selection Committee but it is the Festival’s general delegate who has the final say, the parallel selections remain current and the protocol is also unchanged. Take, for ex-

ample, the attire for climbing the stairs. If the tuxedo is required for projections after 7 pm, it is because at the time the sessions were held at the Casino de Cannes and that the tuxedo was required. The Festival has therefore kept



this tradition.

Aware of the importance of its role to play in the world cinematographic industry, the Cannes Film Festival has always known how to face the facts that have marked our planet. The September 11 attacks have, for example, changed the face of the Festival, which has become more polished and more secure. Security increased when France was hit by this wave of attacks. But each time, the Festival found a solution to continue to exist.

It would therefore have taken a pandemic with disastrous consequences for the 73rd edition of the Cannes Film Festival to be forced to exist in a form other than the one we know. Indeed, Thierry Frémaux, general delegate of the Cannes Film Festival, presented an official selection bearing the label “Festival de Cannes 2020” and which will be supported by the Festival during its exhibition in theatres.

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