

Luang Prabang lights up for nation's premier film festival



Audience gathered for film delights on opening night.

Times Reporters

Xaisongkham Induangchanty's "Raising a Beast" and Siege Ledesma's "Cat Island" projects have taken home top awards at the 2017 LPFF Talent Lab, led by Tribeca Film Institute (TFI) held on the opening weekend of the eighth incarnation of the annual Luang Prabang Film Festival.

Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Thailand were represented as 10 projects in various stages of production received expert insights from TFI's Bryce Norbitz and Molly O'Keefe in a pitch workshop to see filmmaker's visions come to fruition.

Participating projects included *Autobiography* (Indonesia), *Lady Warrior of the Lumad* (Philippines), *Cat Island* (Philippines), *Doi Boy* (Thailand), *Going Straight* (Philippines), *It Wasn't an Accident* (Myanmar), *Luzviminda* (Philippines), *Raising a Beast* (Laos), *Song of the Homeland* (Thailand) and *Wilderness* (Malaysia).

The 2017 LPFF Talent Lab is part of the eighth Luang Prabang Film Festival (LPFF) that has been

lighting up the city's UNESCO World Heritage Listed old town since Friday, with some 32 feature films showcasing the best of Laos' and Southeast Asian cinema's current crop.

Friday evening saw a lively opening ceremony at the festival's night venue at the Handicraft Market, overflowing with Lao music and dance as well as insights aplenty in opening speeches from Governor of Luang Prabang, Mr. Khamkhanh Chanthavisouk and LPFF director Gabriel Kuperman.

The opening ceremony was also attended by Deputy Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism, Mr Boua Ngeun Xaphouvang and Director General of the Department of Cinema, Mr Vithoune Soundara.

This year was exceptional and many visitors were interested in joining because there are so many inspiring films and related activities, Mr Vithoune told Vientiane Times at the ceremony.

Filmmakers from different countries were absorbed in public

discussions, while shared experiences and new ideas would improve and inform each other's future efforts, he said.

Some 22 of this edition's 32 feature films have directors, producers, writers or actors in attendance, all of whom participate in Q&A sessions after the screenings of their films. The festival's intimate and casual ambience makes it so that audiences can chat one-on-one with their favourite filmmakers between screenings.

The first night following the ceremony saw screening of the new Lao film, "The Anniversary."

Directed by Chilasack "Jojo" Saysanih, the film had a successful commercial run in cinemas across the country upon its release in March of this year.

After the film, an international film crowd joined a who's who of national and regional filmmakers to head across the street and party on the grounds of the new Azerai Hotel, the first location in a venture from Adrian Zecha of Aman Resorts fame.

In addition to the filmmakers representing their features, a bevy of directors, writers, and producers from across Asean, Europe, and the United States also showed up to walk the red carpet, develop film industry contacts, and check out the rising regional talent.

Also spotted at Azerai was Jeremy Sim from the Singapore-based film fund Aurora Media Holdings, which will be awarding one of the Talent Lab projects the Aurora Producing Award of US\$10,000.

A slew of stars milled about, posing for photos with fans and new friends.

Festival host and Lao pop star Touly was all elegance in traditional dress, while *The Anniversary* star Vena Boupha stunned in a gorgeous gown.

The festival wraps up today after screenings, public discussions, and performances throughout the week.

Two films per evening play near the Handicraft Market from 6 pm, with additional films screening at the Sofitel Luang Prabang during daytime hours from 10am to 4pm.

Every day before films show there are performances of Lao music and traditional dance.

In keeping with LPFF's commitment to accessibility, all events are free and open to the public.