

Lao PDR Selects “Dearest Sister” as Its First Foreign-Language Oscar Entry

Monday, 18 September 2017 -- In the country's first-ever Oscars submission, Lao PDR has selected Mattie Do's film *Dearest Sister* as its official entry for best foreign-language film at the 90th Academy Awards.

The thriller, which was selected to attend the 2014 Cannes Film Festival as part its *La Fabrique des Cinémas du Monde* program and had its world premiere at Austin's Fantastic Fest in September 2016, follows Nok, an impoverished young woman who moves from her rural village to Vientiane to take care of her cousin Ana, a wealthy woman married to an Estonian expatriate. Ana is gradually losing her sight and simultaneously seeing ghosts that communicate to her a mysterious message of numbers--numbers that Nok eventually uses to win the lottery.

Dearest Sister--which is a co-production of Laos (Lao Art Media), France (Screen Division), Estonia (Oree Films)--comes as Do's second title and the second-ever Lao horror film, with her directorial debut *Chanthaly* being the first. Do is also the first female director of a Lao feature film.

That this is the first year Laos will send a film to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) demonstrates how young the country's film industry is. Making films in a country where the film industry is still underdeveloped has its difficulties, according to Do.

“The greatest challenge of making a film in Laos is having to work with no resources, hardly any budget, and almost no professional infrastructure for films,” said Do.

However, following the relatively untrodden path of being a filmmaker in Laos has its upsides, too.

“The benefits of working in a new environment like Laos without pre-existing structure is actually that everything I make is new,” said Do. “Because there aren't any locked expectations about what a Lao film should be, I have the freedom to create something completely unique that hasn't existed before.”

Do's film was selected by the Lao PDR's newly formed AMPAS Selection Committee, comprised of six professionals, all Lao nationals, from the Lao film and media industries. The committee was facilitated by the Luang Prabang Film Festival, a celebration of Southeast Asian cinema held annually in Luang Prabang, the nation's cultural capital and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This year's main event will take place 8-13 December 2017, and will showcase 32 feature films and several programs of shorts for over 22,000 attendees.

Luang Prabang Film Festival Board Member and Indochina Productions Founding Partner and Executive Producer, Nicholas Simon, says the Luang Prabang Film Festival formed the committee as part of the project's mission to promote Lao film on the world stage.

“We wanted Laos to be represented in the foreign-language entries along with the rest of the world’s countries,” said Simon. “While the Lao film industry is still in its infancy, there are Lao films that deserve the Academy’s consideration. And the knowledge that a Lao film could be considered for an Oscar will only serve to improve Lao filmmaking and encourage more production.”

Director of the Lao government’s Department of Cinema, Vithoun Sundara, also sees the significance that the new Oscar eligibility will have for Lao filmmakers.

“*Dearest Sister* competing for Best Foreign Language Film is a wonderful development for the Lao film industry,” said Sundara. “The possibility of being considered for an Academy Award along with films from the other participating countries will surely inspire and motivate Lao filmmakers in the years to come.”

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LFFF Background:

Founded in 2009, the Luang Prabang Film Festival (LFFF) is an annual celebration of Southeast Asian cinema held every December in the UNESCO World Heritage town of Luang Prabang, Lao PDR. LFFF is a not-for-profit project that fosters cross-cultural dialogue within the region and supports the burgeoning film industry in Laos. Throughout the year, LFFF organizes a range of cultural events and educational activities, from film screenings to workshops for amateur Lao filmmakers. LFFF also manages the Lao Filmmakers Fund, a publicly-generated granting system that helps local artists realize their film projects.