

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Scandinavian Film Festival Showcases Nordic Oscar Contenders, Honors Harlin

The 13th Scandinavian Film Festival L.A. is scheduled to run Jan. 7, 8, 14, 15 at the Writers Guild Theater 135 S. Doheny Dr.

The program includes Oscar submissions, current feature films, shorts, and documentaries from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden—and, sometimes, a special offering from an acclaimed Scandinavian working in Hollywood.

This year, Renny Harlin, the Finnish director, will receive the *Cinema Without Borders* “Bridging the Borders Award” for his film *5 Days Of War*. The award will be presented Sunday in conjunction with a special 3 p.m. screening of the film with Harlin for honors and Q & A.

Based on a true story, the film, set in the midst of the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, unfolds around an American journalist, his cameraman, and a Georgian schoolteacher caught in the crossfire of the first Russian airstrikes against Georgia.

As the three desperately attempt to flee for safety, they witness—and document—the devastation, destruction, and cold-blooded murder of innocent civilians. When they attempt to broadcast the footage, they are captured while under attack from Russian soldiers and local mercenaries, but are met with resistance from American and international



Pernilla August's *Beyond* opens the Scandinavian Film Festival Sunday.

forces as well, who are either shorthanded from covering the Beijing Olympics or simply tired of war news from other arenas like Iraq. The three put the survival of “the truth” ahead of their own survival.

“Real disasters are often described by the people caught up in them as being ‘surreal’—almost as if in slow motion,” says SFFLA Founder/Director Jim Koenig. “Renny Harlin skillfully captures the ‘surreal’ interruptions of war in a way that captures both the brutality and humanity of those caught up in the cause and the casualty of the action.”

Opening night brings Pernilla August, the prolific Swedish actress from Ingmar Bergman's *Fanny And Alexander* and George Lucas' *Star Wars* alike, with her directing debut, the award-winning drama, *Beyond*.

(see 'FESTIVAL,' page 16)

FESTIVAL

(Continued from page 14)

- Based on a best-seller by Susanna Alakosi, *Svinalängorna* ("Swine Row" or "The Pigsties"), it tells of a girl in a poor family emigrating from Finland to Sweden in the 1970s and living in a housing project. Growing up with parental alcoholism, violence, and neglect is a life the girl would like to forget, especially as Pernilla August adapts the story to give equal weight to her as an adult with two daughters of her own, but her loving husband pushes her to confront her past when it crawls out of the woodwork.

This couple is played with aplomb by Noomi Rapace, of *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* fame, and her own one-time husband, Ola Rapace. Both display tenderness, tenacity, and sobriety, each in the right amount, showcasing Pernilla August as a fine actors' director.

- She wears the thespian hat on Jan. 14 in *A Rational Solution*, a domestic drama, one spiked with inventive mores, playful humor, and, yes, angst by director Jörgen Bergmark, co-writer of *Kitchen Stories*.

- Fans looking for a romantic comedy will find in *Superclásico*, Ole Christian Madsen's Danish romp in Buenos Aires, the same quirky fish-out-of-water point of view he displayed earlier in Prague.

The second in his trilogy on marriage and its catastrophes (beginning with *Kira's Reason: A Love Story*), *Superclásico* completes the cycle with the lightest touch of the three, the title referring not only to the soccer championship in which the

macho heart-throb of the film must compete, but also, in the local slang, to a foreign "blonde bombshell" (Paprika Steen, a familiar favorite at SFFLA) who takes a younger Latin lover in Argentina.

In most rom-coms with family involved, the kids are smarter than the grown-ups about the ways of the heart, and this son's forever-clicking camera catches mom, dad, and amorado all off-side in this game of "futbol" south of the border.

- The most stylized of the five Oscar submissions screening at the festival is *Le Havre*, another film set on foreign shores. Aki Kaurismäki's Finnish contender is made in French as his valentine to this soulful harbor town of stow-away émigrés and old-time rock'n'roll, but also to the classical era of French cinema and song surrounding World War II and the Resistance.

Picking up from where he left off as a writer in *La Vie Bohème*, André Wilms, now a shoe-shiner in *Le Havre*, plays a local hero-in-the-making when he decides to shelter a Gabonese youth (Blondin Miguel) who fled from a police raid on a cargo ship arriving at the port.

The brilliantly colored frames of mannered performances with deadpan humor show Kaurismäki as a master of form: pitch-perfect ensemble acting and eclectic music deliver his trademark look and feel that here, more than ever, cast a magical aura on everyday life.

For more information, visit www.scandinavianfilmfestival-la.com. or www.sffla.net.

—Diane Sippl