



Ouzo-ing with gritty realism

FILM REVIEW
ANTIPODES GREEK FILM
FESTIVAL ★★★★★½

Como, until September 25
Adrian Martin Reviewer

OF ALL the various specialist events that fill the local filmgoers' calendar, the Antipodes Greek Festival is the most confident and impressive — as well as the one that seems to evoke the most spectacular display of community spirit in the audience.

This year, the festival presents its most far-reaching program. Particularly commendable is the commitment to the past achievements of Greek cinema, exemplified by the career of director Pantelis Voulgaris, and the singular classics *America, America* (1963) by Elia Kazan, and the ever-popular *The Counterfeit Coin* (1955).

The word on contemporary Greek cinema is that it is returning to urban realism and provocative subject matter, after idling with too many weakly scripted comedies and misguided genre pieces (sound familiar?). Even within the current crop, however, one can discern two quite different approaches.

Greek cinema has always displayed a highly formal, classical side — often with ostentatious reference to the national treasury of myths and legends. Sometimes this formality can become a stiff academicism, but when it works, it is a salutary reminder of how good seemingly "old-fashioned" cinema can be.

The highlight of the program for many will be Theo Angelopoulos' *Trilogy: The Weeping Meadow*, the first in an ambitious series that aims to trace a history of the 20th century. Since this is Angelopoulos, history (here covering a refugee family from the 1920s to the end of the '40s) is mixed freely with poetic, dream-like fancy, and a tough, intimate drama of father and son fighting over the same woman, Eleni (Alexandra Aidini).

Angelopoulos has not been treated well by local film culture in recent years; his greatest films

(from *The Travelling Players* in 1975 to *Eternity and a Day* in 1998) have become very hard to see here. But what is striking when re-encountering his magisterial style (based on distant shots, long takes and extensive recourse to music) is how modern it seems in the light of the most progressive Asian cinema.

Although not in the same league, Fotini Siskopoulou's *Rakushka (Shell)* exhibits a similar, careful formality. This film is of particular interest since it is based on the same story by Dostoevsky, *A Gentle Creature*, which Robert Bresson adapted to the screen in 1969. It does not really survive that comparison, but it remains a powerful account of a man who, using only psychological and emotional abuse, manages to "imprison" and unhinge his younger wife.

The grittier films in the festival present a panorama of social ills besetting Greek society today. Nikos Panayotopoulos' *Delivery* presents a blank outsider — his only distinguishing feature is his enormous penis — who trails silently through various underclass jobs that give him a cross-section of Greek life. The result is predictably bleak (with an odd, surreal ending), but it's worth seeing for its glimpses of Athens off the tourist route.

Hostage, based on a true story, is a mixture of muckracking social comment and uneasy melodrama. An edgy Albanian immigrant hijacks a bus to take to his homeland. The besieged passengers represent various (and mainly odious) attitudes to his plight: racism, indifference, irrational fear of the "other". Captivating, if uneven.

Sight unseen, I also recommend *Marathon*, a drama by Antonis Kokkinos, who made the outstanding political comedy *The Very Poor Inc* shown by Antipodes in 2001. It is indeed a sign of cultural wellbeing when a festival incites one to follow the careers of special filmmakers, and the evolution of cinema grappling with diverse ways of telling its national stories.

about what it means to be fixated on a team defined by loss.

A challenge not fully accepted