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**Prague IFF – Febiofest proves culture is still alive**

**As is well-known, the festival’s traditional March dates had to be cancelled due to coronavirus measures. In the end the management of the Prague IFF – Febiofest decided on an alternative term in September. Then also the festival was impacted by a number of other measures, which, however, both organisers and lovers of high-quality cinema responded to excellently. The festival was launched on 18 September at the Prague multiplex Cinema City Slovanský dům, where it ran until 25 September. After that the festival headed for the regions, with the closing ceremony of the 27th edition taking place on in Zlín 8 October.**

*“Despite all the measures and worries over whether we’d bring the festival to a successful conclusion, I’m satisfied,”* said **Kamil Spáčil,** director of the Prague IFF – Febiofest*. “Gratitude belongs to all those people who weren’t afraid to come. I’m heartened by this, as I am by the positive feedback from viewers, who wrote saying how much they appreciated us not cancelling the festival. It is, of course, true that we’re used to tens of thousands of viewers, which this year was out of the question. Nevertheless, those who did come to screenings made us really happy. Our work had meaning.”*

**Danish star and Italian delegation welcomed at Febiofest**

The coronavirus situation was seen in the participation of (not only) foreign guests. Despite this, a number of notable world-class professionals did attend. From neighbouring Slovakia we welcomed a delegation for Febiofest’s winning film, *Servants*, headed by director **Ivan Ostrochovský**. The Iranian producer **Kaveh Farnam** appeared in connection with *Son-Mother*, which earned the Amnesty International Febiofest Award. A delegation including director **Mario Piredda** came to Prague from Italy for the international premier of the picture *The Lamb*. The second film that the Prague IFF presented in an international premiere was the Canadian thriller *We Had It Coming*. Greetings from directors who were unable to attend were an appreciated show of sympathy with Febiofest’s audiences; such video greetings were always screened just before their films.

The Danish actor and director Ulrich Thomsen, who introduced his comedy *Gutterbee* at the festival, also delighted viewers, while his visit demonstrated solidarity with arts projects in this trying time. *“As an actor and director, I have several reasons to spread awareness of new films. Films – and culture in general – bring people emotions, stories, knowledge and also a certain opportunity for education. And we’re not going to give up on that voluntarily!”*

This year’s Prague IFF – Febiofest also handed out its Kristián award for lifetime contribute to cinema. Actress **Iva Janžurová** collected the prize in person, though another recipient, Slovak actor Milan Lasica, was unfortunately unable to attend the Prague ceremony; his statuette was collected by Roman Lajciak, deputy director of Prague’s Slovak Institute.

*“I’m sorry that so many eminent guests from abroad were unable to come,”* said programme director Marta Švecová Lamperová. *“For that reason we were forced to postpone the presentation of awards to major filmmakers such as Hirokazu Kore-eda and Atom Egoyan. Visitors to the next edition will see profiles of them.”*

Numerous directors, actors and representatives of Czech cultural life ascended the red carpet for the festival’s opening ceremony. Among those welcomed to Slovanský dům by moderator Vlastimil Korec were the minister of culture, Lubomír Zaorálek, Prague 1 councillor Petr Hejma, director Olga Sommerová, the actresses Iva Janžurová, Dana Morávková and Hana Vagnerová, director Slávek Horák and numerous other well-known names. The festival was launched with a pre-premiere of *Karel*, the long-awaited documentary from director Olga Malířová Špátová.

**Accompanying programme at new venues**

As well as Cinema City Slovanský dům, the 27th Prague IFF – Febiofest took place at Kino Ponrepo, Edison Filmhub and, for the first time, Kino Pilotů and Zahrada Savarin. The last venue, a unique space, hosted musical events and above all a tribute to Jiří Menzel that included a talk with the late director’s colleagues. Zahrada Savarin also played host to the ***Industry Day***, which this year featured a panel debate on the theme *Czech cinema at international festivals: What next?*

**Festival competitions in a new guise**

This year for the first time the Prague IFF – Febiofest invited three film professionals onto its **Main Competition** jury. From the five pictures, which had been screened in Berlin or Venice, directors Slávek Horák and Beata Parkanová and actress Anna Polívková selected the Slovak-Czech-Romanian-Irish drama *Servants*. *“Each of the films made an impact on us, affecting different parts of our personality. That’s why we also decided to bestow a Special Mention. And it was just that award that represented the toughest choice among well-matched films. In the end it went to the film* Hope*, which won us over with its sensitive telling of a story, with excellent acting performances,”* Horák said.

The traditional viewers’ jury this year judged the new **Comedy Competition**. The 33 film buffs headed by actress Dana Morávková were most impressed by a movie that handles the difficult subject of fruitless interpersonal communication with elegance and humour, the Swedish film *Call Mom!*

The jury in the **Amnesty International Febiofest Award** competition**,** comprising the director of the Czech branch of Amnesty International Linda Sokačová, actress Hana Vagnerová and documentarian Klára Tasovská, awarded the prize to the Iranian-Czech picture *Son-Mother*. Its director, Mahnaz Mohammadi, is also a prominent women’s rights activist in Iran. The uniqueness and importance of the subject matter of her film is borne out by the fact that the film has still not received a distribution permit in Iran.

Six prizes were handed out in the amateur shorts competition **You’re the Filmmaker**, which this year focused on the environment. Vít Rosenkranc won in the individuals category with *Robinson Crusoe*, a playfully narrated story drawing on elements of contemporary reality. The jury was particularly impressed with the use of sound, which is part of film language. Second place went to Šimon Černík with the film *The Tribe*, while Tina Tran took bronze for *Why Actually?* In the team category, a financial donation of CZK 30,000 intended for educational events in the area of internet and media literacy went to Prague’s Secondary School for EU Administration for *Absolute Environmentalist*, for the courage to speak thoughtfully about the everyday reality facing many of us. Second place went to the Animation Studio of fourth and fifth grade pupils at the Kolín V elementary school for *Up to Our Necks in Garbage*. Third spot went to the Vráž primary school and *How you help nature be clean*.

**Culinary Cinema according to Le Chocolat de H**

In view of the unusual timing of the festival, Culinary Cinema offered only one special menu, created by the head chef at Grand Hotel Pupp, Ondřej Koráb. Following a screening at Cinema City Slovanský dům of the film *Le Chocolat de H,* a four-course meal inspired by the film, including selected wines, was served at the adjacent Empire Hall. As every year, presenter Jolana Voldánováhosted the evening.

**Prague IFF – Febiofest visits six regions**

This year regional editions of the festival kicked off in Liberec. Among those in attendance at the opening ceremony were the director of the festival, Kamil Spáčil, and the governor of the Liberec Region, Martin Půta. *“We cut a cake in the colours of Febiofest together and all the viewers who came got a piece,”* said Kamil Spáčil.

In České Budějovice the opening of Febiofest drew Kamil Spáčil, the city’s mayor Jiří Svoboda, the organiser of the festival’s regional versions in South Bohemia, Ivo Brabec, and the operator of venue Kino Kotva, Jan Turinský. Next up was Ostrava, where its Febiofest was opened by Deputy Culture Minister Jiří Vzientek. The city’s viewers were treated to fresh Czech titles *The Silent Companion* and *Cook F\*\*k Kill*, the Polish hit *Corpus Christi*, Roman Polanski’s new film *An Officer and a Spy*, Comedy Competition winner *Call Mom!* and the pictures that were recognised in the Main Competition, the dramas *Servants* and *Hope*.

Viewers in Děčín got to enjoy the winning films in both competitions this year, the drama *Servants* and the comedy *Call Mom!* Its edition of the festival was launched by director Kamil Spáčil and the head of the town’s Sněžník cinema, Martin Pošta. In Beroun Febiofest was welcomed by deputy mayors Dušan Tomčo and Michal Mišina and the head of the Beroun Municipal Cinema, Jan Beznoska. The festival’s closing ceremony was held at the Golden Apple Cinema Zlín multiplex.

*“This year’s edition was highly demanding because of the number of changes, most of them unplanned,”* said Prague IFF – Febiofest Kamil Spáčil at its conclusion*. “On the other hand, it proved that culture – of which films are an essential part – is necessary, that it is lives and will do whatever the circumstances. Though it’s not possible to guess what changes still await us, I can promise now that lovers of high-quality films are not going to lose their festival!”*

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