



50th San Francisco International Film Festival

By: Jamileh Davoudi

50TH SAN FRANCISCO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

The San Francisco International Film Festival, the longest running film festival in the Americas, celebrated its 50th anniversary this year. SFIFF50 was kicked off on April 26 and ran through May 10, with a record 325 screenings from 54 countries, nearly 200 filmmaker guests and 125 industry guests in attendance, with an estimated 84,000 filmgoers. Thirty-two percent of the 50th International's screenings were sold-out. From a spectacular Opening Night party at City Hall to Mayor Gavin Newsom attending the annual Film Society Awards Night, the city of San Francisco celebrated and supported the 50th International. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi delighted audiences by coming to the screening of Fog City Mavericks and earned a standing ovation before the show started. Every year major awards are given in Film Society Award Night. Among the award recipients this year were Spike Lee for Directing Award and Robin Williams for an actor whose work exemplifies brilliance, independence and integrity.

There was one feature film from Iran; **A few days later:** directed by Niki Karimi



who played the main character. Shahrzad, a graphic designer is trying to go about her daily

life; working, driving, listening to her voice messages, watching TV. But she is not present as she is in the middle of making a big decision; leaving her boy friend with whom she is raising a disabled son. The movie focuses on Shahrzad and any showing of cultural and social discriminations against women are side-stepped. A few days later has the feel of Kiarostami's films. In fact Niki Karimi has assisted Kiarostami on *The wind will carry us and ABC Africa*.

The last days of Yasser Arafat: A documen-



tary by Australian-Palestinian director Sherine Salma covers the last interview with the ailing Palestinian president. The movie opens a window into both the political and personal aspects of Arafat's life during those turbulent last days.

Emma's Bliss: The German movie directed by Sven Taddicken was my favorite. You never know how people will react if they find out they are dying. When Max, a used car salesman is diagnosed with cancer with not much longer to live, he wants to escape to Mexico! Instead, he ends up in Emma's farm that turns out to be his paradise. *Emma's Bliss* is a great movie about accepting death as a



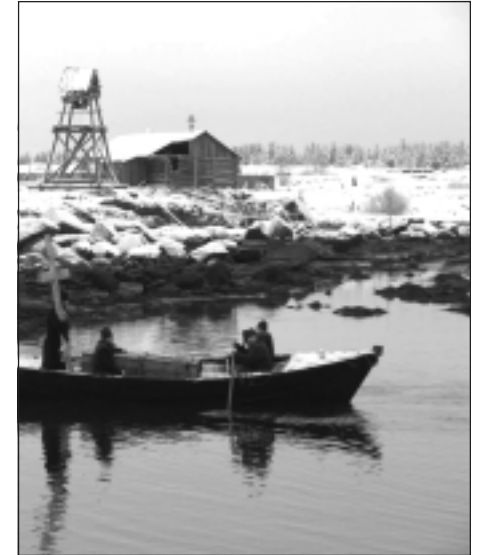
part of life as much as anything else. **Aqua:** This Argentinian film by director



Veronica Chen deals with the lives of two swimmers, Chino and Goyo. Chino dreams of winning the national championship and Goyo, now retired, dreams of reliving his past victories. Together, they try to fulfill their dreams. The most stunning part of the film is the underwater camerawork, but on land, the two characters truly look like fish out of water.

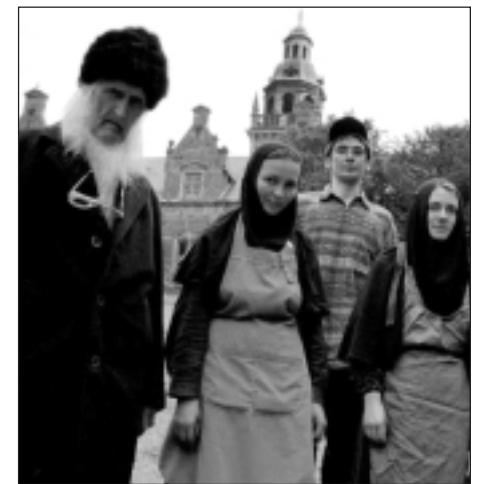
The Island: This beautiful Russian film by Pavel Lounguine, is set in the far North on a barren island. It's only inhabitants are monks in a small Russian Orthodox monastery. The strangest inhabitant is Father Anatoly, who lives his life in constant repentance for what he views as an unforgivable sin. Although his life a never-changing ritual of penance, he somehow evokes spiritual transformation in those who come in contact with him. It is a

fascinating study of the "Holy Fool" tradition. **The Monastery:** A quite different take on Russian Orthodox monasteries is this documentary by Danish director Pernille Rose Gronkjaer. It, too, involves a particularly eccentric man, Jorgen Laursen Vig, who wishes to donate his dilapidated old castle in Denmark to the Russian Orthodox church. The film takes us through five years of transformation, both physical and spiritual, as Sister Amvrosija and Mr.



Vig try to make the dream a reality. It is a delightful film.

The closing night of the festival was at the Castro Theater with the screening of *La Vie En Rose* by Olivier Dahan. "Presenting an International Film Festival commensurate with the historical significance of a 50th anniversary is no easy feat, but I believe we can say in good conscience that we have acquitted ourselves honorably," said Graham Leggat, executive director of the San Francisco Film Society. "We are very happy with what we have achieved on this historic occasion and look forward to our next 50 years."



U.S. House won't ban war with Iran

Iran Times: The House of Representatives last month defeated two proposals to bar President Bush from going to war on Iran without advance approval from Congress. The votes came on two amendments to the annual Defense Authorization Act. The first amendment, offered by Rep. Robert Andrews, Democrat of New Jersey, was narrowly worded. It would have barred the use of funds authorized in the bill for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but not other funds, from being spent to plan and military operation in Iran. The vote was close, but the amendment was defeated 202-216. The second amendment was offered by Rep. Peter DeFazio, Democrat of Oregon.

It was much more broadly worded. It said that nothing previously enacted by Congress authorizes any military action against Iran, and prohibited the use of any funds in the defense Authorization Act or any other act from being used to launch military action against Iran unless there is first a "national emergency created by an attack by Iran upon the United States, its territories or possessions or its armed forces." That

language was defeated overwhelmingly by a margin of two-to-one on a vote of 13-288. Support for the amendments came primarily from members of Congress who do not trust President Bush. As Rep. Patrick Kennedy, Democrat of Rhode Island, said in the debate, "If it were any other president, I don't think we'd have to worry about this." Opponents expressed concern that the language would limit the president's ability to pressure Iran to halt its nuclear program by threatening it.

Others expressed concern it would make it appear the United States was abandoning Israel to Iranian threats. Rep. Shelly Berkeley, Democrats of Nevada, speaking for the opponents, said, "No one wants another war.

But if we don't take a tough stance on Iran and maintain the threat of military action, Iran will get the message that we don't care if it gets nuclear weapons."

The Senate has not yet voted on a proposal to bar war with Iran without prior approval from Congress that Sen. James Webb, Democrat of Virginia, has drafted.

Revolutionary Court charges radio's Azima

Iran Times: Radio Farda broadcaster Parnaz Azima was hailed before a revolutionary court last month, Radio Farda reported. The radio said she was freed on bail. It did not report the charges against Azima or the amount of bail, however. Azima holds dual Iranian-U.S. citizenship and lives in Prague, where Radio Farda is headquartered. She flew to Iran January 25 to visit her aging mother. Azima's passport was seized at the airport so that she has been unable to leave. The criminal charges were apparently added only couple of weeks ago. Azima said that when she arrived at the airport in January, officers demanded her CDs. An officer then said, "You know what kind of CD we're talking about,

condensed information that is your suitcase." She told the officers to search her suitcases. They found no CDs, but took some papers she was carrying, Radio Farda reported.



Cannes insults Islamic Rep. by screening 'Perspolis'



Iran Times: As the Cannes Film Festival started up in Southern France, Iran's Culture Ministry fired off an official letter to the French objecting that the festival will screen the animated film "Perspolis" based on the graphic novel of the same name by Marjane Satrapi.

Satrapi lives and works in France. Her film was scheduled to have its world premiere last month at Cannes and it is in the competition for the Palme d'Or, the French Oscar.

Perspolis tells with humor the story of Strapi's family as it confronts the religious strictures imposed after the 1979 revolution. And the Islamic Republic finds that offensive.

"This year the Cannes Film Festival, in an unconventional and unsuitable act, has chosen a movie about Iran that has presented an unrealistic face of the achievements and results of the glorious Islamic Revolution

in some of its part," the letter said. It commented that the inclusion of "Perspolis" in the list of competitors would without a doubt damage the reputation of the famed, 60 years old festival.

Dated April 25, the letter was signed by Ali-Reza Rezadad the director of the Culture Ministry's Farabi Cinematic Foundation. Rezadad asked the Cannes organizers: "Doesn't such a decision by the festival have political, non cultural and even anti-cultural implications? Do independent films and independence convey a right to assault the principles, values and rights of other nations?"

rezadad did not comment on Cannes' inclusion this year of the Michael Moore film "Sicko," which assails the Bush Administration health policies in very strong and obvious political terms. Nor did he explain what parts of "Perspolis" he found offensive. The film is essentially about Satrapi's family.