

From a celebrity gala dinner to hard-nosed investment talks, the 2006 Entertainment Expo Hong Kong proves itself to be one of few events that effectively marry the glamorous and business aspects of our industry

# In The Mood for Entertainment

As if to symbolize that the Hong Kong film industry – currently in a slump – is still alive and kicking, veteran action hero Jackie Chan made a surprise appearance at the Opening Ceremony of Entertainment Expo and the Gala Evening of the 25th Hong Kong Film Awards. Seated on a director's chair affixed to a crane arm, the iconic star was hoisted several hundred feet above a banquet of invited guests and fellow artistes. Perched aloft, he went on to give a scripted opening address about the recent accolades bestowed on local filmmakers. In his inimitable way, Chan injected a healthy dose of optimism to spur his compatriots, most of who were hit by the local film industry's downturn in recent years.

Unbeknownst to him, Chan also jump-started a night of motivational speeches, including a befuddling one by actor Tony Leung Kar Fai who used his double nominations at the Awards this year, as a case study for challenging oneself to accomplish greater things. Most of the invited speakers used the podium to talk about the need to rise above the current economic situation, while others took jibes at the local paparazzi. Maggie Cheung, who received a viewer's poll award for most charismatic actress in China and Hong Kong, pleaded with entertainment journalists in her acceptance speech, to ease up on the celebrity stalks. Tony Leung Chiu Wai, her acting partner for "In a mood for love" and Official Hong Kong Entertainment Ambassador, picked up similar honors for most charismatic actor.

Despite sporadic turns in mood, the Opening Ceremony will generally be remembered as an evening of nostalgia as singers took turns crooning a medley of Chinese movie theme songs, and giant video screens relayed whimsical montages of Hong Kong cinema through the last quarter century. Many of Hong Kong entertainment's heavyweights including studio executives, film directors and actors turned up in force to support the Silver anniversary of the local equivalent of the Oscars. The actual awards ceremony will be held on 8 April at the Hong Kong Coliseum. At press time, more than 8000 guests were expected to attend this star-studded prize-giving event.

As far as media coverage was concerned, the celebrities' star attraction also helped to divert some of the public's attention to several other landmark occasions, all of which fall under the auspices of the 2006 Entertainment Expo Hong Kong.



01-02: Jackie Chan; Wong Kar Wai

Other founding events related to Entertainment Expo Hong Kong 2006 are: Hong Kong – Asia Film Financing Forum (HAF), Hong Kong Digital Entertainment Excellence Awards (HKDEEA), Digital Entertainment Leadership Forum (DELFL), IFPI Hong Kong Top Sales Music Awards and Hong Kong Independent Short Film & Video Awards (IFVA).

## On the FILMART trail

The theme for this year's Expo is 'Asia's Multimedia Extravaganza', held from 20 March to 19 April. The Expo is divided into two portions: the first two weeks is dedicated to the commercial field, and the second two weeks for activities devoted to the general public.

The main halls at the HKCEC venue are dedicated to the FILMART, where essentially the buying and selling of film and TV titles take place.

participation, more than 28 countries were represented, including newcomers Iran, Turkey and the Bahamas.

Several fringe events were organised in conjunction with FILMART, including national-themed film premieres as those organised by the French and Japanese, as well as a HK-UK Business Partnership networking reception and seminar covering the UK Film industry. More than 160 films, which offered a foretaste of Asia's year ahead in film, television and animation, kept the theatres and booths bustling with daily activity.

Away from the exhibition halls and theatres, FILMART continues into the packed auditoriums and meeting rooms, in which the press conferences were held. Apart from the opportunity to preview the exhibited films, the press conferences offered a bit of something for everyone: From teenage heartthrobs (Nicholas Tze, Shawn Yu); to veteran ac-



First organised in 2005, Entertainment Expo brings together eight leading fixtures in Hong Kong's entertainment calendar, including film, digital entertainment, music and TV productions. The Hong Kong Trade Development Council (HKTDC) and organizers of entertainment-related events jointly presents this month-long Expo (March 20 – April 19), which at the time of this writing, is ongoing.

Apart from the Awards, the Expo also celebrates the birthdays of another two founding events: namely the 10th Anniversary of the Hong Kong International Film and TV Market (FILMART) and the 30th Anniversary of the Hong Kong International Film Festival (HKIFF).

Commencing its 10th outing on 20 March, FILMART is held over four days. This is where exhibitors from all over the region, representing the film and TV industry, converge yearly to showcase their work and seek out potential customers. FILMART offers producers and distributors a suitable meeting ground for communication and exchange, within which an eclectic spread of the region's output in TV and Film would be traded.

In 2005, a record high of over 2,800 visitors attended the exhibition. Although 2006's visitor numbers have yet been established, more than 400 exhibitors participated in this year's FILMART, which represents a 15% increase over the previous year's figures. In terms of overseas

tors (Aaron Kwok, Charlie Young, Donnie Yen); to up-and-coming auteurs (Patrick Tam, Wilson Yip). Most of the press conferences were designated for new and upcoming Hong Kong films, including "Isabella", "After This, Our Exile" and "Dragon Tiger Gate".

## Show me the money

Co-organised by the HKTDC as well as Hong Kong and New Territories Motion Picture Industry Association Ltd (MPIA), the Hong Kong–Asia Film Financing Forum (HAF) was held concurrently with FILMART for the third time.

As part of the HAF-FILMART series on identifying trends and business opportunities in TV, film and animation, five



seminars were organised for delegates, exhibitors and buyers: 'New money in Asia', 'European-Asian co-production partnership', 'The global development of media convergence and its impact on Asian animation', 'New development and trends of Asian animation industry', 'Digital cinema and production' and 'Development of HDTV in China'.

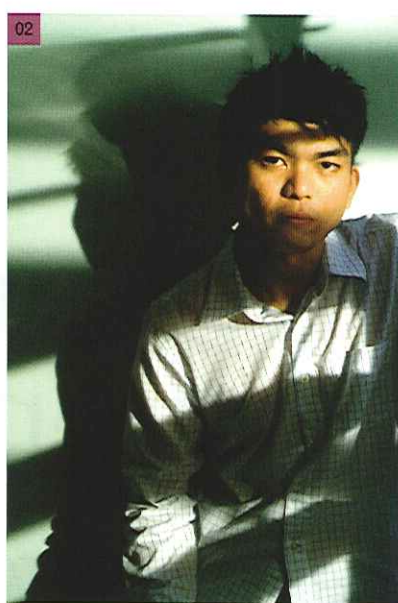
On the topic 'New money in Asia', an interesting panel comprising film directors, producers, studio heads and a banker deliberated on noteworthy film investment topics. The most prominent of which focused on the flow of investment dollars going towards large-scale China epics, and away from the mid-sized budget films.

The lure of Hollywood and the profit trail left by big budget co-productions with China like 'Hero' and 'House of Flying Daggers' means that investors are prone to view such formulaic collaborations as guaranteed returns. According to Director Peter Chan Ho-Sun, many Hong Kong and Chinese directors are hopping on the same bandwagon, resulting in an "unhealthy" situation. Speaking at the seminar, Chan lamented: "The films must be big, spend \$10m - \$30m, must be period martial arts. So we end up in a situation where all the directors are chasing the same thing. It's completely unhealthy and it's part of what new money is buying in China."

Candid about Hong Kong films' immediate future, Chan predicted 2006 and

locate financial and business support through co-productions or joint ventures. Twenty-five film proposals from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Mainland China, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand and Iran, were selected this year. These selected filmmakers got to pitch their projects to a host of investors, producers, financiers, distributors and sales agents. Amongst the short-listed filmmakers and their works are: Fruit Chan's 'Typhoon 101' (Hong Kong), Stanley Kwan's 'Green Mansion' (Hong Kong), Gordon Chan's 'Julius Caesar' (Hong Kong), Liu Fen-dou's 'Part Ocean, Part Flame' (Mainland China), Su Chao Pin's 'The unspeakable curse of the ox family' (Taiwan), Miike Takashi's '51 ways to protect the girl' (Japan), Nimibutr Nonzee's 'Toyol' (Thailand), Royston Tan's '132' (Singapore), Kelvin Tong's 'The Maid - A New Beginning' (Singapore), and Tabriz Kamal I's 'The God Is On The Side Of Women' (Iran).

If HAF 2005 serves as any indication, the pitching sessions have produced tangible benefits for some of its participants. According to reports in the South China Morning Post, four HAF 2005 projects have been completed while three of them are currently in production. One of the completed films, 'Invisible Waves' directed by Peter Chan, was nominated for the Golden Bear Award at the Berlin International Film Festival. Awards amounting to approximately HK\$600,000 worth in cash and services, will be pre-



the local film community also managed to show, in subtle ways, the bonds that exist within its closely-knit fraternity. From Jackie Chan's galvanizing speech at the opening gala, to the affirmative calls - heard throughout the events - for more concerted efforts towards revitalizing the local film market, Hong Kong's film community has projected itself as a united front. Many of the film directors, including internationally acclaimed auteur Wong Kar Wai, have come forth to offer panaceas for the ailing domestic and export markets. In an interview published in the 16 March 2006 issue of *Yazhou Zhouban*, Wong spoke unabashedly about his love for his homeland.

Explaining how his upbringing in the city's hustle and bustle has crafted and inspired his storylines, the director of multiple award-winning film, 'In The Mood For Love' said: "Over the years, my creative experiences have been intertwined with happenings in this city. In filming 'As Tears Go By' and 'Days Of Being Wild', most of the shots were taken on Hong Kong streets. For 'Happy Together', although the film was shot in Argentina, the theme is also about Hong Kong."

## A new focus

Besides giving vocal support, industry stalwarts are bank-rolling film projects to back up their claims of forging ahead despite the times. Worthy of commendation is an initiative that not only considers Hong Kong alone, but Asia as a collective movie-making hub. Fa-

mous Hong Kong actor Andy Lau led the way when his company, Focus Films, invested HK\$25m last year to develop fresh directorial talents through the launch of Focus: First Cuts Project. The groundbreaking initiative invited six up-and-coming Asian directors to helm HD film projects. The company handpicked these directors-cum-scriptwriters based on their originality in script and past works. Since the films were aimed at the Mandarin speaking market, the directors were selected from Chinese populated countries like Hong Kong, Singapore, Mainland China, Taiwan and Malaysia. Two films from the First Cuts Project premiered at the FILMART: namely Taiwanese director Robin Lee's 'The Shoe Fairy' and Hong Kong director Lam Tze-chung's 'I'll call you'.

Projects like First Cuts embody the importance of regional collaborations that pool resources from content-rich Asian countries, at the same time uncover young and exciting new talents for the industry. It is such forms of collaboration amongst filmmakers of this region that would keep the Asian TV and film markets healthy and vibrant. For Hong Kong, such ventures may prove to make more than just economic sense. Indeed, the Hong Kong film industry may yet discover another Wong Kar Wai or Tony Leung, looking beyond its domestic shores.

Such ventures not only channel Hong Kong's indigenous resources and expertise to better use, but may also provide itself the necessary fuel for growth.

Thus when all signs are pointing to an arduous journey ahead for Hong Kong to reclaim its former glory, perhaps it needs to set aside the historical baggage of doing things "as in the good old days".

In this regard, perhaps Wong Kar Wai said it best: "Because of the shrinking market, filmmakers are unwilling to take risks and tend to stick to old thinking and work patterns. Hong Kong film workers should widen their horizons and keep a close watch on our fast-changing world. They should not just reminisce the glory of the past". ♦



01-02: Registration booth bustling with activity; Royston Tan

2007 to be worse than 2005, which was the former colony's worst year in recent filmmaking history.

According to Chan, the only respite for a growing China-centric market, is that Hong Kong has a supporting role to play. "Foreign feeds off China, and China makes its films from foreign," Chan said, alluding to the opportunities for Hong Kong's seasoned filmmaking community to work with China on collaborative projects.

## The HAF nods

On a brighter note, the issues and concerns raised during the investment seminars were being duly tackled by corresponding events taking place under the same roof. For example, one of HAF's key initiatives is the HAF Awards.

HAF serves as a matchmaking platform for the film industry, helping commercially viable and promising film projects in Hong Kong and Asia

sent to the outstanding projects from amongst the 25 short-listed works.

## United we stand

As the festivities for the Entertainment Expo Hong Kong 2006 continue - two more weeks to go - while some of the opening events like FILMART and HAF come to a close, one truth has prevailed: Hong Kong unflinchingly retains its title and role as the Chinese movie capital of the world. Amid speculation about its diminishing capacity to produce consistent box-office results, as compared to its heydays in the 80s and early 90s, Hong Kong's entertainment industry still has an edge, as shown in its determined presence and resilience by constantly making itself heard and recognized in Asia's film world.

Through events like the Expo that promote and sell Hong Kong entertainment and its industry on a grand scale,



Life-size standees and posters of actor Tony Leung (L) can be found throughout the halls at Hong Kong FILMART