



Chicago South Asian Film Festival Debuts with a Bang

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CHICAGO, IL – October 04, 2010 - The First Chicago South Asian Film Festival (CSAFF) was inaugurated at the Chicago Cultural Center on October 01, 2010. The evening was a true red carpet affair with stunning celebrities, enthusiastic press and hundreds of admiring fans. Several highly accomplished filmmakers and artists including Deepti Naval, Aparna Sen, Ajay Naidu, Rajeshwari Sachdev, Rajit Kapur, Baljit Sangra, Umakanth Thumrugoti, Ann Feldman, Ravi Kapoor, and Sandeep Sharma were in attendance. Indian Consul General Hon. Mukta Dutta Tomar was also present to show her support. Sen cut the ribbon while Naval along with Sachdev lit the lamp to commence the festival.

The festival opened with Deepti Naval's 'Do Paise Ki Dhoop Chaar Aane Ki Baarish' starring Manisha Koirala, Rajit Kapur, and Sanaj Naval. The film follows the relationship between Juhi, an ageing prostitute, and Debu, a gay lyricist, and their budding love for Juhi's disabled son Kaku. The captivated audience flooded Naval and Kapur with questions on stereotypes and how they were able to break the mold.

After the screening, the evening's festivities moved to the lavish Grand Army of the Republic Memorial Hall in the north wing of the Cultural Center where artists and guests mingled over divine hors d-oeuvres and toasted to the future of South Asian Cinema.

In a letter to the CSAFF team, Mayor Daley wrote "Chicago is home to a respected film community and we are proud to provide resources and support for our film makers. I applaud the Chicago South Asian Film Festival for your important work to promote South Asian films and filmmaking."

Over the next two days, audiences showed up in the hundreds for the 15 other film screenings. The culturally diverse crowd enjoyed film screenings at Columbia College Chicago as well as the Chicago Cultural Center and outside the theaters, Chicago favorite Gaylord replaced traditional popcorn with samosas, pakodas, biryani and other mouth watering South Asian finger food. The moviegoers appreciated how accessible the actors and filmmakers were even after the formal sessions. In her Q&A session, nine-year-old Raspberry Magic actress Keya Shah captured the hearts of the audience with her witty and charismatic personality.

Ajay Naidu's directorial debut 'Ashes' made its US premier at the festival as the center piece film. Ashes is a cautionary tale of mental illness, greed, and the definition of family both real and imagined. The story is a meditation on how easy it is to fall through the cracks of today's health care system and how we ultimately find grace in the face of tragedy. After the sold-out show Naidu, Producer Nina Spensley and Actress Reena Shah had a Q&A with the audience. It was the one of the most personal Q&A interactions of the festival as Naidu spoke emotionally about how he drew inspiration from his life and experiences to make this film over the span of a decade.

"Both the film itself and the discussion afterward were very powerful. Ajay's passion for many things- storytelling, social issues, and those near and dear to him, came through loud and clear on screen. When he talked with the audience, we all came away with an abundance of food for thought, to digest in our minds and in our hearts." says Mileen Patel, Programming Director of CSAFF.

The festival showcased many documentaries, and one that got audiences really talking was Canada's 'Warrior Boyz'. The documentary took an unflinching look at the South Asian gang-related killings and violence in suburban Vancouver. It focused on the root causes of gang violence, and offered real solutions and a hard-fought hope for the future. Director Baljit Sangra spoke of her thought process behind her picking such a film at the Q&A.



The three-day festival came to a successful close with Umakanth Thumrugoti's '7 Days in Slow Motion' starring Rajeshwari Sachdev, Vivek Mushran, Teja, Shiva Varma, Kunal Sharma, and Ayesha Jaleel. The film about a young boy's tinsel-town dreams in a typical middle class family was one of the most entertaining movies of the festival. In the interaction session, Producer Soumya Sriraman and Thumrugoti spoke of the film and its subtle hints about the business side behind movie making.

Also part of the festival was a Canon DSLR Workshop by Snehal Patel. The engaging and educative workshop got the actors, filmmakers as well as the CSAFF team involved.

Kekti Parikh (Executive Director), Amit Rana (Festival Director), Mileen Patel (Programming Director), Suhani Amin (PR Director), Kaivan Dave (Marketing and Technology Director), Parveen Usman (Sponsorship Director), Shalini Trivedi (Hospitality and Volunteer Director) and Susan Singh (Events Director) were all very excited with the incredible response the festival has received and have already started working on CSAFF 2011. "We are very grateful for the support we have received for this first festival. The event and experience far exceeded anything we could've imagined!" says Rana.

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About CSAFF

The first Chicago South Asian Film Festival, presented by NetIP Chicago and Vachikam Inc., hosted by Columbia College Chicago and supported by the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, will be held from October 1st through October 3rd, 2010. The festival was developed to promote South Asian culture throughout the Chicago area and Midwest by showcasing films by South Asians as well as films that represent the perspectives of the Diaspora. For more information on the Chicago South Asian Film Festival, please visit www.csaff.org.

About Network of Indian Professionals - Chicago

The Network of Indian Professionals Chicago (NetIP-Chicago) is a, non-profit, 501(c)(3) professional organization dedicated to the overall achievement and advancement of South Asian professionals. For more information, please visit www.netipchicago.org.

About Vachikam

Vachikam is committed to bringing greater awareness and appreciation of the Indian performing arts and culture to audiences in the United States and Canada. As a national and local promoter, Vachikam showcases the rich and diverse mosaic of Indian theatre by promoting accomplished artists in high-caliber drama, dance, and musical performances. Vachikam also draws upon its extensive network of artists to orchestrate special social occasions and benefits for the Indian-American community. For more information, visit www.vachikam.org.

About Columbia College Chicago

With more than 120 academic programs and nearly 12,500 students, Columbia College Chicago is the largest and most diverse private arts and media college in the nation. For more information, please visit www.colum.edu.

About Chicago Cultural Center

The Chicago Cultural Center is one of the city's most visited attractions and is home to many of its great public events which include free music, dance, and theater events, as well as films, lectures, art exhibitions and family events. For more information, please visit www.chicagoculturalcenter.org.

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