VOICE OVER

Bulgarian Film Grabs 2 Top Cairo Fest Awards

Bulgarian film director Svetoslav Ovcharov at the award ceremony of the Cairo Film Festival. Photo by Cairo Film Festival

Bulgarian film director **Svetoslav Ovcharov** became the star of the 34th edition of the prestigious **International Film Festival** held in **Cairo**, Egypt, between November 30 and December 9.

Ovcharov's movie "**Voice Over**" took the **Best Director Award** and the International Federation of Film Critics **FIPRESCI** award at one of the most important and emblematic film events in the world, the Bulgarian daily "Dnevnik" reported.

The jury was chaired by the legendary Mexican director **Arturo Ripstein**, who said the Bulgarian motion picture was the "most serious film work from the official international features competition program."

"The movie shows the strong devotion of its author to the dramatic lives and fates of the characters – he knows them well, he identifies with them and suffers with them. The film also impresses with its original structure – very precise on one side and filled with surprises on the other. I would call it reflection of reflections with the present painfully reflecting on the past where the characters are tragically entangled in the narrow space of a psychological dead-lock" Ripstein told "Dnevnik."

The film critics, on their part, have been impressed with Ovcharov's condemning analysis of the destructive influence of the Communist regime on the fate of ordinary people.

"This is a love story between a man and a woman that could not endure the political pressure of the totalitarian regime. Everything in this movie is true; it has happened; the excerpts from their letters were taken out of real files of the Communist Secret Security," Ovacharov said during his press conference in **Cairo** in the presence of the most influential Egyptian media.

When asked about the way filmmaking is financed in Bulgaria, the director had the opportunity to voice his strong opposition to the **budget cuts** the current cabinet is imposing, practically eliminating State subsidies for the film industry.

Bulgarian actress **Kasiel Noah Asher** – the leading female character, also received a number of accolades for being able to express strong feelings with little external ostentation.

"**Voice Over** is a universal story, but also very personal to me; in a way this is the story of my parents, who were victims of the Communist repression. I have a 13-year-old son and I want him to grow without fear and oppression. I want him to be raised as a free person," the actress said in **Cairo**.

Both Ovcharov and Asher enjoyed the warm welcome of the audience while the film was shown three times, including in **Cairo** cinema theaters. During the festival's closing day, a taping of their press conference was aired many times on the Festival's TV channel. Film critics say for a country like Bulgaria, which did not participate in the **Cairo** event in the last 20 years, "**Voice Over**'s" success is a true precedent.

After the award ceremony, the Bulgarian director and actress took part in live shows aired by several TV channels.

Ironically enough, amidst this extraordinary interest towards the Bulgarian film and filmmaking, and the intensification of Bulgarian-Egyption relations as a whole, Bulgarian institutions failed to notify the Bulgarian Embassy in **Cairo** about its country's presence at the Festival. The diplomatic representation had been entirely "in the dark" about the "**Voice Over**" participation in the international competition, "Dnevnik writes.

All this happens in times when Bulgarian **filmmakers protest** and stage rallies against the **budget cuts** proposed by the cabinet of the Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (**GERB**) party where financing of Bulgarian movies will be offered only if there "are enough resources" while the number of films receiving subsidies will be scaled down to seven, and while Bulgaria is involved in a **scandal** in **Italy** revolving around the **Venice** Film Fest and a fabricated award for Bulgarian-born actress and producer, **Michelle Bonev**.