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Sundance to Sarajevo: Film Festivals and the World They Made

By Kenneth Turan



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Sundance to Sarajevo: Film Festivals and the World They Made By Kenneth Turan

Almost every day of the year a film festival takes place somewhere in the world—from sub-Saharan Africa to the Land of the Midnight Sun. *Sundance to Sarajevo* is a tour of the world's film festivals by an insider whose familiarity with the personalities, places, and culture surrounding the cinema makes him uniquely suited to his role. Kenneth Turan, film critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, writes about the most unusual as well as the most important film festivals, and the cities in which they occur, with an eye toward the larger picture. His lively narrative emphasizes the cultural, political, and sociological aspects of each event as well as the human stories that influence the various and telling ways the film world and the real world intersect.

Of the festivals profiled in detail, Cannes and Sundance are obvious choices as the biggest, brashest, and most influential of the bunch. The others were selected for their ability to open a window onto a wider, more diverse world and cinema's place in it. Sometimes, as with Sarajevo and Havana, film is a vehicle for understanding the international political community's most vexing dilemmas. Sometimes, as with Burkina Faso's FESPACO and Pordenone's Giornate del Cinema Muto, it's a chance to examine the very nature of the cinematic experience. But always the stories in this book show us that film means more and touches deeper chords than anyone might have expected. No other book explores so many different festivals in such detail or provides a context beyond the merely cinematic.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In this lively blend of travelogue and film history, Los Angeles Times film critic Turan details the inner workings of 12 of the world's 400-plus film festivals, capturing the essence of each. More broadly, he shows how festivals have become a "growth industry" providing filmmakers with an "alternate p.r. universe" and fans a symposium on the "nature of the cinematic experience." For standard bearers like Sundance and Cannes, the thrust is, despite the hype, to uncover new films that surprise audiences and make "dreams come true" for filmmakers. Aesthetically driven festivals, like Italy's silents-only Pordenone, run on the commitment of organizers and patrons who believe in a given film genre or set of artistic tenets. But most indicative of film's life-affirming power are the festivals set in poor or war-torn lands, such as Burkina Faso or Bosnia-Herzegovina. There, organizers and audiences take many risks to ensure that a film is available, for to them it marks a "determination not to be alone in the world." Add to these aesthetic overviews Turan's well-observed social tableaux the "pleasantly schizophrenic interaction between the minions of Hollywood and the scruffy independent world" of Sundance, the flashy yet "privileged look behind the scenes at the interlocking gears of the theatrical experience" at Vegas's ShoWest and the film festival portraits are complete. Turan's easy erudition and wholehearted pleasure in the film experience infuse the book, making it, like a good movie, a multilayered delight.

From Library Journal

In this slim volume, Los Angeles Times film critic Turan surveys a variety of film festivals in terms of importance and scope, giving a brief overview of the famous (Cannes) and the more obscure (Lone Pine). Four sections discuss different festivals in terms of business (Cannes, Sundance, and ShoWest), geopolitical issues (Fespaco, Havana, Sarajevo, and Midnight Sun), aesthetics (Pordenone, Lone Pine, and Telluride), and the politics of festivals in general. Turan observes, "Though the gathering didn't even have a name, and any thoughts of making it an annual event would have seemed preposterous, this was the first Pordenone Festival. There were only eight guests." Turan also evaluates a festival that failed in Sarasota, FL, and relates his experience as a juror in Montreal. Experiencing an inside look at these festivals and discovering the lesser-known ones such as Fespaco (African film) held in Burkina Faso and Pordenone (silent cinema) in Italy are what make this book interesting. This enjoyable and well-informed read for fest fans and film students is recommended for academic and public libraries. Barbara Kundanis, Batavia P.L., IL
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Review

"It is in the nature of film festivals to lack coherence--they must, necessarily--so any book about the phenomena is bound to partake of that shapelessness; and indeed Turan's book reads very episodically, with little in the way of a central thesis or theme."--"Los Angeles Times Book Review, 6/23

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Francis Garcia:

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