NIARCHOS FOUNDATION AWARDS CHALLENGE GRANT

The New York City Greek Film Festival is for the second consecutive year the recipient of a $25,000 matching grant from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation. The funding has been awarded to strengthen the festival’s sustainability and help it to reach a broader audience.

“The Stavros Niarchos Foundation has proudly supported the New York City Greek Film Festival since 2008,” noted Stelios Vasilakis, Program Officer for the Foundation. “We are happy to be able to once more help the festival introduce to New York cinephiles a new generation of Greek filmmakers whose work deserves greater attention.”

“Having the Stavros Niarchos Foundation on our team is both an honor and a responsibility,” said Michael Theodorobeakos, president of the Hellenic American Chamber of Commerce. “We are grateful for the confidence that the Foundation expresses in us and remain mindful that we must live up to the Foundation’s high expectations of us.”

Responding to the challenge posed by the Niarchos Foundation grant, Festival Manager Stamatis Ghikas announced the launching of a fund-raising drive for the 2012 event. “The festival’s annual budget is close to $100,000,” he said. “We can’t raise that kind of money through ticket sales. It is absolutely necessary for us to meet the Niarchos Foundation challenge, and to do so we need the support of donors from the business community and the private sector. That’s the only way we can have a festival that all of us can be proud of.”

“Pride is an important element,” added James DeMetro, Festival Director. “Of course, our mission is to make available the best that Greek cinema has to offer, but it is important to remember that we are projecting not only movies but a vision of Greece as well. Day after day we hear and read horrific accounts of the current situation in Greece. The Festival shows that all in Greece is not dysfunctional. There is an artistic community working at the top of its form, creating films we can be proud of.”

Those who want to help the Festival meet the Niarchos Foundation challenge can send their checks, payable to the New York City Greek Film Festival, to the Hellenic American Chamber of Commerce, 370 Lexington Ave. (27th floor), New York, NY 10017. Donors who wish a tax deduction can write their checks payable to the Hellenic American Cultural Foundation but earmarked specifically for the festival. Those who wish to charge their donations or who are considering sponsorship of specific festival events are asked to contact Mr. Ghikas directly at 212-629-6380. All donations will be acknowledged in the festival’s program and on the website.

* The Stavros Niarchos Foundation (www.SNF.org) is one of the world’s leading international philanthropic organizations, making grants in the areas of arts and culture, education, health and medicine, and social welfare. The Foundation funds organizations and projects that exhibit strong leadership and sound management and are
expected to achieve a broad, lasting and positive social impact. The Foundation also seeks actively to support projects that facilitate the formation of public-private partnerships as effective means for serving public welfare.

From 1996 until today, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation has approved grant commitments of 948 million Euros/$1.242 billion, through 2,115 grants to nonprofit organizations in 102 nations around the world. Out of the Foundation’s total grant commitments, 79% of funds have been directed to organizations and initiatives in Greece, through 1,013 grants.

The Foundation’s largest single gift (566 million Euros/$790 million) is the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center (SNFCC) in Athens. The project is approaching the beginning of construction phase, with excavation works already in progress at the site. The Stavros Niarchos Foundation firmly believes that the project is of national importance, even more so under the current socio-economic conditions. It remains a testament and a commitment to the country’s future, at a critical historical juncture. It is also an engine of short- to mid-term economic stimulus, which is essential under the current circumstances.

THE AUDIENCE SPEAKS

By Angelike Contis

Editor’s Note: Close to 3,000 people attended screenings of the fifth annual New York City Greek Film Festival. Angelike Contis got a chance to speak with some of them.

A festival is, of course, as alive and enthusiastic as its audience. Here are a few thoughts of people from different backgrounds and ages who attended festival screenings last October.

Koula Sofianou, Consul General of Cyprus in New York: Here I am at the exciting Museum of the Moving Image in a beautiful theater full of people, many of them not Greek, and we all came to watch a movie at the New York City Greek Film Festival. The festival has managed to make a mark of Hellenism in New York. I congratulate all involved.

Evangelos Kyriakopoulos, Greek Consul in New York: We are all very proud to see that this festival is growing and flourishing. I believe that movies in general bring us close to what is happening in society, and in that sense it is the best and most objective way to gain a picture—even if it is exaggerated at times—of what is going on in Greece right now.

George Kanellopoulos, educator: I come to the festival every year. I think it’s worth every minute of it, every second. It is good that we try to preserve the language and the culture.

Staz Tsiavos, insurance specialist: I have just seen the film **Gold Dust**. It made me think of my father telling me not to sell the house in Greece, which is his **periousia** [property]. I also thought of my own kids, growing up, and wanting them to know Greek.

Spiros Efthimiades, Professor of Physics, Fordham: Sometimes I see films that aren’t that good, but there is always an immediacy in Greek cinema that moves and astounds me and reminds me of what Greece is. I have seen films at the festival that are true gems.

Voula Ganiari, retired from the shipping industry: I am here again. Last night I saw **Strella**. I was shocked at the beginning. I didn’t expect it to be so raw. I kept asking myself why did I come to see this movie. It upset me, yet I was so absorbed. I talked
“I have seen films at the festival that are true gems.”

“Greece is not just about feta and olive oil.”

“I’d say we had a wonderful eye-opening experience.”

“I realized the film had quite an impact on me.”

with my husband about it, and all the issues, all the ideas, all those questions raised by the film came to the surface. I realized the film had quite an impact on me.

Alexia Benakis, visitor from Switzerland: Here in the US there are so many different cultures, so I think it is important to keep this festival going.

Nicolette Barsamian, student, Barnard: In New York you get a very skewed idea of what a Greek person is because you get the Greek American view. The Greek American in Astoria is very different from the Greek in Athens or Nafplion, or Thessaloniki or anywhere.

Tony Barsamian, journalist: Greek films differ from Hollywood films. Greek films tend to be on a more microcosmic level, more localized. They are more about ordinary people and their ordinary plights.

Cheri Rose, former dancer: I just saw My Sweet Canary. Rosa Eskenazy was incredibly soulful. I am very interested in her music, in the whole cultural and historical context she sang in. I am interested in the whole period of migration of the Greek and Turkish musicians who came to New York City and recreated a little piece of Greece and Turkey on Eighth Avenue back in the 1950s through the 70s.

Koula Rigas, daughter of a 1922 refugee: I saw My Sweet Canary as well. I came with my daughter. I thought the film was wonderful.

Spiros Carras, filmmaker: We are familiar with the older Greek films where characters are so plastic. In these new films, we see how real people feel. These films are very real.

George Liakeas, physician: I’m here with a group of friends, some of them Greek, some not. We saw Attenberg. I’d say we had a wonderful eye-opening experience.

Nicholas Patouris, lawyer: I like Greek movies. I enjoy watching them, and I want everybody to know about them. Greece is not just about feta and olive oil. There is a small group of Greek filmmakers who are distinguishing themselves, and we have to support them.
Q&A WITH FESTIVAL DIRECTOR

Editor’s Note: Festival Director James DeMetro sat for a q&a on festival-related issues. Here’s what was said.

Q: How are the festival films chosen?
D: It’s a responsibility that we take very seriously. The selection process is on-going. We try to see all the major films, those that have won awards at festivals or that have commanded attention in Greece. We also look for the films that didn’t do so well but that still deserve to be seen. The Greek Film Centre is an enormous help. Sometimes producers or directors send us films. Other times, we solicit them. We don’t always get the films we want, but I think we do fairly well. Members of the festival committee provide input, but I have the responsibility to put the final slate in place. We try to provide a balanced selection in any given year, everything from the commercial to the more esoteric. We try not to insult the viewers’ intelligence. I can tell you, there is never any one film that will appeal to every single person in the audience.

Q: Which film was your favorite this time?
D: That’s like asking a parent which of his children he loves the most. The only thing I’ll admit to is having favorite moments from various films.

Q: Such as?
D: In Strella, for example. After a scene of reconciliation between the two main characters, Strella walks the rain-soaked streets of Athens while Maria Callas is heard on the soundtrack singing the Vissi d’arte aria from Tosca as only Callas can. I defy anyone watching not to be moved.

I’ve made no secret of my enthusiasm for Tungsten. There’s a scene in which the two aimless young men interrupt their day-long wandering on the streets of Athens to watch kids play soccer. One of the kids apparently is the neighborhood pusher. As they watch the game, one of the young men begins talking about airplanes, claiming rather preposterously that he can identify makes of planes flying in the air by looking at their landing gear. Then, kind of off-handedly but ruefully, he admits to never having been on a plane. The moment captures the absolute hopelessness of the young man’s dead-end life. No future. Just dreams that will never be fulfilled. That’s sharp filmmaking. Director Giorgos Georgopoulos is a young man to watch.

Q: You haven’t mentioned Knifer.
D: The director of that film, Yannis Economidis, always plays up the shock element, and his films can be tough on the audience. It took several viewings for me to get comfortable with the film. I think it’s very interesting. There’s a scene when the brutish husband, played by the wonderful Vangelis Mourikis, turns to his emotionally abused wife and suggests that they have a baby. “Let’s make something beautiful,” he says, startling not only her but the audience as well. It is a pivotal moment because it changes our perception of the balance of power in the relationship between husband and wife. Eventually we come to understand that it is the woman who is in control. It is she who shapes the destinies of the men in the film.

Q: What about Attenberg?
D: I love the audacity of that film. I was so disappointed when it failed to get nominated for a best foreign film Oscar. I thought Dogtooth had opened the door of the Academy not only to Greek films but to provocative, untraditional films.

Q: Many of the films in the festival picture a Greece that we don’t really know, a Greece in black and white, a country of menacing landscapes.
D: Absolutely. We haven’t mentioned Margarita Manda’s Gold Dust where the city of Athens assaults the audience. Three siblings argue about what to do with their family home now that their mother has died. One is absolutely set against selling the home to developers. She doesn’t want her family to become part of the destruction that Athens has wreaked upon itself. And yet how beautifully the film shows us how to accept change.
and what to value from the past. So many people have told me that they love this film.

Q: What are the challenges for the future?
D: Every festival is a learning experience, and we enter our sixth year determined to do even better than last year. Our biggest challenge is to build an audience. I was thrilled to see so many young people turn out to see Attenberg. We need more young people. We need people of all ages. Our films are worth seeing. We've got to make sure that people know this.

GREEK FILM IN COMPETITION AT SUNDANCE

For the second year in a row, a Greek film has been screened at the Sundance Film Festival. Last year, Athina Rachel Tsangari’s Attenberg was shown out of competition, becoming the first Greek film to play the prestigious festival in Utah. This year, L, directed by Babis Makridis, was selected to compete.

L is an offbeat allegorical film about a man who lives in his car, meeting his wife and family at appointed times at various parking lots. His job, which he loses during the course of the film, is to deliver single jars of honey to a client who regularly complains about the driver’s lateness.

Makridis says that his film is open to interpretation. “It’s natural for viewers to read into the economic dead-end faced by the man in the film aspects of Greece’s current situation since the film comes from a country facing its worst economic calamity,” he said.

The man is played by well known actor Aris Servetalis who was seen as the police officer in Small Crime, a major hit at the 2009 New York City Greek Film Festival.
THE MASTER IS DEAD AT 76

Master filmmaker Theo Angelopoulos died on January 24, 2012 from injuries he received when he was hit by a motorcycle on a street near the city of Piraeus where he was working on a film. He was 76 years old.

Born in Athens in 1935, Angelopoulos abandoned his law studies and moved to Paris to study philosophy. Once there his love for movies led him to enroll at the renown Insitut des Hautes Etudes Cinematographiques. He returned to Greece where he worked as a film critic before beginning his career as a filmmaker.

Created over a period of more than forty years, his films established Angelopoulos as one of the auteurs of world cinema. Among his best known works are: The Travelling Players (1974-75), Voyage to Cythera (1984), Landscape in the Mist (1988), Ulysses’ Gaze (1995), and The Weeping Meadow (2005). His film Eternity and A Day (1998) won the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival.

Angelopoulos created an impressive body of work—films of political, social and philosophical content that focused on the turbulent history of modern Greece and its people. While his enigmatic style, contemplative approach and allegorical narratives made demands of his audience, Angelopoulos rewarded his viewers with astonishing visuals, compositions of resonating beauty and symbolic significance.
THEODOROS ANGELOPOULOS (1935-2012)

By Dan Georgakas

Theodoros Angelopoulos died as he had lived, making movies. In an absurdist moment that could have been a scene from one of his films, he was killed by a motorcyclist while preparing a set for a new film, The Other Sea. Justly renowned internationally for his innovative cinematic techniques, in many respects Angelopoulos was a realist who offered continuing historical, metaphoric, and personal commentary on Greek national and personal identity. His films almost always had a Classical subtext built into contemporary events, and many of his films used Byzantine images and historical personalities.

His great masterpiece, The Travelling Players (1974-75), provides a coda to understanding his entire body of work. The film presents Greek events from the late 1930s to the early 1950s in all their complexities. Angelopoulos’ “cinema of contemplation” was the antithesis of the rapid cutting style of Hollywood. The Travelling Players has shots that last more than five minutes, forcing the viewer to really look at the images and personally decide what is significant. In one scene, a train rider virtually leaves the film by looking directly into the camera and speaking at great length about the Turkish atrocities in Asia Minor. Another scene begins with a man listening to military music and right-wing oratory in 1952. He walks down the street to emerge into another square with the same music and oratory but the year is now 1938. Although almost four hours long and filled with unusual cinematic techniques, The Travelling Players was not a hothouse orchid. The film broke all previous national attendance records for any Greek film, and it won awards at major festivals in Germany, France, Japan, and Great Britain.

The Other Sea was intended to apply Angelopoulos’ signature themes to a nation in cultural crisis. The script deals with strikes, illegal immigrants, political corruption, a rising suicide rate, historic unemployment, and the general cultural malaise. While The Other Sea is fated to remain unfinished, we have seventeen completed films. Some, of course, are more powerful than others, but all are testaments of a filmmaker whose profound Hellenic sensibilities have universal resonance.
GREEK BOX OFFICE REVENUE DOWN 7% IN 2011

Greek box office revenue for 2011 is down 7% from the previous year, suggesting that the film industry has not escaped the effects of the country's financial crisis. There were 10.9 million admissions in 2011, 1 million fewer than in 2010.

Many countries, including the US, experienced declines in ticket sales, but in the current climate every diminution in Greece takes on an ominous significance.

That being said, even the most optimistic observers of the film business in Greece acknowledge concern over the underperformance of the 26 Greek films released in 2011. There was not a single Greek film among the top ten box office hits in 2011. In past years, Greek titles have even topped the charts.

Pirates of the Caribbean: On Strange Tides had the highest grosses in Greece in 2011, with Harry Potter and the Deadly Hallows: Part Two a close second.

ALEXANDER PAYNE’S ‘THE DESCENDANTS’ SCORES BIG WORLDWIDE

With a tribute delivered in Greek to his mother who was in the audience, Alexander Payne accepted the Oscar for best adapted screenplay for The Descendants at last month’s Academy Awards ceremony.

Greek American director Alexander Payne (Alexandros Papadopoulos) has the biggest hit of his distinguished career in The Descendants, a doleful comedy about a distracted father trying to hold his family together after the fatal injury of his wife. The film, which is drawing audiences all over the world, won the Golden Globe for best dramatic feature and was nominated for five Academy Awards, including best picture and best director.

With films like Citizen Ruth, Election, About Schmidt, and Sideways, which won him an Oscar for screenwriting, Payne has established himself as the spokesperson for middle America. In The Descendants he worked once again with his fellow Greek American Phaidon Papamichael, who was the director of photography.

Payne was born 50 years ago in Omaha, Nebraska where his mom and dad ran a Greek restaurant. He still maintains a home there, not far from his parents.

The Descendants had a special screening at the Thessaloniki International Film Festival last November, with Payne in attendance. He told a reporter for Kathimerini that he found the situation in Greece horrifying and frustrating. “It’s in situations like this that my DNA and my Greek heart are reawakened,” he said. “We Greeks in the Diaspora read the paper every day, scratch our heads, very heartbroken but feeling very much solidarity.”
Athina Rachel Tsangari’s eagerly awaited and much praised Attenberg is scheduled for a commercial run at New York City’s IFC Theater in Greenwich Village beginning March 9. The coming of age story involves a young woman who explores her sexuality even as she braces herself for the death of her beloved father.

* * *

“The Greeks are here,” declares the promotional material for Film Comment Selects, an eclectic collection of film festival favorites from around the world, showing at Lincoln Center until early March.

Two Greek films are among those chosen: ALPS directed by Yiorgos Lanthimos and Man At Sea directed by Constantine Giannaris.

Described as “the latest warped and absurdly funny exploration of unnatural doings from the director of Dogtooth,” ALPS tells the story of four members of a unique service society who can be hired by the recently bereaved to act as surrogates for deceased loved ones. Winner of the best scenario at the 2011 Venice Film Festival, ALPS is scheduled for commercial release in the United States later this year.

Man At Sea, re-edited by its director following its initial screening at the Berlin Film Festival in 2011, concerns a boatload of refugees who, having been picked up in the Mediterranean, are unable to find a country willing to take them.

* * *

The tiny Spectacle Theater in Williamsburg, Brooklyn will offer several screenings of Morning Patrol (Proini Peripolos), directed by Nikos Nikolaidis, as part of its science fiction series in March. The 1987 classic is a love story in a city where life has gone terribly wrong.

Nikolaidis, who died in 2007, was the only Greek filmmaker to have won five Best Director citations over the years at the Thessaloniki Film Festival.

The Spectacle is at 124 South 3rd Street, at Bedford Avenue.  www.spectacletheater.com
It was a rousing closing night for the fifth annual New York City Greek Film Festival when ALMA Bank presented a free concert, Singing in the Movies, featuring Jazz Mediterraneo performing music from Greek and other films. An estimated crowd of 600 turned out at the Frank Sinatra School of the Arts on November 6 to watch and enjoy consummate musicians at work.

Leading the ensemble was Christos Rafalides (vibraphone). Also performing were Ron Affif (guitar), Yosvany Terry (saxophone), Petros Klampanis (bass), Ludwig Afonso (drums), and Sergio Salvatore (piano). Evi Siamanda and Thana Alexa provided the vocals, and Maria Manousaki played the violin. The expert narration was provided by Apostolos Pappas, who as musical curator was also responsible, along with Rafalides, for putting the program together.

Sanfords (Astoria’s landmark restaurant) and COSMOS FM provided additional support.

You can view concert highlights on You Tube:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEuj9eoG7uk&list=uuSenXGoUCgoj2L1EXYmm6DQ&Index=1&feature=plcp
ROSA BRINGS IN THE CROWDS

My Sweet Canary, a documentary on the life and music of legendary singer Rosa Eskenazy, was the film everybody wanted to see at the fifth annual New York City Greek Film Festival. Directed by Roy Sher, the Israeli/Greek co-production followed three musicians on a mission to tell Eskenazy’s story and explore her music. First coming to the public’s attention in the 1920s, Rosa became the most recorded singer of “rebetika” in a career that spanned more than 50 years.

The standing room only audience at the Manhattan screening at the Center for Jewish History had the added pleasure of watching a live concert of Rosa’s music, featuring Mavrothi Kontanis and the Maeandros Ensemble.

Born and raised in the US but with roots in Halkidiki, Greece, Kontanis is a multi-instrumentalist, singer, composer and teacher who has devoted years to studying the music of the Eastern Mediterranean. Love for this music leads Kontanis and the Maeandros musicians to perform without distracting modernistic intrusions, leading to a sound that is as authentic as it is respectful of the material.

NYCGFF ON YOU TUBE

Watch interviews with directors and catch festival-related news items on the festival’s You Tube channel:

http://www.youtube.com/user/NYCGreekFilmFestival

SPECIAL THANKS TO THE GUESTS WHO CAME TO NEW YORK CITY TO PRESENT THEIR FILMS AND MEET THE AUDIENCES

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Giorgos Georgopoulos, director

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