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Ecofilms Festival on Rhodes

Canadian Peter Raymont's 'A Promise to the Dead: The Exile Journey of Ariel Dorfman' will be first screening

An exploration "of exile, memory, longing and democracy," seen through the experiences of writer Ariel Dorfman, will open Ecofilms Festival on Rhodes next Tuesday.

Canadian filmmaker Peter Raymont, who produced and directed "A Promise to the Dead: The Exile Journey of Ariel Dorfman," describes the project as "an extraordinary, intimate journey of discovery."

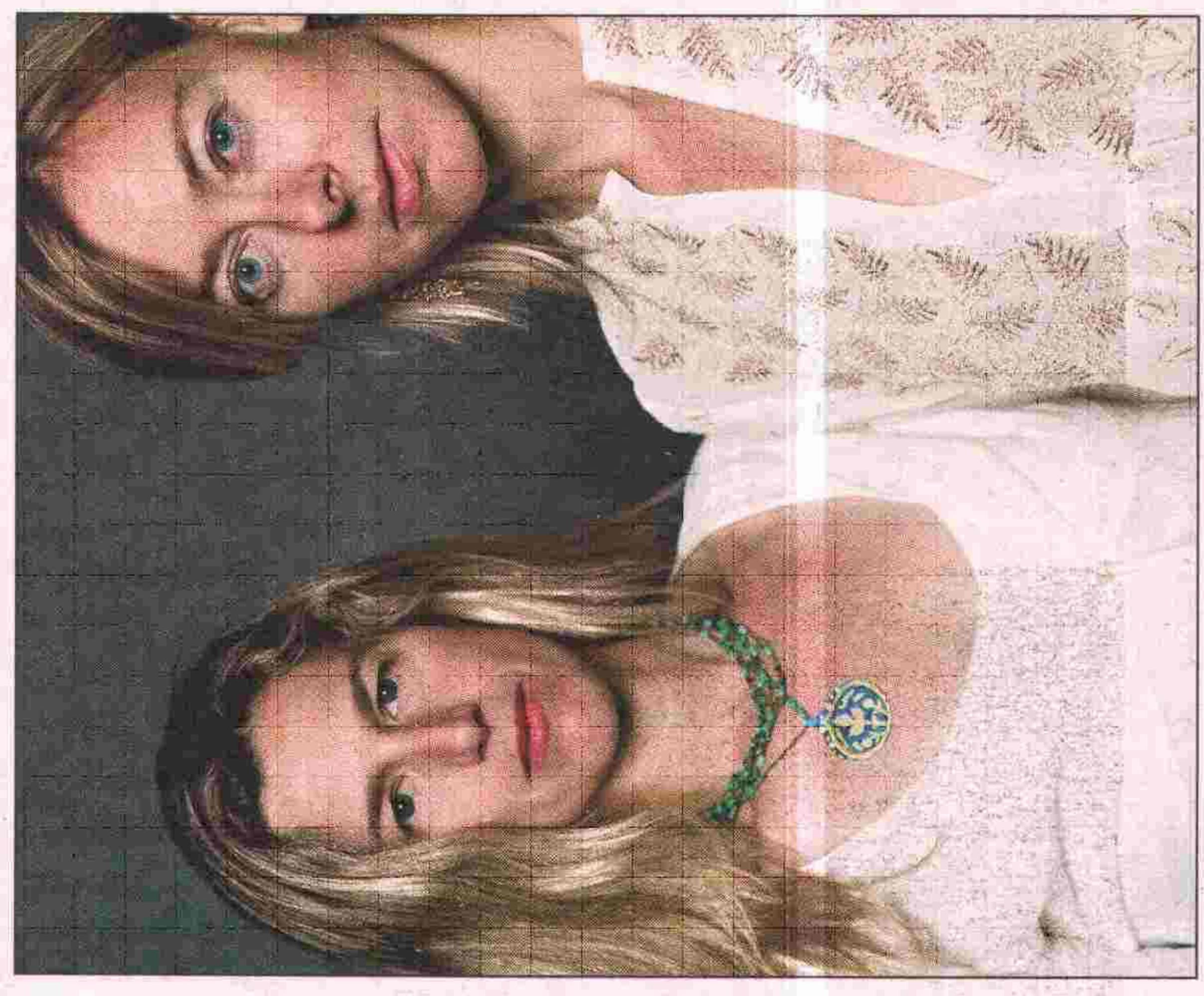
Born in Argentina, Dorfman grew up in New York until his family had to leave during the McCarthy era. Later a member of Chilean President Salvador Allende's administration, he was forced into exile when Augusto Pinochet seized power in a coup, and was one of only a few of Allende's entourage to survive. The film is partly based on his autobiography "Heading South, Looking North."

Another strong contender in the feature category is "The Devil Came on Horseback," (USA) which exposes the horrors taking place in Darfur. Directors Annie Sundberg and Ricki Stern use dramatic images and eyewitness reports by former US Marine Captain Brian Steidle, who has since gone back to the US to campaign on behalf of the victims.

"Urban Explorers: Into the Darkness" (USA) by Melody Gilbert introduces the subculture of thrill-seekers who seek out the lost, hidden and forgotten sides of cities. Whether sneaking into abandoned buildings,



Screen feast. (Above) A scene from 'Urban Explorers: Into the Darkness' by Melody Gilbert (USA), which tracks the thrill-seekers who explore the unknown side of cities. Right, directors Annie Sundberg and Ricki Stern, whose dramatic film on Darfur, 'The Devil Came on Horseback,' uses photographs and eyewitness accounts by former US Marine Captain Brian Steidle. The festival ends on June 29.



delving into drains, or getting into the catacombs of Paris, the explorers, often equipped with cameras, see the world in a new way.

That's just a sample of the vast array of films - features, medium length and shorts - in the festival, which also has tributes to Louis Malle, Werner Herzog, and the Greek classic "Megara" as well as the collective effort "Poetry in Motion." Plans to cut back the number of

movies screened at Ecofilms never last. This year sees a new record, with 132 films from 41 countries.

"But don't worry, lots of them are shorts," artistic director Lucia Rikaki reassured the press yesterday at the Culture Ministry.

In other respects, Ecofilms has trimmed back. Funding cutbacks have meant that as of last year, only the prizes for Greek films bring a monetary reward, yet, as Rikaki not-

ed, that hasn't discouraged participation. In fact, 650 applications were received this year.

There is no sign of the parallel events, such as exhibitions, that used to add an extra dimension to the festival, at least for those who could tear themselves away from the screen.

The festival gets most of its funding (75 percent of the total budget) from the City of Rhodes, in addition

to support from the Dodecanese Prefecture's Cultural Organization and the Culture Ministry. Rhodes Municipality has refurbished the cinema in which most of the screenings take place. That's a welcome improvement: Unpretentious is good, but uncomfortable seats are a turnoff.

The films are free, you get to meet the filmmakers, and Rhodes is beautiful. It's worth a visit.

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