

# Film

## Green visions in Rhodes

Ecofilms fest screens images of an ailing planet

By Angelike Contis

**M**ASSIVE 300-year-old olive trees are bulldozed by industrialists in the 1974 documentary *Megara* directed by then-youngsters Yiorgos Tsemberopoulos and Sakis Maniatis. The film, which follows a community's desperate plea for justice and its sudden decision to join students in their anti-Junta protests (despite vast political differences), closed the Ecofilms International Film & Visual Arts Festival in Rhodes on June 29.

"Scientific studies have shown," a protester says in *Megara*, "that if one more industrial plant is added to the region, the environment will be polluted." The people in the film were able to halt the construction of the proposed refinery over the trunks of their 4,000 destroyed olive trees. However, the viewer may cringe in the knowledge that many other factories have materialised in Greece since the 1970s.

'A Promise to the Dead: The Exile Journey of Ariel Dorfman'



The Cyclown Circus entertains Ecofilms crowds

Other tragedies and triumphs were depicted on the three screens of the event that opened on June 24 on the Dodecanese island notable for both its physical beauty and tourism overdevelopment. (No recycling was visible again, in stark contrast to the message of Ecofilms.)

The clusters of visitors who wandered into the free screenings on the last two days of the festival were able to visit different worlds full of contradictions. In Swiss documentary *Greina*, cheesemakers airlifted their cows by helicopter, but struggled to keep their products faithful to the methods of their ancestors. Armenian students created a remarkably sensitive film called *Following the*

*Sun: Beside the Tracks*, in which they focus on how the most marginalised of people can be the most generous to animals. Culture clashes were evident in documentaries like Louis Malle's *L'Inde Fantome* series, which painted a fascinating portrait of 1967 India, and new US film *Dalai Lama Renaissance*, about a group of US intellectuals who fight their own egos while meeting with the Tibetan leader.

The programme also featured Greek student/university projects, such as *Poetry in Motion*, in which graphic arts students from Athens create images to go along with short poems, and *Soundscapes*, a look at new efforts to record Greece's audio environment. The film *A Hole in the*

*Water* considered the reasons why the planned Thessaloniki tunnel project is so controversial.

In the 8th edition of the festival (which first began on Zakynthos island), the Best Feature-length Film award went to *Encounters at the End of the World*, Werner Herzog's documentary on Antarctica. Runner-up in the category was Canadian director Peter Raymont's biographical portrait of Argentine exile *A Promise to the Dead: The Exile Journey of Ariel Dorfman*. A special mention went to rural Montenegro film *The Thirst of a Stone Sea*, directed by Vladimir Perovic.

The top award in the medium-length film category went to Finnish

director Elina Hirvonen's immigration documentary *Paradise: Three Journeys in This World*. New Zealand director Justin Pemberton was on hand to receive the runner-up prize in the category for his documentary *The Nuclear Comeback*. Despite his sombre subject, Pemberton revealed his love for danger. He confessed that "I really enjoy going to places like Chernobyl." Special mentions also went to Indian film *The Black River* and Dutch production *Uncle Mitte*.

Among the short films, the top award went to *Apna Aloo Bazaar Becha: From Subsistence Ecology to the Market*, an Indian documentary about an imperilled Himalayan community, while the second prize went to *Mbebeus*, an Italian film about a child living in a Dakar garbage dump.

The audience awards went to US film *War/Dance* about a group of children finding refuge from the violence of war in a music festival in Uganda and Crete-based painter Angelos Spartalis' short *Erato*.

Two films shared the Greek competition prize. The first of these went to veteran Nikos Kavoukides for his film *The Ashes that Remain* about last year's devastating fires. Kavoukides dedicated the award not only to the firefighters, pilots and cameramen who risked their lives last summer but also to "the old people who continue to live in the village, insisting they must live in their home". The tone lightened up significantly when cycling juggler Fred, one of the stars of the second award-winning film *Cyclown Stories*, took the stage. He amused the audience on his unicycle, while director Dimitri Sfiris played his accordion.



## An appetite for Holmes

**SHERLOCK** Holmes, the pipe-smoking Victorian super-sleuth with a penchant for cocaine, is to become the subject of a faceoff by two Hollywood studios which are both bringing out films about Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's literary hero.

In one camp is Columbia Pictures, which has announced the making of an untitled comedy starring Sacha Baron Cohen (photo) as Holmes with Will Ferrell as his sidekick, Watson.

Squaring up to Columbia is Warner Bros, which has announced a Guy Ritchie project entitled *Sherlock Holmes*, which will portray the legendary detective as a punching, sword-jousting comic book-style adventure hero.

While Conan Doyle traditionalists will be alarmed about the reinterpretation of his literary legacy, few would argue that Holmes, who lived a bachelor's life in his Baker Street lodgings with Watson, does not have mass-market appeal. But film experts agree that only one "big studio" film can be a winner.

Archie Thomas, from *Variety* magazine, said two similar releases would inevitably lead to



"brinkmanship" in a race to get the film out first - as happened with the two movies about the author Truman Capote in 2005-06. "Presumably they have done their research and there is an appetite for Sherlock Holmes," he said, "but is there an appetite for two?"

Ritchie's vision is based on a comic book created by the Harry Potter producer Lionel Wigram, and has been slated for release in 2010. The casting is unconfirmed but Robert Downey Jr - a reformed drug addict himself - has been rumoured. Fans of Ritchie's hit film *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, about London's criminal underworld, will inevitably be drawn to a remake that is said to give Holmes a "gangland makeover". The studio says it wants to "reinvent" Holmes and Dr Watson to make him more "adventurous", focusing on his skills as a boxer and also a swordsman.

But Columbia's Sherlock may, ultimately, have the greater advantage, in its co-producer Judd Apatow, one of Hollywood's hottest talents, who has produced the successful *40-Year-Old Virgin* and *Knocked Up*. (Arifa Akbar, *the Independent*)

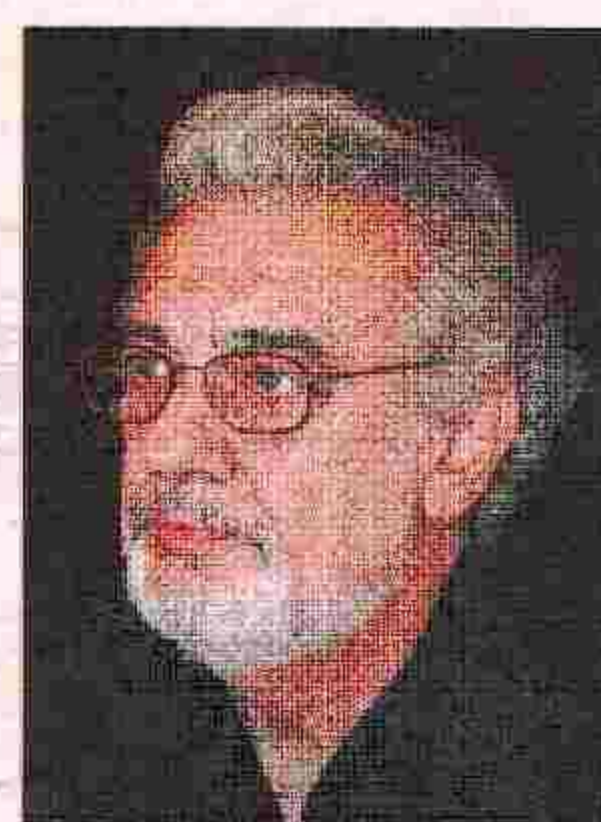
## 'The Fly' buzzes into opera

**PARIS BE AFRAID**, be very afraid: David Cronenberg's 1986 horror flick *The Fly* has undergone a bizarre metamorphosis - and now it's an opera. The new incarnation, with tenor Placido Domingo (photo) conducting the orchestra and Academy Award-winning composer Howard Shore (*The Lord of the Rings*) behind the score, isn't as gory as the original. Highbrow opera audiences will be spared close-ups of the title character's fingernails falling off as he makes the transition from mild-mannered scientist to giant insect.

Still, for an opera, it's pretty scary - even if there are touches of dark humour, as in the movie. Giggles broke out among those invited to see Monday's dress rehearsal when a mezzo-soprano belted out the film's catch phrase: "Be afraid. Be very afraid."

Cronenberg, who came back to direct the opera version, said he wasn't sure what effect it would have on audiences. "Someone's 6-year-old said, after seeing one of our rehearsals, that she thought she would have to sleep with her parents for a while," he told reporters. "So I guess it's working."

The opera got its world premiere July 2 at Paris' Theatre du Chatelet. Shore, a childhood friend of Cronenberg's who also wrote the film's original music, said



his opera score is all new - he sampled only two themes from his 1986 work. He said he started picturing *The Fly* as an opera as soon as the film was released.

Reporters in Paris pressed Domingo on what attracted him to the story of star-crossed lovers, one of whom learns to regurgitate digestive fluids onto his food like houseflies do. "Why not?" he said. "I couldn't resist."

The plot has all the elements needed for good opera: a love story, a transformation, tragedy and death, not to mention a large dose of melodrama. The plot sticks to the same basic lines as the movie. Reporter Veronica Quaife falls for eccentric scientist Seth Brundle at a reception. One drunken night, Brundle climbs into his teleport machine himself - only a housefly buzzed into the machine with him.

Overall, the opera has a very different feel than the movie. As Brundle and Quaife, bass baritone Daniel Okulitch and mezzo-soprano Ruxandra Donose are classically attractive blondes with powerful voices, but they have less eccentric charm than the film's stars, Jeff Goldblum and Geena Davis. The retro set design is evocative of 1950s horror flicks with gruesome costumes, a singing teleport machine and a giant fly.

(Angela Doland, AP)