

MYANMARTIMES
HEARTBEAT OF THE NATION

ACADEMY AWARDS

December
2014

Reach for
the stars

The story behind
the statue

A new day for
filmmakers?

Director's
commentary



Plus: Celebrate over a century of cinema with our timeline

Rewind

Once more popular and prolific than Bollywood, Myanmar's film industry – like the rest of the country – has faced more cuts than action since 1962. Will our heros find a happy ending? Sit back, put your feet up and turn the lights down low for a special review of over a century of cinematic highs and lows, romance and heartbreak, risk and adventure, stunts and drama

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1906

Travelling cinema operators from abroad put on public screenings using cotton sheets hung in streets – the first films ever shown in Myanmar.

1910

Cinemas in Yangon start screening foreign films and documentaries.

1918

U Ohn Maung, the father of filmmaking in Myanmar, founds Burma Film productions and starts trying to make the country's first feature film. During filmmaking, independence leader U Tun Shein dies, and U Ohn Maung shifts attention to capture the funeral on film using a second-hand camera.

1920 August

The country's first documentary, *The Funeral of U Tun Shein*, debuts at Yangon's Cinema de Paris (some sources say Royal Cinema), together with an American film. The movie opens with a notice "Our apologies for shaky and blurry images", but it plays to packed houses, providing the first moving images of their own country ever seen. It also sparks a trend: In coming decades, both Bo Aung Kyaw and Bogyoke Aung San would have their funerals filmed and shown to the public.

1920 October 13

U Ohn Maung's feature film, *Myitta ni athuyar* (Love and Liquor), is released at Rangoon's Royal Cinema – the first feature film made and shown in Myanmar. The film is black-and-white, silent, and shot with a single fixed camera position; it opens with the title "Burma Film Presents: Love and Liquor" but shows no credits or cast listing. Cast members include Nyi Pu (considered the country's first film actor), Maung Maung Chit and Maung Maung Kalay. English versions of the poster boasted "7500 feet in 5 parts" and advertised it as the company's "most costly exclusive Burmese photoplay", lauding the "most successful attempt at filmmaking by the Burmans under the directorship of Maung Ohn Maung in producing this Burmese love drama in an animated form, teeming with intense humor and excitement". Hype aside, the plot – based on a P Moe Nin story – is a cautionary tale about how gambling and alcohol destroy the life of the protagonist. The release date, October 13, has been Myanmar Film Day ever since, with respect-paying ceremonies for elder film artists starting in 1963. Another consequence of the success is that Fox, later Twentieth Century Fox, asks U Ohn Maung to film Burmese nature scenes for them, the pay for which allows the purchase of better equipment from Kodak and paves the way for more sophisticated productions to come.

63rd Myanmar Academy Awards

Saturday, Dec

Who will win?

Of 15 films released in theatres during the calendar year 2013, six have passed through an initial round of judging and are shortlisted as contenders for 11 available prizes.

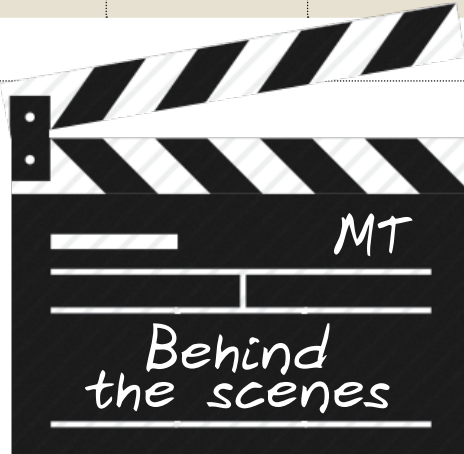
Courtesy: Myanmar Motion Picture Organisation (MMP0)

	<i>Kyai Zin Maw Gon</i>	<i>Nim Sae Yim</i>	<i>Satan Ye Kachay The</i>	<i>Ko A Htar Nae Ko</i>	<i>Sone Byue</i>	<i>Ah Phyu Yaung Ye Taik</i>
Production	Zillion Entertainment	Sein Htay	Dawei	Shwe Moe The	Aung Thiri	Shwe Taung
Director	Bagyi Soe Moe	Wyne	Wyne	Ko Zaw (Ah Yone Oo)	Win Htun Htun	Ko Zaw (Ah Yone Oo)
Music	Piano Tin Win Hlaing	Di Ra Moh	Di Ra Moh	Thein Lwin (Dana Moe)	Zaw Myo Htut	Khin Maung Gyi
Editing	Nyan Win, Tin Nyi Nyi Tun	Kyaw Naing Moe	Kyaw Naing Moe	Zaw Min (Han Thar Myay)	Lucky Face	Zaw Min (Han Thar Myay)
Sound	Wai Tun	Ko Lwin	Kyi Min Thein	Thein Aung (MRTV)	Ko Aye	Thein Aung (MRTV)
Photography	Bagyi Soe Moe, Aung Ko Latt	Toe Toe Win	Ko Toe	Kyauk Phyu (Badaythar)	Tun Tun (Bauk Htaw)	Kyauk Phyu (Badaythar)
Screenplay	Nyein Min	Nay Naw	Wyne	Nay Soe Thaw	Myint Oo Oo Myint	Nay Soe Thaw
Starring	Luu Min, Nay Toe, Wai Lu Kyaw, Zin Wyne, Ye Aung, Tun Tun, Soe Yan Aung, Soe Myat Thu Zar, Thet Mon Myint, Pan Phyu, Eaindra Kyaw Zin, Tint Tint Tun and Captain Pyae Phyo Aung as General Aung San	Pyae Ti Oo, Min Oo, Wutt Hmone Shwe Yi, Than Than Soe	Nay Toe, Wyne, Thet Mon Myint, Zin Wyne, Yone Yone, Heavy Phyo	Khant Si Thu, Kyaw Kyaw Bo, Tun Tun, Moe Hay Ko, Moe Yu San, Thandar Bo, Moe Pyae Pyae Maung	Nay Toe, Min Yar Zar, Moe Yan Zun, Tun Tun Win, Thet Mon Myint, Khine Thin Kyi, Thin Zar Wint Kyaw, War So Moe Oo, Thaingi Tun	Nay Toe, Pyae Ti Oo, Tun Tun Win, Kaung Pyae, Eaindra Kyaw Zin, Cho Pyone, Thandar Bo



Bagyi Soe Moe

Best director nominee, for *Kyai Zin Maw Gon*



Piano Tin Win Hlaing

Best music nominee, for *Kyai Zin Maw Gon*



Nay Soe Thaw

Best screenwriting double nominee, for *Ah Phyu Yaung Ye Taik* and *Ko Ah Htar Nei Ko*

THIS movie was shot with a lot of effort because we wanted to create a work of art. We had to include memories of three eras. So we collected documents, records and history books and even planned the costumes to make sure the movie has no mistakes.

Originally the film was intended to be a series. The original running time was 6 hours and 45 minutes. We had to cut out four hours to be able to show it as a 2h45min movie.

Some accused us of making a movie on the army's side. I just asked them, "Do you call him General Aung San or U Aung San?" We present this film because it is necessary as a historical document.

Asking me about winning an Academy Award is like asking a student who prepared well for the exam whether he will pass. We went all out. Awarding us or not is for authorities to decide.

I played as best as I could as this is my career. I am pleased if the audience and artists know that. I don't expect to win the Academy Award but I think this movie, *Kyai Zin May Gone*, will win many awards. It is not important whether I will win or not. The screenplay and the director are very good, mainly choosing actors who are very clever and natural. Maybe I can call it the rhythm of the story – the style of using tricks and the climax are so good.

I used only instrumental melodies as background starting from the scene in which the BIA enters Dawei. Most of the music is instrumental except the "Bama Thu Ye Gaung" (Bama Hero) song. As this movie is historical and I know a lot of national songs, I used them to fit with that age.

If asked if I am excited about the Academy Awards, I would say "of course I am". But everyone will know the results only on the night of December 27. I have tried my best combining all the artistic talents I have. Of the two short listed two films, one is a comedy [*Ko Ah Htar Nei Ko*] and the other is a drama [*Ah Phyu Yaung Ye Taik*]. The two films are totally different.

Although it seems easier, comedies are more difficult as it's necessary to create totally the opposite of people's nature. It is hard to make people laugh. It is also difficult to choose the right character to fit in well. For a drama film, it is entirely easier. We have chosen two super actors and they were able to do their parts best. It was a three-hour story and we had to cut it down to 2 hours and 15 minutes.

– Chit Su

MYANMARTIMES

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ember 27, 2014

Myanmar Event Park, Yangon

Although script censorship for feature films ended in 2012, the current pack of nominated films all had to pass censorship, because their scripts date from 2010 or 2011.

This year's nominees and winners are being chosen by a panel of peers, rather than in conjunction with the government as has happened in the past.

The "academy" - the Myanmar Motion Picture Organisation - has 11 categories, though some years a worthy contender is not found for all, which means some statues - controversially - are not given out.

The 2014 ceremony honours domestic feature films shown during the 2013 calendar year.

Nominated films are chosen in advance by one pool of jurors, but they are nominated for general contention, rather than specific categories. A second panel then selects winners.

Five fast facts to help you learn your lines before showtime

'I'd like to thank the Academy'

Vintage film equipment can be seen at the Myanmar Motion Picture Museum in Yangon, which gracefully allowed permission to print this images. Photos: Zarni Phyo



Bright lights for big stars

New venue promises a stellar show

As well as being the first year in which the awards are not jointly organised by the Ministry of Information, the 2014 ceremony - recognizing the best in filmmaking from 2013 - will shake things up with a venue change as well, according to U Lu Min, chair of the Myanmar Motion Picture Organisation.

Rather than Thuwanna, the

stars will constellate this year at Myanmar Event Park, on Shinsawpu Road in Sanchaung township, said U Lu Min.

Although the awards have been given in front of a live audience since 1994, this year will see a closed-door, invitation-only event, because of the limitations of the venue, U Lu Min said.

But he also promised an improved show for those tuning in

at home, saying the shift in location was partly to create a more extravagant light show. Excluding audience members will also allow for a more star-studded gala, with many filmmakers excluded in the past now set to attend.

For those keen for a great seat, the best shot might be to get up on stage - though you may already be too late. Ten models - five men to hold the trays,

five women to distribute the envelopes - will get their turn in the spotlight, alongside up-and-coming actors and actresses.

Rehearsals for the show, which is helmed by Myanmar Index Creative, are scheduled for December 18 to 24. The final show happens December 27, and is set to air on major stations. ■

- Myat Noe Oo,
translation by Khant Lin Oo



And the winner is...

IT'S YOUR LIFE - LIVE IT UP

now!

To find out the winners plus all the fashion and gossip don't miss next week's **now!** Magazine, available Monday, December 28

1931 September

A documentary about Saya San, a leader in the 1930s peasant revolution, is released. Burma Film (later to become the renowned A1 film company) had been bought by Myanmar Aswe, who asked permission of the British government to film Saya San's trial. The government thought this would show events in its favour: It was wrong, and scenes depicting Saya San's bravery as the death sentence is announced - and carried out, at the gallows - enrage the public and turn sentiment further against colonial rule.

That same year, Parrot Film Co, led by U Sunny, releases *36 Animals*, about colonial police complicity in illegal gambling.

1932

A "talkie" called *Ngwe pay lo ma ya* (It's No Use Giving Money) is the first locally made film with synchronised sound, directed by U Tok Gyi and backed by the Imperial Film Company. Starring Chit Tin Gyi, Khin May Gyi and Aye Ko, it's based on a Dagon Nat Shin novel, with on-location filming in Bombay and Calcutta lending exotic flair. Despite advances in technology, though, some silent films would continue to be made even into the 1950s, with musicians and conductors accompanying on-screen action in up to four shows a day.

1936

Director Parrot U Sunny's *Doe Daung Alan* (Our Peacock Flag) is released then banned by the colonial government.

1937

Boycott, a timely political drama directed by then-student leader and future prime minister U Nu, is released during the height of the independence movement. It features appearances by fellow independence figures (and national heroes) Thakhin (later Bogyoke) Aung San and Thakhin Htun Ohn.

The same year also sees scandal when *Aung Thapayay* (The Triumph of Thapayay), directed by Tin Maung of A1, is not banned from being shown by the colonial government. The film looks at the final days of King Thibaw, the country's last monarch.

1940

During wartime, the British form the Burma State Cinema Service to screen propaganda across the country.

1941

The Japanese invade. With so many cinemas bombed or otherwise out of commission, the film industry grinds to a halt, then turns entirely to producing stage drama while they wait out the war.

1946

Post-war, with the Japanese evicted and the British in control once more in control, the Public Relation Film Service screens British propaganda and educational films.

1947

Held two years late due to war, a ceremony marks the 25th anniversary of the momentous premieres of 1920. Bogyoke Aung San urges actors and directors to use their skills for the good of the country; he is later assassinated July 19.

1948 January 4

Independence day arrives, as Britain cedes control to local government. The flag-raising ceremony and departure of British officials is filmed in the morning, edited, produced then shown on screens in residential areas later the same day. The new government then forms a Film and Theatre Department later that year.

1949

With Rangoon under siege from Kayin rebels, filmmakers capture scenes from the battle for Insein, part of a growing documentary movement focused on the civil war. Movie stars visit the front lines to provide rations and refreshments.

1950

A fire at the A1 Film archive wipes out many important films, from features to documentary news reels, including footage of the 1300 revolution, Saya San's trial and Bo Aung Kyaw's funeral.

1952

At the start of an independent “Golden Age” of film, local filmmakers are producing up to 80 films a year. The Motion Picture Promotion and Scrutiny board is formed, and the first Myanmar Academy Awards ceremony – modelled after the Oscars in Hollywood – is held. The awards are given out each year thereafter, with the number of categories gradually increasing though not all are honoured each year. The first ceremony sees five awards given: best picture (*Chit Thet-Wai*, by A1 Film Company); best actor (Kyaw Win, in Maria Yi); best actress (Kyi Kyi Htay, in *Chit Thet-Wai*). Two films (*Mayar Ne Apyo* and *Chit-Ywe Kyaw-Ya*) are also given first- and second-runner-up status, though runner-up categories are phased out over the next two years. Other categories added later (though not always given every year) are: director (1954), child actress (1955 – repeated only in 1977 and 2012), cinematography (1956), supporting actor (1958), supporting actress (1962), special lifetime achievement recognition (1978; repeated only in 1999), music (1991), sound (1994), screenplay (1995), editing (1997). In 1962, a number of categories are not awarded, including for best picture, director, actor and cinematographer, and through the 1960s and 1970s the handouts are sometimes spotty (for instance, only two awards were given in 1972, for best director and best cinematography, and both for the same film). The ceremony has been held in Yangon except for 2007 (for films of 2005) through 2012 (for 2011), when it shifted to the then-new capital Nay Pyi Taw.

1954

Ludu Aung Than (The People Win Through), an anti-Communist film, is released, based on a play by future prime minister U Nu, who appears onscreen in a cameo. Made with local actors in-country but with a US director and crew – and backed by the Committee for Free Asia, an association to fight the spread of Communism in Asia – the film is a big success. The day of its premiere, the Burma Air Force drops publicity pamphlets over Yangon, Bago and Pyay announcing the arrival of 165 copies from the US set for simultaneous release.

Anti-communist sentiment continues post-Kuomintang invasion with *Pa Le Myat Ye* (Tear of Pearl), which calls for unity and glorifying the Tatmadaw. Nationalism aside, popular topics of subsequent decades include romances, histories, thrillers and supernatural tales.

The year 1954 also sees the release in England of *The Purple Plain*, a British war film starring Gregory Peck as a Canadian pilot in the RAF fighting depression while serving in Burma in the final months of the war. He tries to kill himself “but just kept getting medals instead”, he tells Anna, played – in her only acting role – by Win Min Than (born Helga Johnston), who had an Australian father and a Burmese mother. She married politician Bo Setkya, aka Thakhin Aung Than, one of the famed 30 Comrades, who went underground and disappeared following the Ne Win coup. It is based on a novel by HE Bates, who travelled the country in 1945 on military assignment to record the war, and it was generally well-received, with a notably sympathetic portrayal of local life despite having been filmed in Sri Lanka.

1956 Another well-regarded international production, this one featuring scenes shot locally, is released: *The Burmese Harp*. Based on a novel (originally serialised) written by a Japanese professor of German literature who had never been to Burma and never had another literary success, the story tells of a group of POWs who turn to music to pass the time. Originally released in two parts, three weeks apart,

Reaching for the stars

The history of the Academy Award statuette

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WINNING an Academy Award statuette – depicting a *kainara* (mythical female bird) standing on a roll of film and plucking a star by stretching out her hands – is the hope of every artist in Myanmar’s film industry.

The gold statuette was designed in 1956 by Dagon U Myint Soe, adviser to the Myanmar Motion Picture Organisation. He drew inspiration from the Emmy, given every year in the US for achievement in the making of television programs and first awarded in 1949. The Emmy trophy depicts a woman with wings holding an atom.

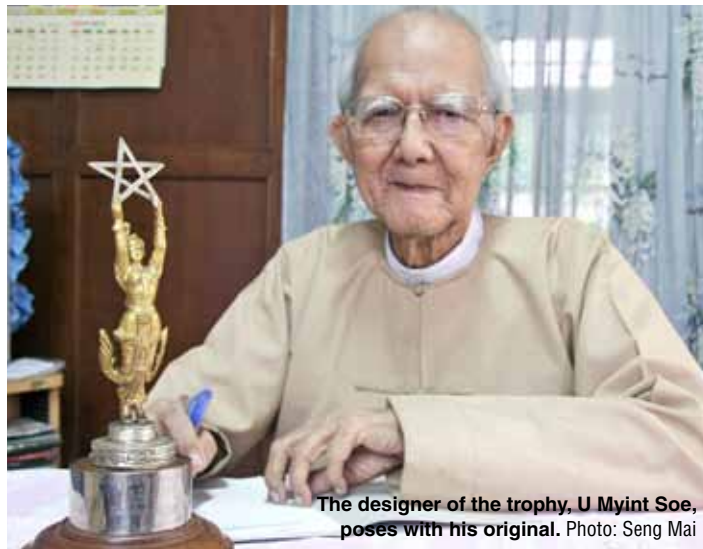
“He drew a different design that represented local tradition,” said U Kyi Soe Tun, five-time Academy Award-winning director and one of the panel of judges helping choose this year’s winners.

The *kainari* and *kainara* dance is a famous Shan dance performed by a man and woman dressed in winged costume.

The statue it has inspired has been tweaked slightly by U Myint Soe, U Kyi Soe Tun said.

“The star at the top of the statuette didn’t have perforations and the size of the statuette was smaller in the past. Later, he redesigned it, by making holes in the star and making the size of the statuette bigger.”

The awards were first presented in 1952 in Yangon, 32 years after the country’s first domestic feature-length film, *Love and Liquor*, debuted in 1920 at Royal Cinema. A team was formed to assess and reward the most deserving films and actors, and five awards in three



The designer of the trophy, U Myint Soe, poses with his original. Photo: Seng Mai

categories were presented that first year.

Actor Kyaw Win and actress Kyi Kyi Htay were the pioneer award-winners, and three films – *Chit Thet Wai*, *Maryar Hnint Apyo* and *Chit Ywe Khaw Yar* – received first, second and third respectively in the best film category.

That first year, the trophies were a golden *kainara* for first, a silver peacock for second and a bronze lion for third. The best actor and actress winners received golden broaches.

Then, in 1956, U Myint Soe designed the now-familiar Academy statuette, to be given out in all categories. It was crafted by Pe Aw U Tun Yin and his sons, who are continuing to make them today.

When the ceremony draws near, rumours about the statuettes and who will get them are rife, particularly in the most hotly contested categories of actors, actresses and directors. Since not every category of award is given out each year, some try to determine

in advance how many awards are going to be given out by trying to figure out how many statuettes Pe Aw U Tun Yin has been ordered to produce.

One year the rumour spread that the assessment team ordered only five statuettes, and those in the industry were sad about the news, thinking only five categories would be awarded that year.

Not so, said U Kyi Soe Tun.

“For example, if we ordered twelve statuettes this year, and could give eight awards to artists, we reduce the orders the following year because we have extra.”

U Kyi Soe Tun has receiving his own awards was a moving experience, and especially so due to the statuette’s unique design.

“In 1989, I got the award for the first time,” he said. “My mother passed away six months earlier. As the statuette was a *kainara*, a mythical female creature like a woman, I had a feeling that my mother was visiting me for the first time since she died.”

He said he often watched films

with his mother and missed her terribly. “If the statuette was a man, I wouldn’t feel that much,” he said.

That win in 1989 wouldn’t be the first *kainara* visit for U Kyi Soe Tun: He also won in 1997, 2002 and twice in 2005, for best director and best screenplay.

“I had the same feeling when I got the award for the second, third and so on. I felt that she came back. How funny it is that I am still believing my mother will come back again,” he said.

In the original design, the star on top was not made of gold, but now it contains 2 ticals (1.152 ounces) of pure gold.

To honour his mother, he decided to donate the gold in her memory.

“I removed the gold star and sold it to donate money to the outstanding students at the school in my mother’s village and the school in the village where I was born,” he said. “I treasure the statuettes and I made a good use of the money from the statuettes.”

A fellow winner, Daw Khin Moh Moh Aye, said the importance of the award is much more than just financial.

“People think the money I get for acting has increased after I won the Academy Award,” said Daw Khin Moh Moh Aye, who took home supporting actress honours in 2011. “But it didn’t. The amount of money is the same as before. I have never asked for more because I am an award-winner.”

She added that the value of the award isn’t something you can measure in kyat.

“I am happy to act and I treasure the award,” she said. “I regard it as if my audience gave it to me.” ■

Sold out?

Stale filmmaking and too few cinemas are threatening the future of Myanmar cinema, says director Mg Myo Min

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EVEN though the industry has made the leap to digital, there’s still a bottleneck holding back filmmakers from remaining on the cutting edge – a lack of theatres.

Academy Award-winning director Mg Myo Min said production and presentation has shifted away from film to DCP, or Digital Cinema Package, but that the decline in the number of theatres in Myanmar means filmmakers actually have to queue for a slot to have their films screened for the public – sometimes up to a full year. And that leaves customers not wanting to line up themselves when the films do turn up.

“It is not good that we have to wait to screen in the cinema,” he said. “The art is not timely. It can be stale. That is why we need more cinemas.”

He suggested that the government needs to offer loans to investors willing to build more cinemas. But he also said the decline in cinemas over the past few years can also be

blamed on the films themselves not reaching the standard required to hold the audience’s attention.

Mg Myo Min said it’s important to aim for a timeless quality of art, something that transcends time, language and boundaries – not something that feels modern but will look tired or dated even before it’s released.

“When they can click TV channels and watch different movies daily for free, we creators need to produce movies with the best quality of storyline and dialogue to attract audience to come and watch at cinema in this era,” he said, saying filmmakers need to “get out” of run-of-the-mill comedy films and look to more original fare. Low-budget, low-taste movies made purely for money will lead to a “crisis” in which people stop seeing Myanmar films in the cinema in future, he warned.

Timelessness, however, doesn’t mean stagnant. Mg Myo Min also voiced his strong opposition to the reinstatement of pre-production script censorship for direct-to-DVD releases – the vast majority of films made in Myanmar.

“Because the government removed

censorship on film we shot some scenes with short skirts and clothes. But now they have restricted the censorship suddenly,” he said. “I think the Myanmar film industry will not improve if the censorship is still restricted.”

At 51, he has plenty of filmmaking under his belt. He started drawing illustrations for journals in 1983 and made his first film, *Hninsi Wine*, in 1992, earning him respected in the industry. A follow-up, *Kyipyar Yaung Negative Myar*, featuring Lwin Moe and Tun Eaindra Bo, showed for three months, and he received best director honours for *Myaw Lint Chin Myar Swar* in 2006. He has studied directing in Singapore as well as putting on plays and writing scripts. He now runs a performance course called 3H to share his knowledge with the next generation.

While he is happy that the age of propaganda films is now over, he said he disliked the possibility of Academy Award winners being chosen according to attributes other than the performance itself, whether political concerns or issues relating to off-screen behaviour. ■



The Myanmar Motion Picture Museum, on Win Gagar Road in Yangon, contains countless priceless film artifacts and memorabilia charting the evolution of the nation's cinema, dating all the way back to a playbill for 1920's *Love and Liquor*, the country's first feature film. This priceless treasure trove has been called "the most comprehensive film museum in all of Southeast Asia" by the Southeast Asian Cinema blog (southeastasiancinema.blogspot.com). Photo: Zarni Phyo

‘Based only on quality’

MT's **Nyein Ei Ei Htwe** speaks to U Lu Min, chair of the Myanmar Motion Picture Organisation as well as a former Academy Award-winner for acting and directing, about controversy, censorship and what categories should be added in coming years

As the nominated films were screened in 2013 and censorship was halted in 2012, can we find more evidence of more freedom in plots or scenes in the nominees?

Though the films were released in 2013, they were given permission to screen on cinemas in 2012. And even to apply to direct the films, we needed to send our scripts before shooting. So, the scripts of all the nominated films were sent to the censorship board in 2011 or 2010, because we need to take time shooting. All those nominated films are under censorship. But as the quality of the awarded films are chosen by our great juries from the film industry, not from government organisations, whether or not censorship is alive in films we can see free and qualified plots in the chosen films.

What is most important for juries when picking the winners?

We can't say what the most important thing is because all aspects are important. Also, all awards are not chosen by only one jury. There are many categories in the Academy Awards and each category's films are chosen by professionals in that field. For the best song award, for instance, professional musicians will make the selections; for supporting actors, former professional actors will choose. Then we choose the film with the most votes for for each award.

Do you think juries will have trouble choosing winners because there is a political film in the running [Kye Zin Maw Gone, which traces the

evolution of the Tatmadaw]?

No, I don't believe the juries will choose the political army film [by default] because no government officers are included in the jury groups. And there is no force or pressure on them. But if the film is perfect in art and quality, juries will choose it. The awards are based only on quality.



Photo: Staff

Why aren't documentary and short films included in the Academy Awards ceremony?

Historically we have only given prizes for feature films. Though during those years documentary and short films were screened in international and local film festivals, there is still a need for them to be brought to the notice of audiences. In future we would love to also select documentary and short films in the Academy Awards ceremony.

Why did you decide not to hold the event with a live public audience, and what feedback have you had about that decision?

Actually, historically there wasn't permission to allow audiences at the Academy event. But starting from 1994, the location was changed to Thuwunna Stadium,

those who were invited from film industry had to sit in the middle of stadium, surrounded by the public. So there were only around 1000 guests and about 2000 in the audience taking part. Many performers and even spouses and family members of the award-winners weren't invited. This year I want to invite as many as people as possible from the film industry. The location, Myanmar Event Park, can be managed as we like for seats or decorations. I have planned to include everyone, including former Academy winners and supporting actors or actresses.

What is the biggest challenge you face for this year's awards?

We are working our best for this year's Academy event and believe it to be the great one. There will be more than one opinion on the new changes and everyone can deny or point out what they dislike. But all people from the film industry hope for the best for the Academy event and I hope all will join us in making it the best.

Now, the most difficult problem for me is being bothered by some people in our industry. Instead of unity, people who always blame the government or me are attacking my idea for the new location for the event. They don't want to change the place, but on that event day, there will be the results of my attempts and hopes. To host an occasion, we can't hold it by ourselves and need government helps for things like transportation, security and traffic jams. So we shouldn't blame the government always. The situation is different with the former and new governments. ■

due to permission to film in Burma not having been granted in time, the half released first contains no Burma scenes. With that still in theatres, the crew went to Burma for 10 days to film further scenes to be included in the second part. The scenes would later be more evenly dispersed in the combined cut of the film released later.

1962

After Ne Win's coup, the motion picture industry is told to "march to the Burmese Way to Socialism". The movie sector, as with the economy in general, goes into reverse. Cinema halls and production houses are nationalised, and those with English names forced to rebrand: for example, Yangon's Excelsior Theatre becomes the Waziya (still showing movies toda on Bogyoke Aung San Road and 33rd and slated for renos in January 2015). Scripts are censored and movies are required to focus on the struggles and triumphs of the working class. The Film and Theatre Department is renamed the Central Film Division under the Ministry of Information. On 1000 feet of film per week, it distributes propaganda in various genres. Until 1980 and the beginning of television in the country, the documentary news reels made by the Central Film Division are second only to newspapers in terms of how the government communicated its wishes to the people.

1964 August 6

Pre-publication censorship of media is instituted; it will remain in place until August 2012.

1968

Initially the government attempts to follow the Chinese model of filmmaking, in which they produce films themselves and show them in government cinemas. After one such film, *The Beloved Land*, bombs heavily, the Film Council takes the easier way out, letting artists make their own films but using censorship to restrict artistic freedom in favour of nationalism.

1970

A1's *Journey to Piya* - chronicling a road trip breaking down due to multiple mechanical failures - is banned by the Film Council, which interprets it as a metaphor for the country's political journey.

1971

Travel writer Paul Theroux recounts in *The Atlantic* magazine a conversation with a cinema manager who tells him that "All Burmese films have to include at least 60 percent socialism". Theroux says he "didn't question" the statistic; nor do most local filmmakers, who in subsequent decades seek safe ground with love-triangle stories, a genre referred to locally as "three flowers facing each other".

1979

Good patriots fend off pesky foreigners in *Ah Mi Myay Hma Thar Kaung Myar* (Good Sons of the Motherland), produced by the Office of the Director of Combat Training - typical approved nationalist fare.

1980

The introduction of television to the nation leads the Central Film Division to stop producing news reels.

1982

The government passes the bizarre decree that all actors must make three movies simultaneously - apparently just because it can, as a way of asserting control over artists' lives.

1985

Thingyan Moe (Thingyan Rain) - a musical directed by Maung Tin Oo starring Nay Aung, Zin Wine, Khin Than Nu and May Than Nu - follows a musician from 1959 to 1982. Decades later, after celebrations become more liberal, the film will be often referenced as a depiction of a kinder, gentler Thingyan.

1989

Socialism ends and the film industry is privatised, with cinemas sold off and new production houses opening for business. Mingalar Ltd takes on most of the biggest movie houses in Yangon and Mandalay. But films continue to be censored by the new junta, with some actors blacklisted.

1996

Thu Khun Ma Khan Byi (Never Shall We Be Enslaved) becomes the country's highest-ever grossing film to this point. Allegedly government-funded, it tells the story of army generals who refuse to surrender to the British in Mandalay in 1885.

1996

The Television and Video Act requires videos (except family recordings) to be approved by the Video Censor Board before public distribution and screening, or else filmmakers can be hit with fines, imprisonment up to 3 years and confiscation of property. The objectives of the 1996 Act are: "To modernize and upgrade the standard of Myanmar Motion Picture Business; to cause the emergence of Myanmar motion picture films which will prove beneficial to the all-round development of the State and to the preservation of Myanmar cultural heritage; to cause the emergence of Myanmar motion picture films which will contribute towards the unity of the national races and towards keeping alive and keen the sense of patriotism; to promote the emergence of outstanding film artistes and film actors and actresses; to prohibit decadent motion pictures which will undermine Myanmar culture and Myanmar traditions and customs".

1998 November

The Myanmar Motion Picture Museum opens its doors in Yangon, containing memorabilia and props from the entire history of Myanmar cinema, including a showbill for *Love and Liquor* (1920). By 2010 the museum receives barely 10 visitors a month, but the Southeast Asian Cinema blog calls it "the most comprehensive film museum in all of Southeast Asia", and it remains today a priceless visit for anyone interested in the history of film, of Myanmar or both.

2004

Hlyo hwat thaw hnin (Mystery of Snow) wins seven Academy Awards. The film tells the story of a boy's search for his father who has fallen into a glacial ravine in a mountain climbing accident, and stars Lu Min, Lwin Moe and Soe Myat Nandar.

2005

In a representative year for the film industry, just 10 feature films are shot on 35mm film, but 902 features are released on video and DVD, with 12 Indian films being imported for showing in theatres and bootleg US films also popular, in theatres as well as for home viewing.

2006

Leaked film footage of former Senior-General Than Shwe's daughter's wedding makes the rounds of the bootleg market, provoking outrage at the lavish spending and inadvertently becoming perhaps the most-seen locally made documentary, in a time when documentary footage is nearly impossible to shoot or show in public.

2007

The National University of Arts and Culture opens a Film and Drama Department, the first in the country, but international workshops prove more effective due to budget and equipment constraints. Such workshops remain closely monitored, however, and students are not allowed to film in public.

2007

The Simpsons Movie is released internationally but banned in Myanmar.

Red carpet fashion

MT gets a sneak peak of what's to come

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DEDICATED followers of fashion should be on the lookout for something interesting on the red carpet when the prizes are handed out at the Myanmar Academy Awards Ceremony on December 27. Some of the garments could be as eye-catching as the artistes wearing them, observers are hinting.

Traditional designs are to be fused with Western styles.

Designer Ma Latt Latt said, "At last year's ceremony, ordinary dresses, in conventional patterns, with emerald green shawls and wraps, were seen. Some celebrities wore Myanmar traditional design with western trimmings, but I didn't create much fashion for the awards last year. Some young actresses

are gorgeous, but decadent dress destroyed their looks."

As is normal in the fashion cycle, old designs are now coming back. Ma Latt Latt said, "The short longyi popular in our college years will become popular again, and so are short waists. But my designs are for senior actresses, so that I will create designs with long longyi and unusual designs."

Her clients include Htun Eaindrabo, Khine Thin Kyi, Khine Hnin Wai and May Than Nu.

"All my creations will be compatible with age and lifestyle. Ma Khine Gyi wears coats, but she favours a front flap with sealing wax thread. Ma Sint likes a traditional design with embellishments that set off her looks. Ma Khine's elegance commands a traditional look with a half-chest design and long sleeves. Khine Hnin Wai calls for a Myanmar traditional look,"



Designer Ma Latt Latt works on dresses for actresses. Photo: Aung Htay Hlaing

she said.

Colours must complement style. Ma Latt Latt continued, "Ma Khine Gyi will wear orange; Ma Sint will be in sky-blue chate; Ma Khine Lay will wear something fragrant, and Khine Hnin Wai will wear black, white and pink," she decreed, adding that design features will include convoluted lotus stems, buds and blossoms.

Designer Ko Pyae Soe Aung concurred. "People should come to this awards ceremony in traditional attire. You can wear Western dress any time. But this is the Myanmar Academy

Awards."

Women wearing Ko Pyae Soe Aung will feature gold shawls.

On the place of make-up and hairstyle, Ko Pyae Soe Aung was clear. "Make-up artists and hairdressers complement fashion designers. Not the other way round."

Men in attendance should keep it smart and simple, he has decided.

"A simple Myanmar jacket with a silk longyi will do. I don't care for figured Myanmar jackets. That looks frivolous." ■

Translation by Khant Lin Oo

Mumbai

Bollywood hit makes history

DT was October 1995 when the Maratha Mandir cinema first showed one of India's best-loved movies, a Bollywood romcom starring Shah Rukh Khan.

One thousand weeks later, the film *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (The Brave-Hearted Will Take The Bride) still plays on same the Mumbai silver screen every afternoon.

"I keep coming back," said Ghulfam Ali, a plumber, who has watched the film here 20 times because it helps him to unwind.

"The way the scenes are shot, the music and songs are very pleasing to the eyes and ears," he told AFP, after buying his latest ticket.

DDLJ, as the film is fondly known, celebrates its 1000th week at the 1,100-seat Maratha Mandir on December 19, by far the longest theatrical run for an Indian movie.

The tickets -- at just 20 rupees (US\$0.32) each -- still regularly sell out at weekends, while during the week a steady stream of fans arrive to enjoy three hours of escapism.

The film tells the tale of two expatriate Indians living in Britain who meet and fall in love on a trip to mainland Europe.

But the young woman Simran, played by actress Kajol, is to be married to a family friend in India, an arrangement set up by her strict father.

After various twists and turns in cities including London and Paris and a few picturesque musical numbers, the lovers get together and convince their families of the union -- an



Photo: AFP

important factor in conservative Indian society.

"I have fallen in love with the movie all over again after watching it here," said architect Mitali Vij as she sipped a soft drink during the interval.

The film was a breakthrough for Khan, the leading man, who became one of Bollywood's most bankable stars and known for playing cheeky romantic heroes.

It was also an archetypal movie from late producer Yash Chopra, known for his emotional films, whose use of the Swiss mountains as a backdrop in hits such as *DDLJ* made them a popular destination for wealthy Indian tourists.

Pravin Rane, the Maratha Mandir manager, said their Mumbai show had the "perfect package" -- and not just in terms

of the film's content.

Its location opposite a bustling express train station, a bus depot and a public hospital ensures the cinema gets a regular supply of patrons, who appreciate the cheap tickets.

"Where else in Mumbai will delayed passengers find three hours of air-conditioned relaxation, with clean washrooms and cheap snacks?" Rane asked.

With its dark-wood interiors, worn-out seat cushions and flaking plaster, the nearly six-decade-old Maratha Mandir is a throwback to a bygone era in India's entertainment capital.

Its record *DDLJ* run is a rare success story for a single-screen cinema, a type of establishment that has been struggling to compete with the increasingly

popular multiplexes in the city.

A celebration is planned this weekend at the big screen to mark the milestone, although Rane said the details were being kept under wraps by the production house.

The movie's director Aditya Chopra has meanwhile released a book on the making of *DDLJ* as well as a new trailer, asking people to "Come fall in love all over again".

Rane said there were no plans to end the 19-year run, despite recent rumours that it may come to a halt, and other theatre workers hoped it would continue to provide them with income.

"In my heart there is a voice which says the shows will continue," said popcorn seller Umar Bhai. ■ AFP

In the fourth *Rambo* film, Sylvester Stallone's character rescues Christian missionaries kidnapped by Tatmadaw soldiers. Filming happens along the Thai border, where Stallone said the crew had "shots fired over their heads" and talked to refugees from the conflict between the government and armed ethnic groups. The film, which mixes documentary footage into its opening montage, is banned but still smuggled in. Its tagline - "Live for nothing, or die for something" - is reportedly taken up among armed ethnic groups, which Stallone calls "one of the proudest moments I've ever had in film".

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2010

After national reforms, the new civilian government continues privatising the film industry, but long-decaying theatres, unable to afford digital systems for DVD projection (about US\$300,000), start closing down. By December 2011 the number of theatres nationwide is said to have fallen from 244 in the late 1950s to 71.

2011

The Lady, a foreign film about Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, stars Michelle Yeoh, who flies to Myanmar, meets Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her son for a day, and is sent out on another flight later that day, due to being on a blacklist over her role. She is the only member of the crew allowed in, though director Luc Besson reportedly scouts locations undercover. The film is shot mostly in Thailand, with a 1:1 scale model of 44 University Avenue built as a set. Myanmar extras are used and Yeoh gives her speeches in Myanmar language. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton later watches the film on the flight during her first trip to Myanmar.

2011 September

The Wathann Film Festival becomes the first independent film festival in the country, featuring 23 local films in its first year.

2012 January

The Art of Freedom film festival is the first in the country to focus directly on the issue of censorship. Coming in the wake of a speech by President U Thein Sein encouraging the opening-up of the media, it is sponsored by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and organised in part by comedian and activist Zaganar. While censorship is still enforced nationwide, the films at the festival are shown uncensored, without repercussions; in part they skip reprisal because the censor board only looks at films released commercially, and these are shown for free. The festival includes a shortlisted 54 films out of 188 entries, with top prize going to *Ban That Scene*, director Htun Zaw Win's 18-minute comedy short - viewable on Youtube - featuring veteran actors portraying a censor board. Other film festivals follow in the coming years, spotlighting local and international films.

2012

Kayan Ahla (Kayan Beauties), directed by Aung Ko Latt and featuring non-actors in some roles, becomes Myanmar's first domestic HD film. The film tells the story of women from a remote Kayan village who must rescue their friend who is kidnapped by human traffickers. It wins the Juror's Special Award at the 2013 ASEAN International Film Festival in Malaysia.

2012 August

Twentieth Century Fox becomes the first major US studio in decades to officially and legally release a Hollywood film in Yangon, with *Titanic 3D*. Illegal copies of foreign films - including *Titanic* - have been shown unlicensed for many years, however, though they have been prohibited from being shown with Myanmar-language subtitles or dubbing, supposedly so as not to compete directly with the local industry. In that same year, 2012, only 30 percent of films shown in theatres are domestic productions; 17 feature films are made, with over 1000 direct-to-DVD releases.

2012 September

Iron Man 3, released by Disney worldwide and in Myanmar, earns US\$109,000 (K97.9 million) during one week in cinemas in three cinemas in Yangon, two in Mandalay and one in NPT. It's widely considered a national box office record for the country, since no one can remember what figures existed for international releases pre-1962.

Also in September, a documentary assembled by novelist, filmmaker and Cornell professor of physics Robert H. Lieberman is released abroad, entitled *They Call It Myanmar*. Containing footage shot over three years of visits aiming to capture everyday life, the film is generally praised, but a scene in which volunteers sweeping up at Shwedagon Pagoda are implied to be forced labour crews causes offence in Myanmar. Lieberman, on a visit, apologises, calling this a mistake in the



French/British photographer Cedric Arnold, currently based in Thailand, was visiting Yangon on assignment a few years ago when he came across a "small antique/curiosity/junk shop" downtown and decided to root through some boxes of old photographs. Among them were antique film stills, all undated, but most stamped "British Burma Film Co, Ltd - Rangoon", perhaps dating back as far as the 1930s. He has graciously allowed us to reproduce them here, and anyone who can help identify the performers or productions should contact him at cedric@cedricarnold.com.

For more of these images - as well as Cedric's own photography, including stunning portraits of everyone from film stars Sharon Stone and Willem Dafoe to Yangon punks and chinlone players - visit www.cedricarnold.com

editing. In the *The Myanmar Times* review, Douglas Long suggests one scene, involving bus crashes at Kyaiktiyo, reveals how willingly the filmmaker was taken in by tall tales. This passage is later quoted extensively by renowned film critic Roger Ebert in his review.

2013 January

The Motion Picture and Video Censor Board is abolished, allowing filmmakers to produce without prior Ministry of Information vetting.

2013 June

Mar yar Myar Tae Alin Kar (Scheme) is approved by censors after being made - then, after showings, sent back to censors and cut. Laws require films to play outside Yangon for one month before showing nationally, and audiences elsewhere tend to be more conservative in taste. In this case, they reacted against a suggestive (but fully-clothed) bedroom scene. In an interview, the film's director Thiha Tin Than says he has heard there is a "secret, red-striped book" in Nay Pyi Taw outlining standards for what can and cannot be shown onscreen, but others say they've never been told what's allowed and doubt such a document exists.

2014 June

The Open Sky - a short film following a woman whose home is burned down in anti-Muslim riots in Meiktila in March 2013 - is scheduled for, then pulled from, the second annual Human Rights, Human Dignity International Film Festival. Sight unseen, protestors objected to the film's portrayal of cooperation between Buddhist and Muslim neighbours in the aftermath, and issued abusive messages and a threat to "burn down the cinema" if the film was shown.

2014 December 1

Pre-production censorship is reinstated for direct-to-DVD films, ostensibly to protect "culture" in response to so-called sexually explicit material offensive to religious belief. Filmmakers must complete their entire film, then face reshoots if a film does not meet with approval. Since the Motion Picture and Video Censorship Board has been abolished, films will be vetted by the Movie Standards Evaluation Group, formed in 2012 and consisting of officials from the Ministry of Information's Myanmar Motion Picture Promotion Department, the Myanmar Motion Picture Organisation, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Attorney General's Office, the Myanmar Music Association and the Myanmar Writers Association, who will read all scripts before shooting, and can modify or reject scripts as they like.

2015 (?)

The long-awaited, long-delayed *Aung San*, a biopic of the life of Bogyoke Aung San film, is set for release "by the end of 2015", executive board member Zaganar has told *The Myanmar Times*. Originally scheduled to premiere February 13, 2015, the film has garnered excitement - and delays - at every step of its progress. The team behind the film have stated they refuse to compromise any aspect of historical authenticity, casting non-actors based on physical similarities to the historical figures depicted, and abandoning the search for a foreign producer in favour of homegrown production after candidates turned the project down and called it too much like a documentary. With shooting planned for Japan, India and England, the film's budget threatens to sink its ambition scope, but hopes are high - perhaps too high, given the challenge of treating the subject matter in a way that will please everyone. Time will tell whether or not the film manages to prove a high-water mark in Myanmar's long and tumultuous cinematic history. ■

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This timeline has been compiled from a number of sources, including *The Myanmar Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Irrawaddy*, *The Bangkok Post*, and various websites, including moviemoviesite.com, screenjunkies.com, hollywoodreporter.com, goethede.com, vnews.com, factsanddetails.com and imdb.com. That's a wrap.