The 25th European Film Awards

Press Dossier

The European Film Awards: HISTORY

The Beginning

The very first European Film Awards took place in 1988 in Berlin (West) upon an initiative by the Berlin senator for culture, Volker Hassemer, to celebrate together with illustrious European filmmakers the achievements in European film. On the night before the awards ceremony, news went around the corridors of the Hotel Kempinski that a special gathering was taking place in the Atlantic Suite: Bernardo Bertolucci and Isabelle Huppert were there, Wim Wenders, Ben Kingsley, Krzysztof Zanussi, István Szabó, Mikis Theodorakis, Erland Josephson, Nikita Mikhalkov, and others. Until the early morning, they talked about their responsibility for European cinema and discussed the idea of founding a European film academy. On the next day, they were joined by some of Europe’s finest filmmaking colleagues such as Ingmar Bergman, Anthony Hopkins, Giulietta Masina, Carmen Maura, Pedro Almodóvar, Krzysztof Kieslowski, Ornella Muti, Max von Sydow, and Richard Attenborough for the Awards Ceremony at Berlin’s Theater des Westens (Theatre of the West). Europe was still divided and when Krzysztof Kieslowski went on stage to accept the first award for Best Film, he said “I hope Poland is part of Europe”. Nikita Mikhalkov had brought a bag full of caviar from Moscow which he presented to the actor Curt Bois, winner of the award for supporting actor. Pedro Almodóvar received the award for Best Young Film, the first of a series of European Film Awards he would receive during the next twenty years. Ingmar Bergman was honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award, special tributes were paid to the outstanding work of Richard Attenborough and Marcello Mastroianni.
A few months later, the filmmakers came together again to found the European Cinema Society which later became the European Film Academy (EFA). And this was truly a family gathering of European film: Claude Chabrol was responsible for matters of taste, Stephen Frears was swamped with spontaneous applause when he burst into the meeting in gym shoes, exhausted and jet-lagged, straight from Hollywood, with three Oscars in his bag. And everybody signed a letter Jiří Menzel had written to the author Vaclav Havel, imprisoned in then-Czechoslovakia, who would eventually become the Czechoslovakian, later Czech president. Ingmar Bergman was elected as the European Cinema Society’s and later the Academy’s first president.
The Early Years

By the time the second European Film Awards took place in Paris in late 1989, the world had changed substantially: the Berlin Wall had fallen and Europe was starting to redefine its co-ordinates. There was a vibrating energy, European filmmakers travelled across hitherto closed borders. The star of the evening was the creative young cinema from Sarajevo which received a special mention. Over the next years, the European Film Awards became a known meeting place for the crème de la crème of European cinema. In 1990, the Awards went to Glasgow where Andrzej Wajda received a Lifetime Achievement Award. Back in Berlin, Ken Loach’s RIFF-RAFF won European Film of the Year 1991, and in the next years, the European Film Awards became an established occasion for the members of the European Film Academy to meet in a mirrored tent in Berlin on a Sunday morning, joined by a select group of journalists, to celebrate the likes of Gianni Amelio, Nanni Moretti, Ian McKellen, Lars von Trier, and many others.

Making it Bigger

¡Muchísimas gracias de todo corazón!
Penelope Cruz
People’s Choice Award 2004 for NON TI MUOVERE

What a wonderful moment, I want to stay here very long!
Roberto Benigni
Best Film 1998 for LA VITA E BELLA

I am the king of Europa!
Jean-Pierre Jeunet
European Film 2001 for AMÉLIE

By 1996 – Nik Powell had become chairman of the EFA and Wim Wenders succeeded Ingmar Bergman as its president – it was decided to open the European Film Academy up to more than the former 99 members and for the industry as such. The members became the voting body thereby replacing the former jury system. And the Awards began to travel again, each city and country hosting the Awards over the years giving the ceremony a distinct taste of its own culture: 1998 in London where Roberto Benigni jumped across the seats to accept the award European Film 1998 for LA VITA E BELLA, 2000 in Paris where Rupert Everett (in French) and Antoine de Caunes (in English) led through the soirée at the Theatre National de Chaillot, 2002 in Rome where Pedro Almodóvar’s HABLE CON ELLA received a total of five awards, 2004 in Barcelona where Juanjo Puigcorbé and Maria de Medeiros hosted the Premios del Cine Europeo and 2006 in Warsaw where Roman Polanski received a Lifetime Achievement Award in a ceremony hosted by Sophie Marceau and Maciej Stuhr.

Every second year, the awards return to Berlin, home of the European Film Academy, and it was here that the young German/Catalan actor Daniel Brühl won two awards for his role as the son in GOOD BYE LENIN! and that Claude Chabrol and Sean Connery received
standing ovations when accepting their awards for Lifetime Achievement (2003 and 2005). The Awards Ceremony now annually brings together 1,400 guests, winners and nominees, the stars of European cinema, the members of the European Film Academy, the international media. Over 20 international TV stations and a crowd of photographers follow the arrivals of the stars at the red carpet and the ceremony is broadcast to more than 40 countries world-wide. The European Film Awards have become established as a highlight on the annual cultural agenda.

The 20th Anniversary

In 2007, the Awards Ceremony again returned to Berlin to celebrate their 20th anniversary! As a kick-off, the Flemish Radio Orchestra under Dirk Brossé gave a special concert with European film composers in concert at Berlin’s historical theatre Admiralspalast. The ceremony itself was hosted by French actress Emmanuelle Béart and German actor Jan Josef Liefers and included the legendary Finnish band Leningrad Cowboys, known around the world from various films by Aki Kaurismäki. As a special tribute on the occasion of the 20th European Film Awards, founding members Liv Ullmann, Jeanne Moreau, Jiří Menzel, Henning Carlsen, David Rose, Jörn Donner, Lord David Puttnam, István Szabó, Manoel de Oliveira, Peter Lilienthal and Wim Wenders were presented with a special memento – they all received engraved stones from the island of Fårö, Ingmar Bergman’s refuge, where he spent his last years. Europe’s oldest still active filmmaker, Portuguese director Manoel de Oliveira, also received a special honorary award.

From 2008 on

*I think we Europeans have a different sensitivity and sensibility to the films we make – which is great and important to celebrate.*

Steve McQueen
European Discovery 2008 for HUNGER

*In Österreich sagt man: Da bin ich baff!*

Michael Haneke
European Film, Director & Screenwriter 2009 for DAS WEISSE BAND
The 25th European Film Awards were the first to travel to a Nordic country – taking place in Copenhagen. Broadcast live on Danish TV, the event was moderated by popular Danish journalist, anchorman and TV-host Mikael Bertelsen. On stage with him was the Danish Radio Big Band, Denmark’s most popular jazz orchestra. Among the evening’s distinguished film guests were Dame Judi Dench, recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award, the Danish Dogma brothers Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, Kristian Levring, Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg who received the award European Achievement in World Cinema 2008, and Their Royal Highnesses The Crown Prince Frederik and Crown Princess Mary of Denmark.

In 2009, the Awards returned to Germany where for the first time they took place in a city other than Berlin: On the occasion of the European Capital of Culture year RUHR.2010, the 22nd European Film Awards took place in Germany’s Ruhr area, a metropolitan region with 20 cities and around 10 million people right in the heart of Europe. The weekend programme included two spectacular venues of historical dimension: Germany’s largest movie theatre, the Lichtburg in Essen, and the legendary Century Hall (Jahrhunderthalle), former gas power station of Bochum’s steel mills – where the heart of the industrial culture once beat.

In 2010, and again on the occasion of a European Capital of Culture year, this time TALLINN 2011, the 23rd European Film Awards – or 23. Euroopa Filmiauhinnad – took place in the Estonian capital on the Baltic coast.

The 24th European Film Awards returned to Berlin, where German star comedienne Anke Engelke once again hosted the ceremony, accompanied by Shantel, one of Europe’s most spectacular live performers. Top honours went to Mads Mikkelsen (European Achievement in World Cinema 2008) and to Stephen Frears (Lifetime Achievement Award) and a Special Honorary Award was presented to Michel Piccoli.

The Silver Jubilee

This year’s 25th European Film Awards will travel to Malta, place of megaliths, medieval dungeons and Calypso's Cave. The Maltese archipelago lies virtually at the centre of the Mediterranean and consists of three islands: Malta, Gozo and Comino. The long relationship between the islanders and the various nationalities that occupied Malta over the centuries has created a marriage of styles, languages and traditions, giving the islands a fascinating eclectic culture. Anke Engelke will once again lead through the evening and this year’s honorary awards go to actress Dame Helen Mirren and director Bernardo Bertolucci.

The celebrations for this year’s 25th European Film Awards kicked off with the new European Film Academy Young Audience Award. On 10 June – Young Audience Film Day – three nominated films were screened simultaneously in six countries to an audience of 10-13 year-old children in Amsterdam, Belgrade, Copenhagen, Erfurt, Norrköping and Turin.

A special highlight this year will be statements from about 20 outstanding European filmmakers who have been visited and interviewed about Europe and European filmmaking.