



Full House at Annual Sikh Film Festival

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NEW YORK: Governor of New York State, David Paterson declared October 3-10, 2008 as "Sikh Heritage Week" to coincide with the Sikh Art & Film Foundation's Sikh Heritage Gala and Annual Film Festival. Undoubtedly the highlight of the week was the completely "Sold Out" Film Festival on October 4 -- from the excited chatter of 200+ children at 10am, the 350+ audience in the multiple room screening of the feature Ocean of Pearls, to the 400+ guests who danced away to pulsating Bhangra till midnight at the Asia Society & Museum in New York City.

This year the Foundation presented a total of \$15,000 in prize money to films that won in their respective genres. The audience voted Ekta Walia's Sikh, Rattle and Roll (UK) as the Best Children's Film. Greg Cote, Director of Kabaddi Cops, adjudged the best short film, said, "The Annual Sikh Film Festival in New York City is among the finest events I have ever attended - period. Although many of the participants, me included are relatively unknown, independent directors and producers, the organizers and audiences made us feel like Martin Scorsese himself. A well attended and organized event the likes of which one rarely sees at film festivals."

Tami Yeager and Preetmohan Singh's 'A Dream in Doubt' was voted the Best Documentary. Capping off the great collection of 15 films was the New York Premiere of Dr. Sarab Singh Neelam's critically acclaimed Ocean of Pearls (USA). Audience members came all the way from California, Canada, Indiana, and Georgia to view this story of a young Sikh doctor struggling with the inequities of the American Health System and ultimately his own identity.

It speaks to the universal challenge of how so many people (not just Sikhs) have to balance romance, family, ethics and spirituality in today's complex world. Preceding the Film Festival, on October 3, the Sikh Heritage Awards Gala was held at the luxurious Cipriani Wall Street. Attended by over 500 guests who included Chief Guest General (Ret.) JJ Singh - Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, India, special guest Thomas P. DiNapoli - Comptroller of New York State, various Assembly Members, Donald and Shelly Rubin, and ex-baseball star Darrell Strawberry, it was a night that celebrated the rich heritage, traditions and culture of Sikhs. Governor Singh in his speech praised the Sikh and Indian

American community for projecting a positive image of India in the US, and said "I am proud of you. India is proud of you."

I commend the Punjabi community for its valor and hard work, and always helping the oppressed and the weak." Awards were presented to individuals who had contributed towards elevating the Sikh Experience: Vision - Stuart Rabinowitz, President of Hofstra University; Leadership - Ajay Banga, Chief Executive Officer of Citi Asia Pacific; and Creativity - Susan Stronge, Senior Curator of Asian Department of The Victoria & Albert Museum. Co-emceed by Hollywood star Katheryn Winnick, and PlanetSpace founder Dr. Chirinjeev Khaturia, the Gala entertainment was highlighted by the legendary Sufi and Punjabi recording artist Rabbi Shergill.

His unplugged live performance of Jugni, Bulla Ki Jana and newer hits mesmerized the audience. Tejinder Singh Bindra, President of Sikh Art & Film Foundation said, "Year over year audience participation in the events has increased, giving us encouragement to make each year's event better than the last. Our goal is to continue to increase awareness of Sikhs amongst our fellow citizens, and instill a sense of pride within our own community."

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