



56th Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin
Kinderfilmfest

CINEQUEST

दूध और अफ़ीम Milk & Opium

a young sufi musician's search
for his place in a rapidly changing world

STARKE FILME PRESENTS A FILM BY JOEL PALOMBO WITH SWAROOP KHAN NIZAM KHAN MOHAMAD KHAN MANJOOR KHAN
MUSIC COORDINATED BY MOHAMAD KHAN EDITED BY TENZIN TSETAN CHOKLAY ASST. DIRECTOR RENU SHARMA TITLE DESIGN BENOY SARKAR
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY PANKAJ BHAKUNI SOUND GISSY MICHAEL PRODUCED, WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY JOEL PALOMBO

www.milkandopium.com

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Downloadable stills from the film are available on press page of
www.milkandopium.com

For sales, screenings or other enquiries please write to
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INTRODUCTION

An artist and a teacher, Joel Palombo set out to make a feature film in the middle of the summer in the desert in India, not to mention to do it on a shoestring budget. He grabbed his DV camera, a good friend, and assembled a small crew. The result is Milk and Opium.

The film depicts the life of a talented boy from a caste of musicians. He leaves his desert village with his uncle to find work, but discovers an India he had never seen before. With live musical performances and amazing locations, Swaroop struggles to find his place in this new world.

From the fascinatingly exotic life of the Great Thar desert, to the urban chaos of modern India, Milk and Opium takes you on an unforgettable ride.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Milk and Opium is a poetic film about a young Sufi musician who leaves his remote desert village in search of work. He discovers an India he never knew existed and tries to adapt to the culture of malls and multinationals. A rapidly changing world is juxtaposed with the age-old tradition of Indian music and culture.

SYNOPSIS



Swaroop, a young Muslim boy from a caste of musicians, leaves his desert village in search of work with his Uncle Nizam. Swaroop is an innocent and curious 14 year-old boy who is discovering the world outside of his isolated village. Nizam takes opium regularly and scams money in any way he can. Swaroop and Nizam travel together, join Nizam's musician friends, and perform at roadside locations along the way.

Nizam's greed and use of religious rhetoric leads to the break up of the small group of musicians and eventually to Swaroop heading off on his own in the city. Swaroop tries to adapt to his ever-changing circumstances of being a traveling musician in a world he has just discovered. In the city, Swaroop meets Santosh, a young Hindu boy studying to become a priest. Santosh decides to join Swaroop to become a musician. The two boys quickly find themselves in a world of malls and multinationals.

Milk & Opium leaves the viewer questioning what will become of Swaroop and traditional India. The film features outstanding traditional Sufi music with a twist of fusion. All of the actors play themselves in a unique neo-realist style cinema.

THE CAST



Swaroop Khan - The star of Milk and Opium is a 14 year old first time actor from Jaisalmer. He is a full time musician and belongs to the tradition of Manganyar folk musicians from Rajasthan. He has performed throughout India and abroad.



Nizam Khan - Acts as the uncle of Swaroop Khan in the film is also a Manganyar musician and a first time actor. Nizam is an established singer within the Rajastani folk music scene in India.



Mohamad Khan - has traveled all around the world playing concerts from New York to Paris. He is one of the most talented musicians among the Manganyars. Milk & Opium was his acting debut.

Manjoor Khan - an amazing "Dholakia" drummer who has traveled widely throughout India and abroad. A first time actor who portrays a quiet friend of Mohamad and Nizam Khan in the film.

Santosh - originally from Nepal, he is currently a student at the Gurukul Ashram in New Delhi. He is studying to become a Hindu priest. This is his first acting adventure.

Deepak Castalino – an accomplished guitarist who plays ‘eastern’ country and Sufi fusion music has performed in concerts through out India and abroad.

THE FILMMAKER



An art teacher and an artist, Joel Palombo has made several short films and video works. His short films have played most recently at the Dallas Museum, the 2005 Japan World Expo, and Planet In Focus Film Festival in Toronto. Originally from Detroit, Joel has been living in India for the last eight years. Milk and Opium is his first feature film.

THE CREW

Pankaj Bhakuni - (First DOP) a busy cameraman and a lighting specialist from New Delhi. He has worked on numerous documentary films and a few feature films.

Gissy Michael - (Sound Recordist) based in Bombay, a former Film and Television Institute of India student has been working as a sound recordist for several years. She worked on Manasarover which won the 2005 MAMI award in Bombay.

Tenzin Tsetan Choklay - (Producer / Production Manager / Editor) a Tibetan filmmaker based in New Delhi has worked on many productions over the past years - latest of which was Dreaming Lhasa with White Crane Films to be released shortly.

Renu Sharma - (Asst. Director / Translator) a freelance Fashion Designer from New Delhi. This is Renu's first experience at film direction and swears she would never do it again.

Vivek Singh - (Lighting Asst.) better known as Monu works in New Delhi with Flamingo Films.

Usman Sayyed - (Boom Swinger/Sound Asst.) a freelance sound recordist based in Bombay.

NOTE ON THE PRODUCTION

Milk and Opium began as a concept in the fall of 2003. I spent a great deal of time in the Muslim neighborhood of Nizamudin filming a form of Sufi music known as Qawali singing. After meeting a Manganyar musician (also Sufi and reminiscent of the Qawali musicians), Tenzin Tsetan and I went on a scouting trip in March 2004 to Jaisalmer and its surrounding villages in the Great Thar desert.



The scouting trip became the foundation of the film. Musicians from all over Jaisalmer district came to perform for us in the village of Keraliya, in the city of Jaisalmer, and a number of villages near Jaisalmer. We listened to the musicians' stories, enjoyed live music, and looked at potential locations. The amazing experience we had during the scouting trip began to feed the script of Milk & Opium.

Back in Delhi, I conducted a drama workshop for all of the potential lead characters with the help of a translator, Renu Sharma. We got the musicians acting, having fun, and feeling more relaxed in front of the camera. We read through the script and revised the script based on our conversations with the musicians. The movie began to take shape.

A small technical team was put together and filming began in July 2004. The tight and extremely demanding schedule only allowed for 23 days of shooting. My summer vacation from my teaching job would be over at the beginning of August - a firm deadline that could not be missed.

Production was riddled with problems. When packing our gear in Delhi, the main protagonist of the film called to say that he could no longer be involved. He was going to Spain for a performance. After a frenzied state of 'what should we do now', I decided to continue onto Jaisalmer to begin the shoot. I rewrote the script in short hand on the long journey to Jaisalmer. Upon arrival, musicians were called and an audition was held. At that point, Nizam was cast. The script needed to be changed drastically, but we also needed to begin shooting.

I continued to revise the script in the evenings while trying to plan for the next day's shoot. It meant very little sleep throughout the month of July.

Everyone knows it is hot in the Great Thar desert in summer. However, I had not anticipated the wind from the monsoon. I had spoken to many people in regards to the weather, but we were focused mainly on the heat. I remember one local telling me that my shoes would melt into the pavement in July in Jaisalmer. The wind became a huge problem for us. When you have wind in the desert, you have sand in your equipment. The sand storms were beautiful, but horrendous to work in. We had sand in our equipment and in every orifice of our bodies. I recall comparing the mounds of sand in our ears; our faces covered with sand, and the hours that Pankaj, our cameraman, and Manu, an assistant, sat in the car until the wee hours of the morning cleaning equipment.

The weather conditions, problems with talent, and malfunctioning equipment made a difficult shoot - almost impossible. All in all it was an incredibly challenging adventure. We had no choice but to do our best, and try to creatively solve the many problems we were confronted with.

Joel Palombo

INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

What is your film background?

This is my first feature film. I've been interested in film for a long time, but in Detroit where I went to art school there was no film program. So I never studied film. My father was a photographer. I grew up with photography. I got a merit scholarship to study photography at art school, but didn't feel like my work was moving ahead. I became interested in all of the other great things happening in art school, and I eventually graduated with a degree in ceramics and sculpture, and later became a teacher. I began making films just a few years ago. I approach film as I would any other artistic medium.

How did you get into film?

I had gotten away from photography entirely and had been teaching art for a number of years. While living in New Delhi, I went back home one summer and talked to my best friend from art school, Robert Taormina. He told me all the great things he was doing, having an exhibit here and there, working on this project and that project. I got off the phone with him and thought to myself, “What am I doing? I haven’t done any art in years”. I went back to Delhi and spent all of my free time working on a series of collages, drawings, and paintings. Several months later, I thought of an idea for an art work.. It involved taking an enormous painting of the Lone Ranger and immersing it into the holy Yamuna River in Old Delhi. It then became a question of how could I document this happening. Ranger Puja was my first film.

You wrote the screenplay, produced and directed Milk and Opium. How did you come up with the idea?

I had made several short films, all about ten minutes each. I was sitting in Lodhi Garden in New Delhi in the fall of 2003 and asked myself, “what makes film powerful”. I looked at the architecture and thought of locations. I made a connection between the Moghal tombs in the garden and Qawali music, an energetic Sufi music that is sung at Sufi shrines in Delhi and throughout the Indian subcontinent. I began doing research, started on a documentary film on Qawali singers in Delhi, and then began writing the script for Milk & Opium. I took an organic approach to writing the script. Rather than write the perfect script and then go out and shoehorn the actors into the movie, I went out and met characters and based the script on real people and real stories. Some of the same people I met, played themselves in the movie.

What difficulties did you have to overcome?

Everything that could go wrong went wrong. It started when we were packing our gear to go to Jaisalmer, the lead actor called to say he couldn’t be involved. We left Delhi on the long journey to Jaisalmer without a lead actor. I had no idea what I was going to do. I began rewriting the script in shorthand. Our troubles continued with being shut down by the authorities on the first day of the shoot for not having a permit. The wind made recording sound very difficult. With wind in the desert, you have sand in your equipment. It was very difficult. No electricity in the village, sporadic electricity elsewhere made recharging batteries very time consuming. The cameraman left the shoot after a few days of shooting. The list of

difficulties goes on and on. I kept telling myself that we can solve this problem and somehow we solved one problem at a time and continued making the film.

Did the film turn out how you expected?

Yes and no. On the one hand, I rewrote the bulk of the script during the shoot, which means the final movie is very different from the original script. However, it feels like a movie that I wanted to make. Some scenes in the beginning of the movie are very close to the original script. After lots of hard work editing the film, I am happy with the movie that we have made.

What is your next project?

I am working on a script that involves Indian classical dance and a changing society. I am very interested in the changes that are happening within India and how the many rich traditions within India are changing.

SCREENINGS

56TH BERLIN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
KINDERFILMFEST

09 – 19 February 2006

<u>Day</u>		<u>Time</u>	<u>Cinema</u>
Sun.	12.02.06	16.00	Zoo Palast
Tue.	14.02.06	16.00	Cinemaxx 4
Sun.	19.02.06	16.00	Zoo Palast

CINEQUEST FILM FESTIVAL
SAN JOSE 2006
GLOBAL LANDSCAPES

01 – 12 March 2006

KEY CREDITS

STARKE FILME
PRESENTS

A FILM BY
JOEL PALOMBO

WITH
SWAROOP KHAN NIZAM KHAN MOHAMAD KHAN MANJOOR KHAN
SANTOSH DEEPAK CASTELINO

MUSIC COORDINATED BY
MOHAMAD KHAN

EDITED BY
TENZIN TSETAN CHOKLAY

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY
PANKAJ BHAKUNI

SOUND
GISSY MICHAEL

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
RENU SHARMA

PRODUCTION MANAGER
TENZIN TSETAN CHOKLAY

TITLE DESIGN
BENOY SARKAR

PRODUCED, WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY
JOEL PALOMBO

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