



Turkish cinema boasted knock-off versions of *The Exorcist* (left) and *Rambo* (right). Chris Stropoulos (below) plays Indiana Jones in a fan version of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

Filmdom's epic copycats

Two indie documentaries look at the art of copying – sometimes wholesale – in cinema. BY DYLAN TAN

IF done for the right reasons, there is no shame in copying as two upcoming documentaries explore this cinematic "crime".

Remake, Remix, Rip-Off looks at how Turkish cinema "borrowed" extensively and liberally from Hollywood and became a movie-making capital; while *Raiders!* focuses on three childhood friends who got the thumbs-up from Steven Spielberg when he found out they were reuniting a quarter of a century later to finish a shot-for-shot remake of his Indiana Jones classic *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981).

Both documentaries will get a one-off screening at the Singapore Cult and Underground Film Festival (SCUFF), organised by alternative cinema collective SCUM (Society for Cult & Underground Movies) over the Good Friday long weekend.

The line-up also includes two features: the award-winning Austrian psychological drama *Goodnight Mommy* (2014) and Kiwi horror-comedy

Housebound (2014).

Directed by Turkish filmmaker Cem Kaya, *Remake, Remix, Rip-Off* looks at the rise and fall of cinema in Turkey and how it eventually evolved into a booming TV industry.

During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, it boasted one of the biggest movie industries in the world and churned out about 300 films annually – most of which blatantly ripped off Hollywood blockbusters because of lax copyright laws and the lack of screenwriters back then.

Hence, Turkey's own version of Tinseltown, Yesilcam, resorted to producing its own versions of *Rambo*, *Superman*, *Rocky*, *The Exorcist* and more; but it didn't stop there as some filmmakers went as far as splicing footage of the Hollywood originals in to their works.

For example, *The Man Who Saved the World* (1982) has become a cult favourite and is often referred to as the *Turkish Star Wars* by cinephiles because of its unauthorised use of

scenes from George Lucas's 1977 classic. Not only that, its soundtrack featured music from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Ben Hur*, *Flash Gordon* and more.

Kaya grew up on a steady diet of those lookalike movies as they were also exported to Germany and had a huge following there among the Turkish immigrants like him.

"My step-father used to own a video store and he would bring two tapes back every day after work," shares the 40-year-old. "These movies compared to mainstream Western cinema were utterly overdone – they were more dramatic, more violent, more hullabaloo than anything we saw in West Germany – and their roughness and imperfection had a big appeal for me as they were the excessive answer to an aseptic and all-powerful (Hollywood)."

Making *Remake, Remix, Rip-Off* gave Kaya the chance to relive that experience as it took him seven years to watch thousands of films and interview hundreds of people who used to

work in Yesilcam.

On the Turkish rip-off films that have since gone on to achieve cult status because of its unique-ness, he says: "Copying is not a bad thing, in fact, it's the most natural thing – if you think about it, tradition is also about copying."

Raiders! also looks at copy culture from another part of the world. The documentary follows the filmmaking adventures of three 11-year-olds – Chris Stropoulos, Eric Zala and Jays-on Lamb – from Mississippi who started shooting their own homemade version of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* in 1982.

The trio spent seven summers making it and everything was shot except for the airplane fight scene that takes place at a desert airfield.

The fan film was shelved when the boys went to college and largely forgotten until horror director Eli Roth (*Cabin Fever*, *Hosts*) stumbled upon a copy and passed it to film critic Harry Knowles of *Ain't It Cool News*.

The latter showed it to fill a gap at



a film festival when the premiere of *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002) was delayed; but when he tried to take it off the screen before it ended, the audience booed because they wanted to watch the *Raiders of the Lost Ark* fan film till the end.

Stropoulos, who plays Indiana Jones in the adaptation, says he was surprised the film even saw the light of day as both he and Zala "worked very hard to keep it off the Net (and) minimised copies to sustain its special, inaccessible quality".

The reception it got at that screening convinced the three friends to reunite and launch a crowdfunding campaign to help them finish the film – 25 years after they started making it.

For their efforts, the trio got to meet Spielberg and the project continues to inspire those who watch it to not be afraid to chase their dreams.

On his advice for budding filmmakers who want to make their own fan version of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, Stropoulos says: "Get ready to have your a** kicked (but) never give up, always finish, don't take no for an answer, push, (and) don't let people tell you that you can't do something."

He insists that if he had the chance to make a fan version of any other film, it would still be the same Indiana Jones action flick, although it might look slightly different: "We'd try and be even more exact than we were – I wish we would've pushed ourselves to get a horse (as there are plenty of horses in Mississippi)" dylantan@sp.com.sg

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SCUFF 2016 takes place from March 24-27 at The Projector. *Remake, Remix, Ripoff* and *Raiders!* screen on March 26 and March 27 respectively. Tickets at S\$13 for each film are available from www.scuffcinema.com/events/scuff2016/