

London diary

BY FARIDA COOPER

GOSS, CULTURE, FUNK AND FUSION. STRAIGHT FROM THE CAPITAL OF VILAYAT. KEWL INNIT?

Desi Director Dazzles



Ever heard of Asitha Amerasekera? Most people hadn't until he bounded up the podium to collect his BAFTA Award for Best Short Film. Apart from his obvious talent, the Sri Lankan-born filmmaker has the kind of classical educational credentials that BAFTA juries rather like – studying Greek at age nine, Latin at Harrow school, and University at Bristol, a tip for all potential BAFTA hopefuls who might want to start fudging their CV's in anticipation. The subject matter of the film is also very topical – a definite bonus to juries the world over, and is the fictional video diary of a mother to her nineteen-year-old son who is stationed in Iraq with the British forces and later goes missing in action. Written in two days and shot in three, *Do Not Erase* is to be screened at nine film festivals. Mr Amerasekera's days of anonymity are clearly numbered.

Women of Steel

Social activist and philanthropist, Zerbanoo Gifford, Director of the multi-cultural and multi-faith Asha Foundation and Centre in rural Gloucestershire, is the kind of redoubtable Parsi lady who doesn't take no for an answer, a quality that comes in very handy when one considers the task at hand. For nearly three years now, Zerbanoo has been travelling the world, interviewing three hundred woman achievers for her latest tome *Confessions of a Serial Womaniser - The Secrets of the World's Inspirational Women*. The women come from diverse backgrounds and nationalities and whilst the inspirational quotient in some cases is open to debate, all agree that the book, a result of a NESTA (National Endowment For Science, Technology and the Arts) Fellowship, will be the sort of page turn-

er that the author (of three previously published books) is famous for. The Indian contingent has amongst others, Sheila Dixit, Barkha Dutt, Simone Tata and Anu Aga holding up the tricolour, whilst International women of achievement include Oscar winning actress and Labour M.P, Glenda Jackson, fashion designer Zandra

Rhodes and Dame Marjorie Scardino, Chief Executive of the International conglomerate, Pearson Plc. Zerbanoo has also roped in noted artist Jeroo Roy to paint the portraits of the subjects and both the books and the art are slated to be unveiled on 20th September at the National Portrait Gallery.



A Different Dance

Los Angeles-based filmmaker Neeta Mittal is yet another butterfly destined to emerge from a chrysalis of anonymity this year, with her 3-minute film that premiered to much acclaim in London this week at the Constellation Change Screen Dance Festival – an international annual festival celebrating the art of dance on film. Neeta, a former dancer and dance and fashion choreographer, produced and directed *Wings Of Legacy*, the story of Eva (Zina Bethune), a dance teacher who is dying of leukaemia and meets Amy, a differently-disabled dancer who is looking for individual expression beyond her wheelchair. Both women grapple with the struggles of their situation and are committed to leaving a legacy in dance. Amy is played by Auti Angel a wheelchair dancer who in real life lost the use of both her legs in an accident in 1992. Hip-hop and ballet were chosen as motifs to represent the contradictory entities of youth and wisdom, ability and disability, life and death. The result is a film that is not only heart-rending but also well crafted.



Naipaul and his Biographer

The Chelsea Arts Club is one of those hidden gems of London that appear non-descript from the outside, but step inside the townhouse and a rarefied world prevails. The weathered door opens and the Nobel Laureate is framed against the fading evening light. It is a private reading of his classics; a rare opportunity to hear Sir V.S. Naipaul as he takes the uninitiated through a journey, *Amongst the Believers*. There are less than forty people present – amongst them, the South-African born artist of Indian origin, Sharon Lutchman, and Patrick French, Naipaul's official biographer. Noted historian and writer, French has been working on the biography longer than most people will care to admit and his travels have taken him to the University Of Tulsa in Oklahoma which houses the Naipaul archives as well as many trips to India where, it is said, he has interviewed around sixty of the author's associates and friends. French, described as a 'multi-tasker', doesn't let anything as onerous as a publisher's deadline get in the way of his obvious enjoyment of the project at hand. The scheduled date of completion of the two-volume biography is expected to be around 2015!

