

ROME (The Hollywood Reporter) -- The 54th Locarno International Film Festival unveiled Wednesday a lineup rich in first works and eclectic fare, along with the European summer launches of Fox's "Planet of the Apes" and Columbia TriStar's "Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within."

This year's edition of Europe's oldest and pre-eminent event dedicated to young directors and auteur cinema will feature nine first works and 15 world premieres in its main competition, which comprises films from 12 countries.

English-language titles in competition include "Miss Wonton," from debuting U.S.-Chinese director Meng Ong; "Baby Boy" from "Boyz N the Hood" director [John Singleton](#); British directorial duo Neil Hunter and Tom Hunsinger's drama "The Lawless Heart"; and German director Peter Sehr's "Love the Hard Way," a U.S.-set tale of a petty thief who falls in love with an innocent young woman.

Other titles vying for a Golden Leopard include "Delbaran," a new work from Iranian director Abolfazl Jalili, whose "Daan" won the 1998 San Sebastian jury prize; Swiss director Thomas Imbach's "Happiness Is a Warm Gun," about German environmental activist Petra Kelly; Brazilian ([news - web sites](#)) director Lais Bodansky's "Bicho de Sete Cabeças," the tale of a young man forced to enter a psychiatric asylum after his father catches him with a small amount of marijuana; and "Guardians of the Earth," a first feature by 24-year-old Indian director Subrahmanian Santakumar.

Located in the Italian-speaking region of Switzerland, Locarno is renowned for its nightly outdoor screenings in the 7,000-seat Piazza Grande, which sometimes serves as a summer launching pad for youth-oriented Hollywood fare but also as a showcase for high-profile auteur titles.

Besides "Planet of the Apes" and "Final Fantasy," Locarno's noncompeting Piazza Grande offerings include the world premieres of British director Alan Taylor's "The Emperor's New Clothes" (aka "My Napoleon"), which stars [Ian Holm](#) as the French ruler, and of U.S. director [Peter Bogdanovich](#)'s 1930s-set thriller "The Cat's Meow," as well as the European bow of

Spanish actor-director Guillermo del Toro's horror drama "The Devil's Backbone."

"I've come across a good crop of titles this year," said new Locarno director Irene Bignardi, who vowed to continue in the fest's tradition of seeking out "ideas, creativeness, innovation and original voices from around the world."

Members of Locarno's main jury this year are U.S. actress [Debra Winger](#), French director Emilie Deleuze, New Zealand actress Kerry Fox, Swiss writer Zoe Jenny, U.S. film critic Janet Maslin, Italian actress Laura Morante, Italian director Ferzan Ozpetek, Chilean writer Antonio Skarmeta and British producer Olivia Stewart. The jury president will be elected by the jurors during their first meeting. The fest runs Aug. 2-12.

As previously announced, Chinese director Chen Kaige will be awarded Locarno's Leopard of Honor career prize (HR 6/28). His "Life on a String" will screen in the Piazza Grande. Special Leopard prizes will go to the Sundance Film Institute and French film magazine Cahiers du Cinema (HR 6/5).

In a further sign of Locarno's long-standing love affair with Asian cinema and cutting-edge U.S. movies, its upcoming edition will feature a retrospective dedicated to Asian directors who have worked in Hollywood, from the silent cinema era to the present day.

A complete lineup of Locarno's 101 entries is available at www.pardo.ch.