



## HARSHVARDHAN HALTED

ALL those who believe star kids have it easy in Bollywood should take a look at Anil Kapoor's son Harshvardhan Kapoor's journey so far. His high-profile debut *Mirzya* failed spectacularly and despite receiving decent reviews, his follow-up film

*Bhaves Josh Superhero* has gone the same way.

While his sister Sonam Kapoor's film *Veere Di Wedding*, which came out on the same day was a blockbuster, his was a huge flop. This will make it very difficult for him going forward.



I HAVE been lucky enough to interview more than 1,000 celebrities, but one of the most magical moments of my career was last week when I met legendary actress Vyjayanthimala (pictured together, right) at an awards ceremony.

The 81-year-old Bollywood icon just took my breath away and we had a lovely conversation about her early days in cinema. I wish the younger generation would take time out to find out more about the actress and how she changed everything for leading ladies in India during the 1950s.



# Venus unveiled

## THE DIRECTOR TALKS ABOUT HER NEW FILM AND SELF EXPRESSION



## SWARA IN THE SPOTLIGHT

IT HAS been a rollercoaster week for actress Swara Bhasker since *Veere Di Wedding* came out.

She got the best reviews for her performance and the movie is a hit, but Swara received heavy criticism from some for her daring masturbation scene in it. However, others thought the same scene was boundary breaking for Indian cinema.

Meanwhile, her ill-advised, negative comments about Pakistan got her a lot of hate from across the border and many pointed out that it directly contradicted what she had said about the country before.

Overall, Swara got a lot of attention and has been the hottest topic of conversation, which means she can now hike up her asking price in Bollywood.



## RANBIR'S NAKED TRUTH

THE trailer for hotly anticipated Sanjay Dutt biopic *Sanju* includes a jail scene where lead star Ranbir Kapoor is completely naked.

When asked about the bold scene in the movie, which will be released on

June 29, he said: "I went nude in my first film (*Saawariya*) itself. I am very shy in real life, but when the cameras are on, I am not as I am portraying a character so you have to be nude in your emotions and physically."



**THE closing night film of this year's London Indian Film Festival is Canadian comedy-drama *Venus*, which is about alternative family values, self-empowerment and love.**

Eisha Marjara has written and directed the entertaining film about a Montreal Punjabi named Sid who, after years of struggling with gender identity, comes out as a woman and then discovers a 14-year-old son from a teenage affair with a woman.

I caught up with Eisha to talk about filmmaking, *Venus* and more.

**What would you say was your first connection to filmmaking?**

As a kid on my summer trips to India, I would play on my grandmother's rooftop and force my cousins to perform scenes before an imaginary audience in ridiculous and sometimes grotesque costumes. They have forgiven me since. I just loved the world of make believe. Flash-forward to high school in Quebec where I got into directing school plays. I loved the spotlight, glamour and art of storytelling.

**What about films?**

I didn't get excited about filmmaking until college, when I took a film production course and my teacher saw talent and encouraged me to pursue directing. And later still, when I studied professional photography, a well-known Canadian director saw my portfolio and said I had an eye for cinema. That confirmed that filmmaking was where I belonged.

**How did your film *Venus* end up being picked to close this year's London Indian Film Festival?**

My producer Joe Balass got in touch with the programmer of the festival, Cary Sawhney, who saw the film and loved it. He invited *Venus* to close the festival. We were keen on having the film play in London, the home town of one of our favourite cast members Gordon Warnecke, who plays the lead's father.

**Tell us about the film?**

*Venus* is a dramatic comedy about an Indo-Canadian transgender woman who discovers that she has a teenage son. The film tracks their relationship as they navigate the complicated and at times strange ironies of blended family and past lovers.

**What was the biggest challenge of making the movie?**

There were several challenges. One was raising the financing to make the film we wanted to make. Money affords time and creative freedom, which is what all directors and filmmaking teams strive for.

Another for me as the writer/director was getting the script tight and ready to shoot. I chiselled away at it to get it down to what's on the screen.

Casting was also a major challenge. It took us a year and a-half to find our lead, New York-based Debarge Sanyal, who nailed the role.

**Which is your favourite moment in the movie?**

My favourite moment in the film is when Ralph encourages Sid, his newly come out dad-turned-mom, to dance in the park with a bunch of strangers. The moment when Sid and Ralph let their guard down is an experience of pure joy, ecstasy and freedom. It's a brief scene that encapsulates the entire premise of the film – the transformative power of love, and unguarded authentic self-expression.

**How much are you looking forward to *Venus* being shown at the festival?**

Very much. Every screening brings feelings of excitement, trepidation and curiosity. I love to witness the audience experience the film for the first time. I never know how the film will be received, but generally the reaction has been consistent, regardless of audience demographics.

That said, the London Indian Film Festival screening is special in particular because it's the closing film, a



**POWER OF LOVE:** Eisha Marjara; and (above left) a still from *Venus*

UK premiere, and presented in the hometown of our beloved Gordon.

**What kind of movies do you personally enjoy watching?**

I enjoy films with fiery and outrageous characters who rub against the norm. Queens, vamps and divas. Queer films, feminist films, that make me laugh and cry, and sometimes at once. *Thelma and Louise*, *To Wong Foo Thanks for Everything*, *Julie Newmar*, *Ma Vie en Rose*, *C.R.A.Z.Y.*, *Heavenly Creatures*. My latest absolute favourite is sassy, brassy and touching *Patti Cake\$* about a young female rapper trying to break out of externally and internally imposed limitations. It's a brilliant mother-daughter story about passion and resilience.

**According to you, what makes for a great movie?**

A compelling story, complex characters and timely yet timeless themes with a unique vision. It can be a simple story that contains complex characters and themes. What separates a good movie from a great one is the ability of the filmmaker to express a universal and timeless story with a

new and unique vision that keeps people talking for weeks, if not years.

**What can we expect next from you?**

I am working on a feature drama with Joe Balass, the producer of *Venus*, called *Calorie*, about a family of strong-willed women who are coming to terms with a family tragedy. At the centre is an Indo-Canadian single mom of two unmanageable teens, whose own immigrant mother was killed in the tragic bombing of Air India flight 182 off the coast of Ireland in 1985. It's a mother-daughter story with political intrigue.

**Finally, why do you love cinema?**

Outside of literature, cinema is the most engaging, immersive and emotive form of storytelling there is. It is an experience that introduces such diverse art forms, which serve to tell a story, any kind of story, on any subject possible. It's a dream.

■ *Venus* is the closing night movie of the 2018 London Indian Film Festival at BFI, Southbank, in the capital on June 29. Visit [www.londonindianfilmfestival.co.uk](http://www.londonindianfilmfestival.co.uk) for more.