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SPECIAL GUESTS of the TLV International Student Film Festival include Hollywood producer Ram Bergman (left) and US indie filmmaker Hal Hartley. (Courtesy)

Honing their craft

The TLV International Student Film Festival brings together film students from all over the world, as well as veteran directors who give workshops

• By HANNAH BROWN

The 17th TLV International Student Film Festival, which opens today and runs until June 6 at the Tel Aviv Cinematheque, is different from all the other film festivals in Israel because “it was initiated by the students of Tel Aviv University, and its prime goal is to bring students and their films from all over the world to Israel,” says Talia Bernstein, who, along with Roni Shamis, is the festival’s co-director.

Founded in 1986, the festival was held every other year until 2012, when, according to Bernstein, the volume of high-quality submissions convinced its management that it should be held every year.

“Students from around the world needed this platform to show their work,” she says.

This year, approximately 200 films (most of them short) from 70 countries will be shown, many of them the work of the festival’s 100 international student guests.

“There are the competitions, for the Israeli films and the international films, and those are always very exciting,” Bernstein says. “Our festival is known in the film industry as a place to discover new directors.”

A number of Israel’s most prominent directors won prizes in the festival when they were students, she says, among

them Dover Kosashvili (best known for *A Late Wedding*), Nir Bergman (*Yona, Broken Wings*), Maya Dreifuss (*She’s Coming Home*) and Elad Keidan (whose latest film, *Afterthought*, was just screened at Cannes this year).

The list of international directors who showed their student films at the festival is equally impressive, among them Francois Ozon, one of France’s leading directors, who has made such films as *Swimming Pool*, *8 Women* and *Young & Beautiful*, and Thomas Vinterberg, best known for *The Celebration* and *The Hunt*.

An important component of the festival is the collaboration between the student filmmakers, both Israeli and foreign, and veteran filmmakers from Israel and abroad.

“The festival is an educational event and we are proud of it,” says Bernstein. “All our guests teach master classes and also meet students at the Q&A sessions after the screenings of their films.”

Among the festival’s many guests this year is the unofficial godfather of American independent cinema, Hal Hartley.

“He’s amazing, one of the pioneers in the US of independent cinema. He manages to keep making great films and keep a strong vision and cinematic style,” says Bernstein.

Several of his early films will be screened at the festival, including *Trust* (1990),

which stars the late Adrienne Shelly and Martin Donovan; *Amateur* (1994), with Isabelle Huppert; and *Flirt* (1995), with Michael Imperioli (who played Chris on *The Sopranos*).

Henry Fool (1998), the first part in his recently completed trilogy – the other films in it are *Fay Grim* and *Ned Rifle* – will also be screened at the festival.

The festival features dozens of other guests from around the world, among them native son turned Hollywood producer Ram Bergman, who recently produced Natalie Portman’s directorial debut, an adaptation of Amos Oz’s *A Tale of Love and Darkness*; American film editor Dylan Tichenor; Mexican director Michel Franco; American producer Effie T. Brown; and television writer-producer Kate Barnow.

The festival will feature special screenings of the work of all its guests. The screenings and classes are open to the general public.

Although many may think this festival is only for students, Bernstein says that an afternoon or evening spent watching movies at the festival will be enjoyable for everyone.

“It’s a great experience to watch a new films from all over the world for an hour and a half,” says Bernstein.

For the full program and to order tickets, go to the website at www.taufilmfest.com.