Indonesian filmmakers have gotten stuck with a reputation for making sensual horror movies.

However, not all Indonesian films are like that, as the manager of Melbourne’s Indonesian Film Festival, Yolanda Yasinta, is keen to point out.

"Unfortunately, my friends – who are in the early 20s like me – see Indonesian movies as those sensual horror films that have no moral value whatsoever,” Yasinta says.

Yasinta concedes that some Indonesian movies are made just for the sake of entertainment, but many have more value than that.

“The last couple of months when Hollywood movies were barred from Indonesian cinemas, the cinemas were totally quiet, even though there were other good quality movies available,” Yasinta says, referring to American filmmakers’ decision to halt film exports to the country after the Indonesian government raised import taxes.

In a recent interview, TV personality Donita told NTD Television the ban saddened her, because Hollywood films were “the boosters for the Indonesian film industry to compete and improve”.

The ban is gradually being lifted, with the final Harry Potter film the first American movie to hit Indonesian screens since February.

The Hollywood ban is reminiscent of an earlier time in Indonesian cinema, when foreign films were restricted. Many argue the influx of Hollywood films in the 1990s marked the end of a golden era in Indonesian cinema, characterised by popular films such as Pintar Pintar Bodoh, Nagabonar and Catatan Si Boy.
And in some ways, the recent ban has certainly given locally made movies some time in the spotlight – if only by default.

But Yasinta believes Indonesian cinema deserves that spotlight all the time.

“Maybe Indonesian movies have not yet achieved the same standard as Hollywood movies, or even Thailand’s, but we are definitely heading in that direction.

“Many new young directors have the vision not only to earn profit but also to produce high quality movies,” she says.

“For me, this is what we should be proud of. The skill is there, it’s now our job as Indonesians to support and promote Indonesian movies.”

Nevertheless, other Asians and Westerners have a different perspective, and surprisingly it is a positive one.

“There are many local audiences who are enthusiastic to go to the Indonesian Film Festival,” Yasinta says.

“These people are so enthusiastic to learn more about Indonesian movies and culture. They give credits to the producers, and highly respect the movies. This is the kind of support that I want for Indonesian cinema.”

Yasinta hopes Indonesian cinema will receive greater recognition internationally, a hope that seems to be on track with Indonesian movies screening at several international film festivals.

“For me, it’s not that other people have not known Indonesian cinema at all, but I’m sure that they must know even just a little,” she says.

“Especially when just months ago Edward Gunawan’s short movie Red Umbrella has won Asian Short Film Award 2011 in Singapore. The story of success must have travelled well.

“Not only that, Belkibolang, which will be screened at the sixth IFF, has travelled to Hongkong International Film Festival, Rotterdam International Film Festival, and Jakarta International Film Festival.”

Yasinta says Indonesian cinema has shown some serious development over the years.

More young directors have shown their skills to the public, including Putrama Tuta, whose directorial debut, Boy’s Diary, will be screened at this year’s festival.

“Apart from the Boy’s Diary, IFF’s opening movie last year, 7 Hearts, 7 Loves, 7 Women, is directed by a very young director, around my age actually, and movie is very, very good,” she says.
That said, Yasinta emphasises they are not merely supporting the younger generations, but also honouring the senior ones.

"In the sixth IFF, we also screen Border by Rudi Soedjarwo as the opening movie. Mr. Soedjarwo is a senior on the field, and one of Indonesia’s most prominent directors.

"But having Boy’s Diary’s director to be very, very young, we hope that we have given a good variety of Indonesian cinema to the Australian crowd."

The Indonesian Film Festival 2011 runs from August 19 to August 25. Check out the festival website for more information.

The Indonesian Film Festival is giving a lucky Meld Magazine reader a double pass to The Perfect House, to be screened at ACMI cinemas, Federation Square, at 7:15pm on Sunday August 21. To enter the draw, simply email your name, address and contact number to pickme@meldmagazine.com.au, with the subject heading “Indonesian Film Festival”.

Deadline for entries is Tuesday August 16. Winners will be notified by email.

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