

A bitter-sweet love story set in Krabi



Mamee.

American-Thai film production highlights the coffee plantations in Thailand

LEKHA J. SHANKAR



James Brolin.



Laura Sorenson.



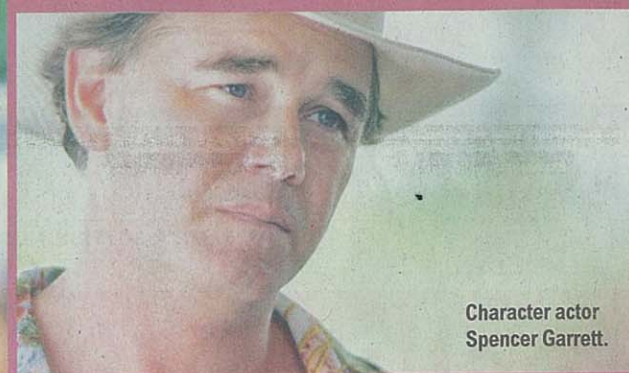
Akara 'Gof' Amarttayakul.



Director Jeff Hare, producer Jon Karas and Thai actor Akara 'Gof' Amarttayakul, who was emcee at the press-meet.



Kip Pardue.



Character actor Spencer Garrett.

There have been many movies celebrating Thai beaches and landscapes, but how many have celebrated its coffee plantations? And how many know that these plantations are located in one of the kingdom's best-known beach destinations — Krabi?

That is the scenic setting for a unique love story between a Thai woman executive and an American coffee buyer, with a big cast from the two countries, that will complete its shooting this month and be ready for release in September.

The film, entitled *Bitter Sweet*, has sultry Thai actress Napakpapha "Mamee" Nakprasit playing Ticha, and dashing American actor Kip Pardue playing Brian Chandler. The two meet in Bangkok but don't take kindly to each other. Ticha is caught up with her work; Brian has come on a trip he was not too keen on.

That's when Ticha's parents, who own coffee plantations in southern Krabi, coax her to bring the American coffee buyer to their estates so that they could possibly strike a business deal with him.

The couple make no bones about their bad vibes for each other, but undertake the trip to the beach town.

Once there, the lush coffee estates and scenic landscapes entice them, and the warring couple find themselves slowly warming towards each other.

Meanwhile, the boss of the company, Calvert Jenkins (James Brolin), comes to Bangkok to find out why Chandler has got inordinately delayed. Following him is Chandler's American fiancé Amanda (Laura Sorenson), who is also worried by his delayed return.

At a press-meet in the Shangri-la Hotel, the American team of *Bitter Sweet* could not stop raving about their experiences in Thailand, as it was the first time in the country for most of them.

Director Jeff Hare, who has made two award-winning films and several TV series, said it was not he who had chosen Thailand, but Thailand who had chosen him.

He said he had run into a Bangkok-based Swiss investor, Urs Brunner, in LA, who was keen on making a film.

"He suggested a story on the lines of *Sideways*, with coffee instead of

wine," said Hare, who was excited, especially after he checked out the lush locations of the coffee plantations in Krabi, and got started on the script.

The unit did an intensive two-week shoot in Krabi last month, and is now wrapping up the film in Bangkok.

This will be the first production of Urs Brunner's Angel & Bear productions. The American producers of the movie are Mark Lane and John Karas (the latter said he has been in holidaying in Thailand for 25 years).

Director Hare said he had five actors from the US and the rest were all from Thailand.

Character actor Spencer Garrett said he played a kind of mentor to Kip Pardue, and his role was based on a real-life Austrian living in Bangkok — the latter went for the audition, but failed the test!

As for lead actor Kip Pardue, who has done thought-

provoking roles in films like *Remember the Titans* with Denzel Washington, and *Driven* with Sylvester Stallone, he said it was "a rare pleasure to do a simple, straight love story".

The young actor seemed to have adapted well to Thailand, and reeled off many Thai words.

When asked if this had anything to do with his beautiful Thai co-star, the American actor quipped, "Mamee is very *suay* [beautiful] and wonderful, and it was very easy to fall in love with her — on-screen!"

"I knew she was my Ticha the minute she walked in," said Director Hare. "Working with Mamee was a joy. I have not met anyone so dedicated and hard working."

Acting coach Eric Fleshman, who helped with her English training, agreed.

Mamee admitted it was the most challenging role of her career, since she had to mouth her own dialogues in English.

"It was very hard," she said.

"She used to call me late at night, to check the English pronunciation of some words," laughed Hare.

Another Thai actor who stars in the film is Akara "Gof" Amarttayakul, who makes a guest appearance as a boxer (like his lead role in his last movie *Muay Thai Chaiya*). Gof, who was emcee at the press-meet, said his was a small role, but he was excited to do an important scene with seasoned actor James Brolin.

As for James Brolin, better known as Barbra Streisand's husband, but an Emmy Award and Golden Globe award-winning actor in his own right, he was tall, tanned and distinguished-looking, with a white mane of hair, deep voice and strong physique.

Brolin said he had made three films in Asia, but this was his first trip to Thailand, and he hoped to come back later with his wife, and do a boat trip here.

To the question as to how a celebrity pair like them cope with their busy schedules, he said simply that they worked hard at it, and tried to spend at least seven to eight months together. He accompanies Barbra on most of her tours, including her recent 29-city tour.

"Did you know that each concert costs at least \$2.6 million [87.3 million baht]?" he asked with a smile.

"I'm proud of her and she's proud of me," said the seasoned actor, who has starred in movies and shows like *Traffic*, *Catch Me If You Can*, *The West Wing* and is to star in Oliver Stone's Vietnam saga *Pinkville* next.

Brolin also said he was proud of his son, Josh Brolin, who took the world by storm with his performance in the Oscar-nominated film *No Country for Old Men*.

Did he expect the film to do so well?

"Oh yes," said Brolin Sr, "he was the find of the film, wasn't he? He has films for at least three years now."

How did he feel, being the head of such a film-centric family, with a wife, son, daughter-law (Josh Brolin's actress-wife, Diane Lane) all having their own film identities?

"It's great to be part of such a great family," said Brolin, who said that, apart from his film career, he also owned truck and construction businesses.

He and wife Barbra are all set to take a truck and drive for a month around various national parks in the US.

"We love nature, and I love the green landscapes of Thailand."