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**Artistic mark:**  
*Muallaf*, by the late Yasmin Ahmad, is arguably her most feel-good film.

## Great film directors and actors may have passed on but their works are their legacies.

AMY de KANTER

**A** NEW year, a new start, new beginnings. I like starting out on a positive note, filled with things to set the tone for the rest of the year. This extends to the first meal, first song, first book and first film.

Sometimes I spend weeks deliberating and deciding, but this year deciding on my first movie was a no-brainer. *Muallaf* was in cinemas and too good a chance to pass up.

I am a great admirer of the late Yasmin Ahmad. Yes, critics may say, her films are a little green, her choice of actors varies from marvelous to embarrassingly bad, yada-yada.

However, she was a fantastic story-teller, she had an eye for beauty and a gift for sharing. Her films tackled love but they were not all sugar and cream. *Muallaf* is arguably her most feel-good film, yet watching it I also felt an undertone

of melancholy.

Yasmin died last year so this is likely the last time we will see her films on the big screen.

An artiste's work is meant to outlive the artiste, that is a given. With film, the production process takes so long that sometimes, the finished work is watched by the world when the artiste has already departed.

There is no question that real-life tragedy drives up ticket sales and opinions on why this happens varies

according to the level of cynicism. Some complain that post-humous releases are morbid, others defend it as a final tribute to the departed.

It is particularly shocking when we lose young, promising talent. Pointless debates often arise like whether it is more tragic if a director or an actor's final film is brilliant or it is dreadful.

James Dean earned a posthumous Oscar nomination for *Giant*. Heath Ledger did not live to personally receive his Academy Award for his role as The Joker in *The Dark Knight*.

Then there was River Phoenix who died at 23. He was a rising star, lauded for his astonishing performances in *Stand By Me*, *My Own Private Idaho* and *Sneakers* but his last film got such poor reviews that I could not bear to watch it.

Ditto for Aaliya's last film. The young R&B goddess was also a gifted actress slated to star alongside Keanu Reeves in *The Matrix* films. Her tragic death at 22 meant that those wanting to see her one last time had to sit through *Queen Of The Damned*.

Whether Brittany Murphy's final movies (three are in post-production) will be praised or forgotten, has yet to be seen.

The circumstances of death often have a lot to do with how much we hear about it.

A major loss to us all was

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barely publicised at all, perhaps because the cause of death was – shhhhh – AIDS. Howard Ashman, who wrote the lyrics to *Little Shop Of Horrors* before getting scooped up by Disney, managed to hear his songs in *A Little Mermaid* but died before his following films, *Beauty And The Beast* and *Aladdin*, were completed. He was nominated for the Academy Award for best song in both films.

Brandon Lee, on the other hand, died of a bizarre accident while he was filming *The Crow*. There was a bullet lodged in a prop gun loaded with blanks. He was young, engaged to be married and the son of iconic martial arts hero, Bruce, who also died too soon and before his final film, *Enter The Dragon*, made it to cinemas.

Both audiences and film producers had an understandably hard time letting go of Bruce, and five years after his death another “last film” *Game Of Death*, was released.

Bruce had filmed a small part of it before moving on to do *Enter The Dragon*. It was completed with stand-ins, doubles, and even a cardboard cutout of Lee’s face.

Last year, we saw another film that was also pieced together after its star passed away. Michael Jackson’s *This Is It* would have never been produced had he survived long enough to have his tour filmed. Losing the film would have been sad, but nowhere as near as losing Jackson.

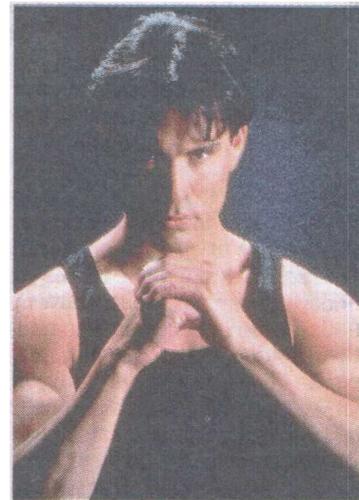
Which brings us back to Yasmin. *Muallaf* was completed years ago, yet deemed too cerebral/dull for Malaysian audiences. It was shown and lauded outside our borders but only came back after its director died.

Yasmin died too suddenly and too young. I only met her once but like so many others was touched by her films.

Imperfect as her movies were, she was among the best we had and perfected her craft a little more each time. I had a running bet with myself as to which of

her films would get Malaysia its first Academy Award nomination for Best Foreign Film.

*Muallaf* was lovely and I was thrilled to be able to watch it here, where it was made and where it belonged. Even so, I would rather have Yasmin back.



Brandon Lee, son of iconic martial artist, Bruce, had his life cut short by a freak accident on the set of *The Crow*.