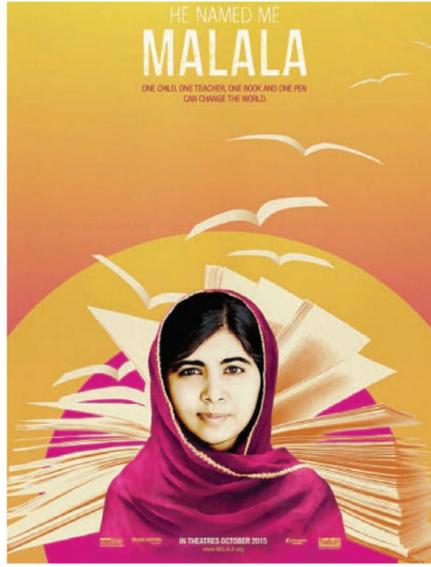




In this Monday, Dec 8, 2014 file photo, joint Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai, aged 17, briefly speaks to the media as she arrives at her hotel after flying to Oslo, to receive her award. — AP



'He named me Malala': Portrait of girls' education icon

Malala was the name on everyone's lips this week at the London Film Festival where a documentary about the youngest-ever Nobel Peace laureate had its European premiere. "He named me Malala" is an intimate portrait of Malala Yousafzai, the passionate Pakistani advocate of girls' education who survived a brutal Taliban gun attack in 2012. Even the festival's biggest stars seemed humbled by the teenager and her aspirations. American actress Meryl Streep hailed her as the worthy heiress of the suffragettes who battled for the right to vote in Britain in the early 20th century.

Filmed over 18 months in Britain, Kenya, Nigeria, Abu Dhabi and Jordan, the documentary by American David Guggenheim recalls how Malala's father chose her name in honor of Malalai of Maiwand, a heroine who rallied the Pashtun army against British troops in 1880. "When I was little, many people would say, 'Change Malala's name. It's a bad name, it means sad.' But my father would always say, 'No, it has another meaning. Bravery,'" the 18-year-old said.

On screen, the teenager is seen at her home in

Birmingham, central England, explaining to her father in the family living room how Twitter works, or squabbling with her brothers, Atal and Khushal. "She's fighting for human rights but at home she's so violent," complained Atal after being beaten in an arm wrestling match. The film follows her at school, in the streets of New York, at a refugee camp, spreading her optimistic and determined message on the right to education. "One child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world," she proclaimed.

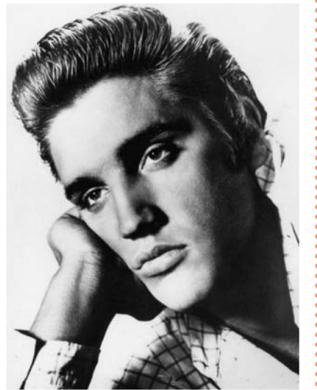
'They had never killed a child'

The documentary also shows her life in Pakistan's Swat valley where she decided, aged 11, to write a blog for the BBC. "Diary of a Pakistani schoolgirl" - in which she denounces Taliban violence. Guggenheim turns to animation to bring to life these years before the attempted assassination in October 2012, when Taliban gunmen opened fire on then 14-year-old Malala on her school bus. The cartoons, matching photos from the family album, also evoke the childhood of Malala's mother, Toor Pekai Yousafzai, who

recalled her own brief education Friday at London's Women in the World summit. "I left school because I was the only girl in a class full of boys. I just wanted to play with my cousins who were girls," she said in Pashtun, adding that she is now trying to learn to read and write in English. Of her daughter, she explained that, despite the anguish, she could not "stop a girl like her from talking or speaking up." "Sometimes when I worried she would tell me 'I can't stop going to school, I can't stop talking, because I am a girl and we cannot go back to the ages when they buried girls alive. I want to progress. I want to speak.' The film also shows the months of hospitalization and reeducation of the girl who wants to become Prime Minister of Pakistan, as well as her close relationship to her father, himself a teacher and staunch defender of the right to education. "We are one soul in two different bodies," said Malala in the documentary. To silence the critics who see her as her father's mouthpiece, she added: "my father only gave me the name Malalai. He didn't make me Malalai. I chose this life." — AFP

New Elvis album teams king with royal orchestra

Priscilla Presley closes her eyes and bites her lip as she listens to a new album of Elvis songs, with the king of rock and roll's voice backed by Britain's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. "I am emotional because I watched him singing each one of these songs," his ex-wife told AFP at London's Abbey Road Studios, where the album was recorded and where The Beatles made most of their hits. "I visualize everything that he's doing: his facial expressions, the point where he gets the chills or when he's really feeling it. I'm reliving all that." Due out on October 30, the album, entitled "If I Can Dream," gives Presley's songs the sort of huge backing he always wanted in studio recordings but only got during his 1970s Las Vegas concerts, Priscilla said. "Elvis loved bigness," she told reporters. She recounted how his manager Colonel Tom Parker would, on studio recordings, sneakily insist that the backing track volume be turned down and Presley's voice brought up front. "When Elvis heard this was happening, he went ballistic. So this is what the songs would have sounded like. He wanted it dramatic, he wanted to feel it," the 70-year-old said. "We've just added to it to make it the sound that Elvis truly would have loved to have had. "Because if you ever saw him on the stage in Las Vegas, this is what you heard."



An undated file picture of US rock star shows Elvis Presley, born in Tupelo Mississippi on January 8, 1935 and deceased on August 16, 1977 in Memphis. — AFP

but Parker felt he could not guarantee his security outside North America. Making this album in London is "kind of our way of saying thank-you" for the popular support he received in Britain, she said. Elvis would have done it "in a minute", she added.

Clean vocal over new backdrop

The album includes "It's Now Or Never", "You've Lost That Loving Feeling", "Bridge Over Troubled Water", "Can't Help Falling in Love", "In The Ghetto", "How Great Thou Art" and "An American Trilogy". "Fever" is reformulated as a duet with Canadian crooner Michael Buble, over a powerful new backdrop that swells like a James Bond movie theme. Hours of painstaking work went into extracting Presley's voice from the original tapes, using modern technology to paint out the music that leaked from his loud headphones onto the vocal microphone. — AFP

'Take it right through the roof'

The album mixes hits with lesser-known tracks deemed ripe for a string arrangement. The 14 songs are drawn from throughout his career, which spanned from the early 1950s to his death in 1977 aged 42. The project to give Elvis' recordings a full orchestral backing was a 15-month labor of love for Priscilla and producers Don Reedman and Nick Patrick. "Elvis didn't really use big orchestras in the recording studios," said Reedman, who came up with the idea. "I just felt this man needs a big orchestra to complement this amazing voice he's got and take it right through the roof." "We really did set out to make a fresh album. It wasn't just redoing the past." Priscilla said Elvis had wanted to perform in Europe from as early as 1959,

Hollywood women say 'no more' to pay disparity, harassment

Hollywood actresses bemoan pay disparity with their male counterparts, as well as the despised "casting couch" - where film executives sometimes make sexual advances before deciding who gets a coveted movie role. But some of Hollywood's top female stars are saying "no more," and are hailing this as a banner year for women in film. Ashley Judd was the latest to join the chorus, telling Variety magazine "one of the industry's most famous, admired" bosses-whom she declined to name-had lured her to his hotel suite in the late 1990s.

She said that after it became clear that she would not return his sexual advances, he asked if she would watch him shower. "I

when women in Hollywood are increasingly standing up for their rights, demanding better treatment and fair pay. "A lot of people are speaking out and the subject of sexism in Hollywood is trending," said Jennifer Merin, head of the Alliance of Women Film Journalists. "But that can be something dangerous as well because it can become a trend and then disappear."

The issue of pay disparity grabbed headlines last year after a leak of stolen emails from Sony Pictures Entertainment showed that Oscar-winning actress Jennifer Lawrence was paid less than her male co-stars in the hit movie "American Hustle." Patricia Arquette also railed against the industry's gender-based wage gap during her acceptance speech after winning an Oscar at this year's Academy Awards. Some of Hollywood's highest profile stars, such as Meryl Streep, Emma Watson and Gwyneth Paltrow, also have chimed in, helping put the issue in the spotlight.

"Look, nobody is worth the money that Robert Downey Jr is worth," Paltrow told Variety, speaking about her co-star in the movie "Iron Man." "But if I told you the disparity, you would probably be surprised." According to Forbes magazine's 2015 list of best-paid actors, Downey topped the list for the third year in a row earning a whopping \$80 million. That's nearly \$30 million more than Lawrence, the best-paid actress, who raked in \$52 million. Kirsten Schaffer, executive director of Women in Film, an advocacy group, said that while the outcry over gender disparities in the film industry was gaining steam much still needed to be done before Hollywood's glass ceiling is shattered. "There are a lot more women in the last six months speaking out publicly against sexism," Schaffer told AFP. "But there is a lot of room for growth." According to a report by the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film at San Diego State University in California, only seven percent of the top 250 movies in 2014 were directed by women. The numbers aren't much better when it comes to other jobs behind the camera, including writers, executive producers and editors.

"Those number haven't changed in 20 years," said Martha Lauzen, executive director of the center. "Women's under-representation both on screen and behind screen has been an issue since the 1940s," she added. "But what is new is that those high-profile individuals are feeling comfortable about speaking out... aided by a cultural zeitgeist in favor of greater diversity overall." Lauzen said that given the industry's track record on sexism, what may prove a tipping point is the fact that rights groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) are now demanding answers from Hollywood. — AFP



Jennifer Lawrence

did not recognize at the time what was happening to me," the 47-year-old actress said in the latest issue of Variety. "It took years before I could retrospectively evaluate that incident, and realize there was something incredibly wrong and illegal about it."

'Subject of sexism trending'

Though Judd's story is by no means unique, harassment of women in Hollywood is only the most explicit manifestation of their treatment as second-class citizens. Her story comes at a time

Beyonce, Billie Holiday: Michelle Obama reveals favorites

Michelle Obama has revealed musical tastes that include Beyonce and past greats such as Billie Holiday as she released a first playlist on streaming service Spotify. Following a separate playlist by her husband, the US first lady released her own yesterday for the International Day of the Girl, part of a UN campaign to end extreme poverty by improving education and health for women and girls worldwide. Obama opened her playlist with a contemporary anthem to female empowerment "Run the World (Girls)" by Beyonce.

The choice is not entirely surprising as Beyonce and her husband Jay Z have been political supporters of the Obamas. Last month, Beyonce brought Michelle Obama on stage at the Global Citizen Festival in New York, where the first lady urged a campaign to bring education to the estimated 62 million girls around the world who are out of school. Obama also picked "Survivor" by Beyonce's former band Destiny's Child as well as songs by contemporary singers including Jennifer Hudson, Alicia Keys and Janelle Monae.

She also reached back to classics including Holiday's 1944 version of "On the Sunny Side of the Street," Diana Ross's hit 1970 take on "Ain't No Mountain High Enough" and, closing the playlist, Aretha Franklin's signature song "Respect." While the playlist, in line with the theme, is overwhelmingly female, men were represented with a song by Norwegian rappers Nico & Vinz. The only other men on the playlist came on "My Shot," a tune from the acclaimed Broadway hip-hop musical "Hamilton," composed by Lin-Manuel Miranda.



Beyonce

President Barack Obama released two playlists of his own in August on Spotify, the most popular streaming platform, during his summer vacation. Five artists win the distinction of being on the playlists of both Obamas: Beyonce, Mary J. Blige, Aretha Franklin, Ms. Lauryn Hill and Holiday. — AFP



Katy Perry set to roar for Hillary

She also performed at Obama's second inauguration and has used her social media power to spread the word on the president's signature reform expanding health care coverage. The 30-year-old singer - who has released a string of blockbuster hits including "Roar," "Firework" and "Teenage Dream" - was raised in a conservative Christian household and does not generally bring politics into her music.

An exception is gay rights, of which Perry has been an outspoken proponent, and which she touched upon in her hit song "I Kissed a Girl." Perry has been touring Latin America on the final leg of her year-and-a-half long tour to promote the album "Prism," with the final date scheduled for October 18 in San Jose, Costa Rica. Clinton is the front-runner to secure the Democratic nomination but has faced rising pressure on the left from Senator Bernie Sanders. Sanders has won endorsements of a number of musicians, although none with Perry's star power. These include Flea of alternative rockers the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Belinda Carlisle of all-female New Wave band The Go-Go's, and folk rockers Jackson Browne, Steve Earle and Loudon Wainwright III. — AFP

Obama offers friendly advice for Kanye presidential bid

US President Barack Obama offered advice Saturday to Kanye West on the rapper's improbable White House bid - telling him that reality TV might be good training for Washington. West, who has declared with an unclear degree of seriousness that he will run for president in 2020, was performing at a fundraiser for Obama's Democratic Party in San Francisco. Addressing supporters who paid up to \$10,000 a ticket, teased that he had campaign advice for West, who is married to reality television star Kim Kardashian.

"First of all, you've got to spend a lot of time dealing with some strange characters who behave like they're on a reality TV show," Obama said to laughter. Obama joked that the background of West-like Obama, an African-American who spent formative years in Chicago - may not be entirely far-fetched for the presidency. "Do you really think that this country is going to elect a black guy from the South Side of Chicago with a funny name to be president of the United States? That is crazy," Obama said to applause. But Obama noted that the title of one of West's albums may prove to be a political liability.

"Saying you have a 'Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy' - that's what's known as 'off-message' in politics," Obama said, referring to West's chart-topping 2010 album. Obama did not resist taking a jab at the rival Republican Party, whose leadership in the House of Representatives is in disarray, saying that he heard "Kanye is thinking of running for speaker of the House." West, who is known for his brash self-confidence and has likened himself to Michelangelo, declared in August at the MTV Video Music Awards that he plans to run for president in 2020. The rapper's aspirations earlier won unlikely praise from real estate mogul Donald Trump, the acerbic front-runner in the Republican presidential race for 2016. Trump told Rolling Stone magazine last month that he found West to be a "nice guy," adding: "I hope to run against him someday." — AFP



Kanye West



File photo show Vin Diesel speaks on stage at the 45th NAACP Image Awards at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium in Pasadena, Calif. — AP

Diesel says 'Witch Hunter' role cathartic to deal with grief

Vin Diesel still struggles over the loss of his friend and "Furious" co-star Paul Walker, so taking on the role of an immortal in the upcoming film "The Last Witch Hunter" helped him deal with his grief. "Death was a huge theme last year," Diesel told The Associated Press Friday. "There was something therapeutic about playing this role after going through (Walker's death)." Diesel is no stranger to fantasy and sci-fi films, having starred in "The Chronicles of Riddick" series, "Babylon AD," and "Guardians of the Galaxy," but this one was special for him. "The idea that someone immortal could be so melancholy, 2014 was a tough year for me in some ways - a lot of ways," Diesel said, choking up before continuing. "Playing a character that was masking his sorrow - his loss - was very appropriate for the time, because that's what I was doing in real life with the post-"Furious 7." Walker died in late 2013 after the Porsche in which he was a passenger crashed and burned north of Los Angeles during a holiday break in the filming of "Furious 7," the latest installment of "The Fast and Furious" franchise. Production was halted indefinitely, but resumed seven months later. Diesel felt continuing the film would honor Walker's legacy, and his respect for the series' devoted fanbase.

"Paul said, 'You know ('Furious 7' could bomb and ('Furious 8' is still guaranteed). When somebody who is like your brother makes a promise, you feel inclined to want to honor that," Diesel said. Diesel shared Walker's vision on the longevity of the series. — AP