

FEATURES

Scorsese film about Japan's hidden Christians out for Christmas

Oscar-winning director Martin Scorsese told an audience in Tokyo yesterday his long-awaited film about the persecution of Christians in 17th century Japan will hit the big screen just before Christmas. The filmmaker, known for hits including Taxi Driver, Goodfellas, and The Wolf of Wall Street, said his latest film "Silence" be released for a limited run in the United States on December 23 — putting it in possible contention for an Oscar nomination. The movie's release, originally slated for last year, as been delayed several times, including after an on-set accident killed a construction worker and injured several others.

Scorsese, who picked up an Oscar for The Departed in 2007, made the announcement at a press briefing in Tokyo where he is to receive Japan's biggest arts award, the Praemium Imperiale, at a ceremony later this week. The film is based on the 1966 novel by famed Japanese novelist Shusaku

Endo, which tells the story of a young, idealistic Jesuit priest from Portugal who lands on the shores of Nagasaki in southern Japan—then the only part of the country open to foreigners. The novel, titled "Chinmoku" ("Silence"), depicts severe persecution inflicted on converts to Christianity—many of whom were impoverished villagers forced into hiding. The Christians came out of the shadows when Japan ended two hundred years of self-imposed isolation in the 1860s.

Before filming, Scorsese—who said he has wanted to do the film for over a quarter century—visited the areas mentioned in the book and interviewed descendants of these so-called hidden Christians. "What came out of that for me was the extraordinary power and sacrifice, the commitment and conviction of their ancestors who were martyrs to the faith," he said yesterday. "For me this was almost like meeting one of the hidden Christians from the 17th century and it changed my perception of how to deal with those scenes and the characters," he added.

The film stars Andrew Garfield, Liam Neeson, Adam Driver and Japanese actor Tadanobu Asano. Scorsese is one of five recipients of the Praemium Imperiale this year, which also honors American artist Cindy Sherman, French sculptor Annette Messager, Brazilian architect Paulo Mendes da Rocha and Latvian violinist Gidon Kremer. — AFP



US director Martin Scorsese, winner of the 28th Praemium Imperiale award, smiles during a joint press conference.



(From left) US photographer Cindy Sherman, US director Martin Scorsese, French sculptor Annette Messager and Latvian-German musician Gidon Kremer, winners of the 28th Praemium Imperiale award, pose during a photo call after a joint press conference in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP photos.

Nobel panel gives up knockin' on Dylan's door

The Swedish Academy says it has given up trying to reach Bob Dylan, days after it awarded him the Nobel Prize for Literature. "Right now we are doing nothing. I have called and sent emails to his closest collaborator and received very friendly replies. For now, that is certainly enough," the academy's permanent secretary, Sara Danius, told state radio SR yesterday. So far the American troubadour has responded with silence since he won the prize on Thursday.

He gave a concert in Las Vegas that very night, but made no mention of the accolade. So-as an early Dylan song may have put it—how does it feel? "I am not at all worried," said Danius. "I think he will show up." Every December 10, Nobel prize winners are invited to Stockholm to receive their awards from King Carl XVI Gustaf and to give a speech during a banquet. The Swedish Academy still does not know if Dylan plans to come to the event. "If he doesn't want to come, he won't come. It will be a big party in any case and the honor belongs to him," said Danius. Dylan, 75, whose lyrics have influenced generations of fans, is the first songwriter to win the literature prize. Other contenders for this year's prize included Salman Rushdie, Adonis and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. — AFP



This file photo shows US singer Bob Dylan performing during the 37th AFI Life Achievement Award: A Tribute to Michael Douglas at Sony Pictures in Culver City, California. — AFP

Indian film festival drops Pakistani movie after threat

An Indian film festival dropped a Pakistani drama from its program yesterday after protesters threatened to disrupt the screening—the latest movie to fall foul of heightened tensions between the nuclear-armed neighbors. Organizers of the MAMI Mumbai Film Festival said they would not show the 1959 classic "Jago Hua Savera" ("The Day Shall Dawn") following a complaint from an Indian NGO called Sangharsh, which means struggle in Hindi.

Sangharsh had said it was inappropriate to show the film, which was Pakistan's official Oscars entry in 1960, following an attack by militants that killed 19 Indian soldiers in Kashmir. "Given the current situation, the Jio MAMI 18th Mumbai Film Festival with Star has decided not to program 'Jago Hua Savera' as part of the Restored Classics Section," organizers of the festival said in a statement. The move comes after a group of Indian cinemas said last week that they would not screen any films featuring Pakistani artists in protest at the raid on an army base in Indian Kashmir last month.

The ban by India's Cinema Owners and Exhibitors Association (COEA) applies to single screen cinemas in four states and is likely to affect the forthcoming release of movies "Ae Dil Hai Mushkil", "Dear Zindagi" and "Raees". The ban came as Hindu nationalist groups pile pressure on the makers of "Ae Dil Hai Mushkil" ("This Heart is Complicated") to drop Pakistani actor Fawad Khan from the romantic drama. The fringe but noisy right-wing group Maharashtra Navnirman Sena has threatened to stall the October 28 release of the movie. India blames Pakistan for the raid on September 18 which saw the Indian army respond with "surgical strikes".

Following the militant attack the Indian Motion Picture Producers' Association, which represents a number of Hindi film industry employees, passed a motion banning Pakistani artists until relations between New Delhi and Islamabad improve. MAMI runs from October 20-27. "Jago Hua Savera", a black and white film, tells the story of a fishing village near Dhaka, now the capital of Bangladesh. — AFP

Face saver: Surgical mask sworn at Japan speed dating sessions

Looks aren't everything. At least, that's what one Japanese dating service is trying to prove - by requiring participants in speed dating sessions to wear white surgical masks. "In order to achieve marriage, it is important to provide chances to know a partner's personality and values in the early stages," said Kei Matsumura, head of Tokyo dating service Def Anniversary. "We chose surgical masks as an essential tool for that."

White surgical masks covering most of the face are common sights in Japan, where people don them to avoid catching diseases, keep out pollen and, sometimes, just to keep their faces warm. Some women also opt for a mask on days when they haven't worn makeup. "Since I wasn't judged by my appearance, I think I was able to be more outgoing with women," said 28-year-old Yasumasu Kishi at a weekend speed dating event for 19 men and 18 women.

Dating services are booming in Japan as young people shy from tying the knot. The marriage rate has plunged by 50 percent over the last 40 years, from 10.1 per thousand in 1975 to 5.1 per thousand in 2014, according to a Health Ministry survey. Young people brought up in the digital era find face-to-face encounters daunting in ultra-polite Japan, while long work hours add still another hurdle. These make konkatsu - active "marriage seeking activity" - often the only option.

"I think I was able to find out more about their inner selves and not just judge them by their looks," said Chiharu Tsukahara, a 28-year-old office worker. "In this event, personality matters. I quite liked that," she added as she prepared to leave with Kishi and two friends for another date. This time, masks were optional. — Reuters

Israeli fashionista's fantasy footwear finds famous fans



A picture shows shoes created by Israeli shoe designer Kobi Levi at his workshop.



A picture shows a shoe creation called 'Banana'.



A picture shows the back of a pair of shoes called "Chewing Gum".

Israeli designer Kobi Levi's psychedelic shoes resemble everything from banana skins, flamingos and stretching cats—and they are all the rage among well-heeled stars like Lady Gaga. "My world is that of everyday glamour, the glamour that goes unnoticed, which I show in an extravagant and fun way," the 41-year-old says. Dressed in a t-shirt and black jeans, he works out of a modest studio at his apartment in Israel's commercial capital Tel Aviv.

He uses a vintage sewing machine and an old leather press to turn his designs from fantasies into shoes. "I see someone stepping in chewing gum on the way to work and getting annoyed about it," he tells AFP. "So I make shoes with a high heel shaped like stuck chewing gum." The result is a stylish black-and-white sneaker with an 11-centimetre (four-inch) pink dripping heel so realistic it could be mistaken for real gum. The bizarre creation, which sells for \$2,240 (1,949 euros) a pair, caught the imagination of actress Whoopi Goldberg, who wore them when she appeared with US President Barack Obama on talk show "The View" in 2012. American singer Fergie wore a pair of the same shoes in the video for her song "M.I.L.F. \$".

Going Gaga

The bulk of Levi's orders come through his website but one, in 2011, changed the course of his career—propelling his shoes onto the global pop scene. "I got an email from a fashion design studio that deals with Lady Gaga. They wanted a pair of shoes for a video," he says. "I was super surprised because at the time I had no studio, just a small blog with photos. I was making the shoes my size because nobody wore them and showing them to friends and then putting them in boxes," he says. Gaga wore the shoes in the video for her 2011 hit single "Born This Way".

Levi's designs are made to measure in very limited batches—as few as 20 pairs. They occupy, he says, the crossroads between



Israeli shoe designer Kobi Levi poses in his workshop with some of his shoe creations.

"design, art and fashion." It takes several months to create a new model, and several weeks to reproduce each one. Once he receives around 20 orders, he moves on to another project. The effort has paid off, winning Levi high-profile fans. Swedish stylist B Akerlund, who designs for the likes of Beyonce and Kim Kardashian, has put 13 of the Israeli's designs in her showroom. Goldberg has been a keen admirer for years, sporting a pair of his low heels shaped like a banana skin at the Paris premiere of the "Sister Act" stage show in 2012. The same year, Vogue Italia described Levi as "a genius, unusual, true creative talent, the captor of surrounding reality, of unpredictable objects, of animal appearances".

Madonna next?

Among his many creations are shoes shaped like playground slides, stretching cats and even a design with a miniature harp in the heel. "Everything starts with a fantasy, then it becomes a challenge," he says. "You

have to find technical solutions. I go through phases where I think I'm crazy, that it's impossible, then I'm afraid that in a second everything could tear or break." "Then suddenly it starts to look like the original sketches and then I get the heady feeling of having given life to a fantasy."

Levi stressed his creations—which sell for between \$800 and \$3,000 — are designed to be worn, not simply for display. Levi also plays on the sex appeal of heels, earning him an avalanche of fan mail from women, he says. He now hopes another glamorous and provocative star—who reportedly spent a recent birthday in Cuba with Akerlund—will fall for his creative madness. "Madonna" is his pair of gold stilettos with a fake microphone and blond wig, and he has high hopes for the shoes. "It would be great to see Madonna wearing them herself," he says. — AFP



Kobi Levi poses in his workshop with one of his shoe creations called "Miao".



A pair of shoes called "Blonde Ambition".