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Cate Blanchett's feminist wake-up call to Cannes

Cate Blanchett knew there was something seriously awry with the Cannes film festival when the winners of its top prize, the Palme d'Or, were gathered together to celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2014. Among the sea of grey heads on the stage there was only one woman, Jane Campion, who had won for "The Piano" two decades earlier. "Sometimes things have to get that bad and that stark for us to say, 'Hang on a minute. There's something wrong—literally—with this picture,'" the actress said this week, days before heading the jury that will choose this year's winner.

With Cannes and the film industry still reeling from the Harvey Weinstein scandal, some saw her appointment as a quick-fix PR coup to head off critics. The world's top film festival, which likes to think of itself as "the movie Olympics", has long faced criticism for its "dismal" attitude to female directors. Only three of the 21 films in competition for the Palme d'Or are directed by women, the same number as last year. And the festival's decision to lift its ban on controversial Danish director Lars Von Trier, who has faced sexual harassment claims from the singer Bjork and whose company has been hit by multiple accusations, further raised eyebrows.

'We are not going back'

But Blanchett, one of the few women in Hollywood with the clout to carry a movie single-handed, insists the film industry must change. The double Oscar winner supports the call for "inclusion riders" or "equality clauses", which demand diversity in casting and were championed by actress Frances McDormand at the Oscars. She called McDormand's speech "one of the highlights of my year" and has been active in the Time's Up movement set up by Hollywood stars to combat sexual harassment. Blanchett said the riders are "a litmus test."

"We have nothing to lose but progress". If the producers do not match up to their commitments, they would have to pay a penalty that would help support female directors or other underrepresented groups. "We are not going back to ground zero," Blanchett told the film industry bible Variety. "We are moving onward



This combination of pictures shows (from top left) US actress and president of the jury of 71st Cannes Festival Cate Blanchett on April 11, 2017, New Zealander director and president of the 67th Cannes Festival Jane Campion on May 13, 2014, French actress and president of the jury of 61st Cannes Festival Isabelle Huppert on May 13, 2009, president of the 54th Cannes Film Festival jury, Norwegian actress and director Liv Ullmann on May 9, 2001, Isabelle Adjani, French actress and president of the 50th Cannes Festival 1997, on May 7, 1997, president of the 48th Festival de Cannes, Jeanne Moreau, president of jury of the 32nd Cannes Festival and French writer Francoise Sagan on May 10, 1979 in Cannes, French actress and president of the jury of the 28th Cannes International Film Festival Jeanne Moreau, on May 10, 1975, Swedish actress and president of the jury of the 26th Cannes Film Festival Ingrid Bergman in 1959, actress and president of the 24th Cannes Festival Michele Morgan, in May 1971, president of the jury of the 19th Cannes Film Festival and Italian film actress Sophia Loren on November 2, 1965 at the Savoy Hotel in London, US actress and president of the jury of the 18th Cannes Film Festival Olivia de Havilland, during the Cannes Film Festival, on April 16, 1953.

and forward from here. "Change is happening within the industry in a kind of positive, unstoppable way that will benefit not just women but everybody in the industry," she added.

Harassed by Weinstein

The Australian-born actress, who now lives in London, revealed that she had also been harassed by Weinstein in the same Variety interview. The disgraced mogul was an "unwanted" producer on several of her films, including "Carol" and "The Talented Mr.

Ripley", she said. Asked if he ever sexually harassed or acted inappropriately with her, she said, "Yes. I think he primarily preyed, like most predators, on the vulnerable. I mean I got a bad feeling from him.... He would often say to me, 'We're not friends'."

Blanchett, 48, said she hopes that Weinstein who is facing a raft of rape and sexual assault accusations goes to jail. "Rape is a crime the last time I looked," she said. The actress, who lives near London with her husband and their four children, made her breakthrough in

"Elizabeth" in 1998, playing the 16th-century British monarch with a distinctly feminist twist. It won her a slew of awards and the first of her six Oscar nominations.

Although her career has been peppered with blockbusters such as the "Lord of the Rings" and "Hobbit" films, she built her reputation in indie movies from the crusading Irish journalist in "Veronica Guerin" to another heavily-accented (and pregnant) reporter in Wes Anderson's "The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou". Although she has never won anything at Cannes, her perform-



In this file photo Actress Cate Blanchett arrives on the red carpet for the 88th Oscars in Hollywood, California. — AFP photos



Actor Cate Blanchett at The World Premiere of Marvel Studios' "Thor: Ragnarok" at the El Capitan Theatre in Hollywood, California.

ance in "Carol", where she played one half of a couple of illicit lesbian lovers, won her rave reviews there in 2014.— AFP

The last 10 winners of the top prize at Cannes

The Cannes film festival—the world's biggest—starts tomorrow in the French Riviera resort. Here are the past 10 winners of its top prize, the Palme d'Or:

2017: "The Square" by Ruben Ostlund (Sweden)
2016: "I, Daniel Blake" by Ken Loach (Britain)
2015: "Dheepan" by Jacques Audiard (France)
2014: "Winter Sleep" by Nuri Bilge Ceylan (Turkey)
2013: "Blue is the Warmest Color" by Abdellatif Kechiche (France)
2012: "Amour" by Michael Haneke (Austria)
2011: "The Tree of Life" by Terrence Malick (US)
2010: "Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives" by Apichatpong Weerasethakul (Thailand)
2009: "The White Ribbon" by Michael Haneke (Austria)
2008: "The Class" by Laurent Cantet (France). — AFP



Weinstein's absence looms over scandal-hit Cannes

Disgraced Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein once held court like a king at the Cannes film festival, but this year it is his absence that will loom large over the competition. The world's biggest film festival has moved to align itself with the #MeToo movement against sexual harassment that has reverberated around the world since Weinstein's downfall. The festival has condemned Weinstein's "unpardonable behavior" after he was accused of four sexual assaults at Cannes over the years, including the rape of the Italian actress Asia Argento in his luxury suite when she was 21.

Director Thierry Fremaux admitted that Cannes "will never be the same again" after the Weinstein scandal, and said festival-goers will be warned about their behavior when they arrive at the huge French Riviera event, which starts tomorrow. A flyer saying "proper behavior required" will be handed out and a hotline and website set up for victims or witnesses of sexual harassment. Women also dominate the jury that awards the top Palme d'Or prize this year, including French actress Lea Seydoux, who has accused Weinstein of assault. The jury will be led by Australian actress Cate Blanchett, who helped launch the Time's Up campaign to tackle sexual harassment in Hollywood and was one of the first to speak out against Weinstein. There will also be a talk about the place of women in film, but no unifying dress theme, such as the black dresses worn at the Golden Globes in support of Time's Up or white ribbons worn at the Cesars, the "French Oscars". However, critics claim that the festival is only paying lip service to real change. "Cannes is a two-

week celebration of male brains and female beauty," said screenwriter Kate Muir, of the Women and Hollywood group which is pushing for great diversity in the industry. "Many wheeler-dealers and producers still parade with paid-for models or prostitutes on their arms, which makes female film-makers deeply uneasy about what, precisely, is valued by the money men." The Weinstein affair may have rocked the film world, but the local tourism industry in Cannes expects little disruption.

Bruno Draillard, who runs eight real estate agencies that rent apartments in Cannes during the festival, said the scandal has had "no impact" on business. "People come to do business, maybe they will just do it with a slightly lower profile," he said. During his years at the festival, Weinstein was known to wield his power as he hosted actors and actresses in his room at the exclusive Hotel du Cap, where Argento has accused him of raping her. Was his behavior well-known at the time? "We learnt about it from the media," said local hospitality union head Alain Lahouti, a sentiment echoed by others AFP spoke to in Cannes. The director of the Cannes Film Market, the huge deal-making hub that runs parallel to the main festival, also expects little change. "It is true that the Weinstein Company often brought quality films," Jerome Paillard said. But other big companies like Lionsgate have filled the gap, he added.

Hotel room scandal

Christine Welter of the Cannes hotel union said that the "film festival is above all about business". For her, another



This file photo shows US film producer Harvey Weinstein attending the De Grisogono Party on the sidelines of the 70th Cannes Film Festival in Antibes, France. — AFP

sexual harassment scandal had far more impact, that of ex-IMF chief Dominique Strauss-Kahn who was taken down by a US assault case brought by a hotel maid, the aftermath of which led to changes in hotel regulations. Aline Buffet, who heads a team of seamstresses that help with last minute alterations, said "when there are problems, it's rather during the summer, in certain hotels or private properties with customers who prefer a massage rather than a fitting". She said the only incident she recalled was four or five years ago, when she sent two seamstresses to the room of two film stars early one morning.

"There was a big orgy going on in the room" when they arrived, Buffet said. "They (too) were asked to undress... but I went to see the producers and it was dealt with very quickly!" There "have probably been other excesses" like Weinstein in the past, said beach worker Nathalie Di Sotto. "It was the same in the time of Marilyn Monroe or Brigitte Bardot," she added. "There has always been this domination of men over women. But now it's become an issue." — AFP

Films in the running for the top prize at Cannes

From an African-American detective infiltrating the Ku Klux Klan to Kurdish female fighters battling jihadists, here are the movies that will battle it out for the top Palme d'Or prize at the Cannes film festival this week:

Everybody Knows: Iranian master Asghar Farhadi kicks off the festival with a psychological thriller about a family reunion going awry, featuring Spanish stars Penelope Cruz and Javier Bardem. While Farhadi, 45, won an Oscar and the Golden Bear at Berlin for his 2011 breakthrough film, "A Separation", he is yet to take home the coveted Cannes prize.

BlackKkKlansman: US director and activist Spike Lee's drama is based on the real-life story of an African-American police officer who infiltrated the Ku Klux Klan in 1978. John David Washington plays him with Adam Driver as his Jewish police partner. The film will open in the US on the first anniversary of a white supremacist march in Charlottesville where an anti-racism activist was killed.

Under the Silver Lake: Four years after giving Cannes audiences nightmares with his thriller "It Follows", David Robert Mitchell returns with another spine-chiller, this time about the mysterious murder of a billionaire.

Dogman: Italian director Matteo "Gomorra" Garrone's new work is not for the faint-hearted. Dubbed an "urban Western", the film is inspired by the gruesome murder by dog groomer and cocaine addict Pietro De Negrì in the late 1980s.

Three Faces: Little is known about this portrait of

three women by the Iranian dissident Jafar Panahi, who is banned from travel by Tehran. The festival and US director, Oliver Stone have pleaded with the authorities to let the director, who has faced years of harassment and arrest, to fly to Cannes to show his film.

Leto: Russia's Kirill Serebrennikov is another director who may not be able to present his work at Cannes. Under house arrest over highly disputed allegations of embezzlement, his film focuses on Soviet rock star Viktor Tsoi and the birth of Russian underground music in the 1980s.

At War: As France grapples with rail strikes and student protests, French director Stephane Brize's gritty drama about factory workers battling to keep their jobs may hit a timely nerve.

Cold War: Amazon Studios is pinning its hopes on this tender black-and-white period romance set among the members of a touring folk group in the Eastern Bloc in the 1950s from Oscar-winning Polish-British director Pawel Pawlikowski.

The Image Book: Cinema's oldest and most enigmatic rebel, French-Swiss legend Jean-Luc Godard, has let little slip about his new film other than this enigmatic synopsis: "Nothing but silence, nothing but a revolutionary song, a story in five chapters like the five fingers of a hand."

Girls of the Sun: Kurdish women fighters battling the Islamic State are at the centre of French actor-director Eva Husson's new film. Iranian star Golshifteh Farahani plays Bahar, the leader



Workers set up the official poster of the 71st Cannes film festival on the palais des Festivals facade, two days before the opening of the festival yesterday in the French Riviera city of Cannes. — AFP

of the Yazidi Sun Brigade, who hunts down the extremists who had earlier captured her.

The Wild Pear Tree: Turkish auteur Nuri Bilge Ceylan, who won the Palme d'Or four years ago for "Winter Sleep", is back with another Anatolian talkie, this time about a young provincial writer raging at his father.

Ayka: Kazakh Sergey Dvortsevov—who won many fans and prizes for his 2009 debut "Tulpan"—was a late entry with his new docudrama about a young homeless single mother adrift in the post-Soviet Central Asian state.

Capernaum: Lebanese actress-turned-filmmaker Nadine Labaki's third film is set in a Middle

Eastern town. Her previous film "Where Do We Go Now?" premiered at Cannes in the Un Certain Regard section in 2010.

Burning: South Korean auteur Lee Chang-dong's new mystery drama is drawn from a short story by Japanese master Haruki Murakami. "Barn Burning", about a writer who becomes fascinated by a woman whose boyfriend burns barns. His first film in eight years, the cult director of "Oasis" and "Secret Sunshine" has an almost fanatical following.

Knife + Heart: French singer and actress Vanessa Paradis stars in the latest tale from Yann Gonzalez, who had a hit on the festival circuit with his quirky orgy drama, "You And The

Night", with Beatrice Dalle and former footballer Eric Cantona.

Asako 1 & 2: In this Japanese drama by Ryusuke Hamaguchi, a young woman meets her first love in Osaka. When he disappears without a trace, she moves on—until his perfect double shows up two years later.

Shoplifters: Japanese master Hirokazu Kore-Eda, a longtime sweetheart of the Cannes jury, returns with a tale of a family of small-time crooks who take in a child they find on the street.

Yomeddine: A Coptic leper and his orphaned apprentice leave the confines of their colony for the first time and embark on a journey across Egypt to search for what is left of their families.

Lazzaro Felice: Rising star Italian director Alice Rohrwacher, already a prize winner at Cannes, is back with a time-travelling story which takes in the fascist 1930s.

Sorry Angel: The new film by Christophe Honoré, the man behind the charming French musical "Love Songs", is a gay love story when the AIDS epidemic was at its height.

Ash is Purest White: Chinese director Jia Zhangke's new film is a story of "violent love" between a mobster and a dancer starring Zhao Tao and Liao Fan. It is a follow-up to his "Mountains May Depart", which also competed for the Palme d'Or in 2015. — AFP