

Lifestyle

TUESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2019



(From left) Sterling K Brown, winner of Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture for "Black Panther" and Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Drama Series for "This Is Us;" Angela Bassett, Lupita Nyong'o, Chadwick Boseman, Danai Gurira, Michael B. Jordan, and Andy Serkis, winners of Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture for "Black Panther," pose in the press room at the 25th annual Screen Actors Guild Awards at The Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles, California. — AFP

LGBT teen shines as France's Eurovision pick

At the tender age of 19, Bilal Hassani is already being held up as an inspiration to LGBT teenagers—and now he's got his sights on winning the Eurovision Song Contest. An internet sensation, Hassani beat better known singers to clinch Saturday night's public vote to represent France in the glitter-soaked competition in Israel in May. "I am very proud to represent in being 100 percent myself, despite people who might say on the internet that I don't represent France," he said Sunday evening on French television. Born to a Moroccan family, the Beyonce fan has delighted in proving wrong critics who laughed at the singer they dismissed as an "Arab in a wig".

"I've been a Eurovision addict since I was nine, as much for the artistry as for what it symbolizes—all the cultures and differences that are brought together by music," he said on Instagram. With a penchant for wigs—each of which has a pet name, including a blonde called "Paris" and a brunette called "Gila"—Hassani is unapologetic about what he stands for. "I am me, and I know I will always be. I am free," he sings in "Roi" ("King"), the song he is hoping will become France's first victorious Eurovision entry since 1977. Hassani is vocal about his sexuality and rejection of old ideas about masculinity, delighting in a gender-bending wardrobe.

Heavily made up a la Kim Kardashian—albeit far less curvy—his success owes much to his big personality, flaunting what he calls his "fabulousness". Encouraging messages flooded in on Hassani's YouTube channel after he was picked for Eurovision on Saturday. "I wanted to thank you — even if you don't read this comment, it's thanks to you that I've managed to have confidence in myself," wrote one fan.



This handout shows French singer Bilal Hassani (center) performing on stage in Paris during Destination Eurovision France television's broadcast.

1,500 hateful tweets

But beyond the tide of support, Hassani has also had to grapple with a violent online hate campaign from homophobes and racists. Campaign group Urgence Homophobie said it had already identified "more than 1,500 insulting, discriminatory or threatening tweets linked to his sexual orientation and/or appearance". The NGO has joined forces with another group, Stop Homophobie, to take to court "every person who has insulted, threatened, or discriminated against" Hassani.

The young singer has tried to take it in his stride, telling

reporters that winning "the votes of so many French people" on Saturday was "the best response to the haters". Hassani has taken singing and dance classes since his early years, appearing on children's talent show "The Voice Kids" at the age of 15. For his audition, he opted to perform a song by one of his idols—Conchita Wurst, the Austrian bearded diva who won Eurovision in 2014.

He became a YouTuber shortly after and has since won nearly 800,000 subscribers, with videos—often humorous—that start with him belting out a tuneful "Bonsoir, Paris!" With titles like "The time I fell in love with a straight guy!",

some videos are confessional, while others feature make-up tutorials or covers of songs by stars such as Ed Sheeran and Ariana Grande. His Eurovision entry, co-written with last year's French contenders Madame Monsieur, has already racked up nearly six million views online. In any case, Hassani is already looking beyond the competition in Tel Aviv: his debut album is due out this spring, under the French label Low Wood. — AFP



This handout picture released by France television shows French singer Bilal Hassani waving a French flag next to Canadian singer Garou (left) in Paris during Destination Eurovision France television's broadcast.

US writer Ferris triumphs over illness to win top comics prize

American artist Emil Ferris has overcome life-threatening illness to become the first woman in more than a decade to win the Golden Wildcat prize at France's top graphic novel festival. The Chicagoan—who wrote "My Favorite Thing is Monsters" after being paralyzed from the waist down after getting West Nile fever



from a mosquito bite—is the first female since "Persepolis" author Marjane Satrapi to take the honor. Satrapi won in 2005 for her novel "Chicken with Plums".

Ferris, 55, picked up the award in the western French city of Angoulême Saturday still walking with the aid of a cane, 15 years after being struck down by the illness. She said she was touched by how her coming-of-age tale of a girl obsessed with monster mags investigating the murder of a Holocaust survivor had found such a global audience. "I live like a monster and I wrote a book about monsters. When I wrote the book I wondered if I would offend people," she said as she received the prize at the Angoulême Comics Festival, one of the biggest in Europe.

"It is marvelous that all these monsters have come out into the light to reclaim their due," Ferris, a single parent, took six years to draw the 700-page story as she recovered from the virus, having also lost at one point the power in her right arm. Art Spiegelman, author of the now classic graphic novel "Maus" about the Nazi death camps, said he "started crying like a big dumb baby" while reading the book, Ferris' first published work.

To make ends meet while she wrote the book, Ferris worked as an illustrator and toy designer, making the "Mulan" line of Happy Meal figurines for the fast food chain McDonald's. On Thursday, the Japanese manga queen Rumiko Takahashi won the festival's top prize for her life's work, only the second woman to have ever done so. The hugely prolific Takahashi, 61, is one of the most read authors in the world, with her "Urusei Yatsura", "Maison Ikkoku" and "Rin-ne" series selling more than 200 million copies. — AFP

In this file photo American writer, cartoonist, and designer author of the graphic novel "My Favorite Thing is Monsters", Emil Ferris poses during a photo session in Paris. — AFP

Suspect nabbed in brazen art theft from Moscow museum

A man who snatched a 19th-century painting off the wall in a busy Moscow museum and calmly walked out has been arrested, authorities said yesterday. The suspect took a Crimean landscape by Russian artist Arkhip Kuindzhi and carried it through a room filled with visitors on Sunday, footage aired on state television showed. It is the second security incident to hit the capital's Tretyakov gallery in a year, after a visitor in May seriously damaged a painting of Ivan the Terrible. The Russian interior ministry said a 31-year-old man was detained yesterday in a village outside Moscow.

He admitted hiding it on a construction site from where it was recovered, a ministry statement said. The painting, depicting the Ai-Petri mountain in Crimea, was completed

between 1898 and 1908. The ministry published a video of his arrest that showed armed police holding the man to the floor and recovering the painting, that appeared not to be damaged. Authorities said the man had previously been charged with drug possession and was currently not allowed to leave Russia. Police are working to establish if he had accomplices.

"At the time of the theft, the museum's security-carried out by forces of the National Guard and the museum's security service—was working normally," the gallery said. "Security measures at the Arkhip Kuindzhi exhibition and all sites of the Tretyakov Gallery have been strengthened," it added. The Kremlin yesterday said the gallery is "protected at a proper level" but added that "conclusions must be drawn". It also praised authorities for recovering the painting. "Thank God, thanks to the energetic efforts of our law enforcement officers, the painting was found quickly and efficiently," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

The theft comes after a man slashed a painting by celebrated Russian artist Ilya Repin, depicting 16th-century Tsar Ivan the Terrible after he killed his son. Police arrested a 37-year-old who used a metal pole to break the glass covering the picture, damaging the work in three places. The gallery is currently hosting an exhibition with more than 120 Kuindzhi paintings that will run until February 17. On its website, the gallery calls Arkhip Kuindzhi, who died in 1910, "one of the most memorable figures in Russian painting of the second half of the 19th century." — AFP



An image shows a man, stealing a famous painting by Arkhip Kuindzhi during an exhibition at the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow. — AFP photos