

Roman Polanski: A life marked by horror and scandal

Like his own films, the life of Oscar-winning director Roman Polanski has been haunted by horror, violence and scandal, turning him into one of the world's most visible fugitives from justice. In the latest twist to a child sex case dating back nearly four decades, Poland's Supreme Court yesterday rejected a bid to extradite the 83-year-old Polish-French filmmaker to the United States.

Polanski pleaded guilty in 1977 to unlawful sex with a 13-year-old girl in Hollywood, but fled the US before sentencing. His work has earned applause from critics and audiences alike, winning eight Academy Awards on 27 nominations. But his admission that he had unlawful sex with 13-year-old Samantha Gailey after plying her with alcohol and pills, and his subsequent flight from justice, fuelled a torrent of disgusted criticism. Polanski has since been engaged in a decades-long cat-and-mouse game with US officials seeking his extradition for trial, before a global audience split between continuing outrage and forgiveness for his acts. When Poland's Supreme Court dismissed the appeal yesterday, definitively ending the nation's part in the case, Polanski's lawyer Jerzy Stachowicz told reporters: "We hope one day it will be over in the United States."

Nazi Poland and tragedy in LA

Polanski was born in Paris in 1933 to Polish Jewish parents, who later brought the family back to their native country. He was eight when the Nazis arrested his parents in Krakow's Jewish ghetto sending them to concentration camps from which his mother never returned. He fled the ghetto and roamed the countryside, trying to survive, helped by Catholic Polish families, in a country occupied by German troops. The experience lent a gripping autobiographical authenticity to his 2002 movie "The Pianist", the tale of a young Jewish man trying to evade the Nazis in occupied Warsaw.

His youthful observation of the human capacity for cruelty shaped Polanski's psychologically wrought work from the start. His 1962 feature debut in Poland, "Knife in the Water", was an erotic thriller about a couple inviting a switchblade-toting hitchhiker onto their yacht. While panned at home, it earned praise in the West, and was nominated for the Best Foreign Film Oscar. That reception prompted Polanski to move to England—the first of many self-imposed exiles that nurtured a sense of alienation resonating throughout his work—where he made "Repulsion" (1965), "Cul-de-Sac" (1966), and "The Fearless Vampire Killers" (1967). Lured to Hollywood in 1968, Polanski shot his first big international hit, "Rosemary's Baby", starring

Mia Farrow as an expecting mother carrying the devil's spawn. But tragedy shattered Polanski's life again the following year when his heavily-pregnant wife, the model and actress Sharon Tate, and four friends were brutally slaughtered in the director's mansion by cult leader Charles Manson and his followers.



This file photo taken on March 01, 2014 shows French-Polish director Roman Polanski posing with his trophy during a photocall after being awarded with the Best Director award for his film 'La Venus a la Fourrure (Venus in Fur)' during the 39th edition of the Cesar awards ceremony in Paris on February 28, 2014.

Devastated, Polanski left for Europe, then returned to achieve arguably his greatest triumph in 1974 with "Chinatown"—an atmospheric film noir starring Jack Nicholson nominated for 11 Oscars, and still considered a Hollywood classic.

Running from the law

In 1977 Polanski was arrested after Gailey, now known as Samantha Geimer, charged that he forced her to have sex after drugging her. The initial felony counts were reduced to unlaw-

ful sexual intercourse charges as part of a guilty plea bargain that saw Polanski serve 42 days in detention while undergoing psychiatric evaluation. In 1978, convinced the judge was preparing to ignore the deal and hand him a heavy jail sentence, Polanski fled for France, beginning his new life as a fugi-

any other. Geimer herself called for the charges to be dropped, complaining that in dogging Polanski for so long, antagonists had made him her co-victim in a case she wanted to put behind her.

"The publicity was so traumatic and so horrible that his pun-



This file photo taken on March 28, 2012 shows French-Polish filmmaker Roman Polanski (front center) delivering a speech during a meeting at the Academie des Beaux-Arts (French Academy of Fine Arts), part of the Institut de France, on March 28, 2012 in Paris. — AFP

Although he avoided returning to the US—not even to accept the Oscar for "The Pianist"—Polanski jostled with Justice Department authorities for years after.

In 2009 he was arrested in Switzerland by local authorities acting on Washington's extradition request. Polanski spent 10 months under house arrest before Switzerland decided not to respect the US order, amid a din of international debate over whether he was a victim of vindictive US officials obsessed with decades-old allegations, or a criminal who should be tried like

ishment was secondary to just getting this whole thing to stop," Geimer told CNN in 2003. Despite that view, Washington filed a request with Poland in January to extradite Polanski while shooting a film there. A court in the city of Krakow ruled against the demand in 2015. Then yesterday, the Supreme Court rejected an appeal filed by the government. "We did not find a flagrant violation of the law," Judge Michal Laskowski said. — AFP



Actor Matt Damon gestures in front of Chinese fans as he arrives at a red carpet event for the movie 'The Great Wall' at a hotel in Beijing, yesterday. — AP

MATT DAMON DEFENDS ROLE IN 'GREAT WALL' AGAINST CHARGE OF 'WHITEWASHING'

Hollywood actor Matt Damon yesterday defended his starring role in upcoming Hollywood film "The Great Wall", saying that accusations of "whitewashing", or the use of Caucasian stars over actors of other ethnicities, were unfounded. "Zhang Yimou called me and asked me to be in his movie," Damon said in Beijing, referring to the film's director who joined him on a panel. Damon, also joined by co-star Andy Lau, said he would be "mortified" if he felt the accusations were merited. Critics decried the decision to cast Damon for the fantasy film set in ancient China.

Damon said the issue was "very important" but drew a distinction between the practice and his role in "The Great Wall". "When I think of 'whitewashing' I think Chuck Connors playing Geronimo, that's whitewashing and that's unacceptable," he said, referring to a Caucasian actor who played the Native American chief Geronimo in a 1962 Western. Zhang, the acclaimed director behind "Hero" and "House of Flying Daggers", said the accusations were "unfair"

to Damon. "Once you've seen the film you'll see it's not like that," he said.

"It's a group of people, a group of heroes, and as it's set to the backdrop of a Chinese story so there are lots of Chinese heroes." "The Great Wall", out in China in this month and in the United States in February, features Zhang's trademarks of martial arts and saturated filters, and is centered around the mysterious origins of The Great Wall of China and what the wall's original purpose was. Strict censorship laws have prevented many Hollywood films from being released in mainland China. To counter that, US studios are co-producing big budget movies with Chinese investors. Hong Kong actor Andy Lau, an Asian super-star, said it remained to be seen whether Zhang's "mission" to bring Chinese culture to the West through film would succeed. "It might not be that successful in foreign markets, and I don't know whether people in our Chinese market will appreciate this style, but I think this is a new direction," he said. — Reuters

Chan starring in Carnahan's 'Five Against a Bullet'

Jackie Chan has signed on to star in Joe Carnahan's action movie "Five Against a Bullet" as one of the bodyguards. Lorenzo di Bonaventura is producing the project through this Di Bonaventura Pictures for Sony along with Suretone Pictures, Jordan Schur through Mimran Schur Pictures and Chan. Carnahan came on to the project in 2014 to direct and re-write Alex Litvak's script, set in a small Mexican town under attack by the drug cartel. The story centers on five the world-weary bodyguards who are signed on to protect a Mexican politician after his father is murdered by a cartel, ahead of an election. Bruce Willis was attached several years ago to star in "Five Against a Bullet" but is no longer on the project. Carnahan is currently attached only as the writer.

Hong Kong-based Chan has been acting since the late 1960s and has credits on more than 150 films. Chan's upcoming movies include "Railroad Tigers," "Bleeding Steel" and "The Foreigner." In September, Well Go USA Entertainment acquired his martial-arts comedy "Railroad Tigers" for distribution in English-language territories including North America, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. The film is tentatively scheduled to open later this month in China. Carnahan's credits include "Narc," "Smokin' Aces," "The Grey" and "Stretch." Di Bonaventura is best known for the Transformers and G.I. Joe franchises. He was also a producer on "Deepwater Horizon" and New Line's upcoming shark tentpole "Meg." — Reuters



Jackie Chan



In this photograph, Ambassador of France Alexandre Ziegler, (left), creative director Sanya Dhir, (second left), Bollywood actress Vaani Kapoor (second right) and actor Ranveer Singh pose during a promotional event for the forthcoming movie 'Befikre' in New Delhi. — AFP

France bets on Bollywood to lure Indian tourists

As France contends with a drop in tourist numbers following a series of deadly attacks, the government is hoping that a new Bollywood romantic comedy can help it lure Indian visitors. From the golden beaches of the Cote D'Azur to the roof of the Paris opera house and the historic bridges of the Seine, the blockbuster movie "Befikre"—"Carefree" in English—is filled with picture postcard scenes of France. The makers of the blockbuster movie, which hits Indian screens on Friday, say it is the first Bollywood production to be shot entirely on the French mainland.

For French ambassador to India Alexandre Ziegler the new movie, which features Bollywood star Ranveer Singh and Vaani Kapoor, is worth "all the marketing campaigns in the world." "In a country like India, the impact of movies on the dreams people have of visiting an unknown place and on the desire to discover is absolutely huge," Ziegler told AFP. "It is without doubt the biggest influence over travel today for the Indian middle classes." Top tourist hotspots around the world have recently focused on Chinese visitors, but are increasingly setting their sights on neighboring India.

The country's burgeoning middle class is travelling abroad in growing numbers, with 50 million forecast to do so by 2020, up from just 20 million in 2014. Last year 524,000 Indians travelled to France, a figure dwarfed by the number of Chinese and Japanese visitors but which is growing rapidly. Sophie

Lacressonniere, marketing director of the promotional agency Atout France, says the Indian client base is also "resilient to security fears", a key factor in the wake of recent attacks in France.

Other European countries have already enjoyed the Bollywood effect—the number of Indians visiting Spain doubled in 2012 after the release of the hit road movie "You Won't Get This Life Again, parts of which were shot there. Switzerland meanwhile has long loomed large in the imaginations of Indian travellers. Its snow-capped peaks and quiet rural villages were immortalized in the cult films of the Bollywood director Yash Chopra, who died in 2012. All of which meant the French authorities pulled out all the stops when they were first contacted by the makers of "Befikre" last year.

As with most Indian movies, the schedule was tight and the crew spent around 50 days shooting in France in the spring. Lacressonniere says she is now working with French operators to try to organise tours that take in the places where the film was shot. A model of Ranveer Singh will make its debut at Paris's Grevin wax museum next year, and more Bollywood projects are said to be in the pipeline. Ambassador Ziegler believes that in the future France may even get as many Indian visitors as Chinese -- 1.7 million of whom travelled there in 2014. — AFP

Jessica Williams, Cate Blanchett star in Sundance premieres

Former "Daily Show" correspondent Jessica Williams flexes her dramatic chops, Cate Blanchett pays homage to great 20th century artists and "Silicon Valley" star Kumail Nanjiani tells a very personal story in some of the films premiering at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival. Festival programmers announced their selections for the documentary and narrative premiere sections Monday, which has launched films like "Boyhood," "Manchester by the Sea" and "O.J.: Made in America."

As with many years, the Sundance premiere slate can be a place for well-known comedians to take a stab at more dramatic and serious roles. In what's expected to be one of the breakout films and performances of the festival, comedian Jessica Williams stars in Jim Strouse's "The Incredible Jessica James," about a New York playwright recovering from a breakup and finding solace in a recent divorce. Nanjiani is another who might surprise audiences in "The Big Sick," which he co-wrote with his wife Emily V Gordon and is based on their own courtship. He stars alongside Zoe Kazan in the Michael Showalter-directed pic.

The Festival also has films featuring veteran stars in different kinds of roles. Shirley MacLaine stars in "The Last Word," about a retired businesswoman who strikes up an



In this June 15, 2016, file photo, Cate Blanchett arrives at the Women In Film 2016 Crystal And Lucy Awards at the Beverly Hilton in Beverly Hills, Calif.

unlikely friendship with a journalist (Amanda Seyfried) after writing her own obituary. Festival founder Robert Redford, too, is in Charlie McDowell's "The Discovery," about a world where the afterlife has been proven. Jason Segel and



In this May 21, 2016, file photo, Jessica Williams attends the 75th Annual Peabody Awards Ceremony in New York. — AP photos

Rooney Mara also star. Cate Blanchett re-enacts artistic statements of Dadaists, Lars von Trier and everyone in between in "Manifesto"; Michelle Pfeiffer and Kiefer Sutherland co-star in the drama "Where is Kyra"; and

"Avengers" Jeremy Renner and Elizabeth Olsen re-team in the FBI crime thriller "Wind River," the directorial debut of "Hell or High Water" writer Taylor Sheridan.

"Bessie" director Dee Rees is also poised to be a standout with "Mudbound," a racial drama set in the post-WWII South and starring Carey Mulligan, Jason Clarke, Jason Mitchell and Mary J. Blige. "It's quite topical to this time even though it's a period piece," said Festival Director John Cooper. Among the documentaries premiering are a look at the Oklahoma City bombing from Barak Goodman; Stanley Nelson's examination of black colleges and universities, "Tell Them We Are Rising"; and Barbara Kopple's account of a champion diver who announces he is transgender, "This Is Everything: Gigi Gorgeous." "The beauty of independent film is it's not a copycat world, unlike some of the Hollywood stuff where they follow trends," said Programming Director Trevor Groth. "Independent film has always been about originality and choice and something different." The 2017 Sundance Film Festival runs from Jan 19 through Jan 29. — AP