

# Wes Anderson, Norway teen massacre films lead Berlin fest race

Wes Anderson's "Isle of Dogs", an animated movie with political bite, and a controversial dramatization of Norway's 2011 massacre of teenagers by a neo-Nazi gunman led the award favorites yesterday at the Berlin film festival. The Berlinale, Europe's first major cinema showcase of the year, will hand out its coveted Golden and Silver Bear top prizes at a gala ceremony starting at 1800 GMT. A six-member jury headed by German director Tom Tykwer ("Run Lola Run", Netflix series "Babylon Berlin") will choose among 19 contenders from around the world.

Anderson's "Isle of Dogs" opened the festival on February 15, delighting audiences with an all-star cast voicing a pack of pooches expelled from a fictional Japanese city by a corrupt, fear-mongering mayor. Britain's Guardian called the movie "hugely enjoyable", showing an "indefatigably fertile imagination letting rip in inimitable style - and packing an eco-themed, antibigotry message as well". The picture led an international critics' poll at the Berlinale published by industry magazine Screen. Reviewers were also impressed with the gut-wrenching drama "U-July 22" about the mass murder of 69 mainly teenage victims

on the Norwegian island of Utoya by far-right militant Anders Behring Breivik.

The film, featuring in a chilling single 72-minute take, recounts the carnage in real time with fictionalized characters. It premiered just days after one of the worst school shootings in US history, killing 17 in Florida. The movie sparked a heated debate among viewers, victims' families and survivors about whether it was too soon - or even necessary at all - to reenact Norway's most traumatic tragedy since World War II on screen. However, US website Indiewire said the "almost unbearably harrowing recreation" in Erik Poppe's movie honored the victims while rallying societies to do more to protect their young. "Movies have the power to re-sensitize us to violence, restoring some terrible shape to the mass horrors we've negligently allowed to become abstractions," it said.

### 'Blind faith in authority'

Acclaimed Filipino director Lav Diaz, who scooped the top prize in Venice two years ago with "The Woman Who Left", won admirers for his new picture, "Season of the Devil". The four-hour-long folk musical, filmed in black and white, depicts the suffer-

ing unleashed on rural communities by a sadistic government-backed militia under Ferdinand Marcos in the late 1970s. Film industry bible Variety said the opus also served as a searing critique of the current regime by exposing its origins. "In its firm, direct rhetorical stand against martial law... (the film) damns the current leadership of President Rodrigo Duterte, under whose rule extrajudicial killings have soared in the country," it said.

Another subtly topical movie also resonated strongly, a biopic about Russian-Jewish writer Sergei Dovlatov grappling with Soviet-era state censorship. "This is not only a look back," said the daily Berliner Zeitung about Alexey German Jr's "Dovlatov". "The societal deformation and the blind faith in authority seen here also have much to say about today's Russia."

### #MeToo cast shadow

Audiences swooned over a rare Paraguayan film export, "The Heiresses" by Marcelo Martinessi, about a middle-aged lesbian couple forced to sell their belongings to pay off mounting debts.

"The relative scarcity of female-centric queer cinema from South America should

guarantee continuing interest from festival programmers," the Hollywood Reporter wrote. At a ceremony late Friday, the Teddy prize for best feature film with gay or lesbian content went to Brazilian "Hard Paint" by Marcio Reolon and Filipe Matzembacher about a young man making his living in sex chat rooms.

Germany's "Transit" with a mysterious tale of refugees in Nazi-occupied Europe transposed to the present day, and "Museum" from Mexico starring Gael Garcia Bernal about a daring heist of priceless relics, also earned praise.

The final day of the competition brought one last critical hit with "In the Aisles", starring Sandra Huelker of "Toni Erdmann" fame and Franz Rogowski as a couple of lost souls in east Germany set adrift after reunification.

The #MeToo movement also cast a long shadow over the Berlinale, with several topical films screened and a raft of industry initiatives launched to combat sexual exploitation. Last year, a tender Hungarian love story set in a slaughterhouse, "On Body and Soul", captured the Golden Bear. It is now nominated for best foreign language film at next month's Academy Awards. —AFP

### Recent winners of the Berlin filmfest's Golden Bear

The Golden Bear prize for best picture will be awarded Saturday at the 68th Berlin film festival to one of the 19 contenders from around the world. Here are the winners over the past decade of the Golden Bear at the event, one of the world's top cinema showcases and the first major European film festival of the year.



Brazilian director Jose Padilha attends a press conference for the film '7 Days in Entebbe' presented in competition during the 68th Berlinale film festival on February 19, 2018 in Berlin. — AFP

2008: "Tropa de Elite" (Elite Squad) by Jose Padilha (Brazil/Argentina)

2009: "La teta astustada" (The Milk of Sorrow) by Claudia Llosa (Spain/Peru)

2010: "Bal" (Honey) by Semih Kaplanoglu (Turkey/Germany)

2011: "Jodaeiye Nader Az Simin" (A Separation) by Asghar Farhadi (Iran)

2012: "Cesare deve morire" (Caesar Must Die) by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani (Italy)

2013: "Poziția Copilului" (Child's Pose) by Calin Peter Netzer (Romania)

2014: "Bai Ri Yan Huo" (Black Coal, Thin Ice), Diao Yinan (China)

2015: "Taxi", Jafar Panahi (Iran)

2016: "Fuocoammare" (Fire at Sea), Gianfranco Rosi, Italy/France

2017: "Testrost es lelekrol" (On Body and Soul), Ildiko Enyedi, Hungary. — AFP

## ED SHEERAN SEARCHES FOR NEW LINES IN MOVIE 'SONGWRITER'

British singer Ed Sheeran said on Friday that the hardest part of songwriting was coming up with lines that had never been written before as a new documentary detailing his creative process premiered at Berlin's international film festival. The movie "Songwriter" was directed by Sheeran's cousin, Murray Cummings, and follows the Grammy winner as he travels around the United States and England writing songs on his laptop, jamming in a garden and recording in the studio.

The intimate portrait of Sheeran, who was the most-streamed artist on music service Spotify globally in 2017, includes footage of him belting out songs while crossing the Atlantic on the Queen Mary 2, returning to high school to see his music teacher and talking to his father about his



British singer-songwriter Ed Sheeran poses during a photocall for the film "Songwriter" presented in the "Berlinale special" category during the 68th edition of the Berlinale film festival. — AFP

songs. "I think the most difficult thing to do with writing a song is finding a phrase that you haven't heard before because there's always a song that's going to be like: 'I love you baby like crazy. I miss you maybe,'" Sheeran told a news conference.

He said he had learned not to push himself if he was struggling to write and did not believe writer's block existed.

"What I do when I can't write a song is I just put the guitar down and go and do something else for about a couple of weeks and then come back and then I'll be able to write a song," the 27-year-old said. "So the way that my mind is now is, I will be able to write songs forever - they probably will start being about pretty mundane things because my life is getting more and more calm." Sheeran said he liked the documen-

tary because it showed a song being written from start to finish, rather than just an album being recorded.

"I like that Murray found a niche that hasn't really been done before. It's quite difficult to find something that hasn't been done in a music movie," Sheeran said. Sheeran, who said he planned to make a film next year in which he would play something other than himself, listed "Goodfellas", "Cool Runnings" and "Love Actually" as his favorite movies. Cummings told Reuters the documentary would give fans an insight into Sheeran off-stage. "When he's on his own he's kind of very like relaxed and chilled and stuff. So I think they're going to see that's what he's like because this film just kind of shows what I see every day," Cummings said. — Reuters

## Deeply indebted Lisa Marie Presley and manager in dueling lawsuits

Lisa Marie Presley, the only daughter of Elvis Presley, says she is facing financial ruin and has filed a \$100 million lawsuit accusing her former business manager of negligence and mismanaging her finances. Her ex-manager has filed his own lawsuit, accusing Presley, 50, of squandering her famous father's



Lisa Marie Presley

inheritance because of her lavish lifestyle. The lawsuit seeks \$800,000 in unpaid bills. The dueling lawsuits, filed earlier this week in Los Angeles Superior Court, follow the collapse in 2016 of Presley's fourth marriage and her announcement that she was \$16 million in debt.

Presley was just 9 years old when Elvis died in 1977, leaving her his sole heir. Her affairs have been managed by Barry Siegel since 1993, when she came into her inheritance through a trust. Her lawsuit

said Presley's "11-year odyssey to financial ruin" began in 2005 and alleged that as result of Siegel's actions, "Lisa has been damaged in an amount that has not yet been fully ascertained, but is believed to be in excess of \$100 million." The 2005 deal she was referring to involved income from Elvis' former home Graceland and his intellectual property rights. The lawsuit said that by 2016, the trust was left with \$14,000 in cash and over \$500,000 in credit card debt. Siegel's lawsuit said Lisa Marie has "twice squandered" her inheritance and she had been repeatedly told to curb "her spendthrift ways." Siegel's attorney, Leon Gladstone, said in a statement on Friday that the 2005 deal Presley was complaining about "cleared up over \$20 million in debts Lisa had incurred and netted her over \$40 million cash and a multi-million dollar income stream, most of which she managed to squander in the ensuing years."

"It's clear Lisa Marie is going through a difficult time in her life and looking to blame others instead of taking responsibility for her actions," Gladstone said. Presley launched her own career as a singer in 2003 and has released three albums to mixed success. She is better known for her two-year marriage to singer Michael Jackson and her 108-day marriage to actor Nicholas Cage. — Reuters



Maya Jama

## JAMA POSTS HEARTFELT TRIBUTE TO STORMZY

Maya Jama has paid tribute to her double BRIT Award winning boyfriend Stormzy, describing him as an artist who is "changing history". The 23-year-old TV presenter worked as a red carpet interviewer at the star-studded event at the O2 on Wednesday night and then joined her man on his table as he waited to find out he would be leaving with the statuette for British Male Solo Artist and British Album for 'Gang Signs and Prayer'. Maya has now taken to her Instagram page to tell Stormzy, 24, just how "proud" she is of him. Posting a picture of the grime rapper holding his two BRITs, she wrote: "Proud is an understatement! You put everything into the album and work harder and are more passionate about what you do than anyone I know, you are inspiring on so many levels and everyone around you is blessed to have you, you deserve everything that comes your way, you are changing history and it is such a pleasure to witness you grow into the most incredible human the actual best [sic]"

Maya and Stormzy went public with their relationship in 2016, before Stormzy's career took off, and she has been there supporting him ever since. Stormzy even said that he is ready to take their relationship to the next level and revealed that he is even ready to propose to Maya. He previously said: "I'm still so young but I want to propose, it's going to happen and I will do it right. She is so sick, she is the best." The songwriter has seen his debut LP go platinum in the wake of his BRITs wins and he wants to enjoy this special moment in his life and career with his family and friends. — Bang Showbiz

## Stormzy went on pre-BRITs diet for closing performance

Stormzy went on a strict diet ahead of his BRIT Awards 2018 performance. The 24-year-old rapper enjoyed an incredible night at the ceremony, leaving the O2 arena in London on Wednesday night with two of the evening's most prestigious prizes: British Male Solo Artist and Album of the Year for his acclaimed debut 'Gang Signs and Prayer'. Stormzy was given the honour of closing the show and at one point in his performance he stood on stage shirtless as water poured down on him and he admitted he worked hard to ensure he was in the best shape possible for his stunt.

Speaking on the red carpet before the event began, Stormzy said: "There's been a diet, specifically for today. I don't think I've quite pulled it off, but I got 70 per cent there. It's all about the lighting." His girlfriend Maya Jama, who was interviewing him for TV, confirmed his efforts to eat healthily, saying: "He has been dieting, he's been getting in shape for his performance." Stormzy performed a medley of two tracks from his BRIT-winning LP, 'Blinded By Your Grace' and 'Big For Your Boots' and in the middle of his set he broke into a freestyle which criticised UK Prime Minister Theresa May for her actions in the wake of the Grenfell Tower Fire tragedy which destroyed a London tower block, claiming many lives. He rapped: "Yo, Theresa May, where's the money for Grenfell? / what, you thought we just forgot about Grenfell? / you're criminals, and you got the cheek to call us savages / you

should do some jail time, you should pay some damages / you should burn your house down and see if you can manage this." Stormzy won both awards he was nominated for but admitted he most proud that his album was recognized because he put so much into the songs. — BangShowbiz



Stormzy

## All that jazz: Saudis attend country's first jazz festival

Men and women swayed to music at Saudi Arabia's first-ever jazz festival on Friday, the second of a three-day outdoor event that showcases the Kingdom's recent efforts of shedding its conservative image. Locals and foreigners flocked to the festival to watch bands from Riyadh, Beirut and New Orleans. The crowd sang along when Lebanon's Chady Nashif performed the Eagles' "Hotel California" - an unusual moment in the Islamic country after the religious police last year condemned concerts that feature singing as harmful and corrupting.

On Thursday, the General Entertainment Authority announced it will stage more than 5,000 shows, festivals and concerts in 2018, double the number of last year. The entertainment plans are largely motivated by economics, part of a reform program to diversify the economy away from oil and create jobs for young Saudis. They also mark a change in social Saudi life and the gradual relaxing of gender segregation, although restrictions persist. At the festival, the area in front of the stage was divided into two sections - one for men and one for women - but people mixed in family seating areas on

the side and in the back. "I am so so happy I got up from bed this morning and went to a jazz festival and performed in front of a crowd like me, my countrymen," said Saleh Zaid, a Saudi musician from the local band Min Riyadh. "It's a feeling I just cannot explain to you." While some showed up out of a love for jazz, many came to enjoy the chance to hear music at an outdoor event, with food trucks, a vintage car display and a relaxed atmosphere.

While reforms have taken place in the Kingdom, with a 35-year cinema ban lifted and women set to drive later this year, the majority of the country is conservative, which is reflected in government decisions. Earlier this month, authorities detained a man after a video of him dancing with a woman in the street went viral.

But on Friday, women in abayas, loose-fitting robes, moved with the music, unconcerned with the possible backlash. "This festival shows that the leadership here wants to let the people open up, to see more things, more cultures," said Salem al-Ahmed, who with his stylish young friends jumped at the opportunity to attend his city's first-of-a-kind festival. — Reuters

## Saara Aalto to support Steps on tour



Saara Aalto will support Steps on tour this summer. The 'X Factor' runner up - who has already worked with the likes of Adam Lambert, Sophie Ellis-Bextor and Matt Terry - has been asked to join the popular 90s band when they hit the road in May and June and she has teased that fans will get to hear some of her new music as well as experience some of her classic performances from the past.

Speaking to The Sun newspaper, she said: "Hitting the road with Steps is going to be so much fun. It's right after 'Eurovision' so I will be on cloud nine after performing to millions of people. It will be the first chance to see my new music and some classic performances on the road in the UK, so I'm very excited." Her gigs come just months after she decided to cut ties with Sony as she didn't think they were the "right team" for her and moved across to rival Warner - who she signed a global deal with - because they were keen to make her a "big theatrical artist." She said recently: "I was honored I was signed to Sony. But later I felt like they weren't the right team. When I met the people at Warner they were very excited about my style and making me into this big theatrical artist."

Despite her switch, the 30-year-old Finnish beauty is adamant there is no bad blood between her and Simon Cowell - who owns Sony - as she's going to be a judge on 'The X Factor' in Finland. She added: "He knows, I'm doing 'X Factor' Finland, so I'm still part of the Sony family." However, the brunette beauty's intense work schedule - on TV and in the studio - has meant that she and her long-term girlfriend Meri Sopenan - who got engaged last summer - have been forced to put their wedding plans on hold for the time being. She said recently: "We wanted to have the wedding next year. But it might be too late to book that now. We don't have time to plan it! I did see some photos online yesterday and sent them [to Meri] but that's sort of it." — Bang Showbiz