

Lifestyle

TUESDAY, MARCH 3, 2020



A carnival participant in full costume smokes a cigarette through a protective face mask while taking part in the Zambo carnival held in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli on March 1, 2020, marking the last period of excess on the eve of the Christian Greek Orthodox lent. The inspiration of the annual Zambo celebration is unclear, despite it being a tradition that stretches back over a century to when an emigrant to Brazil returned to his native Tripoli bringing the carnival with him. — AFP

'Immortal Piano' set for Israel auction



A rare piano that could fetch more than a million dollars at auction in Israel next week has a history as elaborate as the wood carvings adorning its frame. The Piano of Siena's 221-year journey began in Turin and has included stops in Paris, a second world war battlefield in North Africa, New York and Tel Aviv. Moshe Porat, an Israeli piano tuner who has researched the instrument, told AFP the light brown upright decorated with carvings of wingless cherubs, animals, flora and other instruments was a "visual masterpiece".

"Soon the next chapter will begin with a new owner," Porat said, referring to the sale scheduled for today at Winner's auction house in Jerusalem. Turin-based harpsichord maker Sebastian Marchisio started building the instrument in 1799, according to Winner's. Marchisio died before completing it but his descendants finished the initial build in 1825, giving it as a

wedding gift to Marchisio's granddaughter Rebecca, who lived in Siena.

The unusually ornate instrument underwent several modifications before appearing at the 1867 World's Fair in Paris before being gifted to Italy's then-prince and future King Umberto I. The exact circumstances that saw the piano fall into Nazi hands are not clear. But following the 1942 battle of El Alamein, as the British were looking to see what the defeated Germans had left behind, "the piano was discovered in a crate with a mine detector," said Porat. "They were astonished to see a piano inside buried in the desert's sand," he said.

The British army had no use for the piano, which had been covered in plaster. It ended up in the hands of an Israeli merchant, who placed it outside the Tel Aviv piano workshop of Avner Carmi, whose "life was changed" when he discovered the treasure, Porat said. Carmi removed the plaster, fixed the

piano's mechanism and eventually took it to the United States, where it was displayed in New York's Steinway Hall and used for recordings in the 1950s and 1960s.

Carmi, who co-wrote a book about the piano with his wife Hannah called "The Immortal Piano," sold it to a businessman in 1996. In an interview with AFP in his spacious mansion in the posh coastal town Caesarea, the current owner, who asked that his name be withheld, said parting with the piano was not easy. "The more I learnt about it and its history, the more attached I became to the piano," he said. But "everything has its time," he said. "One needs to know how to let go of beautiful things too." —AFP



Pictures taken in the Israeli coastal city of Caesarea shows the carvings adorning the Piano of Siena, a 19th century instrument that disappeared for decades and was found recently in an Israeli house. — AFP photos

Paris' Louvre museum shuttered for second day over staff coronavirus fears

The Louvre in Paris, the world's most visited museum, was closed for a second day running yesterday after staff again refused to work due to coronavirus fears, a union said. The Paris museum insisted that closure was not necessary in response to fears over the virus, which has spread to over 60 countries after first emerging in China late last year. Staff voted yesterday at a meeting, as they had on Sunday, to exercise their legal right not to work due a threat to their life or health, Christian Galani, a staff representative at the Louvre and member of the CGT union, told AFP.

A committee on working conditions at the Louvre will meet this afternoon to decide the further course of action. In a statement on its official Twitter account, the Louvre said: "The museum cannot open at the moment." It offered a refund for tickets bought in advance to visit the museum on Sunday or Monday. The Louvre's management said that health and safety were its top priority but insisted that the closure of the museum was not necessary. "The Louvre museum is fully mobilized. The management is following events in real time. The museum will take all measures needed to ensure the security of its staff and visitors," said the Louvre's general administrator Maxence Langlois-Berthelot.

But he added: "The authorities, culture ministry and health ministry have emphasized that the closure of the museum is not necessary," he added. Staff representatives said Sunday they were demanding stepped up protective measures, including the provision of hand sanitizing gel and glass barriers to separate cashiers from members of the public. In January, workers also forced a one-day closure in a strike over the government's pension reform plans. Earlier this week, the museum ended a special Leonardo da Vinci exhibition with an all-time visitors' record of nearly 1.1 million people. France, which has 130 confirmed cases and two deaths from COVID-19, has said it would ban gatherings of 5,000 people or more, closing schools and cancelling religious services in some of the hardest-hit zones. Sunday's half-marathon in Paris was cancelled. — AFP