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Choir singers perform at a concert for the victims of August's deadly Beirut blast in the gardens of the damaged 19th-century Sursock Palace in Achrafieh in the Lebanese capital. — AFP photos



Candles light-up pictures of victims of August's deadly Beirut blast during a commemoration concert.

Lebanon hosts concert for Beirut blast victims at ravaged palace

Lebanon on Sunday held a concert for the victims of last month's deadly Beirut blast in the grounds of a 19th-century palace wrecked by the massive explosion. The August 4 blast at the capital's port killed more than 190 people, wounded thousands and destroyed or damaged buildings across swathes of the city. "To be able to mourn, to take the time to really remember, it was important to have this moment of music," artistic director Jean-Louis Mainguy said. The event was held in the

gardens of the Sursock Palace, whose windows, red-tiled roof, ceilings and furniture were ravaged in the blast.

The concert, which did not have an audience on site, but was instead broadcast on television and streamed online, kicked off with a rendition of "Li Beirut", an ode to the city by famed Lebanese singer Fairouz. Portraits of those killed in the blast were displayed in part of the heritage building's grounds, with a candle burning under each. The victims' images and names were also broadcast on televi-

sion, accompanied by the Muslim call to prayer and Christian chants of "Amen" performed by an orchestra and some 250 choir singers from around the country. The concert included live performances as well as pre-recorded contributions, including from Lebanese singer-songwriter Tania Saleh.

In a recording, Lebanese-born French author Amin Maalouf offered "a prayer towards the sky so that Lebanon this time again can stand back up, rebuild its walls, and dress its wounds". Organizers asked

Beirut residents to place a lit candle on their balconies or in their windows in commemoration of those killed. The event was initially to be held at the port, but was moved after the air quality around the site was deemed too poor after fires there earlier this month. On Saturday night, Lebanese-born British singer-songwriter Mika headlined another concert streamed online to fundraise for relief aid after the blast. — AFP



Lebanese singer Fadia Tomb El-Hage performs with a choir at a concert for the victims of August's deadly Beirut blast.



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BRITISH-FRENCH ACTOR AND 'BOND' VILLAIN MICHAEL LONSDALE DIES

Michael Lonsdale, the British-French actor with a far-ranging film and theatre career but most widely recognized as the villain opposite James Bond in "Moonraker", died on Monday aged 89, his agent told AFP. Lonsdale, who was bilingual, chalked up more than 200 roles over a six-decade career, equally at ease in experimental arthouse productions as in big-budget crowd-pleasers. With his silky yet imposing voice and a distinctive goatee, Lonsdale often served up memorable performances that stuck with viewers even when only in minor roles. His agent, Olivier Loiseau, said he had died at his home in Paris, the city where he was born on May 24, 1931, to an English military officer and a French mother.

Arguably the highlight of his career came when he played a Trappist monk in "Of Gods and Men" in 2010. Based on true events, the film tells the story of



In this file photo taken on December 09, 2019 French actor and director Michael Lonsdale attending a tribute to French movie director Jean-Pierre Mocky at Les Deux Magots cafe in Paris. — AFP photos

seven French monks who were murdered after being kidnapped from their monastery in Algeria in 1996 during the country's civil war. For the role Lonsdale won his first and only Cesar

award-France's version of the Oscars- for best supporting actor in 2011. Yet for millions of people he was the sadistic industrialist Hugo Drax in the 1979 Bond film "Moonraker" starring Roger



This file photo taken on January 31, 2011 in Vincennes, east of Paris shows French actor Michael Lonsdale arrives to receive an award in the actor category for his performance in "Des hommes et des Dieux" movie during the Henri Langlois film award ceremony.

Moore, with a plan to destroy Earth's population with nerve gas while he escaped into space. — AFP

Lost at sea: Surfboard drifts 8,000 km from Hawaii to Philippines

When big wave surfer Doug Falter lost his board in a wipeout in Hawaii, his best hope was for a local fisherman to pick it up. He never imagined it would be found more than 8,000 kilometers (5,000 miles) away in the southern Philippines. More than two years after watching his pale blue custom-shaped board disappear in the huge swell of Waimea Bay, Falter was alerted via social media that it had been found near the remote island of Sarangani. And the new owner-local primary school teacher and aspiring surfer Giovanne Branzuela was happy to give it back to him. "When I saw the picture of it, I couldn't believe it, I thought it was a joke almost," Falter, 35, told AFP via Zoom. "I was certain that the board would never

be found again."

Branzuela, who bought the badly weathered surfboard from his neighbour a couple of months ago for 2,000 pesos (\$40), said fishermen had found it floating in the sea in August 2018 — six months after Falter lost sight of it. They thought it may have fallen off a passing yacht and sold it to Branzuela's neighbor for a few dollars. Despite months drifting across the Pacific Ocean, the name of the board's shaper, Hawaii-based Lyle Carlson, was still visible on the now-yellowish surface. Curious, Branzuela looked him up on Facebook and sent him a photo of the board. Carlson shared the picture on Instagram, tagging Falter. "It turned out it's a surfboard from Hawaii. I couldn't believe it myself,"

Branzuela, 38, told AFP via telephone. "It's been my dream to learn to surf and ride the big waves here," he added. "For now I can use his surfboard. I told him I will take good care of it."

Surfing videos

The pair have been chatting on Facebook and Falter plans to visit the small island to retrieve his board after coronavirus travel restrictions are lifted. "That board meant so much to me because of my accomplishments on it," said Falter, a commercial photographer who took up surfing about 15 years ago in Florida before moving to Hawaii. "It was my first big wave surfboard custom shaped for myself. I surfed it on the biggest days I've ever surfed in my life",

he said, including the 2016 Eddie Aikau big wave surf contest in Waimea Bay when the swell was 20 meters (60 feet) high.

Falter said he wants to give Branzuela a beginners surfboard in exchange for his and show him how to catch waves around Sarangani and neighboring Balut island. In the meantime, Falter shares short YouTube videos on surfing basics and is raising money to send supplies to Branzuela's school. "It's an excuse for me to go to the Philippines and visit and basically complete the story," said Falter. "I think it would be a great ending to... teach him how to surf." — AFP



This combination image of two handout photographs show, at left, a picture taken by Brent Bielman on October 18, 2015 of surfer Doug Falter posing with his surfboard in Hawaii, and at right, an undated picture taken in 2020 courtesy of Giovanne Branzuela showing Branzuela posing with the same surfboard on Sarangani island in the Philippines. — AFP



This undated handout photo shows Filipino teacher Giovanne Branzuela (left) posing with his surfboard, once owned by big wave surfer Doug Falter who lost it while surfing in Hawaii, along with his village mates on Sarangani island in the Philippines.

Appeal after five Bond guns stolen in London

Police launched a fresh appeal Monday for witnesses after five guns used as props in James Bond films were stolen during a burglary in a London suburb. One of the deactivated firearms—a yellow-handed Llama pistol featured in 2007 movie "Die Another Day"—was recovered in a field in the days after the March 23 theft from a house in Enfield. But the other four remain missing, including the Walther PPK used by Roger Moore in a "View to a Kill" as he pursues Grace Jones up the Eiffel Tower, before she jumps off with a parachute. London's Metropolitan Police issued new security camera footage showing a vehicle parked near the scene of the crime, apparently on reconnaissance, and urged any witnesses to come forward.



A handout photograph shows a yellow-handed Llama pistol, which featured in James Bond 007 movie "Die Another Day", which has been recovered by police following a burglary in London.

"In scenes reminiscent of a James Bond movie you can even see the flash of a camera from the occupant engaged in the surveillance," Detective Inspector Paul Ridley said in a statement. "I believe these individuals were involved in the crime, it was only a matter of minutes prior to the raid." He said the firearms were "very distinctive" and the owner was "devastated" at their loss, particularly as they were due to be showcased as part of a national exhibition. Another gun stolen was the Revolver Smith and Weston 44 Magnum with wood grips featured in "Live and Let Die"—the only one in the world where the whole gun is finished in chrome. Also stolen were the Beretta "Cheetah" and "Tomcat" pistols used by Halle Berry in "Die Another Day". — AFP