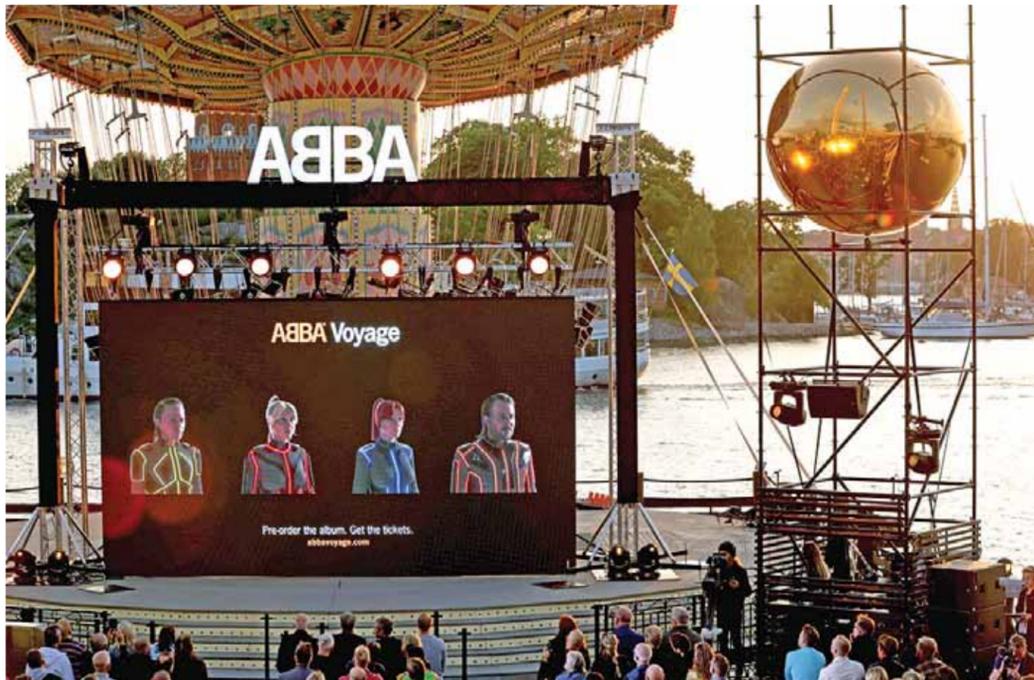


Lifestyle | Feature



Members of the Swedish group ABBA are seen on a display during their Voyage event at Grona Lund, Stockholm, during their presentation of the first new song after nearly four decades. — AFP

Money, money, money: ABBA return to UK singles chart

For the first time in 40 years, ABBA are heading back to Britain's top 10 singles chart after thrilling fans with plans for a new album and virtual concert. Two singles released by the Swedish group from their upcoming album "Voyage" sit at numbers six and seven, based on preliminary CD and vinyl sales and on streaming data, the Official Charts Company said on Sunday. "I Still Have Faith In You" ranks higher thanks to more physical sales so far, while "Don't Shut Me

Down" is Britain's most downloaded song this week. Both songs have been streamed over 500,000 times.

The full chart comes out next Friday, and the tracks will mark ABBA's first appearance in the UK top 10 for singles since "One Of Us" in December 1981, according to the company. ABBA have notched up over 400 million album sales over 50 years despite parting ways in 1982 and resolutely resisting all offers to work together again-until now. The band

announced their comeback on Thursday. The album is due to be released on November 5, and the London gig featuring their digital avatars is expected in May 2022. ABBA are not the only throwback in this week's UK top 10. Elton John features as a lead artist for the first time in almost 20 years with "Cold Heart (Pnau Remix)", a collaboration with Dua Lipa. — AFP

Girls Aloud star dies of cancer aged 39

Singer Sarah Harding, whose group Girls Aloud was one of Britain's most successful female bands, died on Sunday aged 39 just over a year after revealing she had breast cancer. Her mother Marie announced the news on Instagram, alongside a black-and-white photograph of the English singer smiling. "I know she won't want to be remembered for her fight against this terrible disease-she was a bright shining star and I hope that's how she can be remembered instead," the post said. Harding announced in August 2020 that she had been diagnosed with advanced breast cancer, and later said that the upcoming Christmas was likely to be her last.



In this file photo Sarah Harding from the group 'Girls Aloud' meets with fans as she arrives at the premiere of the film, 'Horrid Henry', in central London. — AFP

She released an autobiography in March 2021, explaining she had decided to reveal her illness to encourage others to seek medical advice if needed even during the COVID-19 pandemic. "As scary as it was to go public about my diagnosis, it was the right thing to do, and the amount of support I've received is incredible," Harding said. "I've been inundated with lovely messages from my fans. I'm grateful beyond words for that." Girls Aloud were formed in 2002 on the ITV reality show "Popstars: The Rivals", with Harding one of the five members alongside Nadine Coyle, Nicola Roberts, Cheryl Tweedy and Kimberley Walsh. — AFP

Jane Birkin to skip French film festival after 'minor' stroke

British actress and singer Jane Birkin has cancelled her appearance at the American Film Festival in Deauville, France, as she recovers from a stroke, her family said yesterday. The 74-year-old former partner and muse of French crooner Serge Gainsbourg "suffered a minor form of stroke a few days ago," the family said in a statement to AFP. "She is doing well," the statement added. Birkin was to discuss "Jane," a documentary about her by

her daughter Charlotte Gainsbourg that was presented in Cannes in July, at the Deauville festival that opened Friday.

Born on December 14, 1946 in London, Birkin has long been one of France's favorite English performers and remains indelibly associated with Gainsbourg and his moody melodies from the 1960s and 70s. "When I see the French listening to these old songs from 40 years ago, I realize they are part of their history, but they're also part of mine," she wrote in her 2018 memoir "Munkey Diaries." The book also revealed that Birkin fought a long battle with leukemia that first developed in the late 1990s. She had appeared in good health during recent public appearances, including at this year's Cannes film festival, or on stage during the Francofolies music festival in La Rochelle in July. — AFP



British actress and singer Jane Birkin

Afghanistan becoming 'country without artists,' exiled directors warn Venice

There was moving testimony from Afghan filmmakers at the Venice Film Festival this weekend, as two female directors warned against trusting the Taliban's promises. "In just two weeks, the most brilliant elements have left the country, at least those who were able," 38-year-old director Sahraa Karimi told reporters at the festival on Saturday. "Imagine a country without artists," added Karimi, who has won several international prizes for her work. She said the Afghan film industry had entirely stopped "in the space of a few hours" after last month's sudden takeover by the Taliban in the wake of the US military's withdrawal.

"The archives are now under the control of the Taliban. The work of directors vanished in a few hours. Some were able to leave with their computers, others with nothing at all." Her fellow Sahraa Mani, known for a documentary about victims of incest "A Thousand Girls Like Me", added: "This collapse meant we lost everything." Mani, with a timid but determined air, used the example of Kabul's only mixed music school. "The Taliban are now occupying the building. They have destroyed the students' instruments and the students are in hiding," she said on the verge of tears.

Mina, who became the first head of the

Afghan Film Organization in 2019, spoke of her personal escape on August 15. "I started my day normally, and several hours later I had to take the hardest decision in my life: to stay or leave the country. "We are actors, directors, producers, we are not politicians. We just want to realize our dreams." She described her fellow exiles as "ambassadors of Afghan identity", and warned against trusting the Taliban.

"Not only are they more cruel, they are wiser due to their use of technology." "We can only be saved by the international community. Help us! We need hope. Please be our voices and speak about our situation," added Mani. The pair were joined at Venice by members of the International Coalition for Filmmakers at Risk (ICFR), which was formed at last year's festival to help artists from countries in turmoil such as Myanmar. Today in Afghanistan, "the status of artist puts you in danger, you're at the top of the list," said Orwa Nyrabia, the Syrian head of the International Festival of Documentary Film in Amsterdam. "We all have an interest in saving them, it's in our interest." — AFP

'Shang-Chi,' with an Asian lead, sets a N America box office record

The North American box office got a big boost as Disney's new "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings," featuring Marvel's first leading Asian superhero, scored an unexpectedly strong \$71.4 million opening, industry observer Exhibitor Relations reported Sunday. That figure, for the Friday-through-Sunday period, was a Labor Day weekend record, the Hollywood Reporter said, and the film is expected to take in an additional \$12.1 million. "This is a fantastic opening on a traditionally quiet Labor Day weekend," said David A. Gross of Franchise Entertainment Research. "The three-day number is a record-breaker for the holiday, a positive finish to the summer... (marking) a sensational weekend for the industry."

"Shang-Chi" stars Canadian actor, stuntman and erstwhile Deloitte accountant Simu Liu as Marvel's newest superhero, a former assassin in the shadow of an evil father. It also features Awkwafina, Tony Leung and Michelle Yeoh. The film, which has drawn strong reviews for its choreography and Asian representation, enjoyed the second biggest opening of this pandemic year, behind Marvel's "Black Widow," which had an \$80 million opening.



In this file photo Canadian actor Simu Liu arrives for the world premiere of Marvel's "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings" at the El Capitan theatre in Hollywood, California. — AFP

By way of comparison, Universal's slasher film "Candyman" topped last weekend's box office with just \$22 million before slipping to second place this weekend with a three-day take of \$10.6 million (\$13 million for four days). It stars Yahya Abdul-Mateen II. In third place this weekend was "Free Guy" from 20th Century, at \$8.7 million (\$11.2 million for four days). The sci-fi comedy stars Ryan Reynolds as an everyman bank teller who finds himself inside a huge video game. Paramount animation "PAW Patrol: The Movie" came in fourth, at \$4 million (\$5.2 million for four days). It tells the story of a boy and the brave young pups who help him save their city from an impeachment-worthy mayor. And in fifth was Disney's family adventure film "Jungle Cruise," with a take of \$3.95 million (\$5.2 million for four days).

Rounding out the top five were: "Don't Breathe 2" (\$2.2 million for three days; \$2.7 million for four) "Respect" (\$1.2 million; \$1.5 million) "The Suicide Squad" (\$905,000; \$1.1 million) "Black Widow" (\$748,000; \$903,000) "The Night House" (\$552,000; \$700,000)—AFP



Swedish former Elite model Ebba Karlsson (left), French lawyer Anne-Claire Le Jeune (center) and ex-BBC journalist Lisa Brinkworth pose during a photo session in Paris. — AFP

'Haunted': Ex-models speak out against French fashion boss

After keeping silent for years, more than a dozen women hope their harrowing testimonies will spur prosecutors to pursue a pillar of the French fashion industry, accused of abusing young models with widely known impunity over dozens of years. "It's haunted me for 20 years," Lisa Brinkworth, a former BBC journalist, told AFP of her encounter with Gerald Marie, the former Europe chief of the Elite modeling agency, and its fallout. Brinkworth is one of several women who met with investigators from the French police's child protection brigade last week, with others set to do so in the coming days.

The inquiry was opened in September 2020 after complaints lodged over alleged rapes and sexual abuse between 1980 and 1998, including of minors. Although that would normally put them beyond France's statutes of limitations for prosecution, the women hope their accounts



(From left) US actor Craig Robinson, US actress Kate Hudson, US director Ana Lily Amirpour and British actor Ed Skrein arrive for the screening of the film "Mona Lisa and the Blood Moon" presented in competition during the 78th Venice Film Festival at Venice Lido. — AFP

Rom-com queen Kate Hudson takes 'brave' turn with dark fairytale at Venice

Kate Hudson showed a very different side of herself at the Venice Film Festival on Sunday, playing a hard-nosed stripper in dark fairytale "Mona Lisa and the Blood Moon". The actress said she was excited to take on the role, which is a world away from her best-known parts in sunny, crowd-pleasing romantic comedies like "How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days" and "Bride Wars". She said the moment of revelation came when she found herself "at 3am lying on the concrete in Bourbon Street," referring to the central New Orleans location of the film.

"That's when I felt we really do crazy things for the movies," Hudson told reporters in Venice. The film, which is competing for the Golden Lion at the festival, tells the story of a Korean girl with telepathic powers who escapes from a mental institution and forms a bond with Hudson's erotic dancer. It is directed by Iranian-American Ana Lily Amirpour, who has established herself as a visionary newcomer in the style of uber-hip filmmaker Jim Jarmusch-especially with her 2014 debut about Iranian vampires, "A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night".

"We got into this (film business) to take risks and do things that put yourself out there, and make choices that are brave," said Hudson. "When you get to work with filmmakers that do that, it's just an exciting experience. Amirpour said she had been "a fan of Kate forever". "I've seen every movie she's done," Amirpour said at the press conference ahead of the film's red carpet premiere. "She was full of a baby when I met her, and I said 'Get that baby out and then come and be a stripper.'" — AFP

will nonetheless lead to criminal charges, especially if they spur more recent victims to speak out. "I just think now that the time is right. He was untouchable for too, too long," said Brinkworth.

'Kept on going'

At the time of the alleged offences, Elite Models had launched the careers of household names including Naomi Campbell, Cindy Crawford and Marie's former wife, the supermodel Linda Evangelista. Brinkworth encountered Marie in 1998, when she was posing as a model for a report on the US financier Jeffrey Epstein, who was facing multiple charges of sex trafficking of minors before his 2019 suicide. She was also investigating Jean-Luc Brunel, a French modeling agent and associate of Epstein, who was charged with rape of minors over 15 as well as harassment last December.

"I was just astonished by the number of women who were making allegations against Gerald Marie," she said. During a dinner at a nightclub in Milan, she says, Marie repeated propositioned her and offered to pay for sex, before pinning her to a chair and assaulting her through her clothes. — AFP