

Japan awaits wedding news as royal sweetheart returns

Japanese romantics and royal-watchers held their breath for a wedding announcement as Princess Mako's boyfriend returned to Tokyo yesterday, following years of public controversy over their marriage. The lovebirds' reunion has sparked a media frenzy, with reporters chasing 29-year-old Kei Komuro in recent days through the streets of New York, where he moved for law school. Major TV networks carried live footage of his plane landing, with reports saying the long-delayed wedding could go ahead as soon as next month-more than three years after it was dramatically postponed.

Mako, also 29, is the eldest granddaughter of Emperor Akihito, although Japan's imperial succession rules mean she will lose her title after marriage to a commoner. The pair's union was delayed after a scandal erupted around reports that Komuro's family had run into financial difficulties, with his mother failing to repay a four-million-yen (\$36,000) loan from a former fiancée. Local media said it was his first return to Japan since he left for America in 2018 in a move seen as a bid to defuse negative attention following the tabloid reports. As he stepped off the plane at an



Kei Komuro (center), the boyfriend of Japan's Princess Mako, arrives at Narita airport in Chiba Prefecture from the United States. — AFP photos

airport near Tokyo yesterday, Komuro was met by camera flashes, video crews and a gaggle of eager reporters.

Dressed in a dark suit with his long hair tied back, he bowed deeply to the journalists and did not speak. He will quarantine for two weeks, as required by Japan's border restrictions. Public broadcaster NHK

said the Imperial Household Agency was planning a wedding next month and would announce it soon. Mako is also said to be planning to move to the United States after her wedding, drawing inevitable comparisons with another controversial royal couple: Britain's Prince Harry and Meghan Markle.



Japan's Princess Mako enters the Imperial Palace to attend the Korei-sai autumn ceremonies.

Earlier this month, Japanese media said the pair had decided to wed without some traditional ceremonies, rejecting a payout that usually goes to female royals marrying out of the family. The size of the payment is unknown, though reports put it at 137 million yen or more. Mako is sister to Prince Hisahito, 15, currently the

only eligible male heir to the Chrysanthemum Throne other than his father. The throne can pass only to male members of the family, and the children of female royals who marry commoners are not included. — AFP



American actor and singer Aaron Tveit accepts the award for Best Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role in a Musical for "Moulin Rouge!".



Adrienne Warren accepts the award for Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role in a Musical for "Tina - The Tina Turner Musical!".



Lois Smith accepts the award for Best Performance by an Actress in a Featured Role in a Play for "The Inheritance!".



(From left) Charlie Rosen, Matt Stine, Katie Kresek, and Justin Levine, winners of the award for Best Orchestrations for "Moulin Rouge! The Musical," pose in the press room during the 74th Annual Tony Awards. — AFP photos

Gere belongs in cinema, not as migrant witness

Plans for actor Richard Gere to testify against former Italian interior minister Matteo Salvini for abuse of migrants threaten to turn the case into a show trial, the far-right leader said on Sunday. Gere—a Hollywood star known as a campaigner on Tibet and other rights issues—will testify against him in the so-called Open Arms case, according to remarks Salvini made at a political meeting that were reported by the Ansa news agency. "If someone wants to turn the trial into a show and wants to see Richard Gere, let him go to the cinema, not to a court," the head of the populist and nationalist League party said according to Ansa.



Richard Gere

"I know him as an actor, but I don't understand what kind of lessons he wants to give me," he added, promising to ask for an autograph for his mother. Salvini is accused of kidnapping and abuse of power in August 2019

by preventing more than 100 migrants from disembarking from a rescue ship even as conditions on board deteriorated. Gere had boarded the Open Arms ship to support the migrants, a visit mocked by Salvini at the time.

Migrants were only allowed off the Open Arms vessel after six days, following an order by the prosecutor's office. Salvini has said he was protecting the country with his so-called "closed ports" policy, which aimed to stop people attempting the dangerous Mediterranean crossing to Italy. Italy's Senate voted last year to strip Salvini of his parliamentary immunity, paving the way for the trial. A related case in which Salvini was accused of blocking other migrants at sea on an Italian coastguard boat was thrown out by a court in Catania earlier this year.

Salvini's League takes a hard line on migrants, arguing that Italy bears an unfair burden as the first point of entry for migrants from northern Africa. When he blocked the ships, Salvini was part of a coalition government and held the positions of interior minister and deputy prime minister. He has argued that his migrant policy was not his alone, but agreed by the government, including by the former prime minister, Giuseppe Conte. The trial opened on 15 September in Palermo but was immediately adjourned to 23 October. Twenty-three civil parties, including nine migrants who were on board, are represented in the trial.

Salvini joined the League's coalition government with the anti-system 5 Star Movement (M5S) in 2018, but in August 2019 he provoked a government crisis hoping to reshuffle the deck in an early parliamentary vote. The manoeuvre backfired and the M5S formed a new government with the centre-left Democratic Party, which was replaced in early 2021 by a broad coalition government including the League and led by Mario Draghi. — AFP

'Moulin Rouge!' wins big as Tony Awards return to Broadway

Broadway on Sunday finally honored its best and brightest at the Tony Awards, more than a year late due to the coronavirus pandemic, with jukebox musical "Moulin Rouge!" sweeping the competition with 10 trophies. The event took on a new look this year: Most of the awards were handed out in a two-hour ceremony livestreamed before the main event—a concert celebrating the return of live theater in New York after an 18-month hiatus.

"Everyone here is vaxxed and tested, and everyone is wearing a mask—every Broadway theater is going to look like this for a while and that's ok," host Leslie Odom Jr said at the start of the concert gala at the Winter Garden Theatre. "Moulin Rouge! The Musical"—a stage adaptation of the popular 2001 Baz Luhrmann film of the same name about the famed Paris nightclub—won best musical, best actor and best actor in a featured role, as well as a host of technical honors. The cast served up a colorful, sassy medley of hits from the show at their home theater, as did the cast of "Jagged Little Pill," a musical inspired by

Alanis Morissette's seminal 1995 album of the same name.

Adrienne Warren, who won the Tony for best actress in a musical for her portrayal of Tina Turner in "Tina," gave a rousing performance with her castmates. The concert also featured classic duets from popular musicals "Rent," "Wicked," "Ragtime" and "Hamilton," featuring a stream of Broadway A-listers. The Tony for best play went to "The Inheritance," a reimagining of the E.M. Forster novel "Howards End" set in modern-day New York. The play won a total of four awards, including best director for Stephen Daldry. "A Soldier's Play," a look at racism in the US military, won the award for best revival of a play—and also scored an acting trophy for David Alan Grier, one of several first-time winners of the night. A revival of "A Christmas Carol" took home five prizes.

'Broadway is back'

This year's honors were a bit different—the number of shows eligible to compete for the 2019-2020 season was pared back considerably when the Great White

Way was forced to shut down as the pandemic took hold, especially in New York. Several shows have recently reopened, with more to come in the next few months. "Broadway is back, and it must and it will be better," actress Audra McDonald, a six-time winner and a nominee again this year, said as she hosted the early ceremony.

In a quirky result, Aaron Tveit took home the prize for best actor in a musical for "Moulin Rouge!"—he was the only nominee but needed to earn 60 percent of votes to win. He choked up as he accepted his award, his first Tony. "We are so privileged to get to do this, to be on Broadway," he said. Among the other first-time winners was Lois Smith, who won for best actress in a featured role in a play for "The Inheritance"—at age 90. She is the oldest performer ever to win a Tony for acting. — AFP

US singer-actress Audra McDonald attends the 74th Annual Tony Awards at the Winter Garden Theater in New York City.

