



(From left) Commander, Naval Air Forces/Commander, Naval Air Force, US Pacific Fleet Vice Admiral Kenneth Whitesell, Joseph Kosinski, Tom Cruise, guest, Christopher McQuarrie, Jerry Bruckheimer and band members attend the Global Premiere of "Top Gun: Maverick" in San Diego, California.— AFP photos



Tom Cruise attends the "Top Gun: Maverick" World Premiere in San Diego, California.

CANNES MARKS ITS 75TH YEAR IN NOSTALGIC FORM

From Maverick to Bowie to Elvis, the Cannes Film Festival launches its 75th-anniversary edition on Tuesday with a roster full of icons from the last century. The world's foremost film festival always tries to strike a balance between serious arthouse fare and popcorn-guzzling entertainment. It has scored some big crowd-pleasers for its diamond jubilee, with Tom Cruise coming to the French Riviera for the European launch of "Top Gun: Maverick", the sequel to his era-defining mega-hit from 1986.

Music legends will feature prominently, with flamboyant Australian director Baz Luhrmann screening his biopic "Elvis" along with new documentaries about David Bowie ("Moonage Daydream") and rock'n'roller Jerry Lee Lewis ("Trouble in Mind") by one-half of the Coen brothers,

Ethan Coen). While those are all playing outside the main competition, there are also iconic names in the race for the top prize Palme d'Or, not least Canadian horror maestro David Cronenberg.

The 79-year-old returns to his body-horror (dis)comfort zone with "Crimes of the Future", in which Kristen Stewart, Lea Seydoux and Viggo Mortensen turn gruesome surgical alterations into a sexualized performance art.

Five films from women

Meanwhile, US filmmaker James Gray gets nostalgic for his New York adolescence in "Armageddon Time", starring Anne Hathaway and Anthony Hopkins. And one of France's most feted directors, Claire Denis, is back with "The Stars at Noon", a thriller set in Central America

featuring Robert Pattinson.

Following some last-minute additions, a total of 21 films are competing for the Palme d'Or, including several from previous winners: the Dardenne brothers from Belgium, Sweden's Ruben Ostlund, Japan's Hirokazu Kore-eda and Romania's Cristian Mungiu. Only five are directed by women-though that still makes it a record year for female representation at Cannes-among them US indie darling Kelly Reichardt who is presenting "Showing Up" with Michelle Williams.

Julia Ducournau became only the second woman to win the Palme last year for her wild and gory "Titane". One of its stars, French actor Vincent Lindon, heads the jury this year with a team that includes Iran's two-time Oscar-winning

director Asghar Farhadi, Indian actress Deepika Padukone and British actress-director Rebecca Hall.

'Sadness, shame, pain'

The war in Ukraine will be an inevitable talking point. Its beleaguered filmmakers will get a special day at the industry marketplace that runs alongside the festival and Ukrainian director Sergei Loznitsa will present a timely film out of competition, "The Natural History of Destruction", about the bombing of German cities in World War II.

The main competition also includes Russia's Kirill Serebrennikov, who was unable to attend for his two previous nominations due to a politically-charged conviction for embezzlement back home. Now in exile, the director recently told

AFP of the "horror, sadness, shame, pain" he felt about the invasion of Ukraine, which he said was an act of "self-killing" by the Russian government.

Elsewhere, the festival will celebrate the return of "Mad Max" creator George Miller, who returns with "Three Thousand Years of Longing", a different beast for the Australian director, featuring Idris Elba as a djinn. And actor-director Ethan Hawke will add to the nostalgic feel of the fortnight with his new series, "The Last Movie Stars", about 1960s Hollywood golden couple Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward. This year's honorary Palme d'Or will be presented to US actor Forest Whitaker, best known for his Oscar-winning turn in "The Last King of Scotland". — AFP



'Real euphoria': Cannes luxury back after pandemic pause

After celebrations took a hit during the past two years of COVID-19, this year's Cannes Film Festival promises a return to its traditional wild festivities and displays of exorbitant wealth. "There is real euphoria... people want human contact," Romain Benichou of rental firm Century 21, told AFP. But buying your way into the best parties doesn't come cheap, with the fanciest villas going for up to 400,000 euros (\$421,000) for the fortnight of the event.

That is a small price to pay for the movie moguls and big brands keen to rub shoulders with the glamorous attendees of the world's favorite film shindig. That is especially true after the 2020 edition was cancelled due to COVID, and last year's was forced to go ahead under strict health protocols that meant the parties were far more muted.

Largely back to normal this year, the French Riviera town is hoping to enjoy the windfall. The 2019 edition was estimated to have generated 196 million euros (\$206 million) for Cannes as it welcomed 125,000 festival goers and 12,000 film professionals. That created 90,000 overnight stays and 2,200 jobs during the event, according to local authorities. They did not give the figures for 2021, but with American and Asian delegations largely absent and attendees subject to masks and daily COVID-19 tests, they are almost certain to have been far lower.

'Bursting' ports

Things are looking up, though. "We are not necessarily back to the budgets of five or six years ago, but there is a recovery," said Stephane Grosso, head of Nice-based events firm Terre d'Evenements, adding that he had just

come back from scouting a villa for an "important influencer". "It's changed a lot because last year was bleak," he added. One sour note for those facilitating the ultra-wealthy will be the lack of Russians.

The festival has explicitly said that Russians with ties to the government are not welcome at the festival or the industry marketplace that runs alongside it. A spokesman for the market said only "a few Russians without links to the government or public sector" would be present this year, compared with hundreds traditionally. "There were always one or two Russians organizing a big party on the beach," said Grosso. "But the return of the Americans will make up for it."

The promise of Americans also has ice cream makers Magnum, one of the festival's sponsors, in a chipper mood and they are hosting a private beach party on May 19 featuring singer Kylie Minogue to celebrate. "All the big producers are present this year in Cannes," gushed press officer Frederic Henry. "Not just Tom Cruise... but also Disney and Netflix." Liberty Yachts, a rental firm, said the two ports in Cannes were "full to bursting".

"The American clientele prefer to rent large private boats during the festival-it's more discreet than a large hotel," said owner Fabrice Viard. Not that there is any room in hotels. Such is the demand, said Viard, that even a former Miss France was unable to secure a room and was forced to book a place in St Tropez, an hour away. "There isn't a single hotel room or Airbnb left in Cannes," he said. — AFP

The 21 films in competition at Cannes

This year's Cannes Film Festival has 21 films in competition, including movies from four past winners of the top prize Palme d'Or, as well as several cult favorites. The festival starts on Tuesday, with the winners to be announced at the closing ceremony on May 28.

'Crimes of the Future'

The horrible genius behind "The Fly" and "Crash", David Cronenberg returns to his body horror roots with a tale starring Viggo Mortensen, Lea Seydoux and Kristen Stewart about people indulging in revolting surgical alterations for artistic pleasure. Buckets at the ready.

'Triangle of Sadness'

The king of cringe, Sweden's Ruben Ostlund took a scalpel to modern bourgeois niceties with his Palme d'Or-winning "The Square" in 2017. In a similar vein, his latest places two models and a cleaning lady on a desert island with a group of billionaires.

'Tchaikovsky's Wife'

The enfant terrible of Russian film and theatre, Kirill Serebrennikov fell foul of authorities with his caustic attacks on conservative values and was barred from travelling to Cannes for two previous nominations. Now in exile, he should be present for his historical tale about the famous composer.

'Armageddon Time'

James Gray has made big sweeping dramas, from space odyssey "Ad Astra" with Brad Pitt to Amazon adventure "The Lost City of Z". This one is based on his adolescence in 1980s New York and a school governed by Donald Trump's father, starring Anne Hathaway and Anthony Hopkins.

'Broker'

Japan's Hirokazu Kore-eda won the Palme d'Or in 2018 for his beautiful and touching family tale "Shoplifters". Featuring the star of "Parasite" Song Kang-ho, this one is about people dropping off infants in "baby boxes" to be looked after by other families.

'Decision to Leave'

Park Chan-wook had an international hit with nightmarish thriller "Old Boy" that won him the runner-up Grand Prix in 2004. This time, the South Korean brings his unique stylings to the familiar trope of a detective falling for the prime suspect in a murder investigation.

'Showing Up'

Kelly Reichardt has gradually built up a cult following with her mini-masterpieces about life on the edges of American society, including 2019 sleeper hit "First Cow".

She is reunited with her favourite muse Michelle Williams for a self-reflective look at a small-town artist trying to overcome distractions.

'Tori and Lokita'

Belgian brothers Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne make simple but devastating slice-of-life stories and are among a handful to have won the Palme d'Or twice. Their latest follows the friendship of two African teenagers exiled in Belgium.

'Stars at Noon'

One of France's most lauded auteurs, Claire Denis is having a busy year, having already won the directing prize at this year's Berlinale. Her Cannes entry is a political thriller set in Central America starring Robert Pattinson.

'Forever Young'

A tale of love, life and tragedy in a Paris theatre troupe against the outbreak of AIDS in the 1980s from French-Italian director Valeria Bruni Tedeschi.

'Nostalgia'

Italian director Mario Martone pays homage to his hometown of Naples.

'Brother and Sister'

Marion Cotillard stars in a drama about feuding siblings brought back together by the death of their parents, directed by Cannes veteran Arnaud Desplechin.

'Leila's Brothers'

Iran's Saeed Roustaei made a splash last year with his punchy cop thriller "Just 6.5". His new film examines the economic



The Palme d'Or trophy is pictured at Chopard Jewelry House in Meyrin near Geneva ahead of the 75th Cannes Film Festival. — AFP

'R.M.N.'

Romania's Cristian Mungiu won the Palme d'Or in 2007 for his bleak but vital abortion film, "4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days". This one explores ethnic and political tensions in a remote Transylvanian village.

'Close'

Belgium's Lukas Dhont won the Camera d'Or newcomer award in 2018 for his debut "Girl" about a trans ballet dancer. Here he tackles two teenagers separated by a tragedy.

'Boy from Heaven'

A daring film about power struggles in the leading centre of Sunni Islam, the Al-Azhar University in Egypt, from Swedish director Tarik Saleh.

'Holy Spider'

Having won the Un Certain Regard section in 2018 with "Border", Danish-Iranian Ali Abbasi heads for the Iranian religious city of Mashhad where a family man seeks to rid the streets of prostitutes.

struggles of a family in a country hit by international sanctions.

'EO'

Following a donkey from the circus to the slaughterhouse, this treatise against animal cruelty is from 84-year-old Polish director Jerzy Skolimowski, who was first in competition at Cannes in 1972.

'Pacification'

Spanish director Albert Serra heads for Tahiti to explore the diplomatic tensions around French nuclear testing.

'Mother and Son'

France's Leonor Serraille follows a Senegalese mother from the 1980s to the present day as she tries to establish a life in the Paris suburbs.

'The Eight Mountains'

A story of a lifelong friendship between boys and their rural home from Belgian husband-and-wife team Felix Van Groeningen and Charlotte Vandermeersch. — AFP