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'Bella Ciao', protest anthem the world loves to sing

From Ukraine to Chile, protesters worldwide have long rallied to the stirring Italian anthem "Bella Ciao", now being sung by demonstrators in solidarity with women in Iran. The song, which talks of dying for freedom, was sung in Italy during World War II and became a symbol of resistance against the fascists. It has since become a global rallying call including in support of Iranians protesting the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini after her arrest by the feared morality police. Early in the protests, a video went viral of a singer-her head uncovered in defiance of the compulsory hijab-performing a version in Persian.

Since then "Bella Ciao"-meaning "Goodbye Beautiful"-has been sung by supporters of the protests including Kurdish women in Turkey and expatriate Iranians in Paris. Although it has long been associated with Italian partisan fighters, there is no evidence it was actually ever sung by them, according to Carlo Pestelli, author of the book "Bella Ciao: The Song of Freedom". The song certainly became popular during the war, he said.

But its history goes back further to a 19th century musical tradition from northern Italy characterized by passionate themes, especially unfulfilled love. "It is difficult to say exactly what its origins are," Pestelli told AFP. Its ambiguous lyrics have allowed its adoption for many causes, he said. "It wasn't a communist song but a manifesto for freedom... it repre-



Protesters take part in a demonstration in support of Iranian women in Barcelona following the death of Kurdish Iranian woman Mahsa Amini in Iran.—AFP photos

sents apolitical values that everyone can understand and share," Pestelli added.

It is also "an easy song to sing", with a catchy chorus that even non-Italian speakers can pick up. The global reach of the song has been fuelled by popular interpretations, including by French star Yves Montand, and more recently, its inclusion in the Netflix hit "Money Heist". And it can be heard wherever there are crowds rallying, from the streets of New York to Hong Kong and Athens.

Cry against oppression

Ukrainians this year have sung it in defiance of the invading Russian forces, it has been the soundtrack to dancing demonstrators in Tripoli, a chant by English football fans and a call for action by climate activists from Sydney to Brussels. In Rome and Paris, it was sung with emotion from balconies during the 2020 coronavirus lockdown. For many, the history of the song is of less importance than its global impact.



A boy looks on during a candlelight vigil to pay tribute to those who have died protesting the death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old who was killed in police custody after allegedly violating the country's hijab rules, outside the White House in Washington, DC.

"This song is very famous in Iran and all over the world because it is a symbol against oppression," said Masah, a 29-year-old Iranian expatriate who attended a solidarity rally for the Mahsa Amini protests in Rome this week. While the lyrics are often translated, the chorus is normally sung in Italian, although it has been adapted. In Jerusalem last year, protesters against then prime minister Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu sang "Bibi Ciao" at the prospect of his departure.

In 2019, anti-regime protesters in Iraq rallied to their own version, "Blaya Chara", meaning "no way out" in Iraqi dialect. "When we sing it we feel more united with the whole world," added Masah's sister, Shiva, 33, at the Rome Iran protest. "Music is a form of expression that allows you to communicate even without knowing other languages."—AFP



Hong Kong's Tony Leung says acting gets more rewarding with age

Legendary Hong Kong film star Tony Leung said that after 40 years in the business, he's having more fun than ever playing diverse roles-though he's still hoping to be cast as a serial killer. Leung, who was awarded the "Asian Cineaste of the Year" prize at South Korea's Busan International Festival, is best known for his work with famed director Wong Kar-wai. Half a dozen of his films, including Wong's "In the Mood for Love" (2000) and "Happy Together" (1997), will be screened at the festival, which is Asia's largest and runs until October 14.

The 60-year-old actor, who made his debut on television in 1981, told reporters in Busan that he loved complex roles that made him think-and said he has had more chances to play them later in his career. "I think the first 20 years were about learning, and the second 20 years were about showing what you have learned," Leung said Thursday.

He said he was "at a point where I can enjoy being an actor without being stressed. It's a lot of fun as I can now play more diverse roles, and characters I can act as I get older." Some of Leung's best-known roles include a ruthless Chinese politician collaborating with the invading Japanese in Ang Lee's 2007 period drama "Lust, Caution", and an undercover policeman in Andrew Lau and Alan Mak's "Infernal Affairs" series.

He made his Hollywood debut in 2021 by playing a well-layered supervillain in "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings", a superhero film based on Marvel Comics. "Personally, I would like to try playing a serial killer," he said, adding he's also interested in returning to television, which is experiencing something of a golden age thanks to streaming money.

Busan Film Festival director and acclaimed film critic Huh Moon-young said Leung is incomparable with other actors of his generation. Among Leung's works are "many masterpieces that will long remain in the history of world cinema", Huh told reporters. Leung has long been a well-liked figure in South Korea-where Hong Kong cinema enjoyed peak popularity in the early 1990s-and first appeared at the Busan festival in 1997. Since then, South Korea has cemented its status as a global cultural powerhouse, thanks in part to the explosive success of the Oscar-winning film "Parasite" and the Netflix series "Squid Game".

Leung said the festival has come a long way since his first experience in Busan. "When I first visited the Busan festival, the opening ceremony was held after the organisers set up a small stage on a narrow road," Leung said, adding that he lost a shoe during the chaos. —AFP

Live and Let Buy: James Bond auction nets record haul for charity

A James Bond sale in London featuring the fictional superspy's Aston Martin cars, suits and wristwatch has raised £6.9 million (\$7.8 million) for charity-more than all previous 007 sales at the auction house combined. The two-part sale by Christie's and EON Productions' to mark 60 years since the premiere of first film "Dr. No" concluded on Wednesday-the official James Bond Day. The auction spanned all 25 films in the saga, featuring props, posters, memorabilia and experiences as well as the vehicles, watches, and costumes.

The live auction last month realized £6.1 million, with a replica of an Aston Martin DB5 used for the stunts in 2021 blockbuster "No Time to Die" selling for nearly £3 million. The online sale, which finished on Wednesday, added another £771,000 to the total, with top earners including a signed script of 2006's "Casino Royal" (£69,300), and a suit worn by outgoing Bond actor James Craig in 2012's "Skyfall" (£44,100).

A menu that Bond ordered caviar from after winning a card game against supervillain "Largo" at a Bahamas casino

in 1965's "Thunderball" sold for £60,480. Proceeds from the sale will go to various charities, including BAFTA, British Red Cross, Medecins Sans Frontieres, National Youth Theatre, Refugee Action and The Prince's Trust.

"We are delighted with the extraordinary success of the Christie's sale which benefits over 45 charities who do incredibly important work," said Michael G. Wilson and Barbara Broccoli, producers at EON Productions. Adrian Hume-Sayer, Christie's director and head of sale, said the result was "testament to the enduring

appeal of one of film's greatest and best loved icons".

"This is the fourth and by far the largest official James Bond charity auction on which Christie's has been privileged to collaborate with EON Productions, we are thrilled that the money raised will benefit so many." The money raised surpassed the combined total for all three previous official Christie's 007 sales, said the London auction house. — AFP



A Christie's employee adjusts a costume and cracked mask worn by actor Rami Malek in the film "No Time to Die".



A Christie's employee adjusts a costume used in the film "No Time to Die".



A Christie's employee adjusts a costume used in the film "No Time to Die".



A Christie's employee holds a pair of Omega watches worn by actor Daniel Craig in the film "No Time to Die".



An Aston Martin DB5 stunt car from the film "No Time to Die" is displayed during a photocall ahead of the "Sixty Years of James Bond" auction at Christie's auction house in London. — AFP photos

Bowie, Kardashians inspire UK baby name choices

Ziggies and Saints are on the rise in Britain, with David Bowie and the Kardashians among cultural figures inspiring UK baby names, the official statistics body said Wednesday. Since Bowie died in 2016, the number of boys being named Ziggy each year has risen threefold, while the number of girls being named Bowie has climbed by a similar proportion, according to the Office for National Statistics' annual report on UK baby names. The number of boys named

Saint has risen more than tenfold since the birth of Kim Kardashian's son in 2015, from five to 59.

Films and television also appear to be influencing parents' choices. The number of girls registered with the name Maeve, and boys with the name Otis-both characters from "Sex Education"-are still on the up after the second and third series of the

successful Netflix show aired in 2020 and 2021, the ONS data showed. Arthur had been rising in popularity before the gangster yarn "Peaky Blinders" first hit the screens in 2013 but jumped into 7th place in 2018 and 3rd in 2020.

From the big screen, the number of boys named Luca-eponymous star of last year's Pixar fantasy-jumped into the top

30 for the first time. Bowie is not the only musician who appears to be a source of inspiration, with UK singers George Ezra and Mabel also apparently driving choices. Ezra was just outside the top-50 most common names given to boys in 2021, having risen in popularity as the musician's star rose.

The number of baby girls named Mabel also peaked in 2021 at 885, following large increases in 2018 and 2020. "This may have been influenced by the singer and songwriter Mabel, whose breakthrough single 'Finders Keepers' reached the top 10 in 2017. Her album 'High Expectations' later reached number three in 2019," said the ONS. Overall, Noah and Olivia were the most popular UK names for boys and girls in 2021, according to the statistics agency. — AFP

