

'Ida' director plunges deeper into Poland's history

CANNES, France, May 14, (AP) — While the rest of the world, and the Academy Awards, were celebrating Pawel Pawlikowski's film "Ida" as one of the best films of 2013, the quiet, black-and-white film was swept up into political debate back in Poland, Pawlikowski's home country.

It still mystifies the filmmaker why Poland's ruling right-wing party, which took power in late 2015, painted his film as "anti-Polish." "Ida" was about a young orphaned woman in the 1960s on the cusp of taking her vows to be a nun when she discovers her Jewish heritage and that her parents were murdered by a Polish peasant during World War II.

"Why did they get so heated up about 'Ida'? It's a black-and-white film. They turned it into a big campaign issue. It did help them win the election, unfortunately," Pawlikowski said in an interview. "We'll see what they come up with now."

Pawlikowski premiered his much anticipated follow-up to "Ida," "Cold War," at the Cannes Film Festival, where it was immediately hailed as a companion piece to "Ida" and a likely contender for Cannes' top prize, the Palme d'Or. Like "Ida," it's gorgeously composed in black-and-white and a 4:3 "academy ratio." Also like "Ida," it depicts the ways an oppressive regime can warp and ruin the lives under it.

"Cold War" is the first Polish film in competition at Cannes in 37 years.

"I'm sure the minister of culture is really angry about this," said Pawlikowski. "They'd love to have a film in Cannes, but why this guy? 'Ida' was taken off the schedule on state TV because it was deemed to be 'anti-Polish.' I never meant it as anti-anything. But these people can't think in anything but ideological terms."

"Cold War," set during the 1940s and 1950s of Poland's communist rule, is about an ill-fated romance between Wiktor (Tomasz Kot), a

composer and pianist, and Zula (Joanna Kulig), a singer. They meet at a newly formed academy dedicated to preserving Polish folk music traditions. Once nationalistic pressures descend on the school, they flee the country.

The film is dedicated to Pawlikowski's parents and the characters were named for them. They lived, he said, in a kind of "permanent war." "There was a big love at first sight," the 60-year-old director said. "Then they quarreled and he betrayed her, she took revenge. Then they got together again and had me and then they quarreled again. He left the country, and then she married an English guy and left the country with me. Then they met again abroad, got together again and dumped the spouses. They started living together again and quarreled again."

Impact

"And of course exile has an impact on a relationship," he added. "Suddenly, you meet again and this person looks different in a different context."

Pawlikowski lived much of his adult life in London and Paris. After his first wife died from a sudden illness and their two children were grown, he returned to Warsaw. Following a career in international film (his "My Summer Love" was Emily Blunt's screen debut), going back to his native country transformed as a filmmaker.

"As soon as I touched down in Poland, I just felt on firm ground," Pawlikowski said. "Suddenly, there was a sense of conviction about all my choices. And also with age, I said, 'I want to just keep things simple.' I've complicated things again since because I got married. But at the time, I was living this monastic life, a bit like Ida."

He remains committed to working in Poland, though he notes with a

chuckle, he's content not making films, too — just teaching and "living a life." Pawlikowski has a third black-and-white film in mind and is also prepping a movie on the Russian writer and political dissident Eduard Limonov.

Andrzej Pawluszek, an adviser to Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, dismissed the director's assertion that he has been black-listed or otherwise punished for his films. He noted that "Cold War" was co-financed by the state-run Polish Film Institute, which also helped bankroll the film's promotion in Cannes.

"Poland has no blacklist of artists," Pawluszek said. "There is full creative freedom in Poland. Opponents of the current government, such as a great director Agnieszka Holland or an amazing actress Krystyna Janda, enjoy full creative freedom."

"I understand that director Pawlikowski does not like the government, but he should not attack us with false accusations," added Pawluszek.

But for Pawlikowski, "Cold War" reflects the current political climate in Poland. In February, President Andrzej Duda signed a bill making it illegal to blame Poland for Holocaust crimes committed by German Nazis. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the law "baseless" and warned against Holocaust denial.

"In Poland, because of the politics there — which are not pleasant — it suddenly made sense to be making films there," he said. "Not political films, but just artistic films, films that deal with the human soul and its paradoxes. Films that don't slant history or try to explain it. I think it's important to make films that are about essential things, with an existential dimension, and in the current climate, that in itself is a political thing."

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Brazilian model Izabel Goulart poses as she arrives on May 13, for the screening of the film 'Sink Or Swim (Le Grand Bain)' at the 71st edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. (AFP)

Cannes

2 directors, barred at home, still speak loudly at Cannes

'3 Faces' explores actress life in Iran

CANNES, France, May 14, (Agencies) — Despite being banned from making movies, Jafar Panahi delivered one at Cannes which tackles the hot topic of the moment: the problems women actors face in a male-dominated world.

"3 Faces" is the story of a famous actress, Bahnaz Jafari, playing herself, who receives a selfie-video in which a young woman begs her to help persuade her conservative family to let her take up a place she has won at acting school in Tehran.

At the end of the clip, she appears to commit suicide prompting Jafari and Panahi — also playing himself — to drive to the girl's village to find out what has happened, meeting locals who are both delighted and resentful to be visited by such illustrious guests.

Variety's Deborah Young called the film: "charming Iranian cinema at its purest. Defiantly modern in its liberating message about freedom of choice."

For a banned filmmaker, Panahi's output has been prodigious. His last one, "Taxi" won the Golden Bear in Berlin and "3 Faces" is in competition for the Palme d'Or at Cannes.

As in Berlin, the Iranian filmmaker was not at the festival due to a travel ban imposed in 2010 when he was arrested and accused of trying to make a documentary about the opposition to the re-election of hardline president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

"3 Faces" is Panahi's fourth since then, and the first for which he dared to go far from the confines of a car or apartment and shoot on location in rural northern Iran.

It was also the first for which the crew allowed their names on the credits — "proof of a change of mood in Iran," according to the film's press notes.

Commenting on the film's wry humor, Marziyeh Rezaei, who plays the aspiring actress, told Reuters: "It's dark humor because what's going on in front of the camera is a realistic difficult situation."

Twice the Cannes Film Festival has risen to given standing ovations to empty seats.

Chairs were left poignantly vacant for two absent

filmmakers whose films are in competition for the Palme d'Or at Cannes. Both Iran's Jafar Panahi and Russia's Kirill Serebrennikov were unable to attend their red carpet premieres because both are barred from traveling out of their home countries.

Their absence has put the Cannes spotlight on two cases of artist censorship, their defenders say.

Both were loudly applauded in absentia at their premieres. At the festival news conferences for each of their films, an empty seat was placed in the center of the panel, with a placard bearing the director's name in front. At the premiere of Serebrennikov's "Summer," his cast held up a large sign with the director's name on it.

The Russian filmmaker, who is also a prominent theater director, was arrested last August at the tail end of shooting "Summer," a raucous and romantic period drama about the rock scene of early 1980s St. Petersburg. Serebrennikov has been accused of embezzling \$2.3 million in Russian government funds through his theater company. He calls the charges "absurd," but has been confined to home arrest in his Moscow apartment, where he edited "Summer."

Participating

Panahi has been banned from traveling outside Iran since he was arrested for participating in "propaganda against the regime" in 2010 after supporting mass protests over the country's disputed 2009 election.

He was banned from making films but has found creative ways around the restrictions. He used an iPhone to make his 2011 movie, "This Is Not a Film," which also premiered in Cannes. His "Taxi" (2015), which won the Golden Bear award at the Berlin Film Festival, was shot entirely inside Tehran cabs.

"As usual, Jafar Panahi manages to find solutions to overcome the problems," Mastaneh Mohajer, the film editor for "Three Faces," said Sunday.

Tuesday's opening night movie at Cannes was also an Iranian film, from the Oscar-winning Asghar Farhadi. At his news conference Wednesday, Far-

hadi pleaded with the Iranian government to allow Panahi to attend Cannes. He said that being allowed to come to the festival while Panahi was prohibited "is something I had difficulty living with." In an interview later that day, Farhadi said Panahi texted him to thank him.

The appeals did not bring Panahi to Cannes, nor did the festival's entreaties to Vladimir Putin to allow Serebrennikov to attend his premiere. Ahead of the news conference for "Summer," a festival official announced that Cannes received a letter from Putin saying that the Russian president "would have been pleased to help, but in Russia justice is independent."

Producer Ilya Stewart defended Serebrennikov though he avoided speaking about Russian politics.

"We think it's a completely ridiculous accusation and it should not take place," said Stewart. "As to global politics, I think that's not our place to comment. I think it's a very complicated world at the moment, to be honest."

But Stewart spoke passionately about the missing Serebrennikov, saying: "We woke up to find that our director was not there anymore."

He said the director's situation is "a national discussion" in Russia.

"Summer" is based on the true story of famous Russian rocker Viktor Tsoi, and the film captures the fraught distance between the era's rock musicians and Soviet society. Musicians are frequently shown battling for lyric approval to perform at the city's sole rock venue.

"Anything Kirill does in his work, whether it's ballet, theater or any of his films, regardless of it being a period film or not, is about today," said Stewart.

Mohajer said that "Three Faces" is itself a message from Panahi.

"All three of us, the mere fact we're here shows how he empowers women. We feel very empowered to be here," the film editor said, referring to herself and the Panahi sisters. "That's the message he wants to send out to Iranians and the entire world."

nations. Over the past decade, Filipino cinema has struck a strong balance between critically acclaimed, award-winning films and audience-friendly movies that have broken box office records. Esteemed Filipino filmmakers include Lav Diaz and Brillante Mendoza: Diaz took home took home the Golden Lion at the 2016 Venice Film Festival for



Diaz



Mendoza

"The Woman Who Left," while Mendoza's film "Kinatay" won the director award at the 2009 Cannes Film Festival. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: Singapore's history as a filming location might not ever rival Tokyo or Hong Kong, but things are starting to look up: "Crazy Rich Asians," the upcoming Hol-

lywood adaptation of Kevin Kwan's locally set novel, has already been touted as the biggest film to ever spotlight the metropolis.

The Warner Bros. release starring Constance Wu and Michelle Yeoh joins other noteworthy international movies that have filmed in Singapore since its founding as a republic in 1965.

Possibly the biggest pre-

millennium title was "Saint Jack" (1979), Peter Bogdanovich's down-and-dirty adaptation of Paul Theroux's novel, which was partly based on the author's own experiences in Singapore. It was filmed illicitly and without the government's knowledge, long before the city cleaned up its prostitution scene, with salacious bits shot around Bugis Street. (RTRS)