

# FEATURES

MONDAY, MAY 18, 2009

PAGE 13

## Norwegian wunderkind triumphs at Eurovision

Puppy-faced Norwegian Alexander Rybak walked away with top honors and made history by garnering the most points in Eurovision's 53-year history



Above: Alexander Rybak of Norway sings during the grand finale of the 54th Eurovision Song Contest in Moscow, Russia, on Saturday. Below: Alex Swings Oscar Sings, left, of Germany performs with US burlesque artist Dita von Teese at the Eurovision Song Contest. PHOTOS: EPA

BY PETER LEONARD  
AP, MOSCOW

A boyish, fiddle-wielding Norwegian singer won the Eurovision Song Contest in Moscow on Saturday night, his bouncy ditty the highlight of the musical bonanza studded with pyrotechnic artistry and stunning electronic visuals on an epic scale.

Twenty-five performers from across Europe competed in Moscow in a musical bonanza that is one of the most watched annual television events in the world, despite being written off by some as European kitsch.

*Fairytales*, penned and performed by 23-year-old fiddler Alexander Rybak, blew away competition from Iceland's Yohanna, who finished second, and Azerbaijan's AySel and Arash, who was third, with a folksy melody to the accompaniment of an acrobatic dance routine and two blonde female support singers.

The elfin-faced Rybak, the winning graduate of a Norwegian television talent show in 2006, accrued the most points in Eurovision's 53-year history, outstripping Finland's Lordi in 2006.

"Thank you so much, Russia. You are just great, thank you," an emotional Rybak, said, speaking in Russian from the stage after the result was announced. "You are the greatest public in the world," he proclaimed, before launching into a repeat performance of the winning entry.

Russia was trying to capitalize on the prestigious event to showcase the nation's hospitality and growing role in modern society, but those efforts were undermined several hours earlier when riot police attacked gay pride rallies in the capital.

Gay rights activists sought to use the international competition to draw attention to what they call widespread discrimination against homosexuals in Russia. No injuries were reported. Police hauled away

around 40 demonstrators, including British-based activist Peter Tatchell and American activist Andy Thayer of Chicago, cofounder of the Gay Liberation Network.

"Today's arrests go against the principles of Eurovision, which are about peace, harmony, cooperation and unity between all the peoples in Europe," Tatchell said after being released by police.

Rybak criticized the protesters for choosing the same day as the contest, which has a large following in European gay communities, to vent their frustrations.

"I think it is a little bit sad that they chose to have (the protests) today ... They were spending all their energy on that parade, while the biggest gay parade in the world was tonight" at Eurovision, Rybak said. Minsk-born Rybak, who left Belarus when he was four years old with his musician parents, earned the maximum number of points from several of the participating former Soviet satellite countries.

His performance was greeted by

rapturous applause from the spectators thronging the Olimpiyskiy Sports Complex in central Moscow. The crowd heard a wide array of songs, ranging from traditional cheesy pop to tear-jerking ballads and ear-piercing operatic melodies.

Norway last won the competition in 1995 and as winner will host the show next year.

Russia was pinning its hopes on *Mama*, an overwrought ballad composed by a Georgian songwriter and partially performed in Ukrainian by a Ukrainian-born artist Anastasia Prikhodko, but she could only muster 11th place.

US burlesque artiste Dita von Teese, ex-wife of rocker Marilyn Manson, spiced up Germany's act by straddling a shiny lip-shaped black plastic sofa. In an apparent concession to the organizers' sensibilities, Von Teese toned down her initially planned performance, which involved her stripping off her top down to just sparkly nipple warmers.

The winner of the competition was picked by a combination of telephone voting and official juries from national broadcasters in the 42 nations that originally took part.

Britain had been billed as a favorite for the contest, but its entry, singer Jade, could only manage fifth place, despite composer Andrew Lloyd Webber writing her song.

Bookmakers had also favored Greece, which was pinning its hopes on a choreographed stage performance involving a giant flashing treadmill.

Israel made an appeal for peace and harmony with *There Must Be Another Way*, sung in Arabic, Hebrew and English by Arab-Jewish duo Noa and Mira.

In a Eurovision first, crew members of the International Space Station gave the command to start telephone voting in a video message from the orbiting science laboratory.

Moscow authorities splashed out US\$32.5 million on the show and a weeklong series of decadent parties.

### Eurovision Song Contest top 10 performances

Norway won the 54th Eurovision Song. Unlike last year, half the votes came from professional judges from individual countries, as well as regular votes awarded by the public.

Here are the votes

- |                      |                |
|----------------------|----------------|
| 1) Norway 378 points | 6) Estonia 129 |
| 2) Iceland 218       | 7) Greece 120  |
| 3) Azerbaijan 207    | 8) France 107  |
| 4) Turkey 177        | 9) Bosnia 106  |
| 5) Britain 173       | 10) Armenia 92 |

SOURCE: REUTERS

[ THE WEEKENDER ]



PHOTO COURTESY OF EIKO AND KOMA

## Khmer artists yet to hit their stride

Eiko and Koma's loyal fan base applauded 'Cambodian Stories: An Offering of Painting and Dance' despite the glacial pace of some of its sections

BY DIANE BAKER  
STAFF REPORTER

*Cambodian Stories: An Offering of Painting and Dance* opened with five young Cambodian men, clad in short sarongs, walking on stage and lining up with their backs to the audience in front of a brightly painted cloth. A young woman, Charian So, then painted a "T" on their backs in water in a cleansing ritual. When she was finished, all six turned to face the audience, and introduced themselves, some in English and some in Khmer. They then turned and pulled down the drop cloth, revealing a stage lined with paintings of Khmer women in traditional dress, and the performance began.

The young men (who ranged in age from 20 to 25) carried out a wooden scaffold, which they placed upon a piece of canvas laying the floor, brought out pots of paint and positioned themselves on the scaffold and began painting. The Japanese performance artists Eiko and Koma appeared, their faces painted a grayish white.

There were slow passages by one or more performers across the stage; there was an awkward, shy duet by the young lovers, Setheap (Peace) Sorn and So, who dies shortly thereafter. Two of the men pick up her body and placed it upon a small mound of dirt, while Eiko performs a drawn-out mourning ceremony.

But even as Eiko and Koma conducted an anguished duet, rebirth was underway, symbolized by the young painters splashing the large black backdrop with yellow, white and blue, clambering about a large black scaffold. By the end of the show, the backdrop shows a woman laying with her arms outstretched, floating on a sea of waves or clouds, under a moonlit, starry sky.

In many ways, the show reminded me of the Japanese Butoh troupe Sankai Juku, who were here last August: Eiko and Koma's white faces and arms, the awkward, contorted movements, the glacial pacing of some sequences. I couldn't help but wonder what the students at the Reyum Institute of Arts and Culture in Phnom Penh had thought back in 2004 when Eiko and Koma first showed up at the school to teach their Delicious Movement workshop.

That the Cambodians are painters, not dancers, was evident and despite being veterans of several performances, they still looked uncomfortable on stage. The only time they looked relaxed was when they were painting and when they sang *Take Me to Your Heart*, which turns out to have been a very popular song several years ago and one the Cambodians chose themselves.

The show had originally been created with nine Reyum students or graduates, but the other three could not make the Taipei performances (one just got married and started a family, another had to stay home to work, the third is on a scholarship to Japan) and I couldn't help but feel that the production must have been a bit more dynamic when there were eight painters moving about the stage instead of five.

That the show was about Cambodia's loss and about transformation, I got, but I'm afraid the more spiritual connections escaped me. The show wasn't my cup of tea, but there were many in the audience enthusiastically clapping and shouting "bravo" at the end. Eiko and Koma have a loyal fan base in Taipei, having visited here three times before. Far more interesting was the question-and-answer session after the show, with Eiko, Koma, So and Sorn explaining the meaning of some of the Cambodian songs and how the show was created. The affection Eiko and Koma have for their young performers was clearly evident.

## PLANET POP

Woody Allen's ex-girlfriend Mia Farrow and his wife Soon-Yi Previn will not be called to testify at a trial pitting the movie director against American Apparel, a lawyer for the clothing company said on Thursday. Allen sued the US clothing company for false advertising more than a year ago seeking more than US\$10 million after the American film director's image appeared on billboards in New York and Los Angeles. Allen says his image

was damaged and used for profit without his consent.

Orhan Pamuk, Turkey's Nobel Prize-winning author, said he may face new compensation claims for remarks he made about the World War I-era killing of Armenians, despite an earlier acquittal in a criminal trial, the Anatolian news agency said on Saturday. Turkey's Court of Appeals this week overturned a lower court decision that had dismissed the claims of personal damages against Pamuk,

56, paving the way for a new case.

Actor Charles "Bud" Tingwell, who starred in more than 100 films and television programs in his native Australia and in Britain, has died aged 86, his family said on Friday. Tingwell, whose career spans some 60 years, died in a Melbourne hospital with his daughter Virginia and son Christopher at his bedside. A statement on his Web site said he had been diagnosed with prostate cancer and took ill two weeks ago.

A dying Farrah Fawcett is caught in the middle of a legal battle between her longtime companion, Ryan O'Neal, and a producer who has worked with the *Charlie's Angels* star during her fight with cancer. The dispute centers on the TV documentary *Farrah's Story*, which aired on NBC on Friday. Fawcett collaborated with producer Craig

Director Lou Ye, far left, poses with cast members Zhuo Tan, center, and Hao Qin as they arrive for the screening of the film *Spring Fever* at the 62nd Cannes Film Festival on Thursday. PHOTO: REUTERS



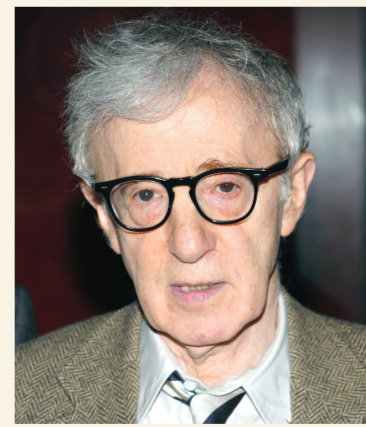
Neivus on the video diary that makes clear she is nearing the end of her life.

Emotional Korean tale *Mother* of a woman's relentless fight to save her mentally challenged boy won a standing ovation for cult *The Host* director Bong Joon-ho at the Cannes festival on Saturday.

Starring veteran actress Kim Hye-ja as a mother convinced of her son's innocence in a murder case, the movie brought the audience to its feet after premiering as one of the films running for the Un Certain Regard prize for fresh upcoming talent.

"A mother can be a noble figure or a savage beast," the director said. In the audience were fellow South Koreans at Cannes, director Park Chan-wook, whose movie *Thirst* is competing for the coveted Palme d'Or and writer-director and former minister Lee Chang-dong, who is a member of this year's Palme jury.

Crowds hoping to glimpse the stars on the Cannes festival's red carpet got an eye-popping surprise on Saturday as a team



Woody Allen's wife and ex-girlfriend will not be called to the witness stand. PHOTO: AP

of nude Belgian cyclists paraded down the Riviera seafloor.

Director Felix van Groeningen and four of his actors straddled bicycles and careened down the Croisette and back under warm spring sunshine, in a remake of a scene from *La Merlitude des Choses* (The Misfortunates).

The comedy, which tells the story of a family of drunkard brothers, seen through a teenagers' eyes, premiered on Saturday at the Directors' Fortnight, one of two high-profile sidebars to the main

Cannes film festival.

For China's Lou Ye (娄烨), the journey to the red carpet on the Riviera is fraught with risk.

Lou is at the festival with a movie made undercover after he was barred from working by Chinese authorities.

Lou tackles subjects that make officials at home uneasy — gay relationships in *Spring Fever* (春风沉醉的夜晚).

Lou, 44, was banned from filmmaking in China for five years after he brought his last film *Summer Palace* (颐和园) — about the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests — to Cannes in 2006 without permission. He shot *Spring Fever*, a moody and sexually explicit drama that tracks the romantic entanglements of five characters over the course of a torrid spring season, with a small camera and without authorization in the city of Nanjing.

"I was worried I might be stopped from working — worried I might get a call from the Chinese Film Bureau," he said on Friday. — AGENCIES