

Samuel Maoz comes top at Venice

Jurors unanimously picked director's claustrophobic tale of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon

BY SHERI JENNINGS
AP, VENICE, ITALY

Lebanon, an Israeli film that recounts Israel's 1982 invasion of the Middle East country through the eyes of four soldiers in a tank, won the top prize at the Venice Film Festival on Saturday.

The festival jury announced the Golden Lion and other prizes on the last day of the 11-day screening of films from around the world.

An Iranian film about women and repression took the second prize, the Silver Lion.

Lebanon, directed by Samuel Maoz, tells the story of Israeli paratroopers searching a hostile town. The conflict is seen through the binocular-aided eyes of those inside a tank, with their cramped quarters lending an anxious sense of claustrophobia to their viewpoint.

"I dedicate this work to people all over the world that come back from the war safe and sound," the director told the audience at the award ceremony. "They work, get married, have children," but the memories get "stuck in their souls."

Maoz was a young man when he served in the Israeli military during the invasion, which led to a long occupation of southern Lebanon.

Variety has described the film, one of 25 which competed for the Golden Lion, as the "boldest and best of the recent mini-wave" of Israeli movies. The awards jury was headed by Ang Lee (李安), himself a Golden Lion-winning director, who marveled that if *Lebanon* was Maoz's first film what might he do next.

He said the jurors were both quick and unanimous in choosing *Lebanon* and were "happy not to be inside that tank, which could have been any tank in any war."

Maoz told Israeli Channel 1 TV in a phone interview immediately after winning that he hoped the film "helps people understand our country better, understand our society better, and the complexity of our society better." The jury seemed to wade straight into conflicted parts of the world.

Iranian filmmaker and photographer Shirin Neshat snared the Silver Lion for best director for her feature debut with *Zanan Bedoone Mardan* (Women Without Men).

The film depicts four women from all classes of society in 1953 Iran, on the eve of an American-aided uprising that deposed an elected government that had nationalized the oil industry, and leading to the return of the shah.

But Neshat said the film aimed at providing encouragement to democracy-loving people in her country a half century after the events in the film.

The movie is about "the courage of the women and the people of Iran to take their lives into their own hands," she said after winning the Silver Lion.

"I knew when I was making the film, I was taking a risk. I knew nothing about cinema." But she added, "I took a risk so the fundamental message is about courage. There is a great value in that struggle and we must fight to evolve as a society and as women."



Director Samuel Maoz kisses the Golden Lion Best Film Award he won for *Lebanon* at the 66th International Exhibition of Cinema Art in Venice, Italy, on Saturday. PHOTO: AP



Above: Iranian director Shirin Neshat kisses the Silver Lion she received for *Zanan Bedoone Mardan* (Women Without Men).

Right: Ang Lee, left, served as president of the jury for the 66th International Exhibition of Cinema Art in Venice.

The Italian news agency Apcom quoted her as adding: "I hope that the people are given what they need — peace and democracy."

A comedy, *Soul Kitchen*, by German-Turkish director Fatih Akin, won the Special Jury Prize. The film represented a departure from the more serious tones set in Akin's 2004 Berlin Golden Bear winner *Head On* and 2007's *The Edge of Heaven*, which won the screenplay award



Above: Filipino director Pepe Diokno holds the trophy he won for his film, *Engkwentro*. PHOTO: EPA



at the Cannes film festival.

Colin Firth took best actor award for his role in Tom Ford's *A Single Man* as a college professor grappling with solitude after his longtime partner dies. Fashion designer Tom Ford made his director's debut with the movie.

Ksenia Rappoport, starring in the Italian film *La Doppia Ora*, won best actress honors.

Winners at the 2009 Venice film festival

Israeli war movie *Lebanon* won the Venice film festival's top honor, the Golden Lion, on Saturday. Following are the winners of the main categories. The festival ran from Sept. 2 to Saturday.

GOLDEN LION FOR BEST FILM

► *Lebanon* by Israeli director Samuel Maoz

SILVER LION FOR BEST DIRECTOR

► Iranian video artist Shirin Neshat for *Women Without Men*

SPECIAL JURY PRIZE

► *Soul Kitchen*, directed by German-born Fatih Akin

BEST ACTOR

► Britain's Colin Firth for Tom Ford's *A Single Man*

BEST ACTRESS

► Russian Ksenia Rappoport for *La Doppia Ora*

BEST SCREENPLAY

► US director Todd Solondz for *Life During Wartime*

BEST DEBUT FILM

► Filipino director Pepe Diokno for *Engkwentro* (Clash)

BEST SET DESIGN

► Sylvie Olive for Jaco van Dormael's *Mr Nobody*

BEST EMERGING PERFORMER

► Italy's Jasmine Trinca for *Il Grande Sogno*

SOURCE: AP

LITERATURE

Chinese exile decries censorship

Organizers of the world's largest book banned poet Bei Ling from its symposium

BY ANDREAS LANDWEHR
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To exiled Chinese poet and essayist Bei Ling (貝嶺), censorship and self-censorship are like a fatal disease. They destroy an author's feelings, critical faculties and creative power, he said.

The remark came in the wake of a decision by organizers of a symposium titled *China and the World*, which took place on Saturday and yesterday in Frankfurt, to meet Chinese participants' demands and not invite him and Dai Qing (戴晴), a journalist critical of the China's government.

The snub is "disgraceful" and tantamount to censorship, Bei said.

He traveled to Frankfurt anyway. Precisely censorship — the insidious and in part unconscious way it spreads — was to be his subject at the symposium, which aims to promote better understanding of China and its writers ahead of the Frankfurt Book Fair from Oct. 14 to Oct. 18.

Bei had plenty to say in Frankfurt about the lack of freedom of expression in China, and the official Chinese guests want to prevent him from doing so.

"There still isn't a single non-government television station, radio station, newspaper or publishing house that is completely independent of the state," read a statement he prepared for the symposium.

"During the past 20 years in China, a very subtle and extensive system of checks at various levels has been developed," Bei wrote. "The responsible departments in the publishing houses scrutinize works once, twice, three times — sometimes as many as five or six times."

After that, municipal and provincial press offices have to approve publication. If an author's book fails just one examination, it cannot be printed. Publishing houses bringing out books that are "politically incorrect," "banned" or "a threat to state security" are punished or even shut down.

"To get a book published, authors have to choose their words carefully and censor their topics themselves," noted Bei, who was arrested in 2000 for "publishing illegally," released with the help of the US and expelled from China.

"Self-censorship by Chinese authors, journalists and editors kills the innocence of their souls and harms their creativity," Bei said, adding that he too had had a



Chinese author Bei Ling speaks to journalists prior to the symposium *China and the World* in Frankfurt, Germany, on Saturday. PHOTO: EPA

pair of scissors in his mind when he worked in China.

"Every author in China knows exactly what he's permitted to write and what he's not permitted to write," he said, including those authors whose books will be displayed at the Frankfurt Book Fair, the world's largest. China is the guest of honor this year.

"Self-censorship is the prerequisite for writers' survival and success, particularly novelists," Bei remarked. Authors, journalists and editors who go along with the system are "consciously or unconsciously being accomplices" to the state supervision, he said.

Bei knows from personal experience that an author, once blacklisted, can never publish again in China. Today he lives in Boston and publishes *Tendency* (傾向), a Chinese exile literary journal, in Taiwan.

Taiwan and the People's Republic of China will practically have dueling stands at the book fair. Taiwan's stand will be carefully separated from China's despite Chinese leaders' insistence that the country is a part of China.

The Taiwanese section of the fair will display books not published in China. There will be hundreds of them by people including Gao Xingjian (高行健), the only writer in Chinese to win the Nobel Prize in Literature (2000) and now a French citizen. And Wang Lixiong (王力雄), who with his wife, Woesser, a Tibetan writer critical of the Chinese government, lives in Beijing under the watchful eye of the state security apparatus.

TOP FIVE MANDARIN ALBUMS

SEPT. 4 TO SEPT. 10



1 Compilation album *Faith Map* with **25.23 percent** of sales

2 Color with *Color First All Original Album* (COLOR首張全創作專輯) with **6.69%**

3 Jam Hsiao (蕭敬騰) and *Princess* (王妃) with **5.6%**

4 Cosmos People (宇宙人) and self-titled album with **5.58%**

5 Khalil Fang (方大同) and *Timeless* (可恥戀刻) with **5.56%**

ALBUM CHART COMPILED FROM G-MUSIC (WWW.G-MUSIC.COM.TW), BASED ON RETAIL SALES

PLANET POP

Elton John wants to adopt a 14-month-old boy from the Ukraine, saying Saturday that the toddler has "stolen my heart" after meeting him at an orphanage.

The British singer-songwriter, visiting the Ukraine with his AIDS charity foundation, performed for children at the orphanage, some of whose parents had died of the disease.

Asked at a press conference later with his partner David Furnish, 42, whether they had ever considered adopting, John said he wanted to adopt 14-month-old Lev.

"David and I have always talked about adoption. David always wanted to adopt a child and I always said 'no' because I am 62 and I think because of the traveling I do and the life I have, maybe it wouldn't be fair for the child."

"But having seen Lev today, I would love to adopt him," he said on Sky News.

"I don't know how we do that, but he has stolen my heart. And he has stolen David's heart and it would be wonderful if we can have a home. 'I've changed my mind today.'"

John said the recent death of his long-term keyboardist, **Guy Babylon**, had also helped change his mind.

"It broke my heart because he was such a genius and so young and has two wonderful children," he said.

"What better opportunity to replace someone I lost than to replace him with someone I can give a future to."

Ukraine has one of the fastest rising HIV rates in Europe.

Two years ago the iconic singer gave a free concert in the main square in Kiev attended by tens of thousands of people to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS.

John has sold more than 250 million records worldwide, with 29 consecutive Top 40 Hits and 35 gold and 25 platinum albums.

Pierre Cossette, a celebrated producer known as the "father" of the Grammy awards ceremony, has died aged 85 in Montreal, according to the hospital where he was being treated.

He passed away on Friday night after suffering from heart failure, a spokeswoman for Barrie Memorial hospital, Jacqueline Bourboin, said.

"It is with a heavy heart that we say goodbye to our dear friend and the father of the Grammy awards," said **Neil Portnow**, the president of the Recording Academy, in a statement.

Cossette, who retired in 2005,



Pop singer Elton John kisses a baby during a news conference at a hospital for HIV-positive children in the town of Makeyevka outside Donetsk, Ukraine. PHOTO: REUTERS

produced numerous shows on Broadway and for US television.

Michael Jackson was buried with one of his iconic white gloves, sunglasses and dressed with pearl beads and a large gold belt, his sister, **La Toya Jackson**, said in a television interview aired on Friday. "He was dressed in all white pearl beads going across, draped across [and] a beautiful big gold belt ... like a belt that you win being a boxer," La Toya told journalist **Barbara Walters** in a 20/20 interview that aired on ABC on Friday night.

Meanwhile, **Janet Jackson's** event-opening tribute to her late brother garnered the most publicity ahead of last night's MTV Video Music Awards. But a slew of more contemporary artists aimed to make just as big a splash.

Much of the buzz surrounded the performance of **Lady Gaga**, which MTV personnel described as historic. The dance diva and singer of hits such as *Just Dance* and *Poker Face* rehearsed in secrecy, unlike many of the other performers lined up for the annual bash, including **Beyonce**, **Jay-Z**, Green Day, **Taylor Swift**, Muse and **Pink**.

Lady Gaga and **Beyonce** led the nominations with nine nods each,

while **Britney Spears** hoped to cap her comeback trail by turning some of her seven nominations into wins. **Kanye West**, **Eminem** and Coldplay garnered four nominations each, ahead of Green Day with three and Jay-Z with two.

Actor **George Clooney** pledged on Friday to help his friend and fellow thespian **Matt Damon** shape up to reclaim the title of "sexiest man alive."

"Matt is very competitive with both **Brad [Pitt]** and myself, and Brad and I are two-time 'sexiest men alive,' and Matt's only won it that one time, and I kinda consider that a fluke," Clooney said.

"Having seen him recently, he's got a lot of work to do if he wants to get back up there," he said. "But I'm going to work with him and he's going to run a strong campaign this year."

Damon was named "sexiest man alive" by *People* magazine in 2007, for his piercing blue eyes and family-guy demeanor.

But he gained almost 13.5kg eating pizza and drinking beer for his latest role as a whistle-blower in film *The Informant!* — the last time Clooney saw him.

Since then, Damon has shed the weight.