Holocaust comedy snares grand prize at 29th Tokyo International Film Festival

Description

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By Philip Brasor, Special To The Japan Times

Philippine trans people, Scandinavian reindeer herders and a romantic comedy about the Holocaust dominated the closing ceremony of the 29th Tokyo International Film Festival on Thursday.

The ceremony at Ex Theater Roppongi opened appropriately enough with awards to individuals who furthered domestic cinema this year, including Godzilla, who appeared on stage to accept an award for the yearâ??s big hit, *Shin Godzilla,* on the 62nd anniversary of the first *Godzilla* film released in 1954.

German director Chris Kraus (center) and producer Kathrin Lemme (second from right) celebrate after his film 'The Bloom of Yesterday' won the top prize at the Tokyo International Film Festival on Thursday, as Seiko Watch Corp. executive Hiromi Kanagawa (left), Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike (second from left) and chief juror Jean-Jacques Beineix look on. | YOSHIAKI MIURA

Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike, decked out in a matching black pantsuit and fedora, awarded the Grand Prix to *The Bloom of Yesterday,* a provocative comedy about two Holocaust researchers â?? one German, the other French â?? who battle over history while falling in love.

However, the top award didnâ??t arouse as much audience excitement as Koikeâ??s announcement that next yearâ??s TIFF budget would be even larger than this yearâ??s, thanks to additional government expenditure for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Another festival winner was â??Die Beautiful,â?• a Philippine film about a transgender woman who dies while being crowned for a beauty pageant. In addition to winning the Audience Award, the filmâ??s leading man, Paolo Ballesteros, won the festivalâ??s best actor award, although presenter Mabel Chung made the point that Ballesteros could have easily won either the â??best actor or best actressâ?• prize.

The best actress award went to Lene Cecilia Sparrok, the teen star of the Swedish-Danish-Norwegian co-production, *Sami Blood,* which examines the discrimination that the indigenous Sami people of northern Scandinavia suffered, and which also won the second place Jury Prize. Sparrok, a reindeer herder in real life, was so overwhelmed that she lost her English-language capability and conveyed her gratitude in Sami.

The best artistic contribution prize went to *Mr. No Problem,* a gorgeously shot and staged comedy of manners, financed and produced by the Beijing Film Academy, about a Chinese farm and its impossibly agreeable manager that takes place in 1943, when Japan and China were at war.

During his Grand Prix speech, jury head Jean-Jacques Beineix stressed that what unified the films he and his colleagues judged this year was their rejection of a â??globalist mindset.â?• All of the films â??accepted our differencesâ?• and proved that â??a universal cinema does not exist.â?•

The fact that there were no Japanese winners in the main competition categories wasnâ??t lost on local reporters. During the post-ceremony news conference, one Japanese journalist asked Beineix how he â??discussedâ?• the two Japanese entries with his colleagues.

â??As you know, our discussions have to be kept secret,â?• Beineix replied, evincing a wave of laughter. In any case, *Poolsideman,* which depicts the lonely life of a Tokyo pool lifeguard, won the Japan Splash prize for domestic indie films, and director Hirobumi Watanabe openly wept on stage while accepting the award.

(Source:www.japantimes.co.jp)

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Date Created
November 4, 2016
Author
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