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French actress
Frederique Bel



Jury members sit on stage during the opening ceremony of the 72nd edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France.



US actress Eva Longoria



Brazilian model
Izabel Goulart



French model Estelle Lefebvre

Chinese heartthrob
Hu goes to dark side
in Cannes debut

Popular Chinese actor Hu Ge, whose suave looks made him the star of small screen imperial dramas, has tapped into a different side of himself for "Wild Goose Lake", a gritty gangster flick competing for the top prize at the Cannes film festival. The Shanghai-born heartthrob plays the male lead in acclaimed Chinese director Diao Yinan's latest film, which follows the noirish vein of his 2014 crime thriller "Black Coal, Thin Ice" which won the Golden Bear at Berlin.

Chinese authorities, notorious for strict censorship, appear to have officially approved the movie's premiere at Cannes on Saturday. Hu will be testing his acting chops against Hollywood stars Brad Pitt and Leonardo DiCaprio who star in Quentin Tarantino's new film, which is also in the running for the Palme d'Or. The dark role is dramatically different to the wholesome heroes Hu usually plays. Starring as a biker gang leader in "Wild Goose Lake", Hu's character is his first lead role on the big screen following a stellar career in television.

A string of hits has made him one of the highest-paid male actors on Chinese TV, commanding fees of around 100 million yuan, Hong Kong news site HK01 reported last year. The new movie marks his return to the limelight after a hiatus to study in the US. Hu, 36, shot to fame in mainland China for his leading roles in wildly popular period series starting with the historical martial arts drama "Chinese Paladin" in 2005.



In this file photo Chinese actor and singer Hu Ge poses during a photocall at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. — AFP

Ladj Ly: From Paris riots to Cannes red carpet

The 2005 riots that shook France began in the suburban high rises where he grew up. Now Ladj Ly, who has been dubbed France's answer to Spike Lee, is bringing his story of angry youth to the red carpet at the Cannes film festival. For Ly, the seething Paris suburbs around Clichy-sous-Bois are both home and film set, and the setting for "Les Misérables", his first feature-length film now vying for Cannes' top prize. One of Paris' infamous "banlieues", Clichy-sous-Bois hit the headlines in October 2005 when two teenagers died while fleeing the police in an area home to many impoverished immigrants.

Their deaths unleashed a wave of fury that engulfed the housing estates then spread through the country in a three-week crisis whose dramatic images of burning cars and street fighting flashed around the globe, in the most serious unrest in France since 1968. It was in the rundown tower blocks of the Bosquets estate that Ly grew up, and when the protests erupted, he went out to film, capturing the explosive anger of the troubled suburbs in what has become the dominant theme of his work.

"Les Misérables" tells the story of three policemen during the 2005 riots and is a full-length version of a short documentary he made two years ago, which was nominated last year for a Cesar Award-France's equivalent of an Oscar.

'Tell our stories'

It is here on this downtrodden estate with 5,400 residents and 40-percent unemployment that Ly set up a film school in a joint project with the Kourtrajme art collective which counts figures like JR, a local graffiti artist turned global star who is from the same suburb, among its members. Entry is free and anyone can apply, offering an unparalleled opportunity to learn scriptwriting, directing and post-production techniques, with more than 1,500 candidates applying for

the 30 places available on each of three specialist tracks.

Nine out of 10 applicants were from the margins of France's biggest cities. Ly, who was born to Malian immigrants, says the idea is to show that "it's possible to make films without having a pile of money", while also sharing his knowledge and connections with "those who have none". "There are doors which do not open to those from a certain social class," says the 39-year-old, who trained at the prestigious Femis cinema school in Paris. But things are starting to change. "Cinema is beginning to open up to diversity. Little by little, we too are going to be able to tell our stories," he says. "That's the challenge, I've had enough of other people telling our story for us."



In this file photo French director Ladj Ly poses during a portrait session in the Chene Pointu council estate in Clichy-sous-Bois. — AFP

'Kicking the doors in'

On an afternoon in April, half a dozen students are shooting a short documentary in the hilltop Paris neighborhood of Montmartre. Gaspa, who runs a community centre in the Paris suburb of Seine-Saint-Denis, said he struggled to make a short film because he "lacked connections". "And along comes Ladj, like the Messiah!" says the 33-year-old, who admits he cannot think of even one black French film director. For Nouta Kiaie, 23, the training has helped demystify the world of cinema.

"I have learned that there are ways into this notoriously closed environment and it's up to us to do it—even if it means kicking the doors in," she says, smiling. "And when you're a woman, you have to make even more of an effort." Former hip-hop dancer Bouchra Ouikou, 36, says it's all about confidence. "Ladj showed us it was possible," she says.

'Passing it on'

For their instructor, Thomas Gayraud, the fact that a local boy has managed to scale the heights to compete in the world's top film festival is a game changer. "The fact that Ladj, a guy from the estate who became a filmmaker during the riots, is now competing for the Palme d'Or alongside Ken Loach or Terrence Malick, is decisive," he said.

Visiting the school for a masterclass, Olivier Nakache, who co-directed the 2011 French blockbuster "Intouchables" (Untouchable), hailed it as "an incredible place" which serves as a reminder that cinema "is open to anyone". "Ladj, who came from nothing, is passing it on. Cannes is the reward for 20 years of work," says his younger brother and right-hand man, Amade. "We're sharing this happiness with everyone in the neighborhood." — AFP

New Woody Allen movie to open in France in September

Woody Allen's latest film, which has been put on ice in the US over decades-old sex abuse allegations against the director, will be released in France this year, a distributor said Tuesday. "A Rainy Day in New York" starring Timothee Chalamet, Elle Fanning, Selena Gomez and Jude Law will hit French cinemas on September 18, Mars Films said ahead of the opening of the Cannes film festival. "The 50th feature film by Woody Allen... is a romantic comedy set in present-day New York City," the company's CEO Stephane Celerier said

on Twitter. In February, Allen filed a \$68 million (60 million euros) suit against Amazon for breach of contract, accusing the streaming giant of cancelling the film because of a "baseless" accusation that he sexually abused his daughter. Allen has said Amazon sought to terminate the deal in June 2018, and has since refused to pay him \$9 million in financing for "A Rainy Day in New York". The film has been completed but not released.

Earlier this month, Variety magazine reported it would be released in Italy in October. The movie was one of

several to be produced with the Oscar-winning director under a series of agreements reached after Allen made the "Crisis in Six Scenes" program for Amazon. Allen has been accused of molesting Dylan Farrow, his adopted daughter, when she was seven years old in the early 1990s. He was cleared of the charges, first leveled by his then-partner Mia Farrow, after two separate months-long investigations, and has steadfastly denied the abuse. But Dylan, now an adult, maintains she was molested.

Her brother Ronan Farrow revived the allegations on

the day the Cannes film festival opened in 2016 with Allen's "Cafe Society", lashing out at the media for failing to ask hard questions about the director. Amazon's relationship with Allen began with "Cafe Society" (2016), to which the studio had purchased the rights, before producing and distributing "Wonder Wheel" (2017), then committing to four additional films. — AFP