

Film News: 'Tree of Life' Wins Top Prize at Cannes Film Festival

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CHICAGO – Thirty-three years after winning the Best Director Prize at the Cannes Film Festival for his 1978 drama, “Days of Heaven,” maverick filmmaker Terrence Malick has received an even greater honor. His fifth feature, “The Tree of Life,” won the Palme d’Or at the 64th annual Cannes Film Festival, despite mixed reviews and a smattering of boos following its premiere screening.

“Tree of Life” stars Brad Pitt, Sean Penn and Jessica Chastain, and juxtaposes a boy’s coming-of-age during the 1950s with the evolution of Earth itself. The famously shy Malick was not present at the award ceremony, leaving producer Bill Pohlad to accept the prize. At a press conference following the awards ceremony, Jury president Robert De Niro said there wasn’t a great amount of fiery controversy among the judges. “It was a very civil experience,” De Niro said. “Most of us felt clearly that [“Tree of Life”] was the movie. It had the size, the importance, the intention that seemed to fit the prize.”

This year, the Grand Prix was split between two pictures. Writer/director/producer/editor Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s “Bir Zamanlar Anadolu’da” (“Once Upon a Time in Anatolia”) is set in the volcanic region of Asia Minor, and explores the uneasy relationship between a lawyer and doctor in the Anatolian Steppes. Like “Tree of Life,” as well as many other entries at this year’s festival, Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne’s “The Kid With a Bike” is about a troubled youth with family issues. The Dardenne’s titular protagonist befriends a salon owner after a chance encounter that just might provide him with the companionship he needs.



Producers Luc Besson, Bill Pohlad, Dede Gardner and an unidentified guest pose with the Palme d’Or for director Terrence Malick’s *The Tree of Life*.

Photo credit: AP

Best Director prizes at Cannes have often honored exciting and radical artistic voices, and this year was no different. Nicolas Winding Refn, the visionary mind behind “Bronson” and “Valhalla Rising,” won for his action-packed drama, “Drive,” about a stunt driver (played by Ryan Gosling) who transports members of the criminal underworld. Beloved comedian and filmmaker Albert Brooks has been garnering acclaim for his performance in the picture, in which he plays against type as a menacing villain. The Jury Prize went to “Poliss,” directed by Maïwenn, a drama set in the volatile world of a police department’s juvenile protection unit.

One of the festival’s breakout hits, Michel Hazanavicius’ “The Artist,” was honored with an acting prize for its leading man, Jean Dujardin, who plays a silent movie star faced with the emergence of talkies. Kirsten Dunst expressed shock and elation upon hearing her name called when the Best Actress winner was announced. She won for her role in Lars von Trier’s apocalyptic drama, “Melancholia,” which was feared to be ineligible for awards after its director’s controversial comments at a press conference led him to be labeled “persona non grata” at the festival. “I’m grateful to the Festival for keeping the film in competition,” Dunst said during her acceptance speech, “And I’m grateful to Lars von Trier for letting me play the role with such freedom.”

Writer/director Joseph Cedar won the Best Screenplay award for his film, "Footnote," a study of the competitive relationship between a father and son, both of whom are professors. In the short film categories, the Palme d'Or was awarded to Maryna Vroda's "Cross-Country," while the Jury Prize was awarded to Wannes Destoop's "Badpakje 46" ("Swimsuit 46"). Pablo Giorgelli was presented with the Camera d'Or during Critic's Week for "Las Acacias."

Spreading the wealth were Un Certain Regard prizes for Kim Ki-Duk's "Arirang" and Andreas Dresen's "Stopped on Track," as well as the Special Jury Prize for Andrey Zvyagintsev's "Elena" and the Best Director award for Mohammad Rasoulof's "Bé omid é didar." Cinéfondation awarded its first prize to Doroteya Droumeva's "The Letter," second prize to Kamal Lazraq's "Drari," and Son Tae-gyum's "Fly by Night." The "Prix Vulcain de L'Artiste-Technicien" was awarded to José Luis Alcaine, for his lighting in Pedro Almodóvar's "The Skin I Live In," as well as editor Joe Bini and sound designer Paul Davies for their work in Lynne Ramsay's "We Need to Talk About Kevin."