

Sokurov's 'Faust' Wins Golden Lion at Venice Film Fest

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Sokurov bested Clooney and Polanski to take the prize with his "Faust." **Alessandro Bianchi**

VENICE, Italy — Highbrow trumped Hollywood at the Venice Film Festival this year, with Russian director Alexander Sokurov's demanding German-language "Faust" taking the top prize and Roman Polanski and George Clooney overlooked.

"Faust" tells the tale of a professor, played by Johannes Zeiler, who craves knowledge and sells his soul for the love of Margarete, played by Isolda Dychauk. The Mephistopheles character is played by Anton Adasinsky.

"Faust" marks the final chapter in Sokurov's four-film look at the relationship between man and power that began with "Moloch" in 1999 about Hitler, "Taurus" a year later about Lenin, and the 2005 film "The Sun" about Japanese Emperor Hirohito.

At a post-award news conference Saturday, Sokurov made an impassioned plea for

governments to continue supporting culture with state funds.

“Culture is not a luxury! It is the basis for the development of society,” he said, adding that he had even raised the issue with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in a phone call just after he won.

“And so I am making an appeal to the Italian minister of culture: Thank you for existing! Insist with all methods you have on keeping culture.”

Sokurov said working with the German cast was one of the most impressive experiences he has had in years, even if he still wonders whether a German director would have been better suited for the task.

“German culture is a fundamental one in Europe,” he said.

“Faust” is a less obvious fit in Sokurov’s series, and some viewers found the dialogue-heavy, German-language picture that lasts well over two hours tough going.

“Taking highbrow to the edge of slapstick, Sokurov’s idiosyncratic adaptation of ... ‘Faust’ will intrigue some and turn off others,” said Hollywood Reporter critic Deborah Young.

Most prizes at Saturday’s closing ceremony went to less-than-familiar names and faces, with the exception of rising Irish star Michael Fassbender’s best actor award for “Shame.”

The Silver Lion for best director was awarded to China’s Shangjun Cai for his gritty “People Mountain People Sea,” best actress went to Hong Kong’s Deanie Ip, and the jury prize went to Italian immigration drama “Terraferma.”

Surprisingly overlooked was Roman Polanski’s “Carnage,” a comedy of manners featuring a stellar cast of Jodie Foster, Kate Winslet, Christoph Waltz and John Reilly.

Based on a play and set in real time in a single apartment, “Carnage” is a stinging critique of middle class mores, but also has plenty of humor including Winslet’s memorable projectile vomit scene.

Polanski was not able to travel to Venice to present the movie, given the threat of extradition to the United States where he is still wanted for sentencing in a 1977 sex crime case.

“Many feel that jury head Darren Aronofsky and his compatriot Todd Haynes, both Americans, lacked the courage to give the victory to a colleague who is not liked in the U.S.” said a commentary in the La Stampa newspaper.

While Venice is not a platform for blockbusters, it has proved an effective launchpad for U.S. Oscar contenders like Ang Lee’s “Brokeback Mountain” and Aronofsky’s own “Black Swan” and “The Wrestler.”

Festival director Marco Müller succeeded in attracting a string of A-listers to the red carpet this year after a low-key 2010, although all were bypassed when it came to the prizes.

Among the overlooked contenders was Clooney’s political thriller “The Ides of March,” which was well received and starred Clooney himself as a governor embroiled in scandal during an

election race.

La Repubblica newspaper's headline said Clooney and Polanski had been "snubbed."

"Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy," directed by Sweden's Tomas Alfredson, slipped beneath the radar despite rave reviews for its adaptation of John Le Carre's classic Cold War spy novel.

Gary Oldman shines as George Smiley and Colin Firth and John Hurt also appeared in the surprisingly digestible retelling of a notoriously complex tale.

Outside the main competition, singer Madonna presented her second feature film as director, "W.E.," about a modern-day woman who becomes obsessed with Wallis Simpson and her love for King Edward VIII.

And Steven Soderbergh assembled an all-star cast for "Contagion," a story about the spread of disease and fear around the world featuring Gwyneth Paltrow, Marion Cotillard, Jude Law, Matt Damon and Winslet.

(Reuters, AP)

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