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'John Rabe' earns kudos in Paris

Pic wins top honors at European Time awards

By ELSA KESLASSY

PARIS -- Helmer Florian Gallenberger's historical drama "John Rabe" won best picture at the first European Time for Peace Film and Music Awards on Friday night at Paris' Ritz Hotel.

Based on a true story, the Steve Buscemi-starrer centers on a German businessman in China during the 1937 Nanjing Massacre, who saved the lives of 200,000 Chinese civilians.

Founded 16 years ago by Marion and Robert Einbeck, Time for Peace honors films and music with humanitarian messages. This is the first time the U.S. event has held a European edition.

Jury is composed of 24 ambassadors of the Council of Europe, as well as the Einbecks.

"We had to sift through more than 400 films," said Robert Einbeck. "We chose to honor lesser-known films and shine a light on them."

Helmer Bernard Bellefroid's debut drama "The Boat Race" took the nod for best first film. Pic follows a teenage boy who finds the strength to break away from his violent father after becoming part of the local rowing team.

Brenda Blethyn and the late Sotigui Kouyate, who starred in Rachid Bouchareb's "London River" as parents trying to find their missing children in the wake of the 2005 London bombings, won best actress and actor, respectively.

Kouyate's award was collected by his wife and son, while Brit thesp Geoffrey Carey picked up Blethyn's award.

The Time for Peace founders' choice nod went to Tony Gatlif's "Freedom" (Korkoro), which follows a Gypsy family travelling across France during WWII.

Meanwhile, Sting won the music kudo for his song "If on a Winter's Night." French musician Hugues Aufray picked up Sting's award and performed a song.

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