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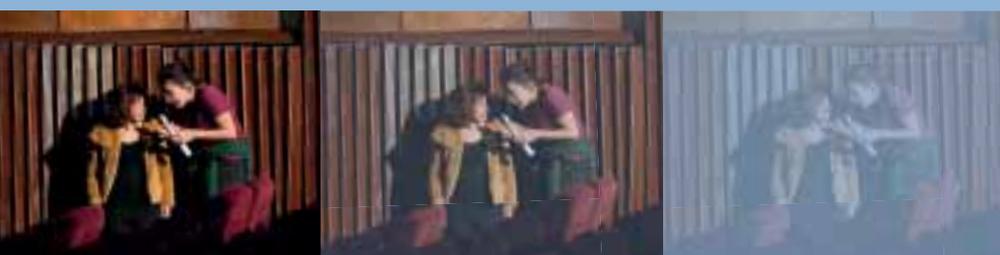
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NOLAN'S

'TENET'

BY RAMIN SETOODEHI

P.34

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“

Y'all are not just props. Y'all are the icing on the cake. Y'all are the beat to the heart.”

Missy Elliott, on her dancers, while accepting the Vanguard Award at the MTV Video Music Awards **P.26**



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FIELD NOTES

THE VOICES BEHIND THE ISSUE



“There are so many highly anticipated films on this year’s schedule that it’s taken me days on end to figure out how to fit most of them into the five days I’ll be at the festival.”

Basking in the Glow of the Toronto Fest

Here we come, Toronto! I know I’ve said it before, but this awesome Canadian film festival is my favorite since there are so many movies for a movie lover to see in such a short span of time. Four or five a day? Bring it on.

In fact, there are so many highly anticipated films on this year’s schedule that it’s taken me days on end to figure out how to fit most of them into the five days I’ll be at the festival. (Enviably problem, I know.)

Variety will also be in Toronto to fete our cover subject, Robert Pattinson, who’s superhot again after a cold streak at the box office following his heartthrob turn as Edward Cullen in the five-part “*Twilight*” franchise.

He’s starring in “*The Lighthouse*” (with Willem Dafoe), which is screening at TIFF and generated awards buzz for the 33-year-old actor when it premiered at Cannes in May. And, of course, he landed the coveted role of the new Caped Crusader in director Matt Reeves’ forthcoming film “*The Batman*,” hitting theaters in June 2021. If that’s not enough, Pattinson shares the screen with Timothée Chalamet in Netflix’s late fall release “*The King*,” and he spent the summer shooting Christopher Nolan’s “*Tenet*.”

I love the edge Pattinson brings to all the roles he plays, even in some of his less popular endeavors like 2011’s screen adaptation of “*Water for Elephants*.” As “*The Lighthouse*” director Robert Eggers tells our writer Ramin Setoodeh in his cover story, “Rob definitely has a darker side and is comfortable working in that space.”

On the lighter side, it’s always fun to see all the money that Hollywood throws around at festivals to acquire movies. Buyers at Toronto, however, should heed the harsh lessons of past festivals as outlined in writers Brent Lang and Matt Donnelly’s Top Billing lead story. The cautionary tale: Don’t overspend for titles when you’re caught up in the frenzy of a bidding war with rivals. There are countless box office casualties that speak to that problem — “*Late Night*” and “*Blinded by the Light*” among the latest.

This year, let’s hope everyone goes home without buyer’s remorse.

Claudia Eller
Editor-in-Chief

Uncovered

Photographed Aug. 14, 2019

“What a pleasure it was to work with Robert,” says photographer Matthew Brookes, whose portraits have been featured in *Vanity Fair*, *Vogue*, *Interview* and *The New York Times’ T Magazine*, among others. “He’s a really soulful and grounded actor with absolutely no ego. He made everyone on set feel at ease.” Brookes says he likes to scratch below the surface to find the emotion in his subjects before he photographs them. Pattinson was clearly willing to collaborate.



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PLUGGED IN



Michael Schneider

For the full story, head to Variety.com.

A Star Who Stood Up for Herself and Won

VALERIE HARPER WILL FOREVER be known for playing Rhoda Morgenstern on “The Mary Tyler Moore Show” and “Rhoda.” But in Hollywood, she will perhaps be best remembered for standing her ground on the NBC sitcom “Valerie.” The comedy launched in 1986 and was an immediate hit. Harper was fired from the show after its second season, however, following a

salary dispute with studio Lorimar.

But Harper didn’t back down, suing Lorimar and NBC for breach of contract. A jury found that she was wrongfully fired, and awarded her \$1.4 million and 12.5% of the show’s profits. Later, Harper took that fighting spirit to SAG, where she served on the Hollywood board — and to her 10-year battle with lung cancer.

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1939 - 2019

Valerie Harper Was Television Comedy Icon

VALERIE HARPER, who played the brash sidekick to the Mary Richards character on “The Mary Tyler Moore Show” and whose Rhoda Morgenstern character spun off into her own series, died Aug. 30 from complications of cancer. She was 80. Harper also toplined sitcom “Valerie” in the mid-’80s and appeared on shows including “The Love Boat,” “Melrose Place,” “That ’70s Show,” “Sex and the City,” “Hot in Cleveland,” “Desperate Housewives” and “Columbo.” In 2013, she competed on “Dancing With the Stars” several years after her initial cancer diagnosis.

• For the full story, head to Variety.com.



Words for a Legend

“A beautiful woman, a wonderful actress, a great friend and with balls bigger than mine. Her brilliance burst through and shined its light upon all of us. Good night, beautiful. I’ll see you soon.”

Ed Asner

“Even when she was down, she danced and showed the world that she refused to let cancer beat her. Now Rhoda is with Mary in heaven. RIP Valerie Harper. You were the epitome of strength and humor.”

Marlee Matlin

“Valerie Harper was one of the greatest TV actors of all time. A true comedic genius. She inspired me, and I loved her very much.”

Michael Schur

“Sad to hear about the passing of Valerie Harper. She was incredibly courageous facing cancer with her humor and grace.”

Robin Roberts



Career Highlights

Valerie Harper won four Emmys and was nominated for six Golden Globes (winning in 1975 for “Rhoda”).

Chapter Two (1979)
Supporting actress
Nominated for Golden Globe

▲ Rhoda (1974-78)
Lead actress
3 Emmy noms (1 win);
2 Golden Globe noms (1 win)

The Mary Tyler Moore Show (1970-77)
Supporting actress
4 Emmy noms (3 wins); 2 Golden Globe nominations

Freebie and the Bean (1974)
Most promising newcomer
Nominated for Golden Globe

Women in Film Crystal Awards (1987)
Humanitarian Award



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WHAT ARE MARLBOROS AND CAMELS DOING IN KID-RATED SHOWS NEXT TO BURGER KING AND COKE?

On August 6, just weeks after Netflix launched a new season of *Stranger Things* (TV-14) with hundreds of tobacco incidents and close-ups of cigarette brands, 43 state Attorneys General told America’s media companies that they should “eliminate or exclude tobacco imagery in all future original streamed content for young viewers,” rate content with tobacco imagery R or TV-MA, and run anti-smoking spots before all content with tobacco imagery. Here’s why:

Tobacco brands in movies and TV series look like paid product placement and act like paid product placement.

If tobacco brands appear alongside prominent brands like Burger King, Coca-Cola, JC Penny or 7-11—as in *Stranger Things* S3—toxic tobacco brands may shine by association. Or at least appear normal.

But do *non-tobacco* brands gain when they appear next to *tobacco* brands? Or do they risk consumer confusion and reputational damage?

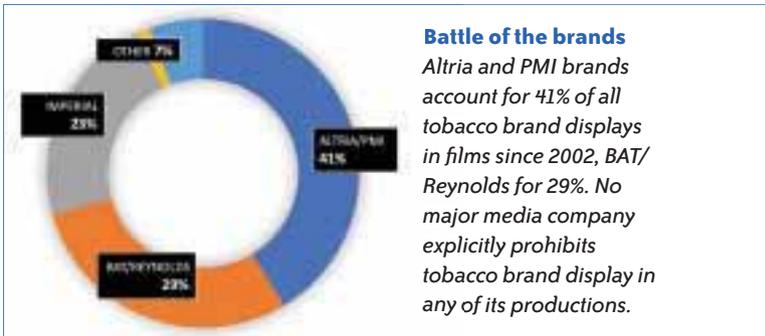
Promoting tobacco brands is just the tip of the problem.

Since 2002, close to 40 percent of the 159 top-grossing U.S. films with a tobacco brand have been kid-rated. More than 95 percent of actors posed with brands have been stars or co-stars, not extras.

Meanwhile, 56 percent of top-grossing PG-13 films and 76 percent of top-grossing R-rated films released since 2002 feature smoking.

Today, more than a 1,300 of these smoking films are offered on Internet streaming and cable on-demand services accessible to kids.

Films with smoking have recruited more than one in three new young smokers, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). That makes “starter” brands like Camel and Marlboro the main beneficiaries of all the unbranded smoking on screen.



Now streaming “originals” are repeating a deadly history.

Netflix’ *Stranger Things* S3 delivered an estimated 3.4 billion tobacco exposures to audiences in its first four days online. That’s more than heavy-smoking PG-13 films like *The Great Gatsby* (Warner) and *The Magnificent Seven* (Sony) delivered in their entire domestic theatrical runs.

Given the regrettable, decades-long history of promoting tobacco in entertainment media, streaming “originals” are not so original after all.

State AGs have battled tobacco promotion to kids since before their multibillion-dollar Master Settlement Agreement with Big Tobacco in 1998. Two decades on, in the strongest terms, they’re telling Big Media how to protect young viewers. **What’s more important than children’s lives?**

Read the Attorneys General letter at <http://bit.ly/AGs0819>

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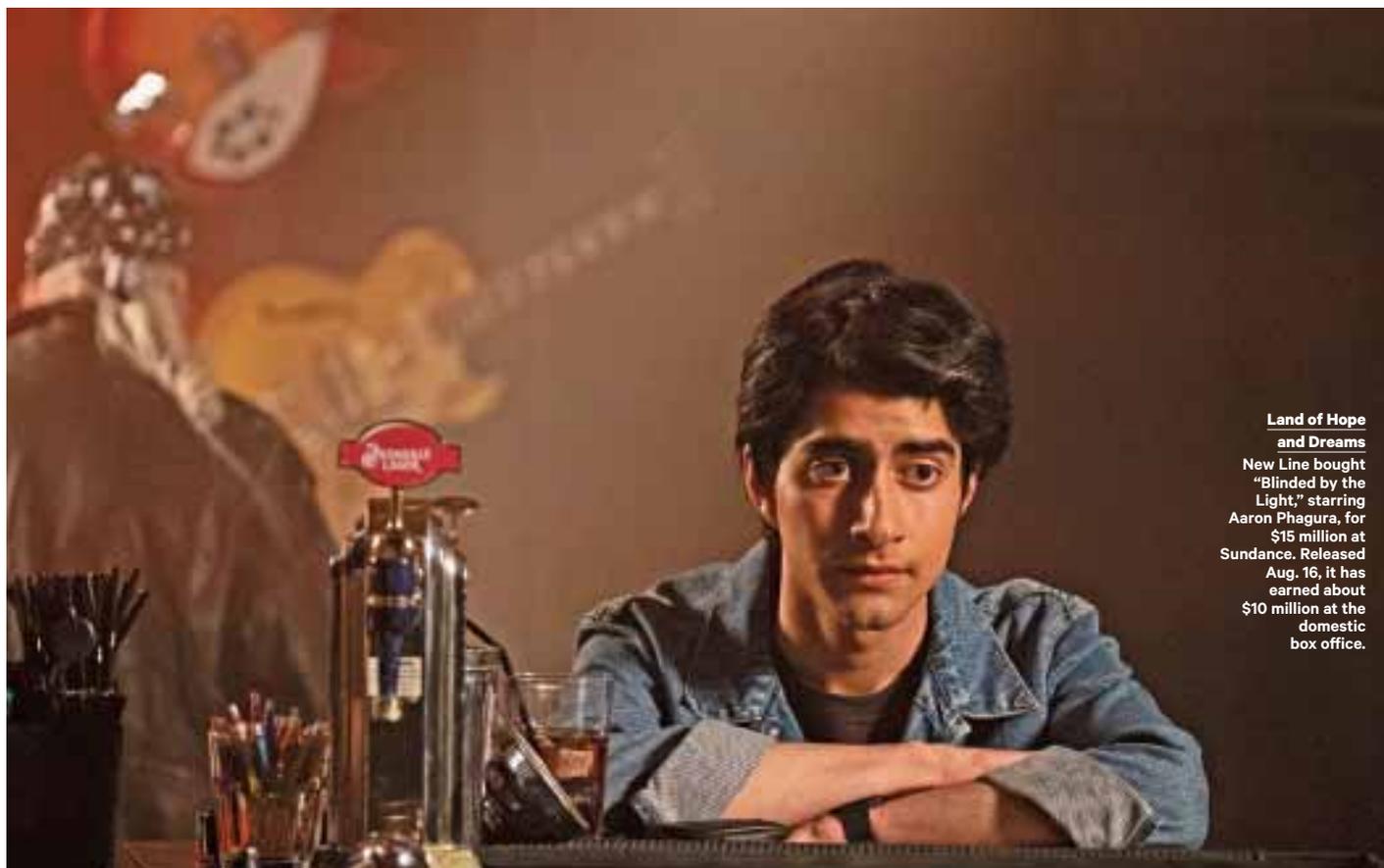
LOOMING IMPACT

The ongoing standoff between writers and agents hasn't yet affected TV biz — but that may change **p.18**

AND THE STUDY SAYS ...

Consumers pick faves among new streaming options **p.19**

TOP BILLING



Land of Hope and Dreams

New Line bought "Blinded by the Light," starring Aaron Phagura, for \$15 million at Sundance. Released Aug. 16, it has earned about \$10 million at the domestic box office.

TOP BILLING EXPOSURE FOCUS ARTISANS REVIEWS

Toronto Buyers Face Harsh Lessons of Past

Fest tests if Hollywood can avoid getting caught in the frenzy and overpaying for rights **Story by BRENT LANG and MATT DONNELLY**

WE'VE SEEN HOW this movie plays out. Festival audiences lose their mind for, say, an uplifting drama or a biting satire. Their rapturous response sends studios scrambling for their wallets. Cue an all-night bidding war, and to the victor goes... an indie movie with iffy commercial prospects.

From "Late Night" to "Blinded by the Light," many of the big sales at this year's Sundance ended in financial failure. As the movie business gears up for the Toronto Intl. Film Festival, studios may be more wary of

cutting big checks. Will an all-too-familiar narrative of frenzy resulting in flops change once Hollywood touches down in Canada?

"People have short memories," says Tom Quinn, founder of Neon, the indie distributor behind "Parasite" and "Apollo 11." "A lot of these failures are the result of companies chasing the moment and the headline. A big acquisition is alluring for a company that is ultimately trying to make a statement."

Fortunately for the agents looking to sell movies, a number of players are hoping to

make some noise. Emerging streaming services such as HBO Max and Disney Plus are in a race to snap up as much compelling content as possible as they arm themselves for a battle against Netflix.

There's word that Apple will be on the hunt for movies, but the company hasn't been very forthcoming about what kinds of films it plans to highlight on its service. However, Apple certainly has the financial resources to buy anything that tickles its fancy.

In the past, some of these streaming services may have had to overpay in part because directors wanted their films to have a more traditional theatrical run. There was a stigma associated with selling to a digital platform. That's dissipated, in part because auteurs on the level of Alfonso Cuarón ("Roma") and Martin Scorsese ("The Irishman") have set up shop with Netflix and its ilk. Consequently, filmmakers have become more receptive to alternative distribution avenues.

"A couple years ago, the conversation with filmmakers was talking them through what day-and-date [releases] meant, and there was hesitancy," says Mikey Schwartz-Wright,

WALT: MICHAEL BUCKNER/VARIETY/SHUTTERSTOCK; BLINDED BY THE LIGHT: NICK WALL/WARNER BROS.

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SEPTEMBER 3, 2019



Promising Pair

Documentary "The Capote Tapes" (above) and "Ema," starring Mariana Di Girolamo and Gael García Bernal, are drawing interest in the run-up to Toronto.



an agent in UTA's Independent Film Group. "Now it's the new normal."

For Vanessa Saal, managing director of sales and distribution at Protagonist Pictures, streaming platforms have emerged as a natural home for films that might be too quirky to draw a crowd at the multiplexes. She'll hit this year's festival with "How to Build a Girl," a coming-of-age story with Beanie Feldstein, that might be a natural fit for a company like Netflix, which has done well with young adult fare. However, there are frustrations with going the streaming route. It may hurt to have a movie crater at the box office, but at least filmmakers get a sense of how their film is performing. Digital services tend to be tight-lipped about how many people watch their movies — refusing to share data on ticket sales or streams with even the directors or producers, let alone the general public.

"Right now we have no visibility," says Saal. She hopes that will change once HBO Max, Disney Plus and others enter the field. "Maybe more competition will put pressure on these platforms to share information so we as an industry can figure out what is a success and what is a failure."

One streaming player may remain on the sidelines as the big deals get hammered out. Amazon Studios dominated the market at Sundance, shelling out more than \$40 million for titles including "Late Night," "Honey Boy" and "Brittany Runs a Marathon."

Most studios measure success or failure based on ticket sales, but Amazon says it's different. "We assess the success of our

films through the lens of our Prime customers and not solely by box office returns," says Matt Newman, co-head of movies at Amazon Studios. "The theatrical release is just one path to supporting the film before its Prime Video launch."

Some of the movies it bought have yet to be released, but "Late Night" was a painful flop and "Brittany Runs a Marathon" faces an uphill climb to box office success. Moreover, the company has signaled it is less excited about the theatrical landscape than it once was. Upcoming movies such as "The Report" and "The Aeronauts" will have only a limited theatrical run before bowing on Amazon's streaming platform, Prime.

"They've clearly made some mistakes, but now they don't even have a distribution person," one top agent notes, speaking anonymously. The agent says that Amazon hasn't rushed to replace Bob Berney, the veteran marketing and distribution chief who left the company in June just as it was overhauling its theatrical release strategy. Without a seasoned executive to advise in that area, some content-brokers are hesitant to sell a project to Amazon, because they worry there won't be anyone to orchestrate a successful rollout.

Privately, many agents think Amazon will be inoculated from festival fever at Toronto after catching a very bad case of it at Sundance. The aftershocks of the spending spree may take longer to wear off. Streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon don't have to rely on box office performance to justify splashy acquisitions. In the case of Netflix,

the company is looking to sell subscriptions by offering content that can't be found anywhere else. As for Amazon, it's showing movies as an incentive to get customers to pay for expedited shipping and thus buy more paper products and household goods. These companies don't want to overpay for movies or release them to empty theaters, but their bottom lines won't be impacted dramatically one way or another. That means they've been more willing to loosen the purse strings, and that's forced other, more theatrically oriented companies, such as Fox Searchlight and Focus, to get more comfortable with paying hefty prices for festival favorites. But there's a wide gap between the select few movies that leave buyers salivating at Toronto and the films that struggle to attract their interest.

"There's seemingly no middle ground," says Arianna Bocco, executive vice president of acquisitions and production for IFC Films. "Either movies sell for a lot of money, or they scuffle to find theatrical homes."

One thing that could depress prices is the films themselves. From "Hustlers" to "A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood," most of the movies heading to Toronto for splashy premieres arrive with their distribution in place. Only a handful of films that are screening at the festival will be looking for a studio home. Compounding things is that two of the more promising acquisition targets, Armando Iannucci's "The Personal History of David Copperfield" and the Bruce Springsteen documentary "Western Stars," sold to Fox Searchlight and Warner Bros., respectively, in the weeks leading up to the fest.

"When you look at the field, you don't see any 'Manchester by the Seas,'" says Tom Bernard, co-head of Sony Pictures Classics. "Nothing jumps out at you. You're going to need to do a lot of searching to find the great movies under the rocks."

Bernard may be pessimistic, but some films are drawing attention from buyers eager to fill out their slates. "Bad Education," the true story of a school-larceny scandal, is said to showcase Hugh Jackman, and "The Friend," about a man who moves in with a couple to support them as they grapple with a terminal cancer diagnosis, smacks of awards bait. Also popping up on studios' radars are "Ema," a drama about a young dancer that was directed by "Jackie" auteur Pablo Larraín; "Sound of Metal," a music drama with Riz Ahmed; and "The Capote Tapes," a documentary about writer Truman Capote that offers up unreleased archival recordings.

But festival veterans say that the best acquisitions are often the films that premiere to little buzz. Sony Pictures Classics, for instance, nabbed "Still Alice" at Toronto in 2014 when few studios were interested in a movie about a professor with Alzheimer's. It went on to win Julianne Moore an Oscar.

"You can't have a lemming mentality," says Bocco. "You have to look at movies that other people might have walked out of or thought were boring from a different perspective. If I went into every festival trying to get the same things as everyone else was, I probably wouldn't have bought half of the movies I did." ■

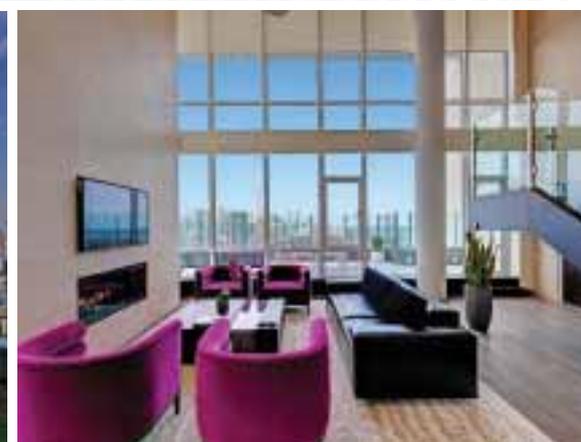
"When you look at the field, you don't see any 'Manchester by the Seas.' Nothing jumps out at you."

Tom Bernard, Sony Pictures Classics



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Madonna's 'Like A Prayer' Video

1991

Dallas, Cagney & Lacey
& Bob Newhart Show

1989

Raleigh Purchased Studio
In the Heat of the Night Wins Oscar

1979

Adventures of Superman

1953

Three Musketeers

1921

United Artists Company
formed by Douglas Fairbanks
Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin

1919



RALEIGH STUDIOS

The WGA-ATA War Drags On; TV Biz Shrugs

The stalemate between writers and their agents has yet to significantly impact dealmaking

By MICHAEL SCHNEIDER

franklinavenue

NEARLY FIVE MONTHS after the Writers Guild and the Assn. of Talent Agents failed to reach a new franchise agreement, leading to thousands of writers firing their agents, it's mostly business as usual at the TV networks and studios — for now. But as the impasse drags on and there's no concrete sign of movement between the two sides, executives warn that the impact will soon be noticeable.

"It's certainly made managers and lawyers have to work a lot harder," says Showtime entertainment co-president Gary Levine. "There are a few bumps in the road, but we've been able to make the deals that we've wanted to make without a problem."

Meanwhile, there have been no talks and very little movement in recent months in the dispute over packaging fees and the agencies' move into production. The conflict has led to suits and countersuits by both sides. As the standoff drags on, there have been plenty of rumors about movement — officially, however, "it's mostly radio silence," says one writer.

In the interim, according to network insiders, agents are still dealing with their A-list clients on existing overall deals, and they're still calling about projects — but are clear that they're repping directors and producers, not writers. Some writers are reaching out to development execs on their own. Elsewhere, projects have already been stacked up at the premium cable and streaming services, and with so much content in the pipeline, there's no shortage of opportunities for scribes.

All of that has allowed the business to continue on a kind of autopilot despite the sudden absence of the traditional agent-writer relationship.

Outgoing AMC entertainment networks president of programming David Madden says he hasn't been talking with agents as much as he used to, and there "certainly isn't the kind of auction environment that existed pre-clients firing their agents." Madden notes that the majority of deals were made prior to separation, so for now the long-term effect would be minimal — that is, if the writers went back to their agents tomorrow. "But if this goes on another six months, it will be a lot more challenging," he says.

HBO programming president Casey Bloys says that more dealmaking has fallen to entertainment lawyers in the absence

"It's really bizarre that there's this high-end activity going on and yet tremendous discord in the day-to-day structure of it."

Kevin Reilly, HBO Max and TBS/TNT/TruTV



Movable Feast
Despite the ongoing battle between writers and agents, "The Chi" writer-producer Lena Waithe signed a deal with Amazon.

of agents. Production pacts continue to be made, although "there are probably more to be had if it were a fully functioning marketplace," he adds. "But even given that, it feels like a robust market."

Recent TV megadeals include Greg Berlanti and John Wells renewing their pacts at Warner Bros. TV, Dan Fogelman sticking with 20th Century Fox TV, Lena Waithe moving from Showtime to Amazon and "Game of Thrones" creators David Benioff and Dan Weiss leaving HBO for Netflix.

"It's really bizarre that there's this high-end activity going on and yet tremendous discord in the day-to-day structure of it," says HBO Max chief content officer and TBS/TNT/TruTV president Kevin Reilly. "Most of this is at a different level. It's a pipeline of stuff that was in motion; deals were already happening."

The more immediate impact of the standoff might have been in show staffing, but The CW president Mark Pedowitz says he has seen "minimal effect." Execs can't call agents to get lists, which leaves showrunners to drive those hirings. One showrunner tells Variety that his staffing went "surprisingly smoothly" despite the lack of agents. "I hired a writer with no agent and two others who hadn't gotten one yet," he says. "More writers are getting meetings and being read because of way guild membership banded together and helped each other out... Those alternatives are just going to improve over time, and people will adjust."

Speaking at the Television Critics Assn. press tour this summer, "Carnival Row" executive producer Marc Guggenheim said he was able to staff up the second season of the Amazon show without agents. "It's possible, but I think agents do a lot more than simply submit writing samples to showrunners," he noted. "We can get by without agents for that, but that's not to say that we shouldn't be getting back in a room and working out a deal."

One agent says that broadcast development is fine, since the megadeal producers are getting more orders — and it's the producer business that's driving packaging.

But Pedowitz warns that new development is starting to see the effects of the standoff, starting with fewer original projects and more intellectual property coming in via agencies (a trend that was growing anyway). "The sad part about it from my perspective is the lack of representation is going to impact diversity writers and young writers who are trying to break in," he says. "What you want to not happen is the backsliding of new talent coming into the business."

For FX Networks chairman John Landgraf, the toll is also personal. "On a human level, as somebody who has many friends and close associates who are on both sides of this conflict, I can see there's a lot of stress and anxiety," he says. "I see there's a human cost to what's going on with people that I care about. But it hasn't impinged on our ability to try to find the right path toward working with writers." ❏



Streaming Wars
Disney Plus fare like "The Mandalorian," set in the "Star Wars" universe, has viewers intrigued.

Disney: The Next Stream King?

Media giant poised for solid debut as study forecasts shakeup in how consumers value services

By **TODD SPANGLER**
@xpangler

THE STREAMING-VIDEO BATTLEFIELD is about to get some major new combatants — and fresh research suggests that Disney is best equipped to grab new territory.

Once Disney, WarnerMedia and NBCUniversal launch their direct-to-consumer services, customers' perceived value of incumbent players Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Prime Video will drop significantly, according to a study conducted by Langston Co., a Denver-based behavioral consumer research and consulting firm, shared exclusively with *Variety*.

Disney Plus, which will include powerful brands that span Lucasfilm's "Star Wars," Pixar and Marvel, is forecast to have a better price-to-content rating ratio than both WarnerMedia and NBCU, Langston's research shows. The accompanying chart illustrates a before-and-after picture: Respondents were asked about their perceived value ratings for Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Prime prior to the media companies' launches; then they rated the six services after being informed of the entertainment options coming to the new services — which includes

proprietary content the media conglomerates had licensed to Netflix (like "Friends," which is heading to WarnerMedia's HBO Max, and "The Office," to be exclusively streamed on NBCU's offering). Even with new rivals, Netflix is expected to enjoy the best value ranking. In the chart, services in the bottom-left quadrant have lower overall ratings than those in the upper right.

However, as with any research, there are caveats. For starters, the consumer reactions the Langston study measured were based on hypothetical, not actual, behavior. Another issue: Pricing for HBO Max and NBCU's service isn't known at this point, so researchers asked participants to assume each of the services were priced about the same — which will not be the case. Disney Plus will bow at an aggressive \$7 monthly, versus Netflix's \$13-per-month standard HD plan. HBO Max is widely expected to cost more than the \$15 baseline monthly price of HBO alone. The upshot: Disney's overall value could be even better than Langston's study predicts, while WarnerMedia's could be worse.

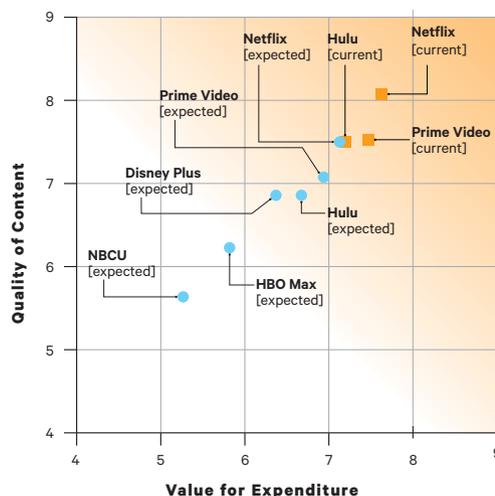
The study's data is based on an online survey of 1,250 U.S. adults (24-54) from July 28 to Aug. 8, census-balanced to reflect national population by income, age and geography. The researchers focused on millennials and Gen Xers as the age groups most representative of purchasing decisions in the market.

The research has other gaps. It omitted Apple TV Plus, the tech giant's streaming

package expected to debut in November. The survey also didn't gauge reaction to Disney's plan to bundle Disney Plus, ESPN Plus and Hulu for a reduced price of \$12.99 monthly. Given consumer frustration with the growing fragmentation of subscription streaming, the Disney triple play could prove enticing, says Langston Co. principal Spencer Imel. "Bundled services will likely do quite well," he says. And on this front, "Disney is much further along than the other media companies." ▮

Streaming Value Map

Consumers rated the three major current services for value and content (amber squares), then those same services with the three expected new players (blue circles). Services at the upper-right quadrant rank highest; those at the bottom left lowest.



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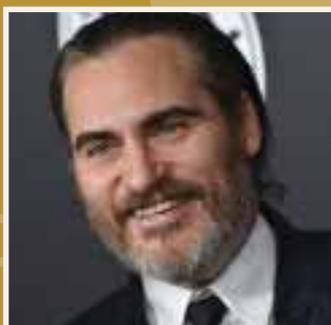
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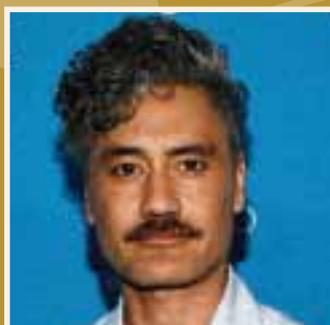
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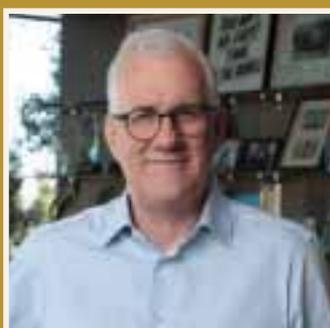
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Michael Schneider
In the Running

Host-Free Emmys Will Focus on Awards

Producers hope to get watercooler moments from the winners — but no one's making any vows

Done+Dusted partner Guy Carrington was in the production truck last year at the Emmys when director Glenn Weiss, who had just won the Emmy for helming the Oscars, surprised the Microsoft Theater audience by proposing to his girlfriend.

“For me in the truck, it was a horrifying moment,” says Carrington, who told me it added about seven minutes to a show that was already running long. “But at the same time, it was gold. It’s what a show like this needs. You watch the clock tick away... but you know that this is going to be a moment that everyone is going to talk about.”

This year, Done+Dusted and Don Mischer Prods., which are jointly producing the Emmys for Fox on Sept. 22, are hoping for a few more Glenn Weiss-like elements. Without a host to create any watercooler moments, it will be up to the show’s winners to provide a bigger share of the surprises that people will be talking about on social media.

“The moment that can make or break these kinds of shows, that make them memorable, are often things producers have absolutely no control over,” Mischer says. “Are there surprise wins? Are there underdogs that win? Is there someone who’s been nominated dozens of times who hasn’t won and finally wins? These all carry more emotional freight. We don’t have any idea who’s going to win until the envelope is opened, and we have no control over what a winner will say. So if a winner gets up there and makes an eloquent, emotional speech about what this moment means to them, that’s not something we can produce or write.”

Without a host, Mischer and Carrington say there will at least be extra time to let winners create those moments. Getting rid of a full monologue and other host routines will save nearly 20 minutes that can be applied to other elements — including, most importantly, ending the show on time.

“When you go past 11, I don’t care who’s on that stage or what they’re doing, people turn you off,” Mischer says. “That really affects the overall ratings and success of the

show. We have to keep that in mind.”

The Emmys’ biggest problem is the sheer number of kudos that need to be televised: 27, more than any other major awards show. The Television Academy previously floated the idea of handing out some of those awards before the ceremony or during commercial breaks (aiming to edit down acceptance speeches and air them tape-delayed during the ceremony), but the various guilds have protested those attempts. “It’s not easy — I’ll be honest,” Mischer says of balancing the network’s and TV Academy’s needs, which are often contradictory.

Without a host, the show is expected to jump immediately into the awards, and rely on the night’s presenters to “do more than a little bit of patter and then throw to a nominations package,” Carrington says. “We had a discussion very early about getting into the awards as quickly as possible. You have a host, and it can be a bit hit or miss. It’s a lot of time before you give out the first award, and the awards are what we’re there for. We’re there to celebrate the content and the people who make it. We made a conscious effort to focus on that.”

The producers have divided the Emmy telecast into five parts, centering on key TV genres: Comedy, drama, limited series, unscripted and variety. “We want the first presenters to come out and talk about the

significance of those particular genres of television in the past season,” Mischer says.

Some of the night’s segments will celebrate the large number of landmark shows leaving TV this year — “Game of Thrones,” “Veep,” “The Big Bang Theory” and others. Mischer and Carrington also say they hope they now have a bit of a time cushion to allow the more poignant winners’ speeches to go longer, rather than cutting them off after 45 seconds.

But there’s no guarantee another Glenn Weiss event will happen. That’s where the winners really need to step up their game. Ideally, no one will walk onstage, open up a crinkled piece of paper and recite a litany of thanks to names the audience has never heard of. Yet pleas for winners to make it entertaining often fall on deaf ears. And it almost never fails: As soon as the producers cue the orchestra to start playing off a winner whose boring speech has droned on for too long, he or she will suddenly perk up and offer the deeply emotional reaction that should have been given in the beginning.

“For those of us who do these kinds of programs, we get an adrenaline rush from rolling the dice and knowing we’re going to have to ride this thing out no matter what happens,” Mischer says. “It’s kind of the fun of being in this business. I love live television, and that’s one reason why.”

Giving Them a Hand
This year’s Emmys will honor the final bows of landmark series including “Game of Thrones,” co-starring Peter Dinklage.

“We’re there to celebrate the content and the people who make it. We made a conscious effort to focus on that.”

Guy Carrington, Emmy co-producer





Looking Up
Andy Muschietti directs
Isaiah Mustafa on the
set of "It: Chapter Two."

Isaiah Mustafa

'They Would Check Off Boxes So You Would Know Exactly What You Did Wrong'

Isaiah Mustafa was a journeyman pro football wide receiver with a dream of becoming an actor. Then he landed the spot as the suave Old Spice spokesman who burst out of the shower wearing nothing but a bath towel and deodorant. The moment led to appearances in sitcoms like "Anger Management" and "Baby Daddy," after which he landed a recurring role on Freeform's "Shadowhunters." Next up, he stars alongside Jessica Chastain as the adult Mike Hanlon in "It: Chapter Two," opening Sept. 6. Here, Mustafa discusses career changes and his experience on the set of Stephen King's killer clown franchise.

You had a big career switch.

I just take the opportunity that's given to me. I love basketball. I played it all through high school, but I was vertically challenged as far as being in the NBA. I switched to something that I thought would be a little easier, so I played football. I was able to get a scholarship, and I made it on a couple of NFL practice squads. I did that as long as I could. After that, all I really wanted to do was acting.

When did acting first come to mind?

My mom took me to see "Trading Places" when I was 9. I don't know what she was thinking. Immediately, Eddie Murphy became my favorite movie star. I wanted to do what he was doing. People were laughing at what he was doing. He was so quick and witty and hilarious. And then my brother started [acting] and I was like, "My brother is doing it too? Why not try to keep going?" I wanted to follow in his footsteps. He wasn't too successful at it. He didn't carry on. He became a lawyer. Whatever he was doing made an impression on me.

Did you grow as an actor on the set of "It: Chapter Two"?

Absolutely. They always say you get better by working with people who are better than you. I had all these awesome people working with me. A coach of mine said when you play football in a high-caliber game, like a championship game, your game elevates because you rise to the occasion.

Was transitioning from comedy to horror a challenge?

It was a whole new world. To be in a horror movie, that's one of my favorite genres. I had to go back and look at a bunch of horror movies: "Evil Dead," "Friday the 13th," "Aliens," "Drag Me to Hell." My daughter and I have these midnight movie marathons where we watch a lot of horror movies.

Any lessons from football that apply to acting?

My work ethic transferred over from football and also the ability to ignore rejection and keep pushing. Being cut from any athletic team, it's 1,000

times worse than not getting a job or not booking a role. When you don't book a role, you don't ever know what you did wrong. They just say it's not going further, and someone else gets the job. When you get cut from a team, they would literally give you a sheet. They would check off boxes so you would know exactly what you did wrong. It's so traumatizing to get cut and have to go through that. And I got cut at least four times. But the rejection in Hollywood isn't that bad. You get rejected, nobody knows. You pick yourself up and try again. **Z**

Things You Didn't Know About Isaiah Mustafa

AGE: 45 BIRTHPLACE: Portland, Ore. FAVORITE WIDE RECEIVER: Tim Brown FAVORITE HORROR MOVIES: "Scanners," "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" (1978) OLD SPICE SCENT OF CHOICE: Captain TOUGHEST COACH: Josh Gruden BEST NFL OPPONENT: 1997 Pittsburgh Steelers SPORT YOU DIDN'T KNOW HE PLAYED: Hockey (started at 39)

Interview by DANO NISSEN



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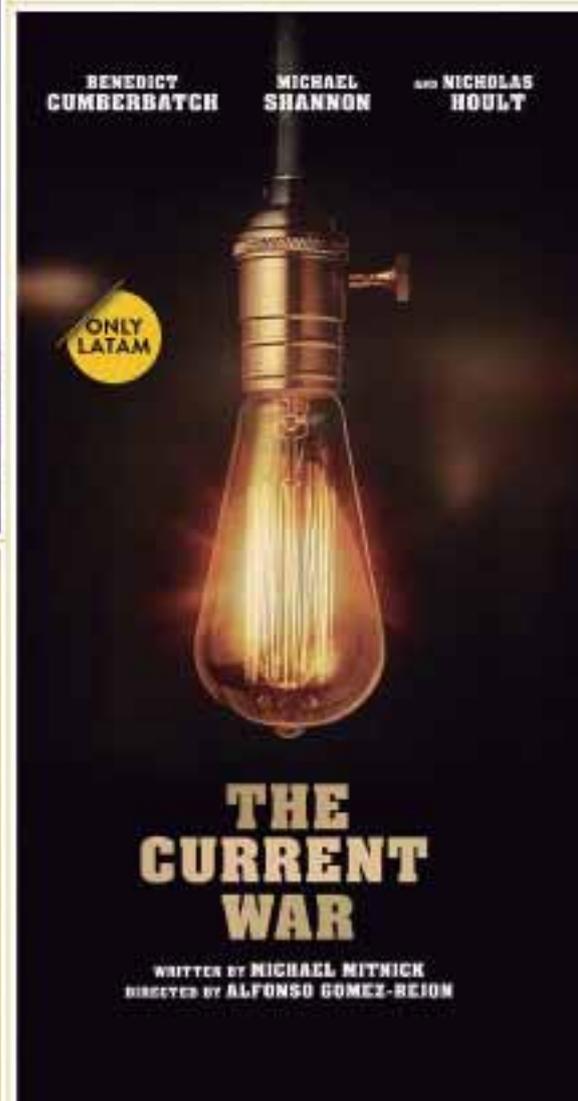
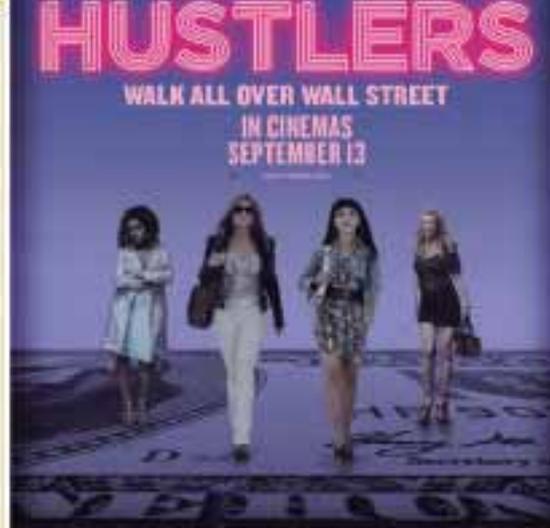
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SEND IN THE CLOWN

Jessica Chastain and Bill Hader scare up a good time at the 'It: Chapter Two' premiere p.27

THE HILLS HAVE BUYERS

Ellen DeGeneres unloads Hollywood Regency villa in Trousdale Estates p.30

EXPOSURE



OUT OF THIS WORLD

Brad Pitt arrives at the Venice Film Festival for the world premiere of "Ad Astra" on Aug. 29.

CHASTAIN: JORDAN STRAUSS/INVISION/SHUTTERSTOCK; PITT: ETTORE FERRARI/EPA/EFE/SHUTTERSTOCK

TOP BILLING **EXPOSURE** FOCUS ARTISANS REVIEWS

VARIETY.COM

SEPTEMBER 3, 2019

Edited by MARC MALKIN

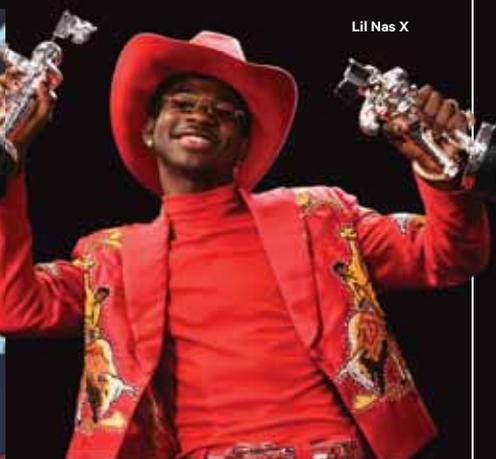
MTV Video Music Awards

PRUDENTIAL CENTER, NEWARK, AUG. 26

Taylor Swift delivered a politically charged speech while accepting the award for video of the year for the LGBTQ anthem "You Need to Calm Down." "I first want to say thank you to the fans, because in this video several points were made," she said. "You voting for this video means you want a world where we're all treated equally under the law, regardless of who we love, regardless of how we identify." Other highlights included a powerhouse performance by Lizzo, real-life couple Camila Cabello and Shawn Mendes' steamy duet of "Señorita" and a medley of greatest hits from Video Vanguard Award winner Missy Elliott.



Shawn Mendes and Camila Cabello



Lil Nas X



Halsey



Taylor Swift



Missy Elliott



Nick, Joe and Kevin Jonas



Queen Latifah



Bebe Rexha



Lizzo



Normani



Gigi and Bella Hadid



Benjamin Wallfisch and wife Missy



Chosen Jacobs and Isaiah Mustafa



Warner Bros.' Ann Sarnoff and Toby Emmerich flank Bill Skarsgård



Gary Dauberman and Barbara Muschietti



James Ransone, Jeremy Ray Taylor and Andy Bean



Peter Bogdanovich



Finn and Nick Wolfhard



Jaeden Martell, Andy Muschietti, Sophia Lillis, Wyatt Oleff and Jack Dylan Grazer

Bill Hader

Jessica Chastain

'It: Chapter Two' Premiere

REGENCY VILLAGE THEATRE, WESTWOOD, AUG. 26

With the first "It" film making more than \$700 million worldwide, is the Losers Club feeling the pressure for another box office hit? "I feel zero pressure," Jessica Chastain, who stars as the adult Beverly Marsh, told *Variety*, laughing. "This ain't my machine. ... I'm a peg. We're all a part of the machine; I'm like a screw in the machine." Bill Hader plays the adult Richie Tozier, a role his younger counterpart, Finn Wolfhard, suggested him for. So what thank-you gift did Hader send in return? "Nothing. He's a 16-year-old and he's famous; he doesn't need anything."

WALLFISCH: MICHAEL BUCKNER/VARIETY SHUTTERSTOCK; JACOBS/MUSTAFA: SARKOFT/VERSAR/EMERICH; MICHAEL BUCKNER/VARIETY SHUTTERSTOCK (2); DAUBERMAN/MUSCHIETTI: RANSONE/TAYLOR/BEAN; WOLFHARD: ERIC CHARBONNEAU/SHUTTERSTOCK (3); BOGDANOVICH: NINA PROMMER/EPA/RETNA/GETTY IMAGES; HADER: JORDAN STRAUSS/INVISION/PHOTOFEST/GETTY IMAGES

Performers Peer Group Celebration

SABAN MEDIA CENTER, NORTH HOLLYWOOD, AUG. 25

Television Academy governors Bob Bergen and Patrika Darbo welcomed Emmy-nominated actors — including Marsha Stephanie Blake (“When They See Us”), Ed Begley Jr. (“Ctrl Alt Delete”) and Jared Harris (“Chernobyl”) — and “RuPaul’s Drag Race” stars Carson Kressley and Silky Nutmeg Ganache to the annual cocktail party presented with Sterling Vineyards and Ferrari Trento wines. Joey King (nominated for lead actress in a limited series for her portrayal of Gypsy Rose Blanchard in Hulu’s “The Act”) paid homage to the streamer’s logo by wearing a lime green ensemble.



Ed Begley Jr.



Ron Cephas Jones, Marsha Stephanie Blake and Glynn Turman



Michelle Visage and Carson Kressley



Television Academy's Bob Bergen and Patrika Darbo



Silky Nutmeg Ganache



Joey King

‘Mayans M.C.’ Season 2 Premiere

ARCLIGHT CINERAMA DOME, HOLLYWOOD, AUG. 27

At the event, Kurt Sutter said he would step down as co-showrunner if the FX series is renewed for a third season, leaving co-creator Elgin James solely at the helm: “It’s time for the white man to leave the building.” Before the announcement, James — who is Latino — emphasized the importance of accurately portraying his culture through the show. “We have to tell our own emotional truth, particularly people of color,” he told *Variety*. “Some of us have lived that life. It took us a long time to get out of that cycle, and now we’re trying to tell a story inside out.”



Carla Baratta, Raoul Max Trujillo, Elgin James



Travis Scott and Kylie Jenner with daughter Stormi

‘Travis Scott: Look Mom I Can Fly’ Premiere

BARKER HANGAR, SANTA MONICA, AUG. 27

Travis Scott wasn’t talking to the press at the event for his Netflix documentary, but he had plenty of friends and colleagues in attendance who were more than happy to gush about the rapper and his latest project. “I’m just excited for everyone to watch this and for it to be out,” Sheck Wes, who’s signed to Scott’s Cactus Jack Records, told *Variety*. “For people to understand Trav better, the game, what we stand for better.” Also spotted were Swae Lee, Offset, Murda Beatz and producer Mike Dean.

WWD Report Card

2019 MTV VMAs

Lil Nas X and Normani sparkle while Shawn Mendes suits up **By LEIGH NORDSTROM and ALEX BADIA**



★ Elton John meets Prince, with a disco-cowboy hint — and we love it. This look, with the silver metallic boot, turns him into a global star.

A-

Lil Nas X



★ The Spanish flamenco sensation seemed to be channeling Ava Gardner in '50s Madrid. The pin curl and chandelier earrings are yet another heritage reference, which completes the look and gives it an overall glamorous megastar feel.

A-

Rosalía



★ This is a perfect throwback to '90s Destiny's Child. The high hip slit with exposed torso is perfect for the VMAs, and sequins were very on trend for the night.

B

Normani



★ The tight teal suit with high-heeled boots screams rock star à la Mick Jagger. Our only criticism would be that the tank top is taking over. Leaving the black sheer shirt as the only layer would have been way more powerful.

B

Shawn Mendes



✗ She's the fashion veteran of the pack, so given her access we expect more from her. This multicolored blazer feels too reminiscent of her Teen Choice Awards outfit. The high boot enhances the sex appeal, but for the VMAs, a little bit more risk would've paid off.

B-

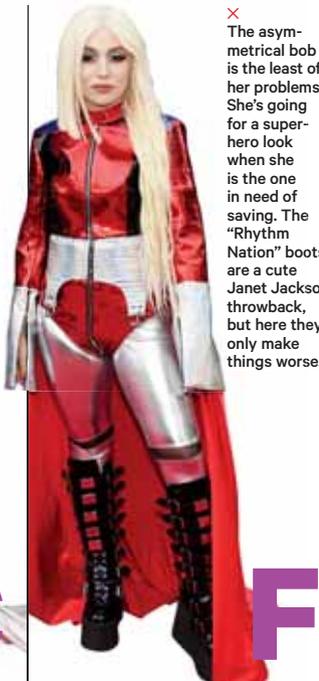
Taylor Swift



✗ This is what happens when a toga party goes wrong. The white stilettos turn the sexy ensemble into a bridal nightmare. The hairstyle is really flattering on her face, but it enhances the messiness of the outfit.

C

Camila Cabello



✗ The asymmetrical bob is the least of her problems. She's going for a superhero look when she is the one in need of saving. The "Rhythm Nation" boots are a cute Janet Jackson throwback, but here they only make things worse.

F

Ava Max

LIL NAS X: ROSALÍA: MAX: EVAN AGOSTINI/INVISION/AP/SHUTTERSTOCK (3); NORMANI: SWIFT: GABELO, ANDREW H. WALKER/SHUTTERSTOCK (3); MENDES: ERIK PENDZICH/SHUTTERSTOCK

Dirt



\$15.5m

BEVERLY HILLS

5,100 SQ. FT.

5 BEDROOMS

4 BATHS

Ellen DeGeneres Offloads Villa in Trousdale Estates

Almost as well known for their perpetually in-flux portfolio of fearsomely pricey homes as their many showbiz accomplishments, **Ellen DeGeneres** and **Portia de Rossi** have sold a soignée Hollywood Regency villa in the trendy Trousdale Estates area of Beverly Hills for \$15.5 million, a huge amount by any standard but far less than the almost \$18 million they originally asked. Considering the comprehensive updates and real estate fees that easily ticked up into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, it seems unlikely the property-mad pair turned much, if any, profit on the eye-catching residence, which they scooped up almost exactly a year ago for \$15 million.

Mark David
The
Real
Estalker

The characteristically theatrical work of iconoclast architect John Elgin Woolf, the sophisticated single-story villa, built in the early 1960s and once home to late actress Marjorie Lord, sprawls over about 5,100 square feet, mixing classic Old Hollywood elegance with new-fangled creature comforts. There are five bedrooms, one of them outfitted as a gym, and 4.5 bathrooms, including a master bath that



features boldly veined navy-blue and white marble throughout. The graciously proportioned, deceptively casual combination living and dining room is done up with a rarefied and costly collection of collectible vintage furniture and spills out to a huge, heated loggia with a glittering city-lights view over the swimming pool. The colossal, high-end kitchen is open to a cozy den.

DeGeneres and de Rossi were represented in the deal by Kurt Rappaport of Westside Estate Agency; the buyers brought Hilton & Hyland's Stephen Resnick.

Zoey Deschanel Sells Manhattan Beach Home

After more than a year on the market and a series of declining prices that started out at an in-hindsight too rosy \$5.25 million, "New Girl" star **Zoey Deschanel** and indie film producer **Jacob Pechenik** have sold their house, a family-sized Cape Cod-inspired residence in affluent Manhattan Beach, Calif., for \$4.7 million. Unfortunately for the Hollywood scion, musician and internet entrepreneur, once improvement expenses and real estate fees are factored in, she and Pechenik likely took a loss on the property they picked up about 4½ years ago for a bit more than \$4.5 million.

A charcoal-colored flagstone path passes through a gated and secured courtyard to the front door of the handsomely unassuming residence that measures in at more than 5,300 square feet with six bedrooms and 6.5 bathrooms. Inside, formal living and dining rooms flank the central entrance hall; the marble-countered gour-



\$4.7m

MANHATTAN BEACH 6 BEDROOMS
5,300 SQ. FT. 6 BATHS



\$2.3m

ENCINO
5,100 SQ. FT.
5 BEDROOMS
5 BATHS

met kitchen is open over a large island to a window-lined breakfast room and a family room with fireplace. Sequestered privately in a wing of its own, the master suite comprises a spacious bedroom with fireplace and vaulted ceiling, a private balcony, a fitted walk-in closet and a luxury bathroom with a two-person soaking tub and separate, glass-enclosed shower. Both the living room and family room have glass sliders to the backyard, where a stone-paved loggia with ceiling-mounted outdoor heaters overlooks a patch of grass bordered by clipped plantings and verdant trees that shield it from the neighboring homes.

Deschanel doesn't appear to have moved very far. In early 2018, she and Pechenik shelled out nearly \$5.6 million for another family-sized Cape Cod-inspired home in another Manhattan Beach neighborhood that's substantially closer to the beach.

Shane Johnson, Keili Lefkovitz Upsize in Encino

The celebrity real estate gossip grapevine is abuzz that "Power" star **Shane Johnson** and actress **Keili Lefkovitz** have upgraded

their residential circumstances in Los Angeles with the close to \$2.3 million purchase of an opulently appointed Tuscan-inspired villa in the affluent foothills above Encino. Hidden up a discreet private drive and fortified behind a high wall and decoratively scrolled iron gates, the just shy of 5,100-square-foot, family-sized home packs in five bedrooms and 5.5 bathrooms.

Imposing glass and wrought-iron doors open to a grandly proportioned, double-height foyer and stair gallery surrounded by commodious formal living and dining rooms. Beyond the dining room, a lavishly equipped kitchen is arranged around a large island and has a small, semicircular breakfast bay. A U-shaped wet bar separates the kitchen from an adjoining family room with fireplace. A curved staircase leads to a second-floor lounge surrounded by three en suite guest bedrooms, each with walk-in closet and balcony access, plus a master suite replete with fireplace, private terrace, walk-in closet and spacious bathroom. In the backyard, there's a trellis-shaded terrace outside the dining room, a verdant sweep of lawn with tropical plantings and a slender terrace alongside a tile-accented swimming pool. The property was listed with Chelsea Lazkani at

Digs

Famed Mansion Goes to Marvel Director

"Avengers: Endgame" director **Anthony Russo** has bought Pasadena's "Dynasty" mansion for a bargain \$15 million. Seen in numerous shows and movies, the 106-year-old villa still has its famous lily pond. **JAMES MCCLAIN**



Proposal to Move Mammoths Raises Ire

Along with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures, the adjoining La Brea Tar Pits are scheduled to get a large-scale makeover. Three plans have been submitted, two from New York architectural firms and one from a Danish firm. The plans have varying ideas for the tar pits'



Page Museum: One would add another story, one would enclose it below grade in a giant berm, while the third would add a wing

and a bridge across the tar-laden lake. The most controversial plan is the one that suggests moving the lake pit mammoths inside the museum. However, longtime park-goers are ready to rise up in protest if their favorite models of mammoths are moved. All the proposed projects will minimize the open parking lot and excessive fencing in favor of a more modern look. **PAT SAPERSTEIN**



\$3m

SANTA MONICA

2,300 SQ. FT.

3 BEDROOMS

3 BATHS

Rodeo Realty; Steven Foonberg at Westside Realty Group represented Johnson.

Johnson and Lefkovitz seem to have upsized their West Coast digs from a not quite 1,700-square-foot architectural on a busy canyon road in Bel Air that tax records indicate Lefkovitz acquired more than 15 years ago for a tetch over \$730,000.

Pierce Brosnan Snags Santa Monica Cottage

Pierce Brosnan and Keely Shaye have shelled out close to \$3 million for an unpretentious but hardly inexpensive 1940s traditional cottage on a pretty, tree-lined street in a coveted Santa Monica, Calif., neighborhood. Described in marketing materials as “turn-key,” the handsome and clean, if not especially chic, single-story home has three bedrooms and three bathrooms in just over 2,300 square feet.

With a stone-faced fireplace and a bay window that overlooks the front yard, the formal living room has wood floors that extend into an unexpectedly long combination family room and dining area. The separate, galley-style kitchen has updated,

average-quality stainless steel appliances, practical if pedestrian beige ceramic floor tiles and a small, window-lined dining space. Both guest bedrooms are ample, while the master suite incorporates a separate office, a skylight-topped dressing hall and the most stylishly updated of the three bathrooms. French doors in the master bedroom lead to the simply landscaped backyard, which has a sun-dappled patch of lawn and, behind a detached two-car garage at the end of a brick-paved gated drive, a huge patio for alfresco dining and lounging.

The listing was held by Alejandra Martinez-Sorensen of The Agency; Brosnan and Shaye were repped by Sandro Dazzan, also at The Agency.

It's unclear if the property was acquired for personal use, as the four-time James Bond actor custom-built a much larger and far more luxurious, Bali-inspired oceanfront estate along Malibu's Broad Beach that some years ago popped up as an ultra-luxe short-term summer rental at a sky-high \$250,000 per month. Brosnan and Shaye have also long maintained an expansive foothold in Hawaii, where they preside over a multi-cottage compound along a pristine stretch of sand on the North Shore of Kauai.

Vincent Gallo Buys Trump Tower Condo

Spectacularly enigmatic Vincent Gallo, who hasn't been seen on the silver screen in more than five years, has paid just under \$1.5 million — in cash — for a one-bedroom and 1.5-bathroom condominium on a high floor of New York City's Trump Tower. Gallo, who makes no secret of his support for the building's owner, told the New York Post he “could smell a slowdown in the market” and made a “lowball” offer for the just over 1,000-square-foot unit, which had languished on the market for more than three years with asking prices as unrealistically high as \$3.4 million.

The front door opens efficiently if inelegantly onto a 30-foot-long combination living-dining room stripped of almost all architectural detailing, with basic parquet floors and two huge floor-to-ceiling windows that provide up-close views of the surrounding towers and a spectacular bird's-eye view down Fifth Avenue toward and beyond the Empire State Building. A short corridor with an itty-bitty coat closet and a convenient powder room leads to a windowless kitchen. The master bedroom, also with spectacular views, includes two closets, one almost as big as the kitchen, and a sizable bathroom with a bidet. The unit was listed with Leonel Piraino and Rafael Salas of Brown Harris Stevens.

Residents pay hefty fees — Gallo's unit traded with monthly common charges of nearly \$1,900 plus almost \$2,200 in monthly taxes — that provide them with a full-time doorman, valet and concierge services as well as elevator operators. **Z**



\$1.5m

NEW YORK CITY

1 BEDROOM

1,000 SQ. FT.

1 BATH

Digs

Hollywood Hopefuls Get a Leg Up at Upstart

During the Golden Age of Hollywood, aspiring actresses shared rooms at boarding houses with chaperones to keep them safe. The Upstart Creative Living houses in Silver Lake, Hollywood and other neighborhoods

around the city serve the same purpose for new arrivals in town, but with recording studios, hot tubs and Wi-Fi instead of strict supervision. Bunks or sleeping pods at the shared houses rent for around \$800 per month, with no leases required. The co-living spaces are offered for artists, actors, musicians, DJs, models, comedians, writers, directors and dancers. **PAT SAPERSTEIN**



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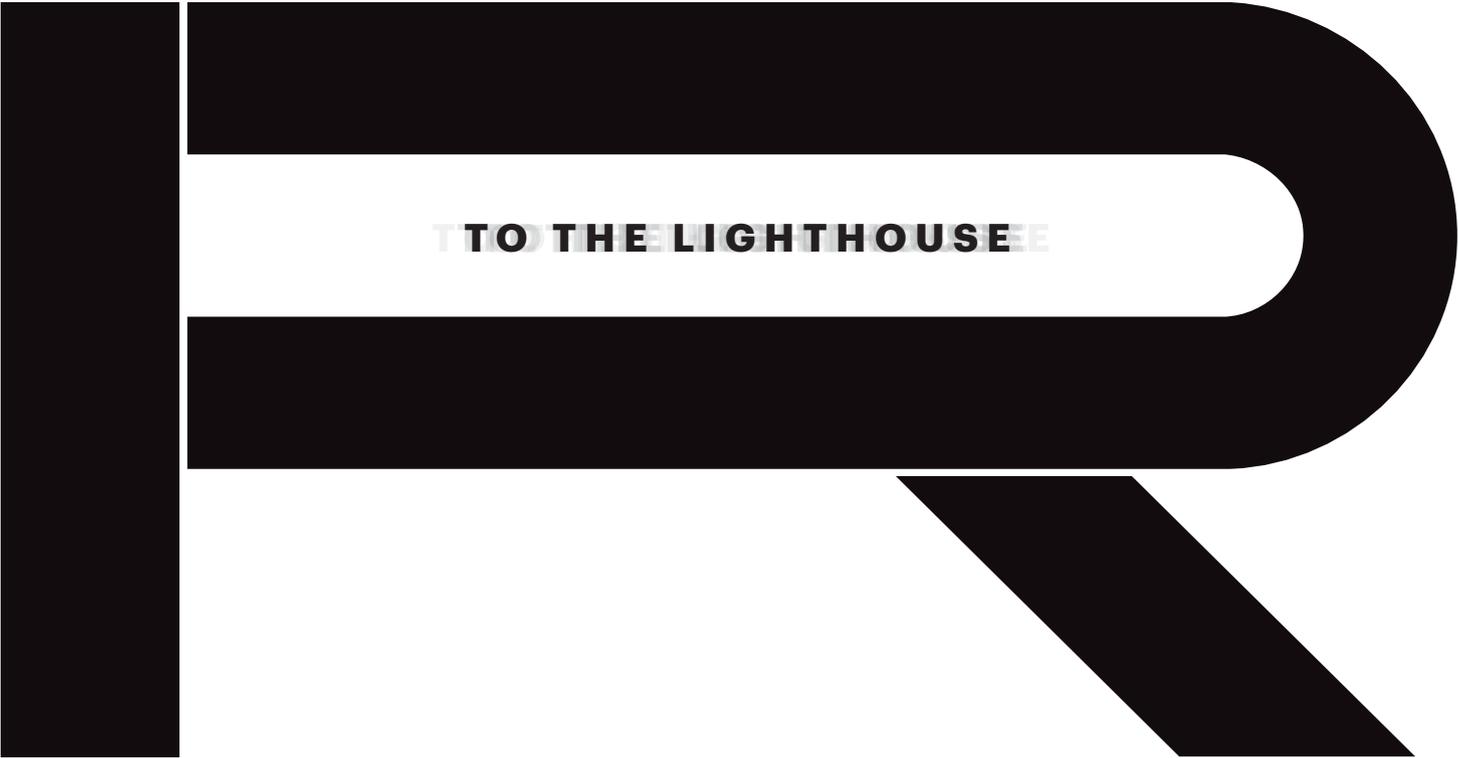
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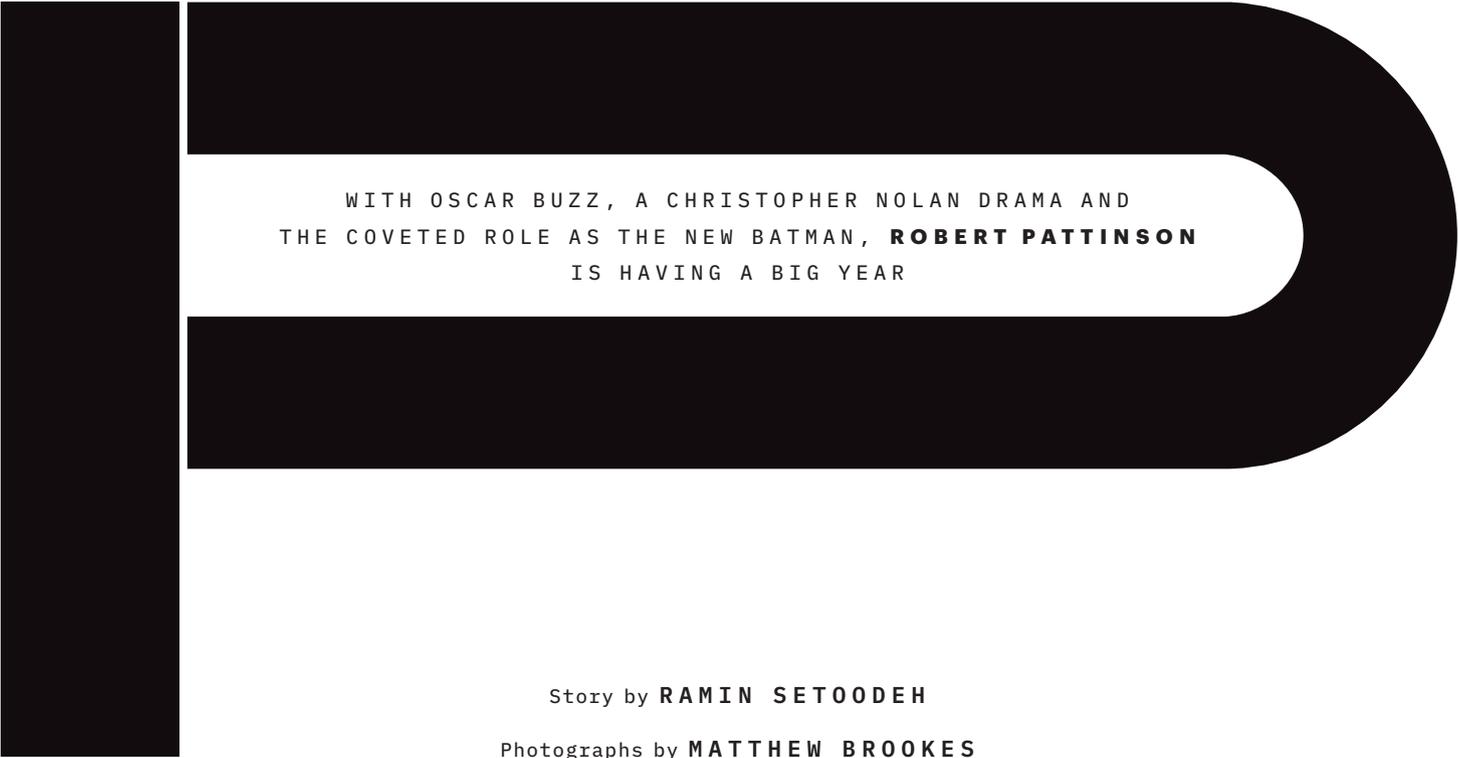
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NICOLAS **CAGE** PRIYANKA **CHOPRA** BRYCE **DALLAS HOWARD**
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JENNIFER **LOPEZ** GUGU **MBATHA-RAW** IDINA **MENZEL**
EDDIE **MURPHY** EDWARD **NORTON** ELLEN **PAGE** KEKE **PALMER**
SARAH **PAULSON** DANIEL **RADCLIFFE** EDDIE **REDMAYNE**
LILI **REINHART** MATTHEW **RHYS** SAM **ROCKWELL**
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TO THE LIGHTHOUSE

A large, bold, black letter 'R' graphic that serves as a background for the introductory text. The letter is filled with a solid black color, and the text is centered within the white negative space of the letter's upper loop.

WITH OSCAR BUZZ, A CHRISTOPHER NOLAN DRAMA AND
THE COVETED ROLE AS THE NEW BATMAN, **ROBERT PATTINSON**
IS HAVING A BIG YEAR

Story by **RAMIN SETOODEH**

Photographs by **MATTHEW BROOKES**

ROBERT PATTINSON couldn't stop Googling himself. In mid-May, the 33-year-old actor found himself obsessively refreshing his phone on a flight from Los Angeles to the south of France. Pattinson was headed to the Cannes Film Festival for the world premiere of his new movie, "The Lighthouse," just days before he was set to start shooting the next Christopher Nolan film, "Tenet." But someone had tipped off the press about another top-secret project, one the entire world was now reporting on: Pattinson had been cast as the next Batman.

The stories were premature — Pattinson hadn't even auditioned yet — and he was horrified that all the chatter would spook Warner Bros. executives into not hiring him. "When that thing leaked, I was fucking furious," Pattinson recalls on a recent rainy afternoon in London. "Everyone was so upset. Everyone was panicking from my team. I sort of thought that had blown up the whole thing."

As he scoured the internet for any clues that he'd been cut from the studio's wish list, the man next to him leaned over to say hello. "I was sitting next to Christopher McQuarrie," Pattinson says. "I'd never met him before. Oh, God! He'd seen me Googling myself for the past hour!" Pattinson tried to explain to the director behind the latest "Mission: Impossible" films what had happened. "No worries," McQuarrie said, nodding. "I'd probably be doing the same thing."

Robert Pattinson never stopped being an internet phenomenon after playing Edward Cullen in the five-part "Twilight" series, which grossed an extraordinary \$3.3 billion worldwide and turned him into the most lusted-after mortal since Leonardo DiCaprio in "Titanic." But after the franchise ended in 2012, Pattinson took the opposite path from mass blockbusters, working instead with indie auteurs such as David Cronenberg ("Maps to the Stars" and "Cosmopolis"), James Gray ("The Lost City of Z"), the Safdie brothers ("Good Time"), Claire Denis ("High Life") and David Michôd ("The Rover" and "The King"). Pattinson relished playing character parts, not needing to worry about hype and audience expectations.

"Rob definitely has a darker side and is comfortable working in that space," says Robert Eggers, the director of A24's "The Lighthouse," which screens this week at the Toronto Intl. Film Festival and opens in theaters on Oct. 18. "And he has good taste in cinema. I think a lot of directors he likes are doing stuff that isn't run-of-the-mill Hollywood."

But in the past few months, Pattinson's career has taken another turn as he's begun gravitating back toward the stormy clouds of movie stardom. He spent most of his summer in Estonia making the Nolan film, which arrives in theaters in July 2020. And of course, despite his concerns, he was cast in "The Batman,"



the Warner Bros. tentpole from director Matt Reeves that will start shooting this winter and debuts in June 2021.

Pattinson can't say exactly what contributed to his process of choosing roles in the past few years. "Big movies, generally the parts aren't as interesting — at least the stuff that was coming my way," he says. "I guess there was some fear." After "Twilight," he wanted to land on solid ground, not lead a life where he was stalked by the paparazzi on his day-to-day errands. He was drawn to quirky and under-the-radar characters that he could sink his teeth into. "I think I probably would have been a little bit nervous to have gone straight into it immediately afterwards," he says about "Batman."

This is Pattinson's first interview since being formally anointed as the Dark Knight. And he still seems to be pinching himself about being next in line to put on the latex boots after Michael Keaton, Val Kilmer, George Clooney, Christian Bale and Ben Affleck. Growing up in England, he watched the Tim Burton "Batman"



“IT’S MUCH MORE FUN
WHEN YOU’RE AN
UNDERDOG. THERE’S NO
EXPECTATION OF YOU.”

—ROBERT PATTINSON

movies. “When I was a kid, it was the only outfit that I had,” Pattinson says. But he won’t reveal *where* he used to wear his Batman costume. “If I actually said it in an interview, I would definitely have a lot of abuse afterwards,” he says with an outburst of nervous laughter. “If I successfully play the character, I can say it at the end.”

When Pattinson was named as the front-runner for the role, the backlash on social media was intense — a petition even surfaced on Change.org asking WB to reconsider. “This will ruin my childhood and my dreams,” one commenter posted. But Pattinson is surprisingly upbeat about the mixed reaction. “To be honest, it was less vitriolic than I was expecting,” he says. And he’s not deterred by the doubters: “It’s much more fun when you’re an underdog. There’s no expectation of you.”

Pattinson splits his time between London and Los Angeles, but he prefers to live on a movie set. He’s restless if he’s not working, and he’s not the kind of person who could travel for months

for fun. "I think I'd come back and my house would have flown off," he says. "I would have absolutely nothing. I'm constantly living in terror." Of what? He searches for an answer. "If you experience a loss of momentum, you don't want that to happen again," he says. "And I really enjoy working. There's no part of me that can go off and disappear."

Besides, he's come to appreciate the camaraderie of the movie-making business. "There's something about people who work in the film industry — they very much wear their heart and dreams on their sleeve," Pattinson says. "There's so much desire falling out of them. I think people in other jobs, their dreams aren't valued as highly. Also, there's nowhere to put them." He says that if he's in an Uber and a driver starts to pitch him a movie idea, he doesn't shudder like other actors would. "I'm so, so into it," Pattinson says. "I don't want to be in L.A. to talk about fucking restaurant reservations. I want to be in L.A. because I love movies."

Yet times have changed. Many movie stars have been crafting career trajectories similar to Pattinson's, swinging from independent films to blockbusters and back. And indie directors such as Ryan Coogler have infiltrated the superhero world. Pattinson reveals he had an informational meeting with Marvel around the time of "Guardians of the Galaxy," but nothing came of it. "I don't know what I would really be chasing," Pattinson says. "The idea of trying that transition after 'Twilight,' I never saw a road in that direction." Batman was different because he was the only comic book character Pattinson always loved. "It's actually an interesting part," he says. "I think it's because he doesn't have any superpowers."

He's noticed how much the entertainment industry has transformed since the first "Twilight" hit screens a decade ago. "It felt like the mid-budget movie completely disappeared, but then it kind of came back with Netflix and the streaming services," he says, adding that he wishes Netflix offered a better way to navigate all its titles. "Hardly anyone sees independent movies at the cinema anyway. It would be amazing if people did."



OSCAR BUZZ
Robert Pattinson with Willem Dafoe in "The Lighthouse" (top) and on set with Robert Eggers



At least he still does. Pattinson says he can sneak into a multiplex, and nobody will bother him. He tried to do that the other day for Quentin Tarantino's "Once Upon a Time ... in Hollywood," but all the shows were sold out. "It's literally impossible to get a ticket anywhere in London," Pattinson says with a sigh. Couldn't he have called in a favor? "I used to have a tiny bit of power. And the power is completely gone. I can't do anything anymore. I actually just called my publicist: 'Can I get some free stuff? Just anything!'" he says in a mock-pleading voice. "I just want a package."

BEFORE HE TAKES ON GOTHAM CITY, Pattinson will first tend to "The Lighthouse." The black-and-white drama is his first performance that's generating serious awards buzz, although it's not your typical Oscar movie. True to its title, "The Lighthouse" is set in a watchtower in the middle of nowhere, as tension builds between a pair of watchmen. (Willem Dafoe plays the other role.) Slowly, things start to happen as the men succumb to their isolation, booze and hallucinations involving a mermaid who lives off the coast. "I remember doing it thinking I don't know how I'm going to promote it," Pattinson says. "Every single scene is just sprinting up to a cliff."

Pattinson had seen Eggers' 2015 Sundance horror film, "The Witch," and he reached out to him about working on something down the line. The first idea that Eggers suggested wasn't weird enough for Pattinson, so Eggers offered him an alternative script called "The Lighthouse." He threw himself into preparing for the role, poring through historical studies about men in lighthouses, reading macabre stories and listening to audio tapes of dialects of New England, where the story is set. And Pattinson moved three months early to Cape Forchu, Nova Scotia, where Eggers had constructed a 70-foot wooden lighthouse, to acclimate to the location. To settle into the character, Pattinson grew a mustache, which he'd been trying to persuade directors to let him do for other parts. He's not offended when a reporter asks if it was a prosthetic. "It's actually real," he says. "I thought it looked a bit fake as well."

Dafoe says that Pattinson will sometimes use humor to disarm others. "He's wildly self-effacing," Dafoe says. "If you ever talk to him about performing, he acts like he doesn't know what he's doing. That's a little bit of a device to allow him more freedom. And I might add that Rob really wants to jump into things, sometimes with his eyes closed."

On "The Lighthouse," he had trouble seeing anything due to the stylized cinematography. "We realized, because of the combination of shooting on black-and-white negative and the 1920s lenses, you need so much light just to get anything," Pattinson says. "We were doing one scene which was talking to each other over a table. The light is so bright, you couldn't see the other actor. OK, this is an unexpected turn of events." Since his character is inebriated for most of the film, Pattinson had to double down on throwing his equilibrium off-balance. But he didn't attempt a Method approach like on 2011's "Water for Elephants," where he actually got plastered. "All you're doing is trying to stay sober afterwards and hoping that no one will find out you're drunk for a drunk scene," he says.

Pattinson relishes all the peculiarities of "The Lighthouse." He reveals that the crew had to move a sex scene from the frigid waters of the ocean to the shore. "We were just sitting there convulsively shivering," he says. "It's not very sexy at all." And he's eager to discuss the moment when his character pleasures himself while thinking about a figurine of a mermaid that he's just

"THE LIGHT IS SO BRIGHT, YOU COULDN'T SEE THE OTHER ACTOR. OK, THIS IS AN UNEXPECTED TURN OF EVENTS."
—PATTINSON



found. "I keep masturbating," Pattinson says of a theme that runs through his recent work. "In the last three or four movies, I've got a masturbation scene. I did it in 'High Life.' I did it in 'Damsel.' And 'The Devil All the Time.' I only realized when I did it the fourth time. But when I saw the clay figure of the mermaid, if you're getting turned on by that, you're in a very strange place in your life."

PATTINSON BEGAN THE YEAR as an unemployed actor, feeling fidgety about his empty schedule. But his concerns were put to rest when his agents phoned him in January to say that Nolan wanted to meet with him. "I couldn't believe it," Pattinson says. "He's one of those people who seem quite out of reach."

He'd been chasing Batman for much longer than anyone knew. Pattinson had heard that Reeves was working on a script that reimagines Bruce Wayne in the younger years of his life. "I'd had Batman in my mind for a while," Pattinson says. "It's such an absurd thing to say. I sort of had an idea to do it, and I'd been prodding Matt. He didn't accept any prods. I kept asking to meet him."

When Reeves finally finished a script, he relented and agreed to a meeting in Los Angeles. "And then I had to kind of try to imagine what he'd written, and I hadn't even read the script," Pattinson says. "I'd come with this pad full of notes." As discussions continued, Pattinson arrived in Cannes in May, and all hell broke loose in the press. "It was terrifying," he says. "I was like, 'Oh fuck! Does that screw me because they are so intent on secrecy?'" He found himself attending the "Lighthouse" premiere in the middle of reading the script pages that he'd just been sent. "I'm literally in Cannes in my hotel room [rehearsing]," Pattinson says. "The whole thing was a lot."

After "The Lighthouse" screened to a rapturous standing ovation, Pattinson promptly flew back to L.A. to try on the Batsuit for the final phase of the high-stakes audition. "It's maybe the craziest thing I've ever done in terms of movie stuff," Pattinson says. "I put it on. I remember saying to Matt, 'It does feel quite transformative!' He was like, 'I would hope it does! You're literally in the Batsuit.'" Pattinson describes what the moment was like: "You do feel very powerful immediately. And it's pretty astonishing, something that is incredibly difficult to get into, so the ritual of getting into it is pretty humiliating. You've got five people trying to shove you

into something. Once you've got it on, it's like, 'Yeah, I feel strong, I feel tough, even though I had to have someone squeezing my butt cheeks into the legs.'"

Although he had a clear take on how he'd play Batman, he had to adjust his movements to his new latex body. "You're trying to think of the way to balance, how to bring something new to it and not want to scare people off," Pattinson says. "And work in the confines of the costume."

Five days later, he officially became the Dark Knight. "I was absolutely relieved when Matt called," says Pattinson, who got the role over actor Nicholas Hoult. In fact, Pattinson received the career-changing news on his first day on the set of Nolan's film. "It's so bizarre," he says. "I was like, 'What a coincidence this is happening. It's absolutely crazy.'" A surprise benefit was that he was able to pepper Nolan, who made the "Dark Knight" trilogy, with questions. "I was talking about things to do with the Batsuit," Pattinson recalls. "How to get more movements in it."

Pattinson won't say whether he's committed to additional "Batman" movies. "I don't know anything," he says. "I've got an idea how to do about four scenes, and then I'm working on the rest gradually." At one point in our conversation, he offers a mundane comment about Joaquin Phoenix, who stars in "Joker" (a movie he hasn't seen yet), before asking to retract it. "Oh shit," he says, adding that he's not accustomed to thinking about spoilers. "I definitely should not say that. I'm so used to pretty art-house movies, where you can watch the movie three times and still not know what it's about."

It's likely that playing Batman will invite the paparazzi back into his life, but he's not concerned. He says that Instagram has taken the pressure off movie stars, because there's so much free photo content of celebrities (and wannabe celebrities) on the web. "There's no money in it for people to follow you around," Pattinson says. "There are just so many photos of me you can get in a black baseball cap getting a diet peach Snapple. Or on Friday night, getting a Kit Kat."

Like Bruce Wayne, Pattinson has taken shelter in his own Batcave. "I made it impossible for people to follow me," he says. "I'd be completely hermetic. It wouldn't be worth it to wait outside my house, because I wouldn't come out." ❧

TORONTO

CANNES

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FESTIVAL WARRIOR.

GLEN BASNER'S FILMNATION HAS BACKED PROJECTS THAT HAVE SCORED BOX OFFICE SUCCESS AND WON OSCARS AND TONYS. NOW, WITH MARKET FORCES CHALLENGING INDEPENDENT FILM, HE'S GOT A PLAN TO ADDRESS ALL PLATFORMS

Story by
BRENT LANG

Photographs by
AMANDA JONES





G

GLEN BASNER LIVES TO MAKE DEALS.

Be it Toronto or Cannes, Sundance or AFM, you'll find the FilmNation founder in the throes of negotiations over pricing and marketing plans, schmoozing and working every angle to nail the best pact. Director Armando Iannucci, who worked with FilmNation on the upcoming "The Personal History of David Copperfield," recalls seeing Basner in action after he presented the Charles Dickens adaptation to potential buyers at the 2018 Berlin Film Festival.

"He was running from booth to booth, having all these conversations, and he just kind of lit up with this infectious smile," says Iannucci. "Fundamentally, all of the things he's doing on the business side are borne out of a love of film. That's what makes him so good at what he does."

Basner will be on hand at the Toronto Intl. Film Festival for the world premiere of "David Copperfield," with Dev Patel in the title role, and the screening of Pedro Almodóvar's "Pain and Glory," starring Antonio Banderas, for which he sold the international rights. He will also likely be selling yet-to-be-revealed packages to buyers at the market.

His genuine enthusiasm for moviemaking has well served Basner, 52, and the company he founded in 2008. In the decade since FilmNation opened its doors, it has established itself in the top ranks of film production and sales companies. Its résumé includes critically acclaimed box office hits such as "The Big Sick," "Gloria Bell," "Arrival" and "The King's Speech." The company has also been responsible for some of the biggest sales to come out of festivals and markets, partnering with 30West and CAA to sell domestic rights for "Late Night" to Amazon at Sundance for a record-setting \$13 million, and working with CAA to sell rights to "Down Under Cover," a Chris Hemsworth and Tiffany Haddish comedy, at Cannes for more than \$40 million.

"Our taste, aesthetic and our approach to doing business is to be best in class in our execution," says Basner.

At a time when many indie films are faring poorly at the box office and some smaller companies are struggling financially, Basner has also seized upon a simple but effective creative strategy for making movies. Don't bore people. "Movies have to be entertaining," he says. "That doesn't mean they have to be light and fun and breezy. They can be serious and sad. But you have to deliver an emotional experience that satisfies people, and if you don't do that, you're done."

Now, FilmNation is taking an approach that's served it well in the features business and applying it to other mediums. Two years ago, as part of a larger diversification strategy, the company branched into theater, television and podcasting. And though it's early days, the moves appear to be paying off.



HIDDEN GEM?

FilmNation is backing "Promising Young Woman," the feature directing debut of Emerald Fennell (second from left), on set with DP Benjamin Kracun and stars Sam Richardson and Carey Mulligan.

Onstage, the company invested in "The Band's Visit," which won 10 Tony Awards, including best musical, lead actor and actress, director and score; a revival of "True West" with Kit Harington that was a hot ticket when it ran in London; and "The Sound Inside," a Broadway-bound drama with Mary-Louise Parker. On the podcasting front, it produced sci-fi anthology series "Hyper-Thetical" for subscription service Luminary. And in television, it has started production on "I Know This Much Is True," an adaptation of Wally Lamb's best-selling novel that stars Mark Ruffalo and will appear on HBO. It's also preparing TV series adaptations of Isabel Allende's "The House of the Spirits," Daisy Goodwin's "American Heiress" and John Updike's "Rabbit Run," the last a co-production with U.K. outfit Lookout Point.

"Our decision to diversify was all about storytelling," says Milan Popelka, the company's chief operating officer. "There are a lot of stories out there to be told, and not all of them work as movies. We want to be a place where anyone with an idea can come, regardless of what form that story ultimately takes."

One of those new avenues for storytelling emerged out of FilmNation's unique corporate culture. Seven of the company's 40 employees, ranging from assistants to senior executives, cooked up the pitch to go into podcasting as part of something the company has dubbed InnovationNation. It's an initiative that's been in place since 2014, one that enables employees to take time off to explore business opportunities or come up with proposals to do things more efficiently. FilmNation's startup vibe is further fostered in the many retreats it hosts for staffers, as well as its insistence on calling workers "citizens" as opposed to employees.

It's a warmer, friendlier sensibility that's in keeping with its founder. There's something low-key about Basner. He's certainly got a natural way with people, and has a salesman's knack for putting them at ease. Yet, he doesn't have the hard-charging, bare-knuckle persona that characterizes other Hollywood players.

"Oftentimes people mistake being tough with being nasty, or being nice with being soft," says Basner. "I don't know if people consider me nice or not nice, but I'm going to be true to myself. I didn't get into the movie business until later in life, so I didn't carry any of the baggage or insecurities that I may have if I started when I was in my early 20s."

Indeed, Basner's entry into the world of moviemaking wasn't conventional.



After college, he got a job working for his father's clothing business in New York's garment district. But he didn't feel fulfilled. His career pivot began when his friend, filmmaker Edward Burns, enlisted him to help with production on "The Brothers McMullen," a 1995 indie comedy that broke out at the box office. From there, Basner got an entry-level job at Good Machine, the influential film production company behind Ang Lee's "The Ice Storm" and Todd Solondz's "Happiness." He loved the atmosphere, and relished the chance to watch Nicole Holofcener huddling over the editing bay on "Walking and Talking" or arranging last-minute private plane travel to ensure that Good Machine executives could circumvent a snowstorm to make a Sundance premiere. But it was only after David Linde, one of the company's co-founders, tapped him to help out with international sales that Basner found his calling.

"I knew he would be great," says Linde. "If you can sell sweaters, you can sell anything."

After Good Machine, Basner had a stint at The Weinstein Co., where he founded its international sales operations. Through it all, he nursed ambitions to create his own company, one that would enable auteurs to direct the movies they wanted to make at a time when studios were shuttering their independent film labels and concentrating more aggressively on franchise fare. He launched FilmNation with backing from real estate developer, film producer and financier Steve Samuels and developers Dominic A. Visconti Jr. and Anthony Visconti II. (Roadshow Distribution would buy a 30% stake in the company in 2014.)

The business plan, calling on Basner to tap into his network of foreign distributors to finance productions, may have been sound. However, the timing was not propitious. FilmNation launched in the fall of 2008 just as the financial markets began to teeter and the global economy slid into recession. The company scaled back plans to hire more staff and

became more conservative about the number of films it backed. Ultimately, it was able to survive, and announced itself as a major player in the space with the release of "The King's Speech," which went on to win the best picture Oscar and gross more than \$400 million globally.

"Things happened for us because we were able to navigate those strong headwinds and actually get movies sold and financed and made when others couldn't," says Basner. "That allowed us to move up the food chain years ahead of when we might have."

From that rocky start, FilmNation has expanded beyond its New York headquarters to install offices in London and Los Angeles. The company has established itself as a haven for filmmakers who make quirkier and more offbeat fare that studios shy away from. When Universal punted on "The Big Sick" or when Fox 2000 put "Late Night" into turnaround, it was FilmNation that swooped in and put the projects together. Often it will reach out to filmmakers it admires such as Iannucci or Emerald Fennell, the "Killing Eve" showrunner who will make her feature film directing debut in the FilmNation-produced "Promising Young Woman."

"Often producers will try to make a film in their own image, but they [FilmNation] don't interfere unless you need their help," says Fennell. "My film is quite an odd one that is sitting across a lot of genres, but there was never any pressure to make it more mainstream. On the contrary, they were like, 'Lean into it. Make it more crazy!'"

Not every film has gone as planned. FilmNation made money selling movies such as "Late Night" and "Life Itself" to Amazon, but both movies failed to resonate with audiences, flopping badly when they were released in theaters.

"When a movie, regardless of how great the sale is or how much money we made on it, doesn't connect with audiences theatrically, it's soul crushing," says Basner. "You feel terrible for the filmmakers and the cast and for your distribution partner."

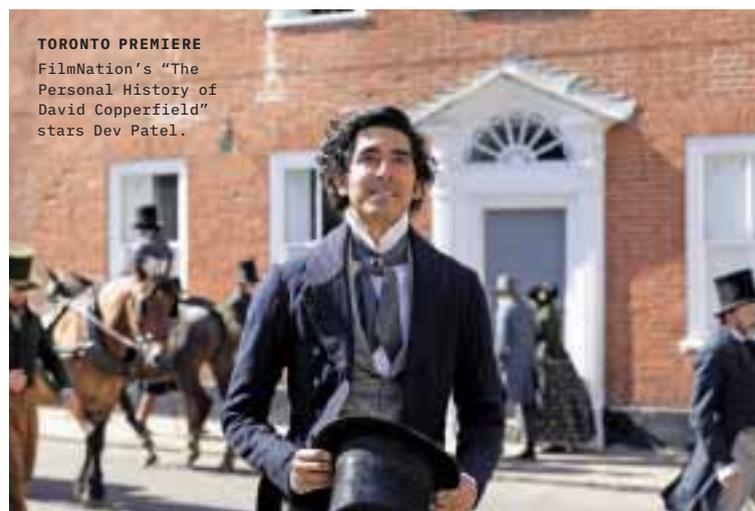
FilmNation is privately held, so it doesn't disclose its financial performance, though executives say it has been profitable since 2010. Revenues and profits have grown each year, they say. The company also boasts a \$120 million credit facility from Bank of America and Union Bank that gives it the capacity to make four to six movies a year.

FilmNation executives take pains to stress that even as they move into podcasting, theater and television, they'll continue to make feature films, such as the upcoming Cold War thriller "Ironbark" and an untitled documentary about pornographer Larry Flynt's presidential campaign. But the reality is that independently financed movies are being brutalized. "Late Night" wasn't the only festival favorite to collapse at the box office in recent months — "Blinded by the Light," "Vox Lux" and "Wild Rose" are just a few of the movies to score big deals at Sundance or Toronto before going on to bomb. That could depress prices for movies at future festivals, since distributors are likely to be wary of overspending for something with murky commercial potential.

To that end, FilmNation is making some concessions to the new ways that movies are being released and monetized. Going forward, the company plans to make two to three films annually that will forgo a theatrical release in favor of debuting on streaming platforms such as Netflix or the soon-to-launch HBO Max and Disney Plus. "There's an amazing proliferation of new buyers," says Ben Browning, co-president of productions and acquisitions at FilmNation. "We took a pitch out in July to six of these services, and we realized that three of them haven't even launched yet. But they need content, and they need it now."

There are some things Basner does appear to be ruling out. He's not interested in self-distributing the movies he makes, nor is he gearing up for any kind of public offering. And while he's willing to produce short-form video for, say, a Quibi, he doesn't have anything in the works yet.

"When you're building a business, there's always these shiny, exciting things, and you think why don't I do this or why don't I do that?" says Basner. "On the creative side, we like that. We don't want there to be boundaries. But on the business side, if we want to last for another 10 years, we need to remain disciplined." ■



TORONTO PREMIERE
FilmNation's "The Personal History of David Copperfield" stars Dev Patel.

'IT'S ALWAYS SUNNY IN PHILADELPHIA'
TAKES AN UNLIKELY PATH TO TV HISTORY

By Joe Otterson

Low Road, High Results

A group of friends hang out in a bar. It's a typical sitcom setup. But "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia" has never been typical — and FX Entertainment president Eric Schrier can attest to that. He was one of the executives "laughing our asses off" a decade and a half ago at a screening of the show's pilot. ¶ "I think what was so great about it was that it was an alternative version of a sitcom, where you had these crazy characters that said and did all things totally politically incorrectly," he says. "But there was a smarter understanding behind the show. They were dealing with societal issues, so there was this great combination of a high-brow side of it masked with a very broad-based lowbrow side."

The single-cam series, which debuted in 2005 on FX, will air its 14th season this month. In doing so, it will tie "The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet" for longest-running live-action TV comedy in history, making it an unlikely entry into the television pantheon. "Always Sunny" has now aired more seasons than "Cheers," "MASH," "Seinfeld," "Friends" or "Frasier."

"Always Sunny" was one of FX's first originals, airing alongside early hits like "The Shield," "Rescue Me" and "Nip/Tuck." It is also FX's longest-running show, period. Its core cast — Rob McElhenney, Glenn Howerton, Charlie Day, Kaitlin Olson and Danny DeVito — has remained intact virtually throughout its run.

The show has endured in part because of its willingness to push the boundaries of comedy. Topics lampooned on the series have included pedophilia, incest, racism, alcoholism,

abortion and the gun debate — and that was just in Season 1. Its main characters all work at a fictional Philadelphia bar called Paddy's Pub, where they engage in various schemes and illicit dealings for personal gain or simply to undermine each other.

The show also helped redefine what a comedy, particularly one on basic cable, was capable of in the early aughts. One need only look at the shows that were up for the best comedy Emmy in 2005 — "Everybody Loves Raymond," "Arrested Development," "Will & Grace," "Scrubs" and "Desperate Housewives" — to see how the landscape has changed in the years since "Always Sunny" started.

The show connected early with college-age men. But DeVito notes that longevity has brought with it a broader audience.

"I've experienced this where 11-year-olds will come up to me on the street," DeVito says. "Almost the same fans as 'Matilda!' I expect them to say, 'I'm such a big fan of 'Matilda,' but this kid goes, 'My favorite was the water park episode!' I think of it, and I say to myself 'Holy shit, I was running around in that one talking about having AIDS to get to the front of the line of a water slide.'"

"Always Sunny" has never been a favorite of the awards community. In fact, the show did an entire episode spoofing exactly that in its ninth season. The plot revolves around the gang trying to win the award for best bar in Philadelphia; the episode ends with Day's character singing a song to awards voters in Paddy's Pub that culminates with him belting out, "Go fuck yourselves," and spitting on the bewildered patrons.

Yet the series remains popular even after more than a decade. According to FX, the 13th season averaged just over 3 million viewers per episode in multiplatform viewing. That's up from 2.2 million multiplatform viewers in Season 10.

Part of the show's early appeal was its almost homemade aesthetic, which was influenced by the original pilot that McElhenney, Day and Howerton shot for next to nothing with a digital camera before pitching it to various networks.

"We knew what we liked, but we didn't know how things were supposed to be done," Howerton says. "It was sort of that bullheaded attitude and being told, 'You can't do it that way,' that emboldened us."

All three agree, however, that they're glad they knew so little going in about making a show, something McElhenney calls a "trial by fire." He does say there's one thing he would change though: "To remember to enjoy the process a little bit more, which we certainly started to do as time went on," he says. "When we started, I was 25 or 26, and I so desperately didn't want to wait tables anymore that I was willing to do anything and everything to make sure that this was going to succeed. We just killed ourselves to make sure that it held up to a certain standard, which I'm proud of doing, but at the same time it wasn't as enjoyable as it could have been if we lightened up a little bit."

(BOTTOM) PATRICK MCELHENNEY/FX; (TOP) BYRON COHEN/FX



LONG LEGS

Rob McElhenney, Glenn Howerton, Kaitlin Olson, Danny DeVito and Charlie Day (below left) have been together for more than a decade on "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia."

"It was sort of that bullheaded attitude and being told, 'You can't do it that way,' that emboldened us."

▶ Glenn Howerton



That early effort has clearly paid off, with all of the core cast members pursuing successful projects since the show began. DeVito continues to star in films like the live-action "Dumbo"; Howerton toplines the comedy series "AP Bio," which was recently revived for a third season at the NBCUniversal streaming service after two seasons on NBC; Olson starred in the Fox series "The Mick"; and McElhenney and Day are prepping a comedy series for Apple.

Howerton is also branching out within "Always Sunny," making his directorial debut in the new season. He says it was always his intention to start directing on the series, but he held off until now. "The reason I haven't done it before, besides the fact it's hard to do because we shoot multiple episodes at one time, is I have a tremendous amount of respect for directors and what that takes," he says. "I never wanted to just jump into it like, 'Oh, I could do this.'"

But one of the drawbacks of being on a series as successful as "Always Sunny" is that network executives are essentially expecting the same show when they hear about a new project.

"Rob and I went through that with our Apple show," Day says. "There's always some expectation that they're going to get 'Sunny,' but then there is always the hope that they are going to get us as a cast. 'Sunny,' beyond the writing, is us performing and the chemistry that we have together. So there is the hurdle of saying, 'Well, you're not going to get that, but you are going to get something great.'"

Olson echoes that sentiment, saying she's often pitched projects in which she would basically be playing her character from "Always Sunny," adding those shows "just aren't as well written." "I would love to play some other characters in some different endeavors, but it's nice to be able to come back here because I realize how great we have it."

"I really feel like I hit the jackpot," she continues. "It's hard to imagine another show ending up as fun and as special as this one." ❧

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PRACTICALITY SETS SILICON ALLEY APART IN TECH WORLD

New York companies build up industry with down-to-earth approach

STORY BY ROBERT MARICH



NEW YORK'S SILICON ALLEY occupies a densely populated area loaded with human expertise, money and corporate ambitions. The local tech culture stands in opposition to Silicon Valley's shoot-for-the-moon ethos by emphasizing practical concepts that are magnets for funding and, if realized, are ideal as bite-size acquisitions for larger companies.

"There's less of the 'giant idea' that's meant to re-paint the sky but more down-to-earth [concepts] that can be implemented in the short term," says Al Lieberman, professor at New York University's Stern School of Business and executive director of NYU's Entertainment, Media & Technology program.

By all measures, the Big Apple region ranks a distant second in tech heft after Silicon Valley. The PwC/CB Insights MoneyTree Report counts New York second among states for tech deals and investment measured in dollars for the second quarter of 2019, but the sum is less than a quarter the size of leader California. When looking at metropolitan areas, PwC/CB Insights MoneyTree places New York-Newark as No. 2, ahead of No. 3 Boston-Worcester-Providence and No. 4 Los Angeles-Long Beach. Those numbers measure all tech, reflecting specializations such as the Boston region's concentration of health-care tech, Pittsburgh's leadership in robotics and Washington's focus on cybersecurity and defense.

The New York tech industry's focus is in digital media, entertainment and advertis-

TECH ON TRACK
Trains roll in and out of Hudson Yards, one of New York's top hubs for the tech industry.

ing. Those are in synch with established hometown industries such as advertising, broadcasting, cable TV networks, magazine and book publishing and the pro sports leagues headquartered in the city. For example, Warner Bros. parent company AT&T is building a 20,000-square-foot WarnerMedia Innovation Lab in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan that will be a testing and proving ground for digital media touchpoints.

Tech congregates in Manhattan, especially at the emerging Hudson Yards real estate development, as well as in Brooklyn and adjacent Long Island. Among New York's appeal to employers is its sheer size, with a vast cadre of white-collar workers and a youth-skewing population, which is the first generation of digital natives.

"When you see all the drivers across many verticals, not just media/entertainment but also financial tech and health care ... they're all here," says Jesse Redniss, general manager of the WarnerMedia Innovation Lab.

Manhattan-based tech entrepreneur Brett Goldberg, co-CEO of online concert and sports ticketing company TickPick, which scored a \$40 million investment from PWP Growth Equity in August, says the population provides "expertise in every specific job front you want to hire, whether it's developers, engineers, CFOs and marketing. You don't have to worry about re-locating people. The people are already here."

Other New York advantages include a cosmopolitan old-world atmosphere and

geographic location that attracts European companies setting up U.S. offices. For example, the U.S. headquarters for Sweden-based music-streaming behemoth Spotify is a Manhattan high-rise. The region's extensive in-city train transit system is cited as other advantage, because tech workers uncomfortable driving can live a car-less lifestyle.

Of course, New York has drawbacks. Labor, operating and land costs are high; the city's infrastructure is crumbling; and the major tech players are largely headquartered elsewhere.

Moneywise, Wall Street rarely funds tech's boom-or-bust startups. But as an affluent region, there's potential to attract high-net-worth financial angels with deep pockets willing to take a bet.

Nurturing companies from scratch — keeping tech-skilled wizards from running off the business rails — is the realm of specialist venture-capital funders who are "company building specialists," says Eric Hippeau, managing partner of Lerer Hippeau Ventures, a Manhattan-based VC firm with media investments. "That's not done through financial engineering. It's done through blood, sweat and tears."

New York tech mushroomed by embracing the digital side of the region's traditional media and entertainment industries and an orientation toward the practical. "There is very little tolerance here for building something with a ton of eyeballs and no revenue, which is something you do see in San Francisco," says one digital New Yorker. ▀

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ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA LAWYERS

ELITES OF THE EAST

Execs and attorneys in and around the Big Apple shaped showbiz with big deals in the past year

BY ROBERT MARICH

HOODED JUSTICE
Attorney Victoria Cook helped talent cut deals for HBO's upcoming "Watchmen" series, starring Regina King.



RUDY ADOLF

Founder, Chairman and CEO Focus Financial Partners

New York-based Adolf is the great consolidator for Hollywood business-management firms providing accounting, financial planning and banking services. With acquired companies, Adolf pursues a scalable approach to owner-succession planning and executive recruitment, sharing of best-practices knowledge and the clout of combined purchasing power. Since December, Focus has bought Neuman + Associates; David Weise & Associates; Altman, Greenfield & Selvaggi; Wasserman, Grossman & Sloan; and U.K.-based Skeet Kaye Hopkins. Neuman and Weise merged into NKSFB, Hollywood's largest such firm, which Focus acquired in early 2018. Focus is publicly traded, with a \$1.5 billion stock market capitalization.



BOB BAKISH

President and CEO Viacom

JOE IANNIELLO

President and Acting CEO CBS Corp.

Bakish revived Viacom since taking the helm in 2016, laying the groundwork for the blockbuster deal last month to reunite with CBS. In the past year, Bakish catapulted Viacom into mainstream streaming with the \$340 million acquisition of Pluto TV, partnered with Tyler Perry on streamer BET Plus, acquired the Garfield property and, for MTV, the SnowGlobe Music Festival. Ianniello accelerated content investment for CBS All Access and Showtime streaming, concluded an AT&T TV channel carriage deal ending a black-out, and bought full ownership of Pop TV. Bakish sees Pluto "as a platform to work with distributors, to create incremental value in broadband, mobile and video sub bases, both through advertising and by up-selling additional video."



BRUCE CAMPBELL

Chief Development, Distribution & Legal Officer, Discovery

New York-based Campbell says today's direct-to-consumer connection enables "going deep with passionate audiences, including a participatory element and not just long-form video content." He adds that brand-name intellectual property is needed to stand out in a cluttered landscape. This past year saw him set up a global video-streaming business using BBC content and unwind a 50/50 TV channel venture with the BBC, giving Discovery full ownership of three U.K. channels. He also established joint ventures with home-improvement gurus Chip and Joanna Gaines; the PGA Tour to create streamer GolfTV; with Tiger Woods for a content partnership; and acquired "Golf Digest."



CHARLES S. COHEN

Chairman and CEO Cohen Media Group

Buying leading indie-movie cinema circuit Landmark Theatres and its 252 screens in December, Cohen grew his company's footprint in the arthouse cinema business. The New York-based entrepreneur and self-described "lover of all things film" adds Landmark to a portfolio that has already expanded into film distribution, film restoration and VOD. In 2015, he bought the revered Merchant Ivory film library. Forbes magazine puts Cohen's net worth at \$3.4 billion, which is grounded in real estate. Cohen says that today's audiences, facing mushrooming digital online options, may temporarily freeze from content overload. "There's a lot to navigate and find what they are passionate about," he says.



VICTORIA COOK

Partner, Entertainment Group, Frankfurt Kurnit Klein & Selz

Cook finds that creative talent today comes from broader backgrounds and geography, so Hollywood gigs are "not as cookie-cutter as they used to be," making a bigger impact on the culture. She repped the creators and co-stars of "Desus & Mero" in their move to Showtime; Oscar-nominee Dee Rees in nabbing the directing gig on "The Last Thing He Wanted" as her second feature with Netflix; and director Alison Klayman and producer Marie Therese Guirgis for doc "The Brink." The New York attorney also repped talent for HBO projects: Nicole Kassell for directing and producing "Watchmen" and Augustine Frizzell for directing "Euphoria."

WATCHMEN: MARK HILL/HBO; ADOLF: FOCUS FINANCIAL PARTNERS; BAKISH: ASA MATHAT; IANNIELLO: CBS; CAMPBELL: ADAM LERNER

**ROB FREEMAN**

Partner, Co-head of Technology, Media & Telecommunications, Proskauer

"In an increasingly disaggregated world, the issue becomes whether some service emerges that once again aggregates the best brands and content under one roof," says the New York-based lawyer who focuses on entertainment and sports. Freeman advised longtime client Discovery Inc. on launching its direct-to-consumer streamer GolfTV in association with PGA Tour; on acquiring the Golf Digest magazine; and on acquiring BBC programming for a streaming initiative. Other clients include cable system operator Cox Communications, Charter Communications' Spectrum arm, Caribbean-focused multichannel provider Digicel, NBA Media, Hulu, and online wagering company the Stars Group for its partnership with Fox Sports.

**DEXTER GOEI**

CEO, Altice USA

JON STEINBERG

President, Altice News

Goei negotiated the \$200 million acquisition in April of millennial-focused financial news streamer Cheddar. Helming the No. 4 cable-system operator, Goei also launched Altice Amplify (partnered with Amazon and Devialet) and Altice Mobile (partnered with AT&T for roaming). Founding Cheddar in 2016, Steinberg grew the company to \$27 million in 2018 revenue and 190 employees. Along the way, Steinberg raised tens of millions of dollars from Jeremy Liew's Lightspeed, Raine Group, Altice USA and others. Steinberg, former BuzzFeed president, is struck by the proverb that "the conventional wisdom is usually right but seldom profitable." He finds going against the grain increases risks, but reaps greater rewards if successful. Both execs are in New York.

**BRIAN GOLDNER**

CEO Hasbro

DARREN THROOP

CEO Entertainment One

Digital-media ambitions are behind Pawtucket, R.I.-based Hasbro's agreement to buy Entertainment One for \$4 billion. Goldner says that tapping eOne's "immersive entertainment capabilities ... better positioned [us] to unlock the full franchise value of our brands." Goldner bought the Power Rangers brand last year for \$522 million. Hasbro also licenses merchandise rights for Marvel, Star Wars, Disney Princesses and Frozen. Throop orchestrated eOne's physical and digital distribution deal with Universal Pictures Home Entertainment and bought U.K.'s Audio Network for \$215 million earlier this year. Headquartered in Toronto, eOne is an original investor in Steven Spielberg's Amblin Partners and owns foreign-film sales company Sierra/Affinity.

**TOP TOYS**

The "Star Wars" toy license is an anchor for Hasbro, which last month acquired Entertainment One for \$4 billion.

**KILLER DEAL**

Richard B. Heller repped Aaron Sorkin in his deal to adapt "To Kill a Mockingbird" for Broadway.

**JUSTIN G. HAMILL**

Partner, Latham & Watkins

Hamill observes that while China is formally opening its local media and tech economy wider, there's a chill from the larger U.S.-China trade battle. "It's an interesting puzzle as a result," Hamill says. "People are trying to figure out how to place their bets. It'll play out over the next 18 months." The New York-based lawyer is advising long-time client Endeavor on its mammoth IPO, now in registration. He also advised Endeavor on the April sale of its creative ad agency Droga5 and the December merger of its sports marketing business, which created the sizeable Learfield IMG College. Other clients include Richard Branson's Virgin Group.

**RICHARD B. HELLER**

Partner & Co-chair, Entertainment Group, Frankfurt Kurnit Klein & Selz

With long-predicted convergence now a reality, Heller says the downside is now apparent as "information overload" from the overflowing media. Going forward, he sees dealmaking around entertainment brands from "iconic talent and storytellers that cut through the clutter." Working the literary scene in New York, Heller repped Roald Dahl Story Co. to Netflix for family-oriented animated series, Aaron Sorkin for the Broadway adaptation of "To Kill a Mockingbird" and author Dean Koontz for a new book-publishing deal with Amazon. Heller also works Hollywood talent, celebrity branding, motion pictures and TV, publishing, streaming and Broadway.



JOEL A. KATZ

Founding Chairman, Global Entertainment and Media Practice, Greenberg Traurig

The Atlanta-based music attorney says music talent needs to be vigilant to get a fair share of streaming bounties from record labels and music publishers. He sees streaming as a blessing because “much more money is being spent by record companies on the discovery and promotion of new talent.” Katz repped Big Machine Label Group in its sale, reportedly for more than \$300 million. Katz also advised Australian concert promoter Frontier Touring in selling a 50% stake to AEG Presents and the employment contract for Randy Goodman to remain head of Sony Music Nashville. Katz is also general counsel to the Recording Academy.



STACY MARCUS

Partner, Entertainment & Media Industry Group, Reed Smith

With high-quality digital video equipment widely available, the New York-based lawyer says that “the definition of ‘celebrity’ has evolved. It now includes YouTubers and people who are not professional performers by training as advertisers are attempting to connect with consumers in an authentic way.” Marcus repped advertisers and advertising agencies in the three-year, \$3 billion commercials contract negotiated in April with SAG-AFTRA. In the past year, she also worked \$58 million in corporate sponsorships and celebrity endorsements, including luxury fragrances, cosmetics and accessories for talent endorsers and a cannabis company tie-in with a rapper.



JONATHAN LEVINE

Music Executive Leadership Group, Paradigm Talent Agency

DALE MORRIS

Founder, Morris Higham Management

Morris sold his decades-old concert touring arm Dale Morris & Associates to Paradigm in November, adding country acts Kenny Chesney and Old Dominion to the agency’s Nashville roster. Levine signed country singer Kacey Musgraves for touring and the Johnny Cash estate for legacy-building. Morris remains at his separate personal management company, Morris Higham Management, though his touring lieutenants, Mike Betterton and Nate Ritches, joined Paradigm. Morris was a songwriter when he quit his pharmaceuticals sales job for music in the 1970s. Morris recalls that in the 1980s, when concert fees for top country acts topped out at \$25,000, he booked venues directly for Alabama generating \$125,000. “Just remember ... if your act sells tickets, you have to do the math,” he says.



ERIK PIECUCH

Senior VP and Team Leader — Entertainment, City National Bank

Piecuch handles bank accounts for half of Broadway’s shows, including “Harry Potter and the Cursed Child,” “Dear Evan Hansen” and eight-time Tony winner “Hadestown.” The New York-based banker finds Broadway an epicenter of two-way traffic for acting talent: Entertainers from other sectors hit the boards, as producers seek “brand names” that sell tickets, while newcomers look to the Great White Way as a launch pad to stardom and eventual career diversification. He also arranged \$20 million in new private banking loans in the past year to individuals and companies in entertainment.



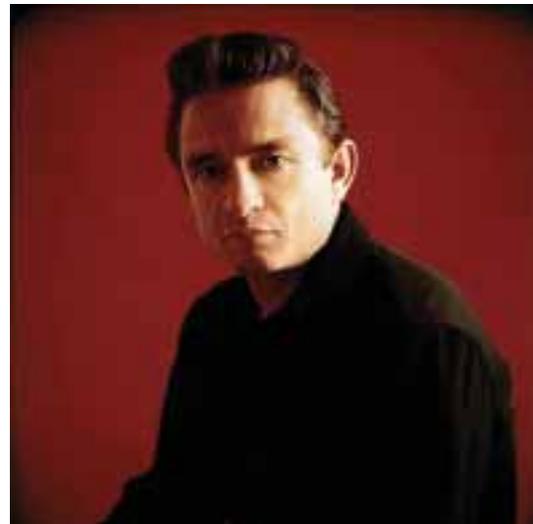
DAVE LOUGEE

President and CEO, TEGNA

Lougee orchestrated nearly \$1.5 billion in broadcasting acquisitions this year that, when consummated, will lift the Tysons, Va.-based company to 62 TV stations reaching 39% of the U.S. In June, TEGNA paid \$77 million for the 85% stake that it didn’t already own of multicasters Justice Network and Quest. Looking at consumer behavior, Lougee feels “what’s kind of lost ... in discussion around cord cutting is there’s actually a lot of cord shaving” as households pull out some cable tuners. Yet, those households are counted as full cable homes though more reliant on over-the-air TV.

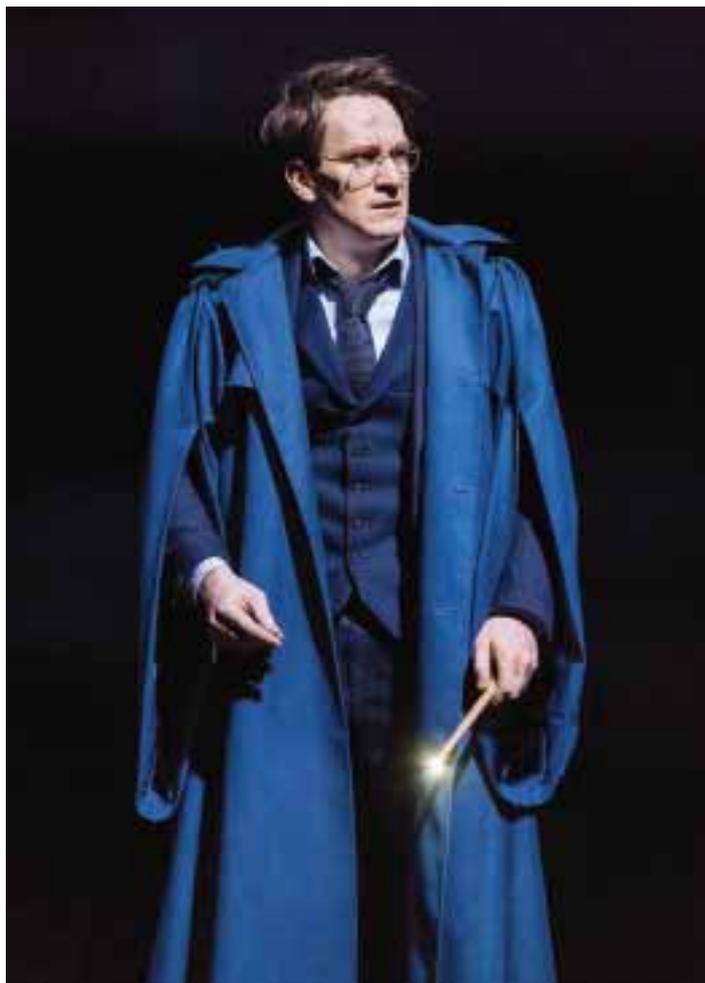
HERITAGE ACT

Jonathan Levine signed the Johnny Cash estate to Paradigm’s Nashville roster.



POT OF GOLD

Eric Piecuch of City National Bank handles accounts for Broadway hits such as “Harry Potter and the Cursed Child.”



LEVINE: JOHN SHEARER; MORRIS: JON PAUL BRUNO; LOUGEE: BUSINESS WIRE; CASH: MOVIESTORE/SHUTTERSTOCK; PIECUCH: PATRICK NUGENT/WAGNER PHOTOS NYC; HARRY POTTER: MANUEL HARLAN



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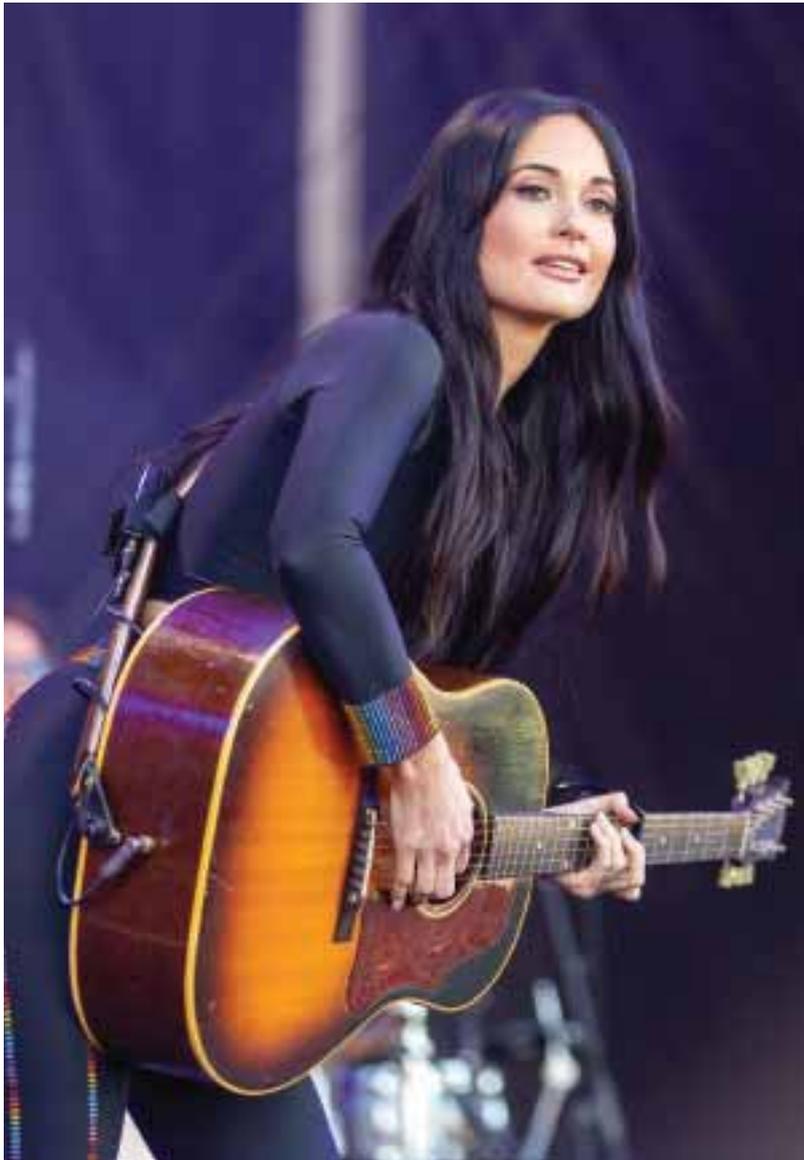
Marc H. Simon



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TOON TUNES

Jonathan Levine signed Kacey Musgraves, above, to a touring deal with Paradigm. Jess L. Rosen also repped Musgraves for several agreements, including a song on the soundtrack to Disney's "Frozen II," right.



BOB PITTMAN

Chairman and CEO iHeartMedia

New York-based Pittman says legacy media should adopt leading-edge data and analytics to emulate and compete with digital advertising, which is an objective of the Project Listen partnership iHeartMedia unveiled in June with advertising giant WPP. A founder of MTV, Pittman guided the radio broadcaster and its 850-plus stations through a bankruptcy that wrapped in May — emerging with less debt and following that up with a direct stock listing in July. A partnership with live-events streamer LiveX-Live was unveiled in March. Pittman diversified into digital radio streaming, award shows, concerts and podcasting — bolstered by acquiring podcaster Stuff Media, reportedly for \$55 million, a year ago.



SIMON N. PULMAN

Partner and Co-Chair, Entertainment Practice, Cowan, Debaets, Abrahams & Sheppard

With streaming igniting a Hollywood production boom, Pulman says that “the continued golden age of television allows rights holders to pursue aggressive dealmaking” for usages granted, creative involvement and financial terms. The New York-based lawyer works transactions for Blumhouse Television, including “The Good Lord Bird” at Showtime, and an adaptation of the Atlantic magazine article “The Stolen Kids of Sarah Lawrence” for TV. Pulman also repped writer Nathaniel Rich for his nonfiction book “Losing Earth” for an Apple TV series, and comics house IDW Entertainment for “Locke & Key” and two other Netflix projects. Other clients include Epix and Macmillan Entertainment.



CHRIS RIPLEY

President and CEO

LUCY RUTISHAUSER

Chief Financial Officer
Sinclair Broadcast Group
Entertainment & Media Practice

Sinclair diversified with a flourish, having bought 21 Disney/Fox regional sports networks for roughly \$10 billion in May, and is in a consortium that bought New York’s YES sports network last week. Ripley and Rutishauser also engineered the follow-on \$9.6 billion debt offering in four tranches. The Baltimore-based company with 191 stations also inked a regional sports channel alliance with the Chicago Cubs and launched locally focused streamer Stirr. Ripley is jazzed by interactive TV standard ATSC 3.0, which offers “much more in the way of programming choice, VOD assets and targeted advertising; premium subscriber-based content; synchronization; low latency for sporting events; [and] integrated interactive features.”



JESS L. ROSEN

Shareholder & Co-Chair, Atlanta Entertainment & Media Practice, Greenberg Traurig

Music-maven lawyer Rosen repped Kenny Chesney for his 2020 stadium tour deal, Florida Georgia Line for a multi-year Live Nation concert deal, Lady Antebellum for its Big Machine Records contract, rapper Pusha T.’s multiyear Adidas endorsement and multi-hyphenate Nicolle Galyon in mentoring female artists with her Songs & Daughters imprint and renewing her Warner/Chappell publishing deal. Rosen also handled Kacey Musgraves for an Apple promotional deal, a Christmas TV special for Amazon and a song for the “Frozen 2” soundtrack. Rosen nudges radio and streamers to embrace under-represented female artists as smart business. “It helps if everybody is pushing the right way,” he says.

MUSGRAVES: RMV/SHUTTERSTOCK; PITTMAN: ANDREW H. WALKER/VARIETY/SHUTTERSTOCK; PULMAN: MARTIN BENTSEN; FROZEN II: DISNEY; ROSEN: CLIFF ROBINSON

Congratulations to our
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Richard Heller, on their
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RICHARD SARNOFF

Chairman, Media, Entertainment and Education for Private Equity/Americas, KKR

The New York-based Sarnoff is connected to investments in Epic Games; UFC, as a minority investor in the Endeavor-controlled mixed martial arts sports business; fantasy sports company FanDuel; smart-audio-speaker maker Sonos; spoken-content producer RB Media; and KKR subsidiary Internet Brands' acquisition of WebMD. KKR is elsewhere a consolidator in the German entertainment and media business, after earlier this year acquiring content and media outfit Tele Munchen Group and movie distributor Universum Film.

HOUSE WORK

Marc H. Simon represented the producers of the documentary "Knock Down the House."



LAWRENCE SHIRE

Partner, Head of New Media, Motion Picture, Theater, Publishing and Sports, Grubman Shire Meisel & Sacks

Shire finds that diverse deal templates proliferate across traditional Hollywood, podcasts, other new media and licensed merchandise. "Each of the forms of media grew up at different times and have evolved differently," he says. Shire repped Bruce Springsteen for his "Western Stars" doc, acquired by Warner Bros.; journalist Gayle King for her "CBS This Morning" deal; rapper Drake for his SiriusXM/Pandora partnership; and Robert De Niro for Netflix's "The Irishman." For client Scott Rudin, the New York-based lawyer handled Broadway productions "To Kill a Mockingbird" and the upcoming "West Side Story" revival. Other clients include LeBron James and Elton John. Corporate clients include Facebook, iHeartMedia and Spotify.



MARC H. SIMON

Vice Chair of Entertainment & Sports Law, Fox Rothschild

In the past, intellectual property fit in obvious Hollywood silos, but Simon notes that media's proliferation blurs lines today so "there's a fork in the road" between scripted and non-scripted avenues for development. Non-scripted can mean quicker to market, though potentially with lower production budgets. The New York-based attorney repped exec producers of the Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez doc "Knock Down the House," acquired by Netflix at Sundance reportedly for \$10 million, and Joe Pesci in big-budget drama "The Irishman." Simon also handles Stacey Reiss as producer of Netflix hit "The Perfection," supermodel Adriana Lima's transition to brand entrepreneur, and Alec Baldwin's El Dorado Pictures.



JOHN STANKEY

CEO, WarnerMedia

Stankey's purview this past year includes preparing to launch HBO Max into the high-stakes global streaming wars, naming Ann Sarnoff the first woman chair and CEO in the history of Warner Bros., and courting top creative talents such as J.J. Abrams ("Star Wars: The Force Awakens") to join the Warner stable. A 34-year veteran of parent AT&T who is based in New York, Stankey sees eventual convergence for disrupter video streaming and traditional linear TV. "Two or three years from now, they're probably going to merge and you'll have a single product that does both," though it likely will tilt more toward on-demand content, he says.

HIT 'MEN'

Lawrence Shire represented Robert De Niro for Martin Scorsese's upcoming Netflix organized crime feature "The Irishman."



KNOCK DOWN THE HOUSE: NETFLIX; SHIRE: DAPHNE BOROWSKI; SIMON: DAVID MICHAEL; HOWARTH: THE IRISHMAN; NETFLIX



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FINANCIAL 'FATE' Debbie White repped China's Tencent in co-financing deal for the upcoming feature "Terminator: Dark Fate."



POWER PLAY Tim Sweeney led "Fortnite" game maker Epic Games through a billion-dollar round of financing.



TIM SWEENEY

Founder and CEO, Epic Games

Epic's "Fortnite" e-sports tournament in July pulled in 2 million live online viewers, filled a New York-area arena and doled out \$30 million in prize money, reflecting the heights to which Sweeney has led the North Carolina-based video-game maker. In December, Epic's digital store shook up the industry, raising the developers' cut from sales from 70% to 88%, and the company was valued at \$15 billion in an October investment round from KKR, ICONIQ Capital, Smash Ventures, aXiomatic, Vulcan Capital, Kleiner Perkins and Lightspeed Venture Partners. They join earlier investors Tencent, Endeavor and Walt Disney Co. Bloomberg News estimates Sweeney's personal net worth at \$7.2 billion.



MATTHEW SYRKIN

Partner and Global Chair Media, Technology and Commercials Transactions Group, Hughes Hubbard & Reed

Syrkin believes dealmakers need to be savvy in economics and technology, as digital disrupts traditional deal templates. He says that requires smarts in e-commerce, "privacy and data collection, alternative data deals, subscription models and how influencers drive brand presentation, as well as emerging technologies like holograms and augmented reality." The New York-based attorney negotiated Epic's first direct-to-consumer streaming distribution affiliation, with Roku. For luxury brand John Varvatos, Syrkin guided fashion product deals with rock band Led Zeppelin and HBO's "Game of Thrones." Other clients include AMC Networks, Bumble, CBS, Ernst & Young for transactional matters and Madison Square Garden.



DEBBIE WHITE

Partner & Vice Chair, Music Industry Group/Entertainment, Loeb & Loeb

The New York-based lawyer says that music-streaming services' appeal on increased mandatory publishing royalties for music streaming bears watching because the outcome "is going to have a profound effect on the livelihood of songwriters who rely on that income." White reps South Korea's Big Hit Entertainment and its K-pop sensation BTS, including global stadium-tour merchandise with Live Nation. White also leads the team handling China's Tencent, including its co-financing deal on the next "Terminator" movie. Other clients include Christie Brinkley, Melanie Martinez, Regina Spektor, the Who for North America and singer-songwriter James TW. She also handles music and sponsorships for Citibank and Uber.



WESTEROS STYLE

Matthew Syrkin repped John Varvatos' deal for fashions based on "Game of Thrones."

TERMINATOR: KERRY BROWN/PARAMOUNT PICTURES; FORTNITE: EPIC GAMES; WHITE: GITTINGS; GAME OF THRONES: HELEN SLOAN/HBO

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TORONTO FILM FESTIVAL

CINEMA OASIS IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Toronto gains strength as a marketing tool and awards season launchpad

STORY BY GREGG GOLDSTEIN



FAST TRACK Disney inherited drama "Ford v Ferrari," starring Christian Bale (in car, above) and Matt Damon, when it bought Fox, and now the pic's screenings at Telluride and Toronto take on much more importance for its awards season marketing team.

THE TORONTO INTL. FILM FESTIVAL is no longer just one of the biggest fests in the world. As sequels, reboots and franchises dominate the 2019 box office, TIFF now represents a cross-section of the industry's few remaining attempts at original feature film-making. And given numerous specialty film B.O. disappointments, few if any award contenders so far and a fourth quarter that seems more backloaded with highbrow releases than most years in recent memory, the 2019 edition seems especially pivotal.

TIFF's offerings include big-budget studio films that aspire to be more than tentpoles (Fox's "Ford v Ferrari," Warner Bros.' "Joker"); award-season bait (A24's "Waves," Netflix's "Marriage Story," Roadside Attractions/LD Entertainment's "Judy"); acquisition hopefuls ("Jungleland," "How to Build a Girl," "Bad Education," "The Burnt Orange Heresy"); docs; and foreign films.

Adding to the uncertainty are a slew of new streaming platforms, with a few owned by the newly supersized Disney, raising further questions about majors' already shaky commitment to theatrical exhibition for films without recognizable brands. Fox Searchlight's uncertain level of support from new owners Disney, and Amazon (in a Netflix-style move) now cutting the theatrical window on films like its Imax-bound adventure "The Aeronauts" and its Sundance pickup "The Report" to a couple weeks before they hit Amazon Prime, only further unsettles the specialty marketplace.

"I think it's a great opportunity for filmmakers now that everyone is investing in content, but at the same time, there's too much product," says TIFF executive director Joana Vicente, who is co-heading her first Toronto with artistic director Cameron Bailey. "So how does that product, especially the smaller, more specialized films, actually get seen? That's scary, and then you have films that people have lots of hope will do well theatrically that got amazing reviews, like 'Booksmart,' that don't live up to expectations."

It's a problem that Exhibitor Relations senior box office analyst Jeff Bock is all too

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Photo by Joel Jares.

familiar with. "Because of how the release calendar lines up and how many franchise films have taken over the media, it's hard for these [specialty] films to gain any sort of foothold in theaters for longer than two weeks," he says. "At the end of August, there are 10 feature-length releases and most of them are going into over 2,500 theaters — good luck trying to hold any of those. So when you play in summer, it's much easier to get burned as an indie. And by the end of summer, when you think things are going to cool off, they don't. That's when the studios have dumped everything that they have. They have the marketing power. So even if you're going to be lucky enough to be in 700 theaters, a bomb like 'The Kitchen' is going to be [on] 2,700 [screens]."

The dependence on festivals and the awards season as a launching pad is only likely to increase at those few risk-averse majors still making original titles — even ones featuring big stars, brand names and subject matter (like the racing drama "Ford v Ferrari") that once might've been considered a safe summer bet.

"It's an incredible, commercial film, but it also has quality performances, and we feel like it functioned on all cylinders," says "Ford" producer Jenno Topping, who made the Matt Damon/Christian Bale-topped film at Fox before Disney's March acquisition of the studio. "So one of the ideas was to maximize its potential [along the lines of] a movie like 'The Martian.' It's also just so beautifully made that to not give it its moment in the sun in the fall seems like a waste." The bet paid off as the film was also accepted into the prestigious Telluride Fest.

Similarly, part of the "Joker" fest strategy seems to be to highlight the awards potential of Joaquin Phoenix's performance and position it as a character study as well as a DC Comics film.

"EVERYTHING'S MOVED UP A FEW WEEKS, AND SO TORONTO BECOMES A MUCH BIGGER OSCAR SHOWCASE."
— TOM BERNARD



EMBRACEABLE YOU Pedro Almodovar's "Pain and Glory" started its prestige run at Cannes and continues its fall campaign at TIFF.

Even with the backing of a studio, adult dramas face a field of landmines like mergers and regime changes. "This is a true Cinderella story, in the sense that ['Ford v Ferrari'] is not an easy movie to get made in this climate, because it's a very expensive [under-\$100 million] drama with action," Topping says. "But once the takeover happened, [we] had nothing but complete support and engagement from Disney. So thankfully we didn't get hung up in any way in terms of the transition."

Sony Classics co-president Tom Bernard arrives in Canada with five titles, including Pedro Almodovar's "Pain and Glory," which earned Antonio Banderas a best actor award in Cannes. He ties TIFF's increased significance in this year's specialty market to the Oscars' move from Feb. 24 to Feb. 9.

"It used to be at the end of March, so you had a very long time to maximize the value of your movie or pick a spot to open it," Bernard says. "Now everything's moved up a few weeks, and so Toronto becomes a much bigger Oscar showcase because the voting and dates have all changed."

And with adult-oriented major studio fare like this year's best picture winner "Green Book" from Universal becoming all the more rare, the importance of the film's 2018 win of the TIFF People's Choice Award (which has predicted best picture nominees and winners — with only one exception — since 2007) only grows. "Green Book" would have disappeared if it hadn't been for the Oscar [race]," Bernard says.

It's something Vicente is well aware of. As the former head of IFP, she saw how the org's Gotham Awards raised her organization's profile and helped indie films gain traction.

In that vein, TIFF is launching an awards component, presenting honors to Meryl Streep (Steven Soderbergh's TIFF player "The Laundromat"), "Joker" star Phoenix, Participant Media (behind fest entries "Just Mercy" and "Sing Me a Song"), Mati Diop ("Atlantics") and Taika Waititi ("Jojo Rabbit"). Cinematographer Roger Deakins ("The Goldfinch") will take home the *Variety* Artisan Award. "We are really excited about having the opportunity to honor amazing artistic achievements during the festival," Vicente says. "At the same time, it is a fundraiser for the organization, and we're given the opportunity to remind people of all of our activities year round."

Making TIFF more of an awards-oriented fest — something its organizers resisted for years — may be one way to help its films gain attention and traction, and make the event a more attractive stop on the ever-competitive fest circuit.

But most importantly, TIFF offers films traction in a market with ever-increasing options from series that have sucked up talent and revenue that's traditionally gone to features. As Bernard puts it, "it's a business where the bottom line eventually catches up with you if you're not paying attention to it." ■

LA SCREENINGS:
 INDIEXFEST.COM 9-6-19 (CA PREMIERE)
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GLOBAL ISSUES DRIVE DOC SLATE

Veteran helmers tackle non-U.S. politics in Toronto's stellar lineup

STORY BY ADDIE MORFOOT

FUELED BY STREAMERS and strong B.O. on high-profile titles, the documentary genre has exploded, and Toronto Intl. Film Festival documentary programmer Thom Powers sifted through 850 possibilities before determining this year's non-fiction lineup. While these 25 films vary widely, "politics is going to be ever-present in this section," Powers says.

Last year, filmmakers including Michael Moore, Alexis Bloom and Errol Morris explored American politics and the people behind President Donald Trump's rise. But the 2016 election is nowhere in site at this year's fest. Instead, veteran doc filmmakers Alex Gibney and Lauren Greenfield as well as first time non-fiction helmer Garin Hovannisian are examining politics in foreign lands, and issues such as election manipulation, corruption, fake news and fragile democracies.

Gibney's "Citizen K" looks at post-Soviet Russia from the perspective of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, an oligarch turned political dissident, while Greenfield's "The Kingmaker" (Showtime) aims its lens at former first lady of the Philippines Imelda Marcos.

Both films are cautionary tales about democracy, corruption and demagoguery.

After the dissolution of the U.S.S.R., Khodorkovsky amassed a fortune in financing and oil production. But when Vladimir Putin became president, Khodorkovsky sensed the country's democracy was in danger and rallied against him. Soon after, Khodorkovsky was sentenced to more than 10 years in prison. In 2013, Putin pardoned Khodorkovsky, who lives in exile in London.

Gibney was attracted to the oligarch's story because it was a way "to look into how power works inside Russia.

"After the fall of the Soviet Union, there was a vacuum and a kind of zeal to embrace something new, with no understanding of what that was," the helmer explains. "What I found interesting was that the businessmen chose to believe that they were separate from politics, except there would be no business without access to and manipulation of the political process. If Americans want to know how bad it can get when business determines politics, all they have to do is look at Russia in the '90s."

The director admits that Khodorkovsky was equally charming and troubling. "I liken him to Jake La Motta in 'Raging Bull,'" Gibney says. "A dynamic flawed character

— a fighter — you learn to embrace."

Like Khodorkovsky, Imelda Marcos is a dynamic, flawed character.

When Greenfield began shooting "The Kingmaker" five years ago, she thought the film would be in large part be about a Philippine island that was turned into an African animal park, its indigenous inhabitants sent to a nearby island that couldn't sustain their agricultural life.

But the focus of "The Kingmaker" changed when it became clear to Greenfield that Marcos was attempting to regain power through her son Bongbong's bid to become vice president of the Philippines. The former first lady was also using her son's campaign as a vehicle to rewrite the history of the Marcos family and replace it with the narrative of a matriarch's lavish love for her country.

"I was just so surprised that somebody who had gone into exile and the entire world basically saw as a dictator who had stolen five to 10 billion (from her country) was able to go back (to the Philippines) and get back into politics," says Greenfield.

After shifting the film's focus to Marco's return, Greenfield initially thought she was making a doc about redemption.

"Because she is such a generous, nice and appealing person when you meet her, I thought that maybe there would be some wisdom that had been gained," explains the

director. "I was open to that and also wishing for that, but she hasn't changed her version of history and she is so convincing that I realized I had to bring in other voices — what I call truth tellers — to give a more accurate version of history."

Hovannisian's "I Am Not Alone" also explores decades of corruption, specifically, corruption involving former Armenian president Serzh Sargsyan, and protests that led to a peaceful citizens resistance movement led to Sargsyan's resignation.

"The Armenian genocide was the dominant story of the Armenian people," says Hovannisian. "But here right in front of me was another story not about death or destruction, but finally a story about the hope and the possibility of regaining your freedom and regaining your nation."

Andrew Renzi's "Ready for War" (Showtime) focuses on losing one's nation. Renzi follows three of the estimated thousands of immigrants who volunteer for service in the U.S. military only to be deported, often due to petty crimes, once their tours of duties are over. Renzi says the film, executive produced by Drake, doesn't preach to a liberal choir.

"People on the left, they're generally very sympathetic about immigration issues and people on the right are generally very sympathetic to veterans. I think with this film I have a very specific, nonpartisan entry point into the conversation about immigration," says Renzi.

The fact that "Ready for War" is one of the only docs at TIFF 2019 that spotlights American politics doesn't surprise Powers.

"It is not as though [the programming team] weren't seeing films that relate to U.S. politics," he says. "Those films are definitely being made. We just didn't see any this year that really stood out strongly enough to us. It's difficult to find a real original take when there is a daily churn in other media (outlets) about U.S. politics." ▮

DISTANT VOICES
Alex Gibney's "Citizen K" looks at dissident oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who lives in exile in London.



GOOD EATS IN TORONTO

New concepts and time-tested favorites get ready for the influx of hungry movie lovers

STORY BY KATHY A. MCDONALD

TORONTO festivalgoers can mix and match between the familiar and novel between screenings and meetings as the city has a dining spot to fit every mood, budget and schedule. From quick bites to late-night revelry to of-the-moment deliciousness, it's all happening close to TIFF venues.

WINE BAR WITH A TWIST

Per Locals, Grand Cru Deli is a hidden gem. Plus, it's steps from TIFF's Scotiabank Theatre. The upscale wine bar meets deli features a finely tuned selection of Canadian and European wines. There are Canadian beers on tap plus a full spirits list providing a buzzy stop before or after screenings. A special TIFF menu is in the offering, but typically there are deli faves like matzo ball soup and lox and bagels plus wine-friendly noshes such as charcuterie, artisan cheese and caviar.

304 Richmond St. W
grandcrudeli.com



NEWLY SEAFOOD CENTRIC

Festival standby Luma (on the second floor of the TIFF Bell Lightbox) now features seasonally changing, sustainably sourced Canadian shellfish and seafood served in all their possible incarnations. There's a daily oyster selection and sumptuous seafood platter, a Nova Scotia lobster roll, cod tacos and native Haddock fish-and-chips. The daily savory soup is always vegetarian and non-fish mains veer from roast chicken to a beef burger presented "paleo" style (no bun). Expect TIFF-themed cocktails too. A tasty menu of small bites is available in the lounge after 3 p.m.

TIFF Bell Lightbox, 350 King St. W
lumarestaurant.com

LUNCH TO LATE NIGHT

MARBL's green and shaded patio is a welcoming spot for lunch close to the TIFF Bell Lightbox; the modern eatery recently updated its lunch menu. Crowd-pleasers include the spinach and artichoke dip with grilled pita, Daffy wings (crispy salt and pepper seasoned duck wings), mussels and fries and the loaded turkey club. On two floors, the downstairs has a champagne lounge for celebratory occasions. During TIFF, the restaurant will be open until 4 a.m.

455 King St. W
marbltoronto.com

POST SCREENING ROMP

On weekend nights, craft beer brewpub Northern Maverick Brewing Co. transforms into a sultry nightclub complete with bottle service, caviar and towers of Canada-sourced cheese, endless oysters and a DJ-led dance party. There is also an ample supply of fresh drafts made in-house by the King West brewery from sours to the signature lager.

115 Bathurst St.
mannightlife.com

YORKVILLE CLASSIC

After more than 20 years, Sassafras remains a go-to spot for TIFF attendees. Notable for its fresh take on Canadian ingredients, in-demand dishes include the Quebec wild boar chop, tuna and shrimp ceviche and the Fogo Island cod and chips. Late-night partygoers opt for the fish tacos, says Sassafras's Zoran Kocovski.

100 Cumberland St.
sassafras.ca



COOKING WITH HEARTH

One of the trio of Momofuku's Toronto concepts, the conceit of Kojin is elementary: meats (and more) are cooked on an open flame within view of diners. The menu reflects executive chef Paula Navarrete's emphasis on culinary skills and seasonality. The griddled corn flatbread and daily selection of sausages are among the items made in-house. Steaks and chops are the hits: the pasture-raised beef comes directly from the Ontario countryside. The wine and beer lists emphasize selections from Canadian winemakers and breweries. Desserts are elevated comfort food classics from the fruit cobbler to the rich chocolate soufflé.

Third Floor, 190 University Ave.
kojin.momofuku.com



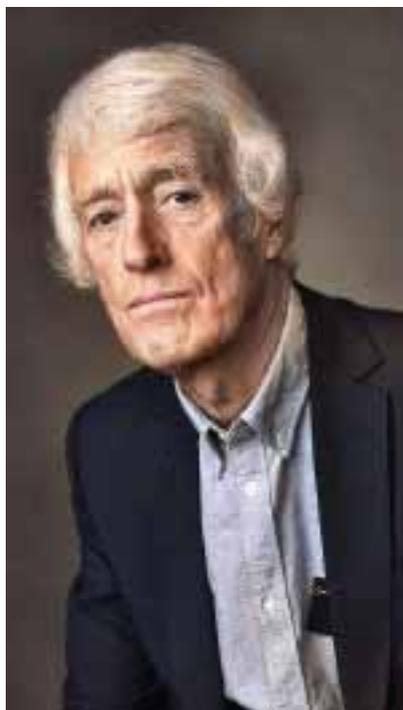
CHIC HOSPITALITY

Victor Restaurant, within Le Germain Mercer hotel, expands its service during TIFF. The continental breakfast buffet is still available along with a-la-carte indulgences like the mascarpone-stuffed French toast. However, during the festival, lunch is also on the menu from 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. Settle into a comfortable teal leather booth or secluded corner; ample natural light infuses the stylish space. A new private dining room, called the Sullivan Room, seats 50. Executive chef Lanny MacLeod's Concession Stand Brownie is his refined and very sweet homage to movie theater snacks.

30 Mercer St.
victorrestaurant.com

CINEMATIC EXCELLENCE

This year, the Toronto Intl. Film Festival launches a new array of awards “that highlights some of the year’s best films, as well as longtime contributors to our industry,” according to fest co-head Joana Vicente. Besides recognizing on-screen talent, the awards also spotlight artisans and emerging voices in world cinema.



ROGER DEAKINS
VARIETY ARTISANS AWARD

● **THESE DAYS, CINEMATOGRAPHERS** have their choice of a dizzying array of cameras, lenses and every imaginable gizmo designed to move, stabilize or otherwise impact a shot. But legendary cinematographer Deakins asks one pointed question when discussing his way of composing for film:

“Why move the camera if there isn’t a reason to do it?” says Deakins. “I mean, I used to shoot a lot of music videos, and whenever you lost confidence in the band you started to move the camera, so if you believe in what you’re filming, why move it?”

Deakins’ belief in holding on to moments that are solid and significant is just part of what makes him a legend in the film world. “The Shawshank Redemption,” “Fargo,” “A Beautiful Mind,” “No Country for Old Men,” “Skyfall” and “Blade Runner 2049,” which earned him an Academy Award, all illustrate the style that has made him a sought-after collaborator.

Production designer Pierre-Olivier Vincent, who has worked with Deakins on all three “How to Train Your Dragon” films, believes Deakins encouraged them to reach new heights on the animated films.

“When he came in to work with us, I was expecting something, I don’t know, to be intimidated,” says Vincent. “But he wasn’t like that at all. He wanted to help us and I think when we decided we wanted to do certain things visually and the studio knew he believed it, they said yes, so our films became even better.”

Deakins also runs RogerDeakins.com, where he answers questions from filmmakers and fans who are interested in learning about his work and techniques.
— Karen Idelson



MATI DIOP
TIFF MARY PICKFORD AWARD

● **THE TIFF MARY PICKFORD AWARD** recognizes an emerging female talent in film, and this year’s inaugural recipient, Diop, is the first black female director to screen a film in competition at Cannes, with her debut “Atlantics.” The film went on to win the Grand Prix.

“This year United Artists is celebrating their 100th anniversary, and honoring Mary’s legacy felt right,” says Jonathan Glickman, president of MGM Studios’ motion picture group. “As Mary was a Toronto native and a trailblazing industry leader, we are thrilled to partner with TIFF, which continues to recognize groundbreaking achievements in filmmaking. Our goal was to continue cementing a legacy that was representative of Mary and her impact in the industry now and for future years.”

The Paris-born Diop has acted in films by Claire Denis and Antonio Campos, and she has filmmaking in her blood. Her uncle was the renowned Senegalese director Djibril Diop Mambéty, whose “Touki Bouki” inspired her own documentary short “A Thousand Suns.” “Atlantics,” which elaborates upon her earlier short of the same name, “is a romantic and melancholy film, part social commentary, part ghost tale, that works best in its evocation of loss and female solidarity,” wrote *Variety* critic Jay Weissberg.

“Diop, like Mary Pickford, is active in social causes and has an abundance of talent both in front of and behind the camera,” Glickman adds. “If ‘Atlantics’ is any indication, we are confident she will continue to make an influential difference in the industry and look forward to what she has in store for us.”
— Akiva Gottlieb



PARTICIPANT MEDIA
TIFF IMPACT AWARD

● **THE NEW TIFF IMPACT AWARD** is being given to Participant Media, which backs movies and programs that both entertain and inspire social change.

“Participant Media is celebrating their 15th anniversary this year,” says Joana Vicente, executive director and co-head of the Toronto Intl. Film Festival. “They obviously had a great year last year, with ‘Roma’ and ‘Green Book.’ Their work just aligns with our mission. Our mission is about transforming the way people see the world through film, and they’re about inspiring social change.”

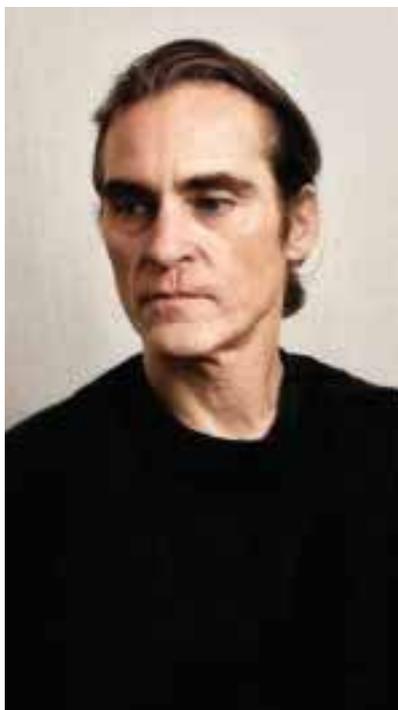
For Participant Media CEO David Linde, above, that impact can be measured through three different kinds of change. There’s cultural change, such as in the case of documentary “An Inconvenient Truth,” “where literally a film’s impact campaign can change the culture’s perception of an issue.” There’s also behavioral change, such as in the case of doc “Food Inc.,” “where literally people change the way they live their lives because of the film.” And finally, there’s tactical, legislative change. Consider the impact campaign around “Roma,” which galvanized the fight for a National Domestic Workers Bill of Rights.

The Participant team doesn’t seem threatened by the 24-hour news cycle and polarization of political media. “This is the golden age of impact media,” says Jeff Skoll, founder of Participant Media. “Audiences are increasingly demanding the kinds of films Participant has been producing for 15 years. The universe of digital tools for organizing and advocacy has made it much easier for consumers to take actions on the issues that concern them.”
— Akiva Gottlieb



CONGRATULATES
OUR FRIENDS AND PARTNERS AT
PARTICIPANT MEDIA

ON RECEIVING THE
TIFF IMPACT AWARD



JOAQUIN PHOENIX
TRIBUTE ACTOR AWARD

● **JOAQUIN PHOENIX HAS MADE** his mark on contemporary cinema in a series of stunning, Oscar-nominated roles — Freddie Quell in “The Master,” Johnny Cash in “Walk The Line,” Commodus in “Gladiator” — but those lucky enough to have seen his latest performance can talk about nothing else.

“We were all blown away by his performance in ‘The Joker,’” says Joana Vicente, Toronto Intl. Film Festival executive director and co-head. The film is director Todd Phillips’ standalone origin story for the “Batman” villain, which promises to bring an intensified psychological realism to the comic-book genre. But Phillips says he mostly ignored the comic books, conceiving the film as an original story about how a character like the Joker might have emerged.

“We saw Heath Ledger’s groundbreaking work [as the Joker in ‘The Dark Knight’] several years back,” adds Cameron Bailey, artistic director and co-head of TIFF. “Just when you think that no one else could take on this role, Phoenix has contributed something entirely new to the canon of comic-book movies. This is a performance so deeply rooted, so anguished, so sure of itself, that you can’t take your eyes off him every moment he’s onscreen. He goes to some pretty deep, dark places with this role, and you’re right there with him the whole time.”

“The Joker” will have its North American premiere at TIFF, before an Oct. 4 theatrical release in North America.

The consistently daring Phoenix is next slated to star in friend Casey Affleck’s 1916-set Western adventure “Far Bright Star,” about the hunt for the Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa. — *Akiva Gottlieb*



MERYL STREEP
TRIBUTE ACTOR AWARD

● **THE RECIPIENT OF THE** Toronto Intl. Film Festival Tribute Actor Award is a no-brainer: Meryl Streep is regularly referred to as the world’s greatest film actress, having received a record 21 Academy Award nominations, most recently for playing newspaper publisher Katharine Graham in “The Post.”

This fall, fresh off her oddball turn as the highlight of Season Two of HBO’s “Big Little Lies,” Streep stars in Steven Soderbergh’s fact-based drama “The Laundromat,” and appears as Aunt March in Greta Gerwig’s adaptation of “Little Women.”

According to TIFF artistic director and co-head Cameron Bailey, there wasn’t much deliberation on the subject of who would get the award. “Meryl is a genius,” he says. “Simply put, she sets the standard in screen acting.”

Whether playing late British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (“The Iron Lady”) or a thinly disguised version of Vogue editor Anna Wintour (“The Devil Wears Prada”), Streep has a way of commanding the screen, but for Bailey, “what I like most about her is that she’s technically brilliant. You watch the details of her performance and it’s really quite astounding.”

“The Laundromat” will have its North American premiere at TIFF, and Bailey says that “her performance is really the emotional heart of the film.” Her director clearly agrees; Soderbergh just announced that he’s started shooting “Let Them All Talk” with Streep. Streep has already wrapped filming on an untitled Martin Scorsese movie with co-stars Robert De Niro and Sharon Stone. No title, plot synopsis or production details are currently available, but it’s clearly already a must-see. — *Akiva Gottlieb*



TAIKA WAITITI
TIFF EBERT DIRECTOR AWARD

● **NEW ZEALAND DIRECTOR WAITITI**, whose satire “Jojo Rabbit” unspools at Toronto, surely embodies the spirit of the TIFF Ebert Director Award, which honors a filmmaker whose work reflects the late film critic Roger Ebert’s passion for cinema. “He’s really such a maverick filmmaker,” says Cameron Bailey, artistic director and co-head of TIFF. “He’s able to do Marvel movies like ‘Thor: Ragnarok,’ and also really affecting, moving independent films in New Zealand. And his new film, ‘Jojo Rabbit,’ is one of the must-sees of the year.”

“Jojo Rabbit,” which will have its world premiere at TIFF, is a boundary-pushing satire set during World War II. It follows a German boy who discovers a Jewish girl hiding in his home and consults with his imaginary friend, Adolf Hitler — played by Waititi. Fox Searchlight will release the film in October.

Waititi’s previous features include “Boy” and “Hunt for the Wilderpeople,” which rank as No. 2 and No. 1, respectively, as New Zealand’s top-grossing films of all time. More recently, he directed the cult favorite “What We Do in the Shadows” and the blockbuster Marvel pic “Thor: Ragnarok.”

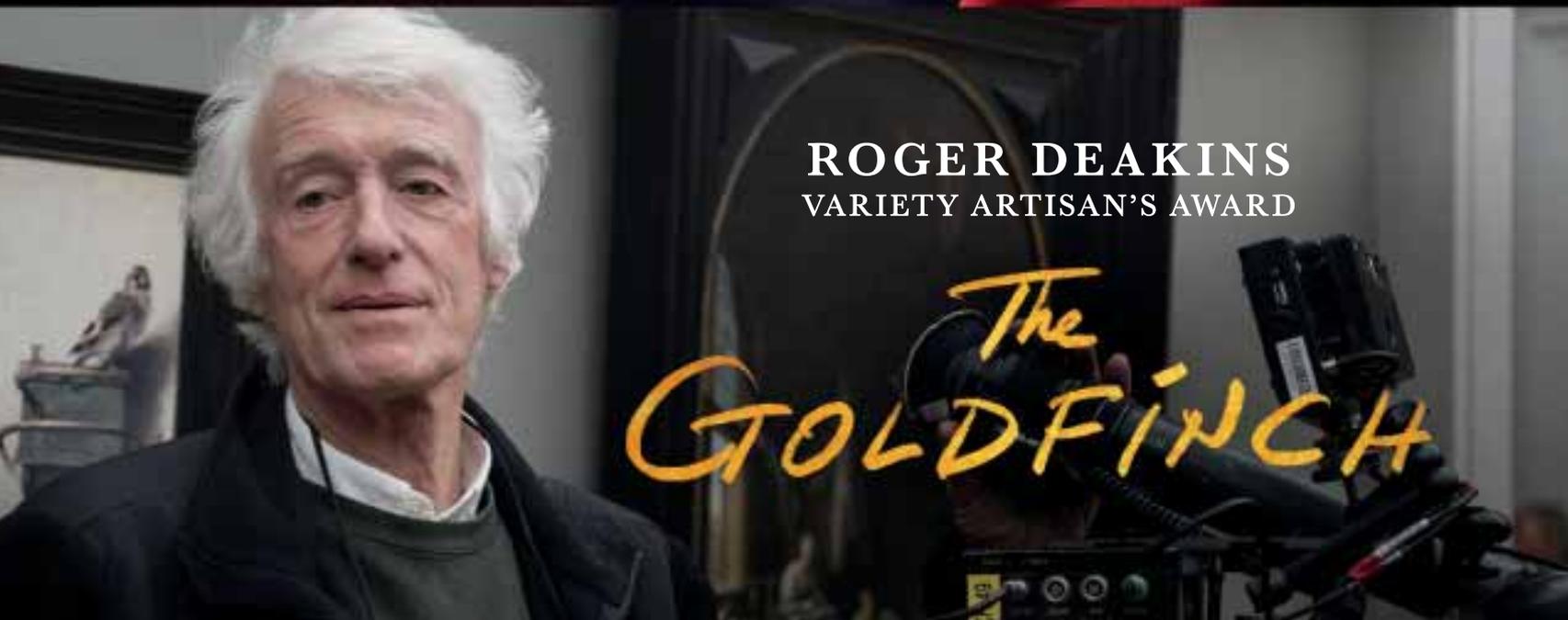
“Roger Ebert famously says that movies are a machine that generates empathy,” Bailey says. “And I think every director we’ve honored with the Director award — Martin Scorsese, Wim Wenders, Agnes Varda, Ava DuVernay — has reflected that. I think Roger would say the same about Taika Waititi. He’s hilarious, and as savage as the satire can be, he’s making movies to bring people together. He takes a lot of risks with ‘Jojo Rabbit,’ but I think the film is ultimately about empathy.” — *Akiva Gottlieb*

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JOAQUIN PHOENIX
TIFF TRIBUTE ACTOR AWARD

JOKER



ROGER DEAKINS
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'MR. EXCITEMENT' GETS HIS STAR

Groundbreaking music icon Jackie Wilson receives honor and revives memories of his hit records and dynamic live act

STORY BY STEVE BLOOM

HIGHER AND HIGHER

Wilson scored Top 40 hits from the late-1950s through the late-'60s.

KNOWN IN THE MUSIC WORLD as “Mr. Excitement,” singer Jackie Wilson was a shell of his dynamic former self when he died in a hospital at the age of 49 in 1984. His fruitful, if short, career will be remembered on Sept. 4 when he receives a long overdue star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

One of the great hitmakers of the early rock 'n' roll period, Wilson first charted with “Reet Petite” (No. 66, 1957), “Lonely Teardrops” (No. 7, 1958) and “That’s Why (I Love You So)” (No. 13, 1959). His later hits included “Baby Workout” (No. 5, 1963), “(Your Love Keeps Lifting Me) Higher and Higher” (No. 6, 1967) and “I Get the Sweetest Feeling” (1968, No. 38).

Wilson’s stage act drew attention: he was a magnetic performer with a multi-octave vocal range and electrifying dance moves that included splits, knee drops and assorted shuffles. He regularly removed his jacket and flung it to his side to the delight of cheering audiences. All he needed was a cape and you might have thought you were seeing an alternative version of James Brown.

At the time, he was dubbed the “Black Elvis,” though Presley scoffed at the comparison: “I guess that makes me the white Jackie Wilson.”

Tipsheet

WHAT: Jackie Wilson receives a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

WHEN: 11:30 a.m. Sept. 4

WHERE: 7057 Hollywood Blvd.

WEB: walkoffame.com





NIGHTSHIFT
Wilson was a fixture on '60s TV shows like "American Bandstand."

But except for his slick dance moves, he had little in common with Presley, or with Brown, who went from doo-wop to creating funk. Wilson was more of a crooner than a belter, a smooth soul-pop singer in the vein of Nat "King" Cole, Sammy Davis Jr. and Johnny Mathis, at least until later in his career.

Born in Detroit in 1934, he wasn't brash and Southern like Little Richard and Chuck Berry, but urbane and sophisticated. Had he come up in the big band era, he probably would have been a jazz singer.

After being discovered by Johnny Otis singing with the Falcons, which included eventual Four Top Levi Stubbs, Wilson joined Bill Ward & the Dominoes. It wasn't long before he decided to become a solo artist.

In 1957, Wilson signed with Brunswick Records, based in New York, where he had his early hits. Future Motown founder Berry Gordy co-wrote "Lonely Teardrops,"

which hit No. 1 on the R&B charts and crossed over to the Top 10. Wilson's signature song features kitschy orchestration and backup harmonies as Wilson begs his woman for "another chance," his alto soaring as he pleads, "Just say you will, say you will."

Years later, Michael Jackson, who loved Wilson's voice and stage presence, recorded a version of the song, as did Jose Feliciano and Bryan Hyland.

America's newest pop star was off and running. But this didn't last long.

In 1960, Wilson was arrested for assaulting an officer during a concert in New Orleans (fans had stormed the stage) and a year later was shot in his Manhattan apartment by a jealous girlfriend. His suave good looks, pompadour hair style and charismatic personality proved to be a magnet to women. He was married twice and fathered nine children.

Wilson resumed his singing career in

1963. Capitalizing on "The Twist" dance craze, he rode back into the Top 10 with the high-energy "Baby Workout," which he co-wrote. In the mid-'60s, Wilson was a fixture on TV variety music shows including "Hullabaloo," "Shindig!," "American Bandstand" and "The Ed Sullivan Show," playing to adoring white audiences.

His other signature song, recorded in 1967, certainly lifted him "Higher and Higher." Another heavily orchestrated track, it swings heavily with horns and a modernized Wilson sound, courtesy of frenetic backing from Motown's Funk Bros.

Now that he had found his "one in a million girl," Wilson sings with purpose, "Honey, I can stand up and face the world."

Rita Coolidge slowed down the pace for her soulful cover version in 1977, which peaked at No. 2. A rendition by Howard Huntsberry appeared on the "Ghostbusters 2" soundtrack in 1989 and Bruce Springsteen has also been known to break it out in concert.

Wilson's last significant hit, "I Get the Sweetest Feeling," co-written by Van McCoy, returned to his early soul-pop style, complete with the orchestration and backup vocals that would mark most of his material.

Sadly, Wilson suffered a heart attack on stage in 1975. He survived, but would never perform again. His last years were spent in nursing homes and hospitals in New Jersey. By the time Wilson died in 1984, he was all but broke.

Like so many artists in the early rock 'n' roll era, Wilson was taken advantage of by his label. In 1975, Nat Tarnopol and several other execs at Brunswick were indicted for mail fraud and tax evasion, though Tarnopol was later cleared. At the time, they allegedly owed Wilson \$1 million.

Respected by many — Jackson called him a "wonderful entertainer" at the Grammy Awards in 1984, Van Morrison dedicated the song "Jackie Wilson Said (I'm in Heaven When You Smile)" to him in 1972, and he was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 1987 — Wilson's accomplishments remain underappreciated today. A biopic was planned but has yet to be produced, and a quality biography of his life has never been written.

Hopefully, with the star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, there will be renewed interest in this legendary singer and performer who thrilled and inspired so many. ▣

"HIS STYLE WAS URBANE AND SOPHISTICATED. HAD HE COME UP IN THE BIG BAND ERA, HE PROBABLY WOULD HAVE BEEN A JAZZ SINGER."



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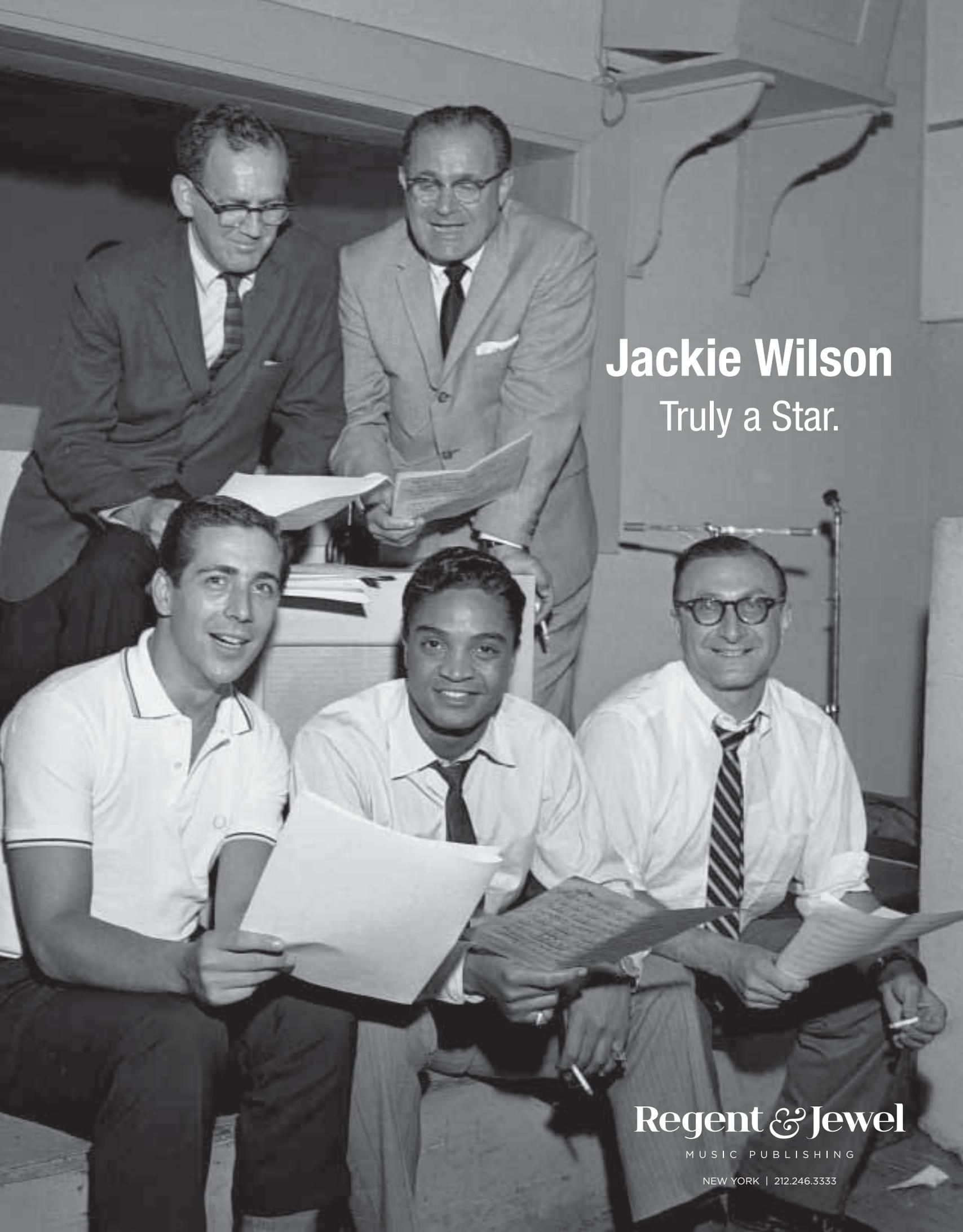


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NEW LINE CINEMA



HOLLYWOOD'S 'IT' WRITER

Gary Dauberman has made a killing out of scaring audiences

STORY BY JENELLE RILEY

AN EVIL DOLL. A DEMONIC NUN. A killer clown. While such creatures are nightmare fuel for some, screenwriter Gary Dauberman embraces them. "These characters have been very good to me," the filmmaker says with a laugh. "So I'm not scared of them. They don't show up in my nightmares."

Dauberman has made an art of out-finding new and creative ways to scare audiences, having written all three installments of the "Annabelle" series, focusing on the porcelain doll that serves as a conduit for evil that was first featured in 2013's "The Conjuring." When 2016's "The Conjuring 2" introduced a new breakout villain in the form of the demon nun Valak, Dauberman was tasked with creating the mythos for 2018's "The Nun."

Then Dauberman took on one of the most enviable but also intimidating tasks for any fan of horror: adapting Stephen King's massive novel "It" for the big screen. The first installment of the film, directed by Andy Muschietti and released by Warner Bros. in 2017, was a critical and box office smash, grossing over \$700 million worldwide off a \$35 million budget. This week sees the release of "It: Chapter Two," set 27 years after the first film and again helmed by Muschietti.

The first movie followed seven young friends battling a demonic force that frequently appeared to them in the form of a grinning, drooling clown named Pennywise. The sequel finds the ensemble brought back to finish the job, weaving in flashbacks and new scenes with the young actors who originated the roles. Everything is bigger: the stars (Jessica Chastain and Bill Hader

join the cast), the scares, the emotion, not to mention the real-life stakes — the first film is one of the most profitable and heralded horror films of all time.

If the writer is feeling the pressure, it's not showing. Seated in a coffee shop he refers to as his office, Dauberman expresses more excitement than nerves. "There's a lot to live up to with the first one because everyone just killed it," he says. "And I know that it's hard to catch lightning in a bottle twice — but they did it."

Dauberman grew up outside Philadelphia in Glen Mills, which could almost pass for one of those idyllic towns featured in so many genre films, with its trees changing color and wrought iron and brick structures. "When Halloween would roll around, it felt like a Ray Bradbury story come to life and I loved it," Dauberman recalls.

He has vivid memories of seeing "Poltergeist" at a sleepover at the age of 7. Movies like "Nightmare on Elm Street" and "Friday the 13th" were staples, but he was also influenced by "Raiders of the Lost Ark" (the face-melting scene in particular) and "The Lost Boys" (look for that film's poster in "It: Chapter Two"). And then there were the books; authors like Lois Duncan, Christopher Pike and R.L. Stein were required reading. And, of course, Stephen King.

HOME BEHIND THE CAMERA

Gary Dauberman on the set of "Annabelle Comes Home," which marked his feature directorial debut. He wrote all three films in the trilogy.

"It was an event when King would release something," he notes. "I'd rush to Waldenbooks and there was a big display with these great covers and I can remember buying them and cracking open that binding."

But it wasn't just King's writing; it was the man himself. "I remember seeing him in interviews and thinking, 'Oh, he seems so normal.' He was a great ambassador for horror because he seemed like a regular guy, not someone holding rituals in his basement of the middle of the night," Dauberman says.

Dauberman says he really learned to write through reading. Originally, he wanted to write and draw comics or be a Disney animator. The only problem, he notes, is that he wasn't a great artist. "So I put all my eggs in the writing basket," he says.

Things actually worked out in comics — Dauberman penned an entry for the DC Comics anthology "Cursed Comics Calvacade," and has just released the first issue of "The Mall," a four-part graphic novel he penned with Michael Moreci for Vault Comics. He also adapted the DC comic "Swamp Thing" for a 10-episode series on DC Universe this year.

After graduating from Temple University, Dauberman moved to Los Angeles and found an early supporter in Cathryn Jaymes, a manager who once worked with Quentin Tarantino. "I was waiting tables when I saw a posting on Craigslist from her, looking for an intern," he reveals. "I didn't even tell her I wanted to be a writer at first." When he finally did show her a script, she was impressed, and became a mentor to him.

He cut his teeth on two 2007 films for SyFy, "In the Spider's Web" and "Blood Monkey," which he refers to as a great film school. "It was like my Roger Corman years," he says. "It taught me how to write and to write quickly."

A spec sent to New Line Cinema impressed them enough to bring him onto a horror roundtable, and a fruitful relationship was born. "Gary came in with such great ideas and we knew immediately he was someone we wanted to keep working with," says Richard Brener, president & chief creative officer at New Line Cinema. "Fast forward 10 years and he has written eight movies for New Line, served as an EP, a producer, and recently made his directorial debut with 'Annabelle Comes Home.' Gary is an exceptional talent and collaborator." (New Line is also one of the production companies behind the "It" films.)

Dauberman was already a fan of James Wan's "Saw" when he met the filmmaker at an early screening of New Line's "The Conjuring." He instantly knew it was going to be one of his favorite horror movies of all time. Wan, for one, is also a fan of his protégé. "It feels like I've known him forever," Wan tells *Variety*. "He's truly one of my favorite people in the business."

"The Conjuring" launched a cinematic universe by introducing audiences to Ed and Lorraine Warren (played by Patrick Wilson and Vera Farmiga), the real-life paranormal investigators who collected artifacts from their cases for their Occult Museum in Connecticut.

The real-life Annabelle is a Raggedy Ann doll that still resides at the museum — eagle-eyed viewers might spot a Raggedy Ann cameo in

DAUBERMAN'S MONSTERS



Annabelle

Don't call her possessed! A conduit for evil, the porcelain figurine appeared in the opening scene of 2013's "The Conjuring" and now has more stand-alone films than the original with "Annabelle," "Annabelle: Creation" and "Annabelle Comes Home."



The Nun

The demon Valak first appeared in "The Conjuring 2" and was such a fan favorite, she received her own origin story. Dauberman scripted "The Nun," and also serves as a producer on the film.



Swamp Thing

Dauberman brought the cult comic hero to the small screen, serving as executive producer and co-writing the pilot about a scientist transformed into a human/plant hybrid.



It

Pennywise sprang from the imagination of Stephen King, first played in the ABC miniseries by Tim Curry, and is now played in the films by Bill Skarsgård. Dauberman shares screenwriting credit with Chase Palmer and Cary Fukunaga on the first film and is the sole screenwriter on "It: Chapter Two."

"Annabelle Comes Home." But developing a backstory and legend was a conversation between Dauberman, Wan and New Line.

One of the biggest challenges of penning the first "Annabelle" film was simply justifying why anyone would ever keep such a disturbing-looking doll. "People always ask about that," Dauberman says with a laugh. "But have you seen the creepy dolls people have? It's not so outside the norm."

Made in a condensed time frame on a \$6 million budget, the film went on to make \$257 million worldwide; 2017 follow-up "Annabelle: Creation" improved both in box office (\$306 million) and reviews. When it came time to make a third movie, this year's "Annabelle Comes Home," Dauberman not only wrote the script, but stepped behind the camera for his directorial debut.

Dauberman says the original "Annabelle" was the first time he was on a set for an extended time, and he used the opportunity to learn everything he could. Wan took notice.

"I would catch Gary taking 'filmmaking' notes during discussions between the producers and director," Wan says. "We all felt it was time for Gary to step behind the camera, and direct 'Annabelle Comes Home' — and he's so naturally talented at it. What I love most about Gary as a director is his focus on creating interesting and likable characters. His writing skill is one of his big secret weapons as a filmmaker." On another note, Wan adds, "Oh, and like myself, he's a fried chicken fanatic!"

One of the biggest challenges with scripting the horror genre is coming up with new ways to scare audiences looking for a bigger adrenaline rush. Dauberman is aware of this, and says he tries to get ahead of expectations.

"You try to zig when they think you're going to zag," he says. This is also where comedy can come in handy, something that is a trademark of Dauberman's scripts — nervous laughter is often a necessary release following a tense moment. So it's no surprise to hear one of this other favorite genres is the romantic comedy, citing "When Harry Met Sally..." as a big influence. He notes, "The timing of comedy and horror are actually very similar. You're setting something up, then hitting the punchline."

To hear his actors tell it, Dauberman's screenplays often contain laughs that aren't intended for audiences.

Bonnie Aarons, who plays the titular character in "The Nun," says the scripts are as fun to read as to see. "His scripts are very lyrical and he is so detailed. As you're reading his words, you see it coming alive," she says. "Also, he writes these little side notes in parentheses that are very humorous." For example, Dauberman says the "Annabelle Comes Home" screenplay contains the description: "There's a Remington typewriter, which I'm going to steal after production is over."

Adds Brener, "Gary has an unmistakable voice in his storytelling and you know a Gary Dauberman script without seeing the cover page. He is an incredibly visual writer and has a way of putting you in the story, which is valuable for horror because it gives you the visceral effect of a given scene. Gary carefully crafts every detail to draw you in and you can feel every beat and emotion alongside the characters."

CONGRATULATIONS

GARY

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TEAM PLAYERS
The grown-up “Loser’s Club” cast of “It: Chapter Two” (top); Vera Farmiga with her infamous co-star in “Annabelle Comes Home.”

Dauberman says he doesn’t always like to script frights out too carefully. “Sometimes when it’s too planned out, it can feel a little joyless. I like a little messiness,” he admits. “And if you’re fortunate enough to work with a great director like James or Andy, they’ll come up with amazing ideas on the day.”

As for every artist’s real-life nightmare, writer’s block, Dauberman says he works through that by actually yelling at himself on the page. “I will write out: ‘What is going on with this scene, why can’t I figure it out?’” he reveals. “Whatever my internal monologue is, I try to get it on the page. Because if it’s stuck in my head, I’m just spinning my wheels.”

Having found so much success in horror, it’s inevitable that people will ask when he intends to leave it behind — moving onto more “prestigious” genres. But Dauberman has no intention of departing anytime soon. He’s currently scripting an adaptation of King’s vampire classic “Salem’s Lot” and

“HIS SCRIPTS ARE LYRICAL AND HE IS SO DETAILED.”
— BONNIE AARONS

the American remake of the Korean zombie hit “Train to Busan,” both for New Line.

“Horror isn’t a stepping stone for me. I love horror,” he notes. “With this genre, you get comedy and drama and suspense and you get to play around. Plus, I love the horror community. It’s a nice, familiar atmosphere where I get to work with a lot of the same people.”

Dauberman also notes how cathartic the genre can be and how it can be used as a metaphor for bigger statements. “It” isn’t just about a murderous clown, it’s a coming-of-age tale about facing your fears and the value of friendship. “The Nun” grapples with issues of faith while “Annabelle: Creation” is a study of grief. In “Annabelle Comes Home,” the evil doll’s powers aren’t unleashed out of malice — it’s because a young girl has lost her father and is hoping to find proof of life after death.

His directorial debut was even personally healing for Dauberman, who lost his own father before filming began. “When I told my sister what the film was about, she said, ‘Well, that’s interesting,’” Dauberman recalls. “I didn’t know what she meant. She pointed out our father had just passed. I don’t know how I didn’t see it. If I had consciously known that going in, I might not have done it. But it ended up being a wonderful experience and really helping me through it.”

IT: CHAPTER TWO: BROOKE PALMER/WARNER BROS.; ANNABELLE COMES HOME: ATOMIC MONSTER/WARNER BROS./KOBAL/SHUTTERSTOCK

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DIGITAL MAVENS EXPLORE NEW AVENUES

Tech leaders converge for *Variety* confab

STORY BY TODD LONGWELL

FOR THOSE LOOKING TO GET AN EASY handle on how thoroughly the digital revolution has reshaped the entertainment landscape, look no further than actor/comedian David Spade's new Comedy Central talk show "Lights Out With David Spade," which was inspired by a series of Instagram posts.

"I'd walk around and try to do jokes instead of just here's my food, here's my dog, and it sort of started talk," says Spade, who begins each episode of the talker with a video selfie. "I had network executives DM'ing me, saying, 'This is different. Could you spin this into half hour?' And that got me thinking, and then it started meetings and started pilots."

Spade will be joining Kevin Nealon, Hannah Hart and Pete Holmes on the "Comedy Renaissance in the Digital Age" panel at *Variety's* Entertainment & Technology L.A. Summit Sept. 5. They are just a few of the 50 leading creatives and execs appearing at the event to discuss, debate and explain targeted audience engagement, live over-the-top programming and other hot button topics. "Lion King" director Jon Favreau, Sony Pictures Entertainment CEO Tony Vinciguerra, Paramount TV's Nicole Clemens and Spotify's Courtney Holt are among the other notables that will share their insight at the event.

Nealon had an experience similar to Spade's with his YouTube talk show "Hiking With Kevin," which began when he spontaneously decided to record an out-of-breath interview with his friend, actor Matthew Modine, on his phone as they walked a canyon trail in the Pacific Palisades. Unlike Spade, he produces the resulting show all by himself and, at this point, there's little in the way of monetary

rewards, just the satisfaction of a job well done.

"It cost nothing, just time scheduling people and getting there and doing it," says Nealon. "I edit the final product, too, and that takes a long time. It would be great to have sponsorship, but it's really a passion for me."

Nealon does get a piece of the ad revenue generated by his YouTube channel, but it's chump change compared to a typical Hollywood paycheck. And these days it's harder for up-and-coming talent to build sustainable careers on the platform in the wake of rule changes that demonetize less-popular channels and risqué content.

But that's not necessarily a bad thing, according to Hart, an eight-year YouTube veteran who parlayed her popular online series "My Drunk Kitchen" into acting roles ("Camp Takota," "Dirty 30") and a career

as an author (her latest book "My Drunk Kitchen Holidays!" is due in October).

"I feel really good that it's a less-lucrative space because it means there's less pressure and you get to just explore," says Hart. "It makes it less readily accessible to people who want to follow the same formula, just trying to get views on YouTube."

The other good news for creators is the ever-growing array of new digital outlets for content, from SVOD services to ad-monetizable social video platforms such as Facebook Watch.

"With Watch, we're trying to create a destination video service," explains Ricky Van Veen, Facebook's global head of creative strategy, who will appear with Crypt TV co-founder and CEO Jack Davis. "That's where the longer-form content works. Once you have people there, the old lessons from 10 years ago about how people will only watch short videos on the internet are no longer true."

One of the big appeals of digital platforms for execs and, to a lesser degree, creatives, is the ability to use the wealth of data they generate to shape and sell the content.

"You learn where audiences really are into content and where they're dropping off," says Davis, whose 14-episode Crypt TV thriller "The Birch" premieres on Facebook Watch on Oct. 11. "But you always need the components of great storytelling." ■

'KING' MAKER
"Lion King" director Jon Favreau will take part in a keynote conversation at the summit.



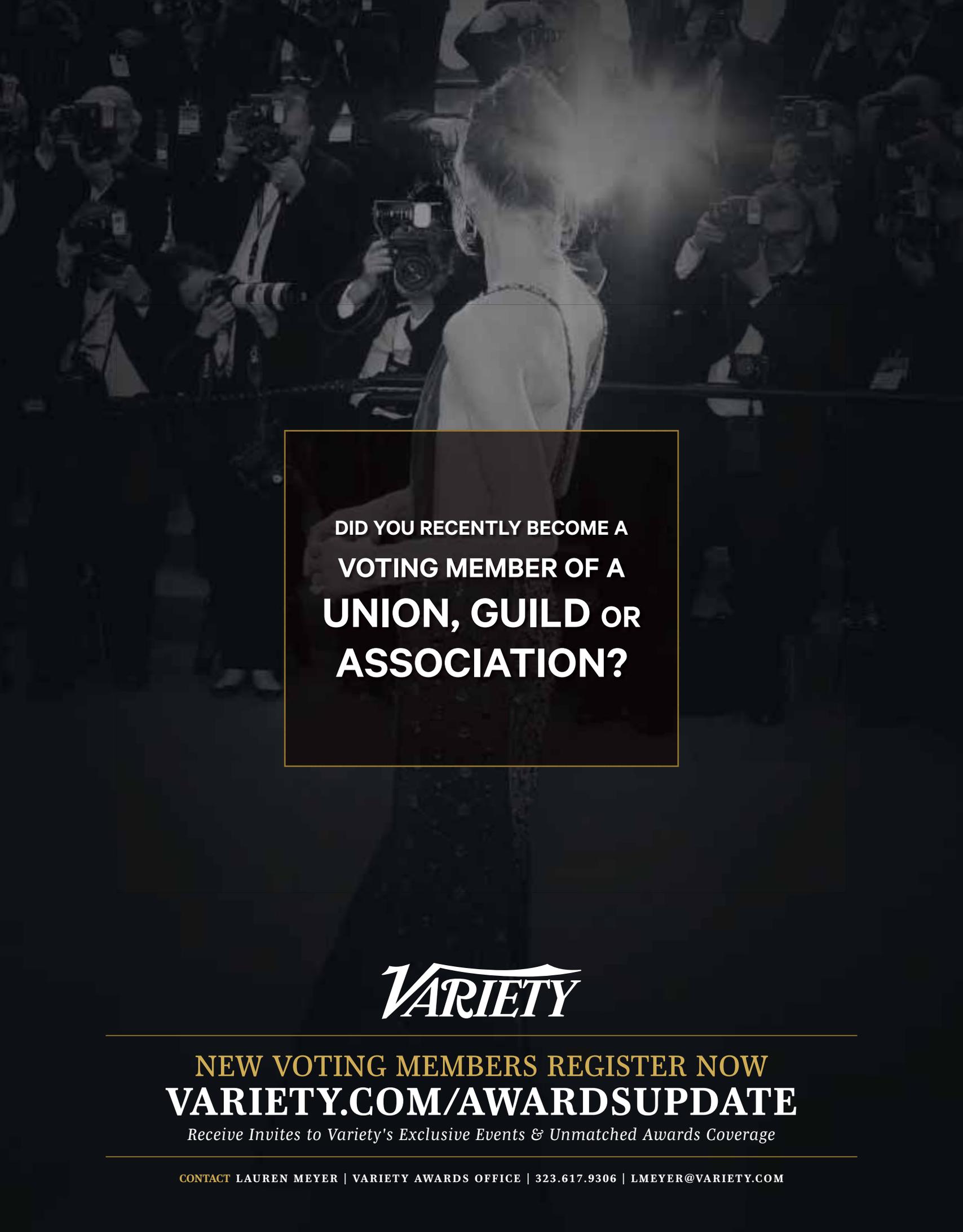
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WHEN: Sept. 5

WHERE: Four Seasons Beverly Hills

WEB: events.variety.com



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A MATTER OF CONTRAST

DP uses light and shadow to show journey of hip-hop trailblazers Wu-Tang Clan in Hulu biopic **p.84**

ANSWERS FROM THE PAST

New technology lets viewers interact with Q&A videos **p.85**

ARTISANS



Mix Master
Brian Volk-Weiss' Comedy Dynamics smooths out the rough spots for his comic clients.

TOP BILLING EXPOSURE FOCUS **ARTISANS** REVIEWS

Digital Fine-Tuning Fixes Stand-up Snafus

Production company Comedy Dynamics' high-tech editing techniques ensure seamless on-screen performances **Story by CALUM MARSH**

IT WAS A STAND-UP comic's worst nightmare: Taking the stage a while back for the first of four shows that would be recorded for a TV special, the comic cracked under the pressure, mispronouncing a word at a pivotal moment in the joke and screwing up the punchline. Gaffes like this are exactly why comics record several shows in succession, so mistakes can be corrected in post-production — except this well-known comic, on a stream of miserable luck, proceeded to flub the same line again three more times.

So Brian Volk-Weiss, founder of Comedy Dynamics, which produced and distributed the show, had to get creative. He asked the comedian to come to the Comedy Dynamics' Burbank studio a few days after the gigs. There, he and his team filmed the comedian repeating the joke in front of a green screen. Then they digitally cut-and-pasted his head onto his body in the original footage with some crafty editing and a bit of CGI. The result? A great show, and a well-delivered line.

"Do I think we needed to do it? No," says

Volk-Weiss, looking back. "The audience never would have given a shit. But the artist was a perfectionist, and we want our artists to feel good." In any case, the work was seamless. "If I handed you the DVD, you would never be able to figure out the moment, not in a thousand years," he says.

This is an extreme example of the behind-the-scenes wizardry that goes into the making of a stand-up comedy special, a genre that has swelled in popularity thanks to streaming services like Netflix, which commission them almost endlessly. Comedy Dynamics has produced hundreds of these specials, and has mastered the art of blending sets, matching footage and making comics look their best.

For Volk-Weiss, the decision-making process starts long before the comedian has stepped foot onstage. There are dozens of questions to be settled based on the preferences of the comic, from lighting to production design to sound, most of which the average stand-up has never had occasion to consider.

"Do you have walk-on music? Are you

being announced? Do you want a wired mic or a wireless mic?" Volk-Weiss says. "These are small things, but they're so important. A comedian might be used to the same thing for 10 years, and suddenly, once the cameras are rolling, one thing's wrong and they're completely disjointed.

"It's really an art," he says of the process. "Not a science."

Consider the stage. You might not think it matters much what the comedian is standing on during his or her act. "We did a special where the comedian wanted there to be carpet. They had a horrible show," he says. "They'd done 10,000 shows on solid surfaces! It messed everything up. We had to tear the carpet out between shows."

The saving grace for most performances is repetition — running through the same act two or three times on camera in one night gives Volk-Weiss' team options in the editing room. It's there that Comedy Dynamics can radically improve the caliber of a show. "We can't turn a D performance into an A," he says. "But we can turn a C minus into an A minus easily."

This is thanks in no small part to Brenda Carlson, an editor with Comedy Dynamics who has cut more than 200 specials. Volk-Weiss says Carlson is "the Mozart of stand-up-special editing," and credits her with helping to perfect every show.

Carlson prefers that her work go unnoticed. "You want people to enjoy the comedian, and not pay attention to the editing at all," she says. "The editing should not work against the jokes."

It's Carlson's job to take the raw material of the gig — seven or eight cameras shooting two or three sets back-to-back — and sculpt it into something coherent, blending the best bits from each set into one punchy, hilarious whole. "I might go through and take out the 'uhs' and the 'ums,' or put two lines together if they flubbed the first part of a joke in one show and the second part of the same joke in the second show."

Of course, the nitty-gritty of the edit can be complex, and requires the delicate touch of an editor with experience. Some comics leave it entirely in Comedy Dynamics' hands; others prefer to be involved. "There are comedians that, as soon as the show wraps, shake our hands and never come into the editing bay, and to the best of my knowledge have never watched the special," Volk-Weiss says. "Then there are comedians who spend, conservatively, 150 hours in the editing bay, going over every single frame."

Comedy Dynamics can accommodate either approach. What's important is that the comic is happy. "There's a great saying the Air Force has," Volk-Weiss says. "Make your pilots feel safe so they can be brave. That's our outlook here." **W**



World of Extremes

Brightness and shadows suggest the early journey of the Wu-Tang Clan in Hulu's "Wu-Tang: An American Saga," starring Ashton Sanders (right) as The RZA, with T.J. Atoms as Ason.

Dramatic Contrast Helps Wu-Tang Clan Series Pop

DP uses light and shadow to show the rise of the seminal hip-hop group

By VALENTINA VALENTINI

@tiniv

FOR HULU'S "WU-TANG: AN AMERICAN SAGA," cinematographer Gavin Kelly set out to capture the heroic journeys of the dozen young black men that Bobby Diggins, aka The RZA, assembled amid the early 1990s crack-cocaine epidemic in New York's Staten Island to form one of the most important groups in hip-hop history.

"The look of the show for me was about the edges of light and shadow, where our characters' conflicts, [losses] and victories take place in a high-stakes world," says Kelly, who comes to the biopic from three seasons of FX's "American Horror Story." "Lighting-wise, rich contrast and layered color textures were central to the look and tone."

The 10-episode series debuts Sept. 4 and tells the story of the formation of the Wu-Tang Clan, which transformed hip-hop and had a huge impact on music, arts and culture via the success not only of the group but of the solo work of its extensive membership. Created by The RZA and Alex Tse, the series is produced by Imagine Television and is based on two books by The RZA — "The Wu-Tang Manual" and "The Tao of Wu" — which explain Wu-Tang terms and delve into the group members' inspirations and philosophies.

Kelly wove together scenes that moved from shadow into light, thematically and emotionally forming the heart of a project that's part musical biopic, part crime drama, part family drama and part hero origin story. The series chronicles its char-

acters' journeys through many realities, both alone and collectively.

"I aimed for the dense, murky, color-bleeding shadows of the streets — where often violence, hardship and conflict lived — to bright, washy light that often flares over them when music, inspiration, family, connection and hope propel them forward," Kelly says. "The look lives in this world of extremes and the complexities of navigating everything in between."

Kelly shot on the Panavision Millennium DXL2, a larger-format camera, so that even medium shots and close-ups would have a richer feel along with a shallow depth of field. He also wanted strong frames that would create portraits of characters in relation to their environment — shooting in the Park Hill or Stapleton housing projects in Staten Island, or seeing The RZA work deep in the musical hive of his basement — to position each character in time and place and give the audience cues to follow: a visual tapestry of the universe of the Wu, as Kelly explains it.

Complementing the larger-format camera was Kelly's choice of lenses that delivered on dramatic and dreamy visuals. "I mixed Panavision Primo 70s and the Artistes, which are more expressive in how they catch light and flare," says Kelly. "We also employed the H-series that are even softer with more wild flares, which we use for the flashbacks — that creamier feel we wanted for the past."

"Ultimately," he explains, "I wanted a dramatic lighting and lensing approach that gave a larger-than-life presence to our heroes and their interconnected stories while also keeping us grounded in the characters' intimate struggles and triumphs." **W**

Getting the Shot

Gavin Kelly has worked in film and TV across a variety of genres.

American Horror Story

2016-19

26 episodes

9-1-1

2018

10 episodes

Cabin Fever

2016

Director:

Travis Z

A Fine Step

2014

Director:

Jonathan Meyers

Phantom Halo

2014

Director:

Antonia Bogdanovich

TableTop

2012-13

34 episodes

Sugar

2013

Director:

Rotimi Rainwater

LUV

2012

Director:

Sheldon Candis

Technology Enables Virtual Q&A With Recorded Subject

StoryFile aims to make interactive video of people's lives accessible to all

By IAIN BLAIR

ASTRONAUT TERRY VIRTS was trained to deal with cutting-edge technology and high-stress situations on his numerous space missions, but NASA failed to prepare him for his latest career challenge: sitting absolutely still for hours in a small studio in Los Angeles and baring his soul.

"This is far more stressful," he says, only half-joking.

The two-day shoot for StoryFile — a mobile app expected to launch in the fall — saw a 360-degree volumetric camera rig capture Virts' answers to hundreds of questions about his life and career. The result: a holographic version of the astronaut that can interact with viewers. "You'll be able to have a conversation with me and ask me anything," says Virts, who spent more than 200 days in space aboard the Space Shuttle Endeavour and the International Space Station on a pair of missions between 2010 and 2015.

StoryFile uses artificial intelligence and natural-language processing to allow the platform to mimic a real conversation, preserving the subject's answers for future generations to explore. The app will present the stories of historically significant people, as well as putting that tech into the hands of everyday users, allowing families to document the lives of their loved ones.

The company was founded by the wife-and-husband team of Heather and Stephen Smith. "Our initial inspiration for the whole idea came from trying to replicate the memories of Holocaust survivors for the public, especially the Q&A parts," says Heather Smith. "We saw that the Q&A parts really engaged audiences, and then we realized that so many people wanted to do the same thing for themselves and create memories for their families and children and grandchildren."

While that was the catalyst, the tech wasn't available a decade ago when the couple started, Smith says. "Back then it was very expensive and labor-intensive," she explains. "We knew it had to be automated,

and by 2017 the technology had advanced enough where we could take it further and really refine the concept."

Since then, StoryFile has filmed about 20 full-length interviews, including the one with Virts, as well as some 30 shorter ones. "Others are scheduled and in the pipeline," says Smith.

"It means that anyone will be able to talk to someone like Terry — someone they'd

probably never otherwise get to meet — and have a conversation and learn from their experiences," she notes. "Imagine being able to do that with scientists, artists, athletes, musicians, politicians, writers and so on. It's a really revolutionary way of dealing with aural history, but it's still a very new technology, and I think the upcoming beta launch will help people get used to it and see the endless possibilities it offers."

Smith says the technology also has a strong library component, both for private and public users.

"We're talking to museums about doing this with some very high-profile names, and we also see applications ranging from online education to hiring and even dating," she says. "There are many directions we could take it, but right now we're focused on getting the app out there and getting it scalable." ■

“

Anyone will be able to talk to someone they'd probably never otherwise get to meet and have a conversation, and learn from their experiences.”

Heather Smith, StoryFile CEO



For Posterity

Astronaut Terry Virts relates his experiences to a 360-degree camera at the StoryFile studio in L.A.

In Production

TITLE/DISTRIBUTOR	GENRE	PRODUCTION	DIRECTOR/SHOWRUNNER	CAST	SHOOT START	LOCATION
The Sinner (Season 3) USA Network	Drama	Universal Content Prods., Zaftig Films, Iron Ocean Films	Derek Simonds (showrunner)	Bill Pullman, Matt Bomer	9/9	New York
Homecoming (Season 2) Amazon Prime Video	Drama	Amazon Studios, Universal Content Prods., Red Om, Anonymous Content, We Here At Corp., Esmail Corp.	Micah Bloomberg & Eli Horowitz (showrunners)	Stephan James, Janelle Monáe	9/9	Los Angeles
Ghost Draft Paramount	Action	Paramount Pictures, Skydance Media	Chris McKay (director)	Betty Gilpin, Yvonne Strahovski, Chris Pratt	9/10	Atlanta, Iceland
Girl	Thriller	Envision Media Arts, Double Dutch Intl.	Chad Faust (director)	Bella Thorne	9/16	Sudbury, Ontario



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FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE

'Unbelievable' is unsurpassed as a depiction of one woman's pursuit of justice and self-empowerment **p.90**

FINAL CUT

Crystal Gale's start with sis's label was challenging **p.94**

REVIEWS



Nowhere Man
Joaquin Phoenix stars as Arthur in "Joker."

TOP BILLING EXPOSURE FOCUS ARTISANS **REVIEWS**

FILM REVIEW

BY OWEN GLEIBERMAN

Joker

Director: **Todd Phillips**
Starring: **Joaquin Phoenix, Robert De Niro, Frances Conroy, Zazie Beetz**

Audiences, as we know, can't get enough of a great bad guy — the kind we love to hate. The worse he acts, the more we stare. Of course, the fact that we relish a villain doesn't mean that we're on his side; getting off on the catchy, scary spectacle of bad behavior isn't the same as identifying with it. But in "Joker," Todd Phillips' hypnotically perverse, ghoulishly grippingly urban-nightmare comic fantasia, Arthur Fleck (Joaquin Phoenix), the mentally ill loser-freak who will, down the line, become Batman's

nemesis, stands before us not as a grand villain but as a pathetic specimen of raw human damage. Even as we're drinking in his screw-loose antics with shock and dismay, there's no denying that we feel something for him — a twinge of sympathy, or at least understanding.

Early on, Arthur, in full clown regalia, is standing in front of a store on a jam-packed avenue, where he's been hired to carry an "Everything Must Go" sign. A bunch of kids steal the sign and then kick the holy crap out of him. The beating fulfills a certain masochistic karma Arthur carries around, but that doesn't negate the fact that we feel sorry for him.

"Joker" tells the story of Arthur's descent (and, in a way, his rise), but it's clear from the outset that he's a basket case, a kind of maestro of his own misery. He would like, on some level, to connect, but he can't. He's too far out there, like Norman Bates; he's a self-conscious, postmodern head case — a person who spends every moment trying to twist himself into a normal shape, but he knows the effort is doomed, so he turns it all into a "joke" that only he gets.

Arthur's response to almost everything

is to laugh, and he's got a collection of contrived guffaws — a high-pitched delirious giggle, a "hearty" yock, a stylized cackle that's all but indistinguishable from a sob. In each case, the laughter is an act that parades itself as fakery. What it expresses isn't glee; it expresses that Arthur feels nothing, that he's dead inside. He's a bitter, mocking nowhere man on the edge of a nervous breakdown.

For all two hours of "Joker," Arthur, a two-bit professional clown and aspiring stand-up comic who lives with his batty mother (Frances Conroy) in a peeling-paint apartment, is front and center — in the movie, and in our psychological viewfinder. He's at the dark heart of every scene, the way Travis Bickle was in "Taxi Driver"; and "Joker," set in 1981 in a Gotham City that looks, with uncanny exactitude, like the squalid, graffiti-strewn, trash-heaped New York City of the early '80s (you can feel the rot), is a movie made in direct homage to that classic, though there are other films it will make you think of, too. As the story of a putz trying to succeed as a stand-up comedian, it evokes Scorsese and De Niro's

UNBELIEVABLE: BETH DUBBERNET/FLIX; JOKER: MIKO TAVERNISE/WARNER BROS.

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SEPTEMBER 3, 2019

satirical gloss on “Taxi Driver,” “The King of Comedy.” There are also elements lifted from “Death Wish,” “Network,” “V for Vendetta,” “The Empire Strikes Back,” “The Shining” and “The Purge.”

More than that, though, the whole movie, in spirit, is a kind of origin-story riff on Heath Ledger’s performance in “The Dark Knight”: the comic book villain as Method psycho, a troublemaker so intense in his cuckoo hostility that even as you’re gawking at his violence, you still feel his pain.

Phoenix’s performance is astonishing. He appears to have lost weight for the role, so that his ribs and shoulder blades protrude, and the leanness burns his face down to its expressive essence: black eyebrows, hollow cheeks sunk in gloom, a mouth so rubbery it seems to be snarking at the very notion of expression, all set off by a greasy mop of hair. Phoenix is playing a geek with an unhinged mind, yet he’s so controlled that he’s mesmerizing. He stays true to the desperate logic of Arthur’s unhappiness.

You’re always aware of how much the mood and design of “Joker” owe to “Taxi Driver” and



Method to the Madness “Joker” tells the story of Arthur’s descent into villainy.

“The King of Comedy.” For a filmmaker gifted enough to stand on his own, Todd Phillips is too beholden to his idols. Yet within that scheme, he creates a dazzlingly disturbed psycho morality play, one that speaks to the age of incels and mass shooters and no-hope politics, of the kind of hate that emerges from crushed dreams.

Arthur and his mother sit

around after hours, watching the late-night talk-show host Murray Franklin (played, by De Niro, as a piece of old-school Carson vaudeville), and as much as we think Arthur should move out and leave his mommy behind, we hardly know the half of it. When he gets fired (for revealing a handgun during a clown gig on a children’s hospital ward), there’s a suspense built into everything that hap-

pens, and it spins around the question: How will someone this weak and inept, this trapped in the nuttiness of his self-delusion, evolve into a figure of dark power?

At night, on the subway, Arthur, still wearing his clown suit, is taunted and attacked by three young Wall Street players. So he pulls out his gun like Charles Bronson and shoots them dead. The case becomes tabloid fodder (“Killer Clown on the Loose”), and the sensation of it is that the denizens of Gotham think he’s a hero. That sounds like a standard comic book-movie ploy, but the twisted commitment of Phoenix’s performance lets us feel how the violence cleanses Arthur; doing tai chi in a bathroom after the murders, he’s reborn. And we believe in his thirst for escape, because Phillips, working with the cinematographer Lawrence Sher (who evokes the gray-green documentary steaminess of “Taxi Driver”), creates an urban inferno so life-like that it threatens to make the film noir Gotham of “The Dark Knight” look like a video game.

Of course, a rebellion against the ruling elite, which is what Arthur’s vigilante action comes to symbolize, is more plausible now than it was a decade ago. “Joker” is a comic book tale rendered with sinister topical fervor. When Arthur, on the elevator, connects with Sophie (Zazie Beetz), his neighbor, the two take turns miming Travis Bickle’s finger-gun-against-the-head suicide gesture, which becomes the film’s key motif. It’s a way of saying: This is what America has come to — a place where people feel like blowing their brains out. The relationship between Arthur and Sophie doesn’t track if you think about it too much, but it’s a refer-

UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT, DISTRICT OF DELAWARE

In re
OPEN ROAD FILMS, LLC, a Delaware limited liability company, et al.,¹
Debtors.

Chapter 11
Case No.: 18-12012 (LSS)
(Jointly Administered)
Re Docket No. 819

NOTICE OF (I) APPROVAL OF DISCLOSURE STATEMENT, (II) ESTABLISHMENT OF VOTING RECORD DATE, (III) HEARING ON CONFIRMATION OF PLAN AND PROCEDURES AND DEADLINE FOR OBJECTING TO CONFIRMATION OF PLAN, AND (IV) PROCEDURES AND DEADLINE FOR VOTING ON PLAN
PLEASE TAKE NOTICE OF THE FOLLOWING:

1. **Approval of Disclosure Statement.** By order dated August 22, 2019 [Docket No. 819] (the “Disclosure Statement Order”), the United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of Delaware (the “Court”), having jurisdiction over the chapter 11 cases of Open Road Films, LLC and its affiliated debtors and debtors in possession (the “Debtors”), approved the Disclosure Statement for the Joint Plan of Liquidation Proposed by Debtors and Official Committee of Unsecured Creditors, attached as Exhibit 4 to the Disclosure Statement Order (as it may be amended, supplemented, or modified from time to time, the “Disclosure Statement”) as containing adequate information within the meaning of section 1125 of title 11 of the United States Code (the “Bankruptcy Code”), and authorized the Debtors to solicit votes to accept or reject the Joint Chapter 11 Plan of Liquidation Proposed by Debtors and Official Committee of Unsecured Creditors (as it may be amended, supplemented or modified from time to time pursuant to the terms thereof, the “Plan”).² annexed as Exhibit A to the Disclosure Statement.

2. **Deadline for Voting on the Plan.** By the Disclosure Statement Order, the Court established **September 23, 2019 at 5:00 p.m. (prevailing Eastern Time)** (the “Voting Deadline”) as the deadline by which Ballots accepting or rejecting the Plan must be received. Only holders of Claims in Classes 3 and 4 under the Plan are entitled to vote on the Plan and will receive Ballots for casting such votes. To be counted, original Ballots must **actually be received** on or before the Voting Deadline by Donlin, Recano & Company, Inc. (the “Voting Agent”) at Open Road Films Ballot Processing, c/o Donlin, Recano & Company, Inc., Attn: Voting Department, P.O. Box 199043, Blythebourne Station, Brooklyn, NY 11219. Ballots cast by e-mail, facsimile, or any other electronic format will not be counted. Classes that are presumed to accept the Plan and Classes that are deemed to reject the Plan are not entitled to vote on the Plan and, therefore, will receive a Notice of Non-Voting Status rather than a Ballot.

3. **Confirmation Hearing.** A hearing (the “Confirmation Hearing”) will be held before the Honorable Laurie Selber Silverstein, United States Bankruptcy Judge, on **October 2, 2019 at 1:30 p.m. (prevailing Eastern Time)**, in Courtroom 6 of the United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of Delaware, 824 Market Street, 5th Floor, Wilmington, Delaware 19801, to consider confirmation of the Plan, and for such other and further relief as may be just or proper. The Confirmation Hearing may be continued from time to time without further notice other than the announcement of the adjourned date(s) at the Confirmation Hearing or any continued hearing or on the applicable hearing agenda. The Plan may be modified in accordance with the Bankruptcy Code, the Bankruptcy Rules, the Plan, and other applicable law, without further notice, prior to or as a result of the Confirmation Hearing. If the Court enters an order confirming the Plan, Bankruptcy Code section 1141 shall become applicable with respect to the Plan and the Plan shall be binding on all parties to the fullest extent permitted by the Bankruptcy Code.

4. **Deadline for Objections to Confirmation of Plan.** Objections, if any, to confirmation of the Plan, must (i) be in writing; (ii) state the name and address of the objecting party and the nature of the claim or interest of such party; (iii) state with particularity the legal and factual basis and nature of any objection or response; and (iv) be filed with the Court and served on the following parties so as to be actually received **before September 25, 2019 at 4:00 p.m. (prevailing Eastern Time)**: (i) counsel for the Debtors, (a) Klee, Tuchin, Bogdanoff & Stern LLP, 1999 Avenue of the Stars, Thirty-Ninth Floor, Los Angeles, California 90067, Attn: Michael L. Tuchin, Esq. and Jonathan M. Weiss, Esq., and (b) Young Conaway Stargatt & Taylor, LLP, Rodney Square, 1000 North King Street, Wilmington, Delaware 19801, Attn: Michael R. Nestor, Esq. and Robert F. Poppiti, Jr., Esq.; (ii) counsel to the Committee, Pachulski Stang Ziehl & Jones LLP, 919 Market Street, 17th Floor, P.O. Box 8705, Wilmington, Delaware 19899, Attn: Robert J. Feinstein, Esq. and Maxim B. Litvak, Esq.; (iii) counsel to the Prepetition Lenders, (a) Paul Hastings LLP (x) 1999 Avenue of the Stars, 27th Floor, Los Angeles, California 90067, Attn: Susan Williams, Esq. and (y) 200 Park Avenue, New York, New York 10166, Attn: Andrew V. Tenzler, Esq., and (b) Ashby & Geddes, P.A., 500 Delaware Avenue, 8th Floor, Wilmington, Delaware 19801, Attn: Bill Bowden, Esq.; and (iv) the U.S. Trustee, J. Caleb Boggs Building, 844 King Street, Suite 2207, Lockbox 35, Wilmington, Delaware 19801, Attn: Linda Richenderfer, Esq.

5. **Release, Injunction, and Exculpation Provisions Contained in Plan.** Article IX of the Plan contains certain release, injunction, and exculpation provisions. You should carefully review the Plan, including these provisions, as your rights may be affected.

6. **Copies of the Plan and Related Documents.** Copies of the Plan, the Disclosure Statement, the Disclosure Statement Order, and related documents are available for review at www.donlinrecano.com/Clients/orf/Index, or upon request to the Debtors’ Voting Agent by email to orinfo@donlinrecano.com or by telephone at (212) 771-1128.

Dated: August 22, 2019, /s/ Ian J. Bambrick, YOUNG CONAWAY STARGATT & TAYLOR, LLP, Rodney Square, 1000 North King Street, Wilmington, Delaware 19801, Tel: (302) 571-4757 and KLEE, TUCHIN, BOGDANOFF & STERN LLP, 1999 Avenue of the Stars, 39th Floor, Los Angeles, California 90067, Tel: (310) 407-4000, Counsel for the Debtors and Debtors in Possession

¹ The Debtors and the last four digits of their respective federal taxpayer identification numbers are as follows: Open Road Films, LLC (4435-Del.); Open Road Releasing, LLC (4736-Del.); OR Productions LLC (5873-Del.); Briarcliff LLC (7304-Del.); Open Road International LLC (4109-Del.); and Empire Productions LLC (9375-Del.). The Debtors’ address is 1800 Century Park East, Suite 600, Los Angeles, CA 90067.

² All capitalized terms used but not otherwise defined herein shall have the meaning provided to them in the Plan.

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ence to one that itself didn't totally track, again in "Taxi Driver": the link, however fleeting, between Travis and Cybill Shepherd's Betsy. Arthur, in a funny way, hides his brains (they're revealed only when he passes through the looking glass of villainy). He's got a piece missing. But what fills the space is violence.

Many have asked, and with good reason: Do we need another Joker movie? Yet what we do need — badly — are comic book films that have a vérité gravitas, that unfold in the real world, so that there's something more dramatic at stake than whether the film in question is going to rack up a billion-and-a-half dollars worldwide. "Joker" manages the nimble feat of telling the Joker's origin story as if it were unprecedented. We feel a tingle when Bruce Wayne comes into the picture; he's there less as a force than an omen. And we feel a deeply deranged thrill when Arthur, having come out the other side of his rage, emerges wearing smeary makeup, green hair, an orange vest and a rust-colored suit.

When he dances on the long concrete stairway near his home, like a demonic Michael Jackson, with Gary Glitter's "Rock and Roll Part 2" bopping on the soundtrack, it's a moment of transcendent insanity, because he's not trying to be "the Joker." He's just improvising, going with the flow of his madness. And when he gets his fluky big shot to appear on TV, we think we know what's going to happen (that he's destined to be humiliated), but what we see, instead, is a monster reborn with a smile. And lo and behold, we're on his side. Because the movie does something that flirts with danger — it gives evil a clown-mask makeover, turning it into the sickest possible form of cool. **Z**

CREDITS: A Warner Bros. release of a DC Films production in association with Village Roadshow Pictures, BRON Creative, A Joint Effort. **Producers:** Bradley Cooper, Emma Tillinger Koskoff, Todd Phillips. **Executive producers:** Richard Baratta, Bruce Ber-

man, Jason Cloth, Joseph Garner, Aaron L. Gilbert, Walter Hamada, Michael E. Uslan. **Director:** Todd Phillips. **Screenplay:** Phillips, Scott Silver. **Camera (color, widescreen):** Lawrence Sher. **Editor:** Jeff Groth. **Music:** Hildur Gudnadóttir. Reviewed at Venice

Film Festival (Competition), Aug. 31, 2019. **MPAA Rating:** R. **Running time:** 122 MIN. **Cast:** Joaquin Phoenix, Robert De Niro, Frances Conroy, Zazie Beetz, Brett Cullen, Brian Tyree Henry, Marc Maron, Dante Pereira-Olson, Douglas Hodge, Sharon Washington



Tough Enough Merritt Wever and Toni Collette are tenacious police officers in "Unbelievable."

TV REVIEW
BY DANIEL D'ADDARIO

Unbelievable

Limited series: Netflix (eight episodes, all reviewed); Sept. 13
Cast: Toni Collette, Merritt Wever, Kaitlyn Dever

The top-billed stars of "Unbelievable" don't appear at all in the first episode.

Emmy winners Toni Collette and Merritt Wever are the big names in this limited series, playing police officers who team up to solve the case of a serial rapist. But the first hour — and the viewer's most strongly held sympathies throughout

the entire eight-episode run — belong to Kaitlyn Dever, a phenomenally talented young performer who brings to life the consequences of violence and of mistrust of women. Her life is marked twice, first by the crime she suffers and then by the protracted inability of society to believe her.

The series, an adaptation of a Pulitzer-winning ProPublica and Marshall

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2	Stumptown	09/25/19 abc	2	Titans	09/06/19 DC
3	Prodigal Son	09/23/19 FOX	3	American Horror Story	09/18/19 FX
4	Unbelievable	09/13/19 NETFLIX	4	The Good Place	09/26/19 NBC
5	Emergence	09/24/19 abc	5	How to Get Away with Murder	09/26/19 abc

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“

‘Unbelievable,’ at its best, is focused less on the system at large than on one individual ground up by it.”

Project story that feels almost too painful to have been true, begins in an aftermath: Dever’s Marie, comforted by her former foster mother (Elizabeth Marvel), is telling a story of having her home invaded by a rapist who undertook an hours-long assault on her. (It’s a siege on her body and spirit that we, mercifully, see only in short glimpses of memory.)

From the earliest stages of the investigation, Marie finds herself put to the test by authorities whose methods and attitudes seem to lie somewhere between spuriousness and outright scorn. “Again?” she asks a nurse who demands she give testimony. “I already told the cop. Two cops.” Marie’s independent life had only just begun — after turbulent years moving between



True to Herself
Kaitlyn Dever stars as rape survivor Marie.

homes, she had moved out on her own and begun a job — and now becomes a spiraling eddy of repetitious communications with cops who care less about finding justice than about poking holes in her story.

Marie eventually faces charges against her for filing a false report — a charge that we doubly

cannot believe to be true, because Dever’s crystalline performance provides a certainty that the law cannot, and because, in their plotline, Collette and Wever are working to find a man whose crimes fit a very specific pattern. Their investigation breaches, at times, the letter of the law, animated as it is by a larger goal:

To bring one wrongdoer to justice before he can do yet more harm. The series, whose producers include “Erin Brockovich” writer Susannah Grant, Katie Couric and the real Marie (the name she went by in the journalistic account of her story), feels like a crusade, the power of which is drawn both from the belief that Marie was wronged and by her tremulous but growing faith in herself, movingly portrayed by Dever.

Elsewhere, Collette and (especially) Wever bring plenty of themselves to an odd-couple routine that might in other hands seem stale: Collette’s a hard-nosed individualist; Wever’s a nurturer who knows how to speak to victims, as she does in scenes that show the softness and heart that lie behind Wever’s usual tough attitude on screen. But aspects of the show’s depiction of the race to justice feel nearly as disconcerting as its depiction of the mishandling of Marie’s case feel assured. The tendency to treat any method as within bounds in pursuit of a larger sort of justice is both big-hearted and troubling if thought through. And in later installments, the show depicts at some length a victim impact statement. It’s a moving bit of acting that is an admirably righteous extension of the spirit of “Unbelievable,” but it pushes past the tendency of such statements to stack the deck. Even monsters, in our legal system, have the right to a fair trial.

Yet, “Unbelievable,” at its best, is focused less on the system at large than on one individual ground up by it. It tells its story — directed in the first few installments by Lisa Cholodenko with lack of adornment or narrative excess — without flash and with a humanistic sense of the ways in which Marie suffers. Unlike fellow Netflix streamer “13 Reasons Why,” there’s no relish here, no sense that a young woman’s pain is inherently entertaining. This series has things it wants to say: That it says them plainly is a virtue, and allows us to see the story more clearly. As a document of trauma, overcome both through justice and through a hard-won fight to find self-worth, “Unbelievable” soars. **Z**

CREDITS: Executive producers: Susannah Grant, Sarah Timberman, Carl Beverly; Lisa Cholodenko, Ayelet Waldman, Michael

Chabon, Katie Couric, Richard Tofel, Neil Barsky, Robyn Semien, “Marie.” 60 MIN. **CAST:** Toni Collette, Merritt Wever, Kaitlyn Dever

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MY FIRST TIME IN VARIETY

Crystal Gayle

“People tell you things, and then you see they’re not telling the truth. It was only a three-year contract that was put together by Loretta’s husband, Mooney.”

With her self-titled debut album for United Artists Records in Nashville nearly 45 years ago, singer Crystal Gayle immediately established a winning sound that would take the 24-year-old younger sister of country music legend Loretta Lynn repeatedly to the top of the music charts. Hit records such as “Wrong Road Again,” “I’ll Get Over You,” “When I Dream,” “Half the Way,” “Talking in Your Sleep” and the ubiquitous jazz-flavored ballad “Don’t It Make My Brown Eyes Blue” erased all shadows cast over her career by her big sister.

Gayle releases her first new album in 16 years this month, “You Don’t Know Me: Classic Country.” But she arrived in the pages of *Variety* 47 years ago, on **Oct. 25, 1972**, when rights org SESAC was celebrating one of the singles from her short-lived association with Decca Records.

You recorded for Decca, your sister’s label, and were produced by Owen Bradley, who also produced your sister’s classic records. Sounds like a lot of pressure straight out of the gate.

My first record, “I’ve Cried the Blues Right out of My Eyes,” was actually written by Loretta. She also wrote some other songs I recorded. That was a time when they leaned on having Loretta on the team helping me. They wanted me to do what she wanted. And I knew I was only there because I was her sister.

But it wasn’t really working.

Starting in the business was fun. I got to work with Owen Bradley. I was scared every minute I was around him, but those were fun times.

Until it wasn’t.

Not when it’s clear you’re not going to be on the label. People tell you things, and then you see they’re not telling the truth. It was only a three-year contract that was put together by Loretta’s husband, Mooney. We ended that deal by mutual agreement. I was actually thinking about not pursuing a career.

That’s surprising to hear. Did being Loretta Lynn’s sister prepare you for the difficulties?

I grew up with my sister in the business. So I thought, “This is simple. You just go to Nashville and record songs, and

you have hit records. I loved singing and I loved what I was doing, though I probably did more things because the agency wanted it than because I enjoyed it. My sister was more ambitious. I watched her work herself into the hospital, and I didn’t want that. I thought, “Nope, I’m not going to kill myself.”

What would you have done if you hadn’t become a country singing star?

I would have become the head of the FBI or something like that.

That’s quite an ambition!

I know it wouldn’t have been easy, being a woman. I probably would have started as a secretary. But I would have worked my way up to the top!

Thankfully for your fans, UA Records signed you, and you started making hit records with producer Allen Reynolds.

I loved Allen’s writing, and his songs fit my voice. He was someone I didn’t think I was going to find in Nashville. The first thing was, he always asked me if I liked the songs. He valued my opinion. And I’d sing, and he’d say, “Let’s try it another way.” He was very wise, and I knew right away that he knew what he was talking about. We worked in a way that was very refreshing compared to a lot of what goes on in Nashville. **Z**

repertoire category.
Artists cited were Johnny Cash, Conway Twitty, Hank Thompson, Ray Price, George Jones, Warner Mack, Nat Stuckey, Jay Lee Webb, Jack Greene, Jimmy Dean, Bobby Wright, Crystal Gayle, Leroy Van Dyke, Lynn Anderson, Del Reeve Bobby Vinton and The Statler Bro.
Other publishing trophies went to Akard Music for “Promise He Anything”; Raydee Music, “A Day in the Life of a Fool” and “No Blues Is Good News”; Slimsongs “One Night To Remember” and “15 Years Ago”; and Page Boy Publications, “I Wanna Be Loved Com

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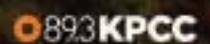
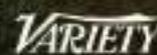
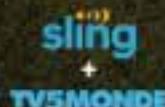
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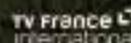
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