

March 16, 2023

# THE *Hollywood* REPORTER

**DO YOU NEED TO  
BRACE FOR  
BANK CONTAGION?**  
The industry searches  
for signs of distress at its  
specialized institutions

**CHRIS PINE,  
ELIZABETH OLSEN,  
REGÉ-JEAN PAGE  
AND MORE AT THR'S  
SXSW STUDIO**

OSCAR  
**SPECTACULAR**

The looks that owned  
the champagne carpet

How A24 made history  
(and left competitors griping)

The parties  
that still pack 'em in

## BEN'S NEXT SHOT

ACTOR, WRITER, DIRECTOR AND BUDDING MOGUL BEN AFFLECK ON THE DISRUPTIVE PRODUCTION COMPANY HE LAUNCHED WITH MATT DAMON, WHY HE'S DONE WITH DC, HOW HE GOT MICHAEL JORDAN'S BLESSING TO MAKE AIR, AND THE ADVICE HE TOOK FROM WIFE JENNIFER LOPEZ ON THAT FILM (AND THIS INTERVIEW)



SHOWTIME ORIGINAL



*Yellowjackets*

Season  
Premiere

Streaming  
Mar 24

SHOWTIME







## FEATURES

### 42 **Ben Affleck Goes for Three**

The actor, writer and budding film CEO on the upsides and pressures of launching a new profit-sharing production company with Matt Damon, securing Michael Jordan's blessing to make *Air* and what wife Jennifer Lopez advised him before this interview.

### 50 **THR at SXSW**

For the first time, *THR* took its photo team to Texas for a weekend full of tacos, tequila and talent — including Elizabeth Olsen, Bob Odenkirk, Kerry Washington and Regé-Jean Page — from the spring's hottest movies and TV shows.

### 54 **'I'm Grateful That I'm There to Bear Witness'**

It's been 25 years since she was first Oscar-nominated, and in that time, documentarian Liz Garbus has talked to death row inmates, contributed to solving the Golden State Killer case, directed *Harry & Meghan* and now helms for TV and the movies.

Kerry Washington stepped out at SXSW on March 11 to promote *UnPrisoned*, her new family-centric Hulu drama series.

#### ON THE COVER

Ben Affleck was photographed by Austin Hargrave on March 6 at Hollywood Vintage Gym in Los Angeles.



Photographed by **Jasmine Archie**





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**18** "I knew pretty early on that I wasn't ever going to get bored with this character," says Courtney Eaton, who plays Lottie Matthews on *Yellowjackets*. She was photographed March 2 at PMC Studios in Los Angeles.

Styling by Erica Cloud  
Sleeper top, AGOLDE jeans,  
Sam Edelman shoes.

**32** Following the March 12 Academy Awards, Michelle Yeoh and Brendan Fraser shared a two-listed celebration at *Vanity Fair*'s Oscar party at the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts in Beverly Hills.

**SEE YOU IN 2 WEEKS**  
The next issue publishes March 29. Keep up with breaking news, reviews and video at THR.com and via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.



Courtney Eaton photographed by **Aaron Feaver**

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Dominique Fishback's brilliant lead turn as a young woman obsessed with a pop star boosts a slippery Amazon series.

# Thanks for wearing green for Hulu's 15th Anniversary!

When we chose green for our brand colors, it was because that's what we were – fresh, fun, and a bit naive. So the fact that everyone's wearing green this week solely to celebrate Hulu's 15 years of streaming makes us feel like a pot o' gold. When we launched, we had nothing but a weird name and a website. No content. We barely had office snacks. But here we are 15 years later with an Academy Award®, a bunch of Emmy® Awards, and some of the greatest stories in streaming. So yeah, we'll take all this green love and we don't know where the leprechauns came from, but we'll take them too.

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↑ **Oscars**  
**A24's Big Night**  
 How the indie studio ran away with wins p.12

**Moguls**  
**Studio Profit Report**  
 Crunching the numbers on year-to-year gains p.14

**Heat Index**



**Ryan Reynolds**  
 Years of marketing savvy pay off as the actor and producer, a minority owner of Mint Mobile, cuts his first billion-dollar deal in a sale to wireless giant T-Mobile.



**Bryan Woods & Scott Beck**  
 The *Quiet Place* writers couldn't conjure the same box office magic with Sony's sci-fi thriller *65*, which opened to \$12.3 million from 3,400 theaters' stateside.



**Kevin Hart**  
 The comedy superstar links a new multiyear deal with SiriusXM that keeps him and his Laugh Out Loud network on satellite radio.



**Jonathan Kasdan & Wendy Mericle**  
 Disney+ ends its *Willow* revival, led by the co-showrunners, after a single season that didn't break into Nielsen's top streaming chart.

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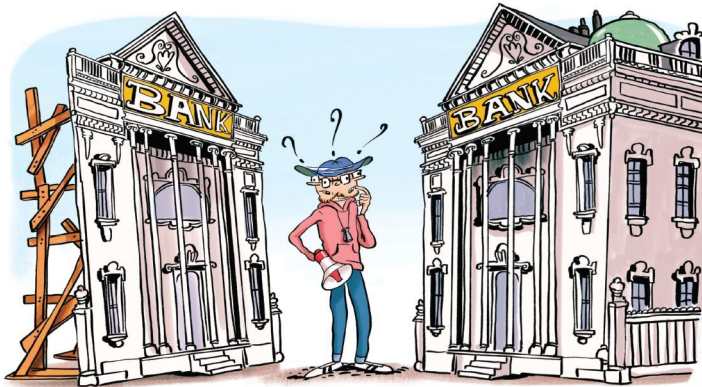
↑ **\$265.44 (+3.7%)**  
**MICROSOFT (MSFT)**  
 The tech titan is benefiting from a halo effect as its partner OpenAI releases the GPT4 large language model.

↓ **\$93.10 (-6.2%)**  
**DISNEY (DIS)**  
 The entertainment giant saw its share price slide after Wells Fargo said it was "unlikely" that it would sell Hulu.

March 9-15

# The Report

Behind the Headlines



## Hollywood Is Hoping Its Bank Relationships Are Too Big to Fail

The industry has long leaned on regional institutions that specialize in entertainment clients. But after Silicon Valley Bank's failure rattled tech moguls, execs may rethink where they put their money

BY ALEX WEPRIN AND CAITLIN HUSTON

**T**he failure of Silicon Valley Bank has sent shock waves throughout U.S. financial institutions. And nowhere was that felt more than at other regional banks. At New York's Signature Bank — which is one of the two main banks that works with Broadway productions — the board spent days grappling with the repercussions.

Yes, there were outflows on Friday, March 10, as some clients sought to move cash to "safer" banks, but former Massachusetts Democratic Rep. **Barney Frank**, a Signature Bank board member, says he believed they would be able to open Monday, March 13, without issue. Nonetheless, he spent the weekend lobbying federal officials to guarantee all deposits. It's an area Frank knows well, having co-authored the landmark 2010 Dodd-Frank Act, a bill that reformed Wall Street by dramatically overhauling regulation of the financial services industry in

an effort to stabilize the sector. The feds agreed to guarantee the deposits, making it "very unlikely that we're going to see serious contagion," Frank tells *THR*.

But it was too late for Signature, which was seized March 12 by the New York State Department of Financial Services, as officials said they had a "crisis of confidence in the bank's leadership." Frank, the author of the bill written in response to the 2008 financial crisis, found himself at the center of a new one. Signature's failure shook the Broadway community that had

long leaned on it for their banking needs. Indeed, much of the entertainment world has relied on regional banks that specialize in working with film, TV and theatrical productions. Dallas-based Comerica Bank has a large, thriving entertainment unit (it recently issued a line of credit to

*Parasite* distributor Neon), while L.A.-based East West Bank has positioned itself at the center of Hollywood's relationships with China. Western Alliance Bank, Banc of California and California Bank & Trust also have teams that specialize in entertainment banking. And there's City National Bank, long a favorite of Hollywood and the other half of Broadway, which is a specialist bank but is owned by the much larger Royal Bank of Canada.

While the actions by the Treasury, Federal Reserve and FDIC, including insuring all deposits at SVB and Signature, may have prevented a full-on regional bank run, the reverberations of the failures of SVB and Signature were felt when the markets opened March 13, as billions of dollars shifted from regional banks to larger institutions. Comerica stock fell by more than 26 percent, Banc of California shares fell by 11 percent, and East



Frank

Illustration by Zohar Lezer

OSCARS: JEFFREY M. HUNTER/ABC; REYNOLDS: JEFFREY M. HUNTER/ABC; WOODS & BECK: JEFFREY M. HUNTER/ABC; HART: JEFFREY M. HUNTER/ABC; KASDAN & MERICLE: JEFFREY M. HUNTER/ABC; MICROSOFT: JEFFREY M. HUNTER/ABC; DISNEY: JEFFREY M. HUNTER/ABC; FRANK: JEFFREY M. HUNTER/ABC; LEZER: JEFFREY M. HUNTER/ABC



Behind the Headlines

West shares plunged 15 percent as fears of contagion spread. Even the big banks like JPMorgan and RBC saw their share prices fall, though in the mid-single digits.

Like the rest of the business, entertainment banking is split between the conglomerates and the independents. Companies like Disney and NBCUniversal have banking agreements with the biggest banks, such as JPMorgan and Bank of America. That can give those entertainment giants a layer of stability.

But not everyone has that option. That's why smaller studios and independents often turn to specialist bankers as they seek financing for their projects. And even if a bank run has been prevented, the threat facing independent Hollywood's preferred banking partners is real and may get more acute as time goes on. As SVB's failure showed, businesses that rely on regional bank partners for payroll or daily expenses cannot necessarily count on that money being there. The federal government guaranteed the deposits this time, but unless there is further legislation to raise the FDIC insurance limit of \$250,000, there might not be a guarantee next time. "You shouldn't have to go to 12 banks or 20 banks or whatever for your deposits," Frank says, adding that he "wished" Congress raised the FDIC limits when it passed Dodd-Frank. "I tried. I was outvoted.

"You should be able to put that in one or two banks and have it guaranteed enough for you to meet your payroll, to meet your operating expenses for at least a couple of months," he adds.

The risk was evident after SVB's collapse. BuzzFeed said most of its cash was at SVB, while Roku kept nearly half a billion dollars at the bank. Hudson Pacific, the studio lot giant that operates 90 soundstages globally, said in a filing that 11 of its 900 clients "collectively occupying approximately 2 percent of the company's in-service office square footage have letters of credit issued by

SVB and/or its affiliates" and that it was working with its tenants to replace those letters with new ones from other banks.

"When you're running a business of a reasonable scale, you're going to be flushing in and out millions of dollars a day — that's just the nature of being in business, that's the nature of cash management," says **David Offenberg**, associate professor of finance at Loyola Marymount.

The end result may be that businesses move more deposits out of some regional or specialist banks and toward perceived safe havens. "If I had \$1 at a regional bank, I'd be pulling it out and bringing it to a 'too big to fail' bank," says **Matthew Tuttle**, the CEO of Tuttle Capital Management. "Even if I'm convinced my deposit is covered, do I want that hassle? Do I want to have to wait even two days to get my money?"

Indeed, **Eric Fulton**, a business manager who works with Hollywood clients, says they are thinking about just that. "I think the larger portion of anyone's cash should be held in one of the

banks and moving the day-to-day accounts to City National.

Broadway business already was largely split between Signature Bank and City National, which has been a multiyear sponsor of the Tony Awards. Both banks had specialized teams that handled relationships with the Broadway community. Several insiders say they could not imagine working with a larger bank due to the specialized nature of the business and the lack of attention they felt they would receive. And another source speculates that specialist entertainment bankers at Signature or elsewhere could find landing pads at banks willing to explore lending to the sector.

Even with the new federal guarantees, Broadway clients are still concerned about the fate of Signature and whether it'll find a buyer. Producers also have to consider their fiduciary duty to investors. "The money is safe right now, which is most important at the end of the day, but you need to be able to transact business and you need to do it with a degree of confidence and surety,"

deposits could reduce the appetite for risk by regional banks, and riskier bets (like film or the atrical financing) could be less welcome than they once were.

"This is a real wake-up call," Tuttle says. "And I think this is going to change behaviors; that's not going to be good for smaller banks." Nor will it be ideal for small or midsize entertainment companies, which may find it harder to secure financing or loans for their productions.

Still, there is some optimism for the financial sector. In the end, the government stepped up to make the depositors at SVB and Signature whole, and there seems to be meaningful movement to raise the FDIC insurance limit, at least for commercial accounts. "There is an advantage to a bank that specializes in your work, and with the guarantee of deposits in place, I think it's OK," Frank says. "The problem you have, of course, is if you are a big business, you've got to keep obviously more than \$250,000 in cash available."

Not to mention the unique role that specialists play — which

## "You shouldn't have to go to 12 banks or 20 banks or whatever for your deposits."

Former Rep. Barney Frank

more secure, larger banks like RBC/City National," he notes.

"They may have a branch that specializes in entertainment, but as a comparison to their overall holdings, it's not significant enough to put their clients at risk."

As it stands, the **Kelly Coffey**-led City National may be a big beneficiary of the chaos. Thanks to its ownership by RBC (and its status



Coffey

as the other big player on Broadway), the bank is already seeing in-flows from clients. Since the SVB failure, several general managers on Broadway whose productions banked with Signature were considering or in the process of moving accounts to City National. Those with longer-running productions or shows with bigger bank balances were also considering diversifying their holdings by putting capital returns or reserves in money market accounts at one of the big

says **Robert Fried**, partner at accounting firm Withum, Smith and Brown, who works with many theater clients.

But the impact of the bank failures will be felt elsewhere in Hollywood as well, even for the specialist banks that make it through the current moment.

"Even the ones that survive, I think risk-taking will suffer," Tuttle says. "Whereas before, if I'm the CEO of a regional bank, I'm incentivized to take risk. I take risk, we make money, stock price goes up, I get a big bonus, everybody's happy.

"Now, I think they're going to rein in a lot of that," he adds. "A lot of industries, the smaller, more speculative types of things that regional banks were more willing to lend on, I think those guys are going to suffer. And so, for the [entertainment industry], this is not a good thing."

In other words, tighter banking regulations combined with lower

keeps a sector of entertainment business alive — may not jell with the culture at larger banks.

Even if policies change, the bank runs that shuttered SVB and Signature are also a product of their moment in time. "One of the biggest problems that the banking industry faces is social media," says business manager **John McIlwee**. "Information spreads like wildfire, whether it's factual or not, and people panic."

Moody's on March 14 downgraded the U.S. banking sector, citing a "rapid deterioration in the operating environment" that could spell trouble for banks with high amounts of uninsured depositors and unrealized securities losses. It's an environment that puts smaller banks at greater risk. And Hollywood will have no choice but to grapple with whatever comes next.

*Ashley Cullins contributed to this report.*



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## The Report

Behind the Headlines

A24 stars, from left: Ke Huy Quan, Michelle Yeoh, Brendan Fraser and Jamie Lee Curtis in the press room after their Oscar wins.

# How A24 Made Oscars History

The indie studio capitalized on the underdog charisma of the films' casts, but some competitors have complained about alleged breaches of Academy rules **BY REBECCA KEEGAN**

**T**his time last year, all I was hoping for was just a job." That's how **Ke Huy Quan** opened a tearful acceptance speech at the Gotham Awards in November, when the possibility that the Vietnam-born, Chinese American actor might be nominated for — and even win — an Oscar for his performance in *Everything Everywhere All at Once* was starting to crystallize. Quan would go on to help drive a wildly successful Oscar night for *Everything Everywhere All at Once*'s indie producer and distributor, A24, which became the first studio in history to sweep the top six awards in a single year. The studio's stunning Oscar haul, which also included **Brendan Fraser**'s win for *The Whale*, owes a lot to the appeal of its actors, and to the deft deployment of their charm at screenings, events and on social media.

Winners **Michelle Yeoh**, **Jamie Lee Curtis**, Quan and Fraser are all industry veterans who have ridden out career lows. "They focused rightly on the cast," says a strategist at another studio. "And their actors are so lovable that you wanted good things for them." Says an executive at another competing

studio: "Their comeback narratives — Ke's particularly — really resonated with voters."

Much of A24's campaigns for both *Everything Everywhere All at Once* and Fraser relied on traditional tools, such as cast Q&As with guilds and media coverage. Strategists at Cinetic Marketing and Divergent PR coordinated those efforts, which benefited from a growing and fervent fan base for the film and for the actors, who had great chemistry. Some guild audiences would return for multiple viewings, and those audiences in turn helped recruit skeptical awards voters. Some competing strategists looked with envy at how well A24's actors used their own social media accounts, particularly Curtis, who has 5 million followers, and Yeoh, who has 1.8 million. As she did in awards shows, Curtis served as an enthusiastic wing woman for Yeoh, which had the effect of reflecting well on her.

Some of the events and social media use in support of the film fell into a gray area when it comes to Academy rules, however, prompting some competitors to complain to the Academy. After Oscar nominations are announced, and

until the final polls close, film companies are not permitted to invite Academy members to any parties or other non-screening events that promote nominated films. A24 itself followed those rules, according to multiple sources connected with the studio, but friends of the actors hosted their own gatherings. Academy members including **Jodie Foster**, **Jake Gyllenhaal** and **Melanie Griffith** threw Curtis a party in Marina del Rey on Feb. 15, and the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Beverly Hills hosted a dinner for Yeoh on Feb. 12 that was attended by Academy members including producers **Jerry Bruckheimer** and **Jon Landau** and directors **Michael Mann** and **Oliver Stone**. Yeoh also shared — and then deleted — a *Vogue* story on her Instagram, which noted that **Cate Blanchett** has "already won two Oscars." The Academy forbids social media that singles out the competition.

Some competitors say that after the Academy declined to take any punitive action against the people behind the unconventional best actress campaign for **Andrea Riseborough**, the events for Curtis and Yeoh didn't surprise them. The Academy, which did not respond to a request for comment about the competitors' complaints, is expected to review its campaigning rules this summer. "It's the wild, wild West out here now," says a strategist for another studio. "If the Academy isn't willing to set the tone in a way where there are repercussions when those rules aren't followed, what do you expect?" Says the executive at the competing studio: "I don't begrudge them pushing the envelope. They won it in the end, and that's all anyone's going to remember." **TMZ**

## Festivals, Take Note: SXSW Launched a Best Picture

It's a first for the event, which is usually overshadowed by Toronto and Cannes for awards fare

**N**early a year before **Daniel Kwan** and **Daniel Scheinert** collected the best picture Oscar, the team behind *Everything Everywhere All at Once* was onstage at The Paramount Theatre in downtown Austin, debuting the movie at the South by Southwest film festival.

The best picture win marks a first for a feature premiering at SXSW. Toronto and Telluride have long been considered launching pads

for awards runs, while recent best picture winners *CODA*, *Nomadland* and *Parasite* have had their premieres at Sundance, Venice and Cannes, respectively. Of this year's best picture nominees, two had Cannes debuts (*Évis*, *Triangle of Sadness*), two bowed at Telluride (*Women Talking*, *Tár*), two more at TIFF (*All Quiet on the Western Front*, *The Fabelmans*), and there was Venice provenance for good

measure (*The Banshees of Inisherin*). But SXSW has never been considered a best picture springboard. The Austin festival (now co-owned by THR parent PMC) has been seen as consumer-facing: Its program is filled with comedies and genre films, and studios often use it for a soft launch of spring releases. But with the run of *Everything Everywhere*, the industry might take note. This year, per SXSW film and TV programmer **Claudette**



From left: Jonathan Wang, along with Daniel Scheinert and Daniel Kwan, at SXSW in 2022.

**Godfrey**, the fest received the usual number of inquiries from studios, but she notes that going forward, "there is maybe a different idea of what things could be." —MIA GALUPPO

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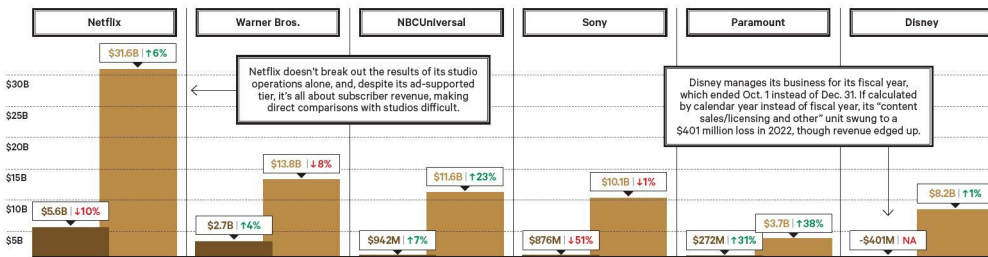


STUDIO UNIT PROFIT REPORT 2022

# Top Gun: Maverick Helps Paramount Jet Ahead

Warner Bros. and Universal also each grew profits for their film studio segments in 2022, as *THR*'s annual analysis shows. For Disney — which is retooling its structure as Bob Iger returns — it's more complicated **BY GEORG SZALAI**

Profit/Operating Income Revenue



Netflix doesn't break out the results of its studio operations alone, and, despite its ad-supported tier, it's all about subscriber revenue, making direct comparisons with studios difficult.

Disney manages its business for its fiscal year, which ended Oct. 1 instead of Dec. 31. If calculated by calendar year instead of fiscal year, its "content sales/licensing and other" unit swung to a \$401 million loss in 2022, though revenue edged up.

The streamer ended 2022 with 230.75 million global subscribers, adding 8.9 million for the year. Original movies, such as *Class Onion: A Knives Out Mystery* and awards season hit *All Quiet on the Western Front*, as well as series *Wednesday* and *Stranger Things* season four, drove viewership, as did royal docuseries *Harry & Meghan*. On a Jan. 19 earnings call, co-CEO **Ted Sarandos** gave shoutouts to *Sea Beast*, "which is our biggest animated film ever," as well as *Purple Hearts* and actioner *Gray Man*, "two of our most watched films ever on Netflix."

The company's full-year revenue climbed 6 percent, but operating profit fell 10 percent as operating expenses jumped 11 percent, with leadership citing "increased personnel costs to support our continued improvements in our streaming service and our international expansion." Question marks regarding the year ahead include how much its ad tier can contribute to the bottom line. Despite a portfolio of 50 games after the acquisition of four game studios, it's unclear to what extent games retain or grow the company's subscriber base in 2023. So far, the firm's biggest gaming launch was tied to unscripted series *Too Hot to Handle*.

In a year of megamerger transition, Warners had fewer theatrical releases domestically — six, compared to 17 in 2021 — but saw stronger box office for those titles. *The Batman* (worldwide box office: \$771 million), *Black Adam* (\$393 million, an underperformer) and *Elvis* (\$287 million) led the way, while *Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore* (\$407 million) underperformed compared to the \$800 million-plus that most of the Harry Potter movies grossed individually. The film division's full-year revenue fell 8 percent due to lower TV licensing and home entertainment revenue. The bottom line, though, grew 4 percent as selling, general and administrative expenses dropped 13 percent, "primarily attributable to lower marketing expense due to fewer theatrical releases." One bright spot: "the studio segment's 'other' revenue department (i.e., not content, ads or distribution):" The Warner Bros. Studio Tour London and Hollywood and the Harry Potter store in New York fed a 36 percent increase to \$702 million. With new film studio leadership (**Michael De Luca** and **Pamela Abdy**) as well as DC Studios co-leaders **James Gunn** and **Peter Safran**, all eyes are now on the next film slate.

Revenue in NBCUniversal's studios segment, which includes its film and TV production and distribution operations, jumped 23 percent last year. Among the hits for Universal, Focus Features and DreamWorks Animation were *Jurassic Park: Dominion* (\$1 billion), *Illumination's Minions: The Rise of Gru* (\$940 million), *DWA's Puss in Boots: The Last Wish* (\$454 million) and *Nope* (\$171 million). That boosted theatrical revenue by nearly 133 percent to \$1.6 billion, while content licensing revenue rose 15.2 percent to \$8.7 billion, including content licensed to other NBCU segments. And home entertainment revenue increased 9.2 percent to \$1.3 billion. Studio profit improved less than that, though, amid a nearly 24.7 percent jump in costs and expenses to \$10.7 billion. This was driven by a 57.4 percent boost in ad, marketing and promotion spending to \$1.7 billion as more titles were released, a 20 percent rise (to \$8.2 billion) in programming and production costs as activity accelerated after the pandemic, and a 19.4 percent gain in other costs (to \$797 million), "primarily due to higher costs associated with live stage plays." (NBCU is a producer of Broadway staple *Wicked*.)

Revenue in Sony's pictures unit dropped slightly during calendar year 2022, but profit halved due to the particularly strong previous year, when it benefited from a gain related to the sale of Game Show Network's GSN Games business to Scopely, and a big licensing deal for Sony-produced *Seinfeld* and the hit *Spider-Man: No Way Home*. (To note: Sony's fiscal year ends in March rather than December.) Sony's top theatrical title of 2022 was *Uncharted*, with a global box office take of \$402 million, followed by *Bullet Train* (\$239 million) and *Where the Crawdads Sing* (\$140 million). And within the motion picture segment, home entertainment revenue jumped 53 percent to \$889 million, benefiting from strong sales of such releases as *Spider-Man: No Way Home*. Despite a new season of Netflix series *The Crown*, TV productions revenue dropped 5 percent to \$3.5 billion. In positive trends, the media networks in Sony's pictures unit climbed 2 percent to \$2.6 billion during calendar year 2022. And, after HBO launched its adaptation of Sony game *The Last of Us*, the studio is hoping to capitalize with future adaptations of *Gran Turismo* and *Ghost of Tsushima* this year.

Fueled by *Top Gun: Maverick*, Paramount saw the biggest year-to-year percentage change in profit. The hits included *Sonic the Hedgehog 2* (\$406 million) and *Smile* (\$217 million). And then there is *Maverick* (\$1.5 billion). The **Tom Cruise** film also garnered more than \$280 million in global consumer spend across 23 million home entertainment transactions, the company touted. The filmed entertainment unit, which also includes Nickelodeon Studios, saw its biggest revenue source, "licensing and other," climb 1 percent to \$2.5 billion, again driven by *Maverick*. At the same time, its expenses rose 38 percent to more than \$3.4 billion amid higher content and distribution costs tied to the revenue increase. The result was a more than 30 percent improvement in its bottom line, with a caveat that this was "partially offset by lower profits from the licensing of library titles," given it sold off *Coming 2 America* and *Tom Clancy's Without Remorse* to Amazon in the depths of the pandemic. Now, the focus is on making the direct-to-consumer streaming division profitable, given it swung to a \$75 million loss in Q4, up from \$602 million in the year-ago quarter.

For the second year in a row, Disney didn't report film or studio business-only revenue and earnings due to its reorg for the streaming age. Instead, the company reported figures for its "content sales/licensing and other" segment, which analysts see as not comparable but as a rough equivalent to its former studio unit, housed in the Disney Media and Entertainment Distribution division. (Yes, DMED is the **Bob Chapek**-created group that returning CEO **Bob Iger** is effectively dismantling.) It includes the sale of film and episodic television in TV/SVOD and home entertainment (some of which was previously reported as part of the giant's media networks unit), distribution of films theatrically, licensing of music rights and its stage business. Given that \$2.29 billion grosser *Avatar: The Way of Water* bowed Dec. 18, not all of its success is included in last year's financials. TV/SVOD distribution results dropped last year, "reflecting the shift from licensing content to third parties to distributing it on our direct-to-consumer services," the company noted. Meaning, originals sent to Disney+ and Hulu (instead of being sold to outside buyers) were a drag on the bottom line.

Sources: Earnings reports and SEC filings. Disney doesn't report results for its film operations, but posts operating profit for its "content sales/licensing and other" business. Sony reports operating profit. Paramount reports adjusted operating income before depreciation and amortization (EBDA). While Warner Bros., Discovery and NBCUniversal report adjusted earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization (EBITDA). Profit and revenue figures in the billions are rounded and focus on the calendar year 2022 compared with 2021, even though Disney and Sony use different fiscal years.

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# 7 Days of DEALS

Who's inking on the dotted line this week

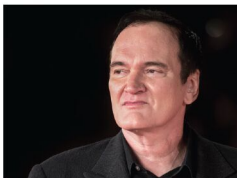
## TARANTINO READIES FINAL FILM AS A-LISTERS CLEAR SCHEDULES

Deal of the Week

Quentin Tarantino is back for the last time, putting together what sources tell *THR* is being billed as his final movie. *The Movie Critic* is the name of the script that the *Pulp Fiction* director wrote and is preparing to helm this fall, sources say.

Logline details are being kept in a suitcase, but sources describe the story as being set in late-1970s Los Angeles with a female lead at its center. It is possible it focuses on the late **Pauline Kael**, one of the most influential movie critics of all time who also was known for her pugnacious fights with editors and filmmakers. In the late 1970s, Kael had a brief tenure as a consultant for Paramount, a position she accepted at the behest of **Warren Beatty**. The timing of that Paramount job seems to coincide with the setting of the script — and Tarantino is known to have a deep respect for Kael, upping the odds of her serving as the movie's subject.

The Tarantino project does not yet have a home; it could go out to studios or buyers soon, according to sources. One frontrunner could be Sony Pictures, where Tarantino has a tight relationship with topper **Tom Rothman**. Sony distributed his 2019 film *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, which grossed more than \$377 million worldwide, and gave him a unique deal in which the copyright reverts to him over time. Warner Bros. (a finalist for *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*) and Universal



Quentin Tarantino's next film is said to be titled *The Movie Critic*.

also have been mentioned as strong contenders.

For two decades, Tarantino was able to attract the most coveted actors, working with **Leonardo DiCaprio** and **Brad Pitt** twice each. He directed **Christoph Waltz** to two Oscar wins. If this truly is his final film, he will have no shortage of thespians dropping everything to line up for roles.

The two-time Oscar winner has long maintained that he has a finite number of movies in him, saying he wanted to direct 10 films or retire by the time he was 60. The writer-director has made nine (if you count the two *Kill Bill* movies as one) and turns 60 on March 27. Even though he says he plans to retire from feature work, he has expressed interest in other creative outlets, noting in interviews that he could direct limited series or plays. — **BORYS KIT**



Jenna Ortega

**FILM**

**Jenna Ortega (CAA)** is circling a role in Warner Bros.' *Beetlejuice 2* from director **Tim Burton**.

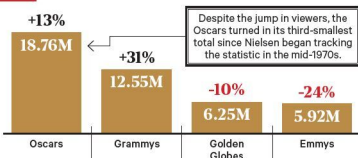
**Oscar Isaac (WME)**, **Andrew Garfield (CAA)** and **Mia Goth (WME)** are eyeing roles in the **Guillermo del Toro**-directed Netflix feature adaptation of *Frankenstein*.

**Julianne Moore (WME)** and **Sydney Sweeney (Paradigm)** will star as mother and daughter in Apple Films' *Echo Valley*. *Beast* helmer **Michael Pearce** will direct and *Mare of Easttown* creator **Brad Ingelsby** wrote the script.

**James Van Der Beek (APA)** is in talks to join **Rebel Wilson (WME)** and **Leslie Mann (CAA)** in the eOne comedy *Rock the Boat* from director **Luke Greenfield**.

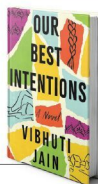
Inside View

### Awards Season: The Ratings Scorecard



The big four awards shows had decidedly mixed results this season. The Oscars and Grammys grew by double digits (albeit from much lower-than-usual numbers last year), but the Emmys tumbled to an all-time low, dipping below 6 million viewers for the first time. The Golden Globes only beat its worst-ever showing on NBC, with about 250,000 more viewers than the starless announcement of winners in the writers strike year of 2008. — **RICK PORTER**

Source: Nielsen. Globes ratings percentage is compared to 2021.



### Rights Available! Hot new books with Hollywood appeal

**Our Best Intentions** (WILLIAM MORROW, MARCH 14)

BY **Vibhuti Jain** AGENCY UTA

Fans of **Celeste Ng** will instantly connect with this subtly funny thriller about a wealthy suburban community struggling in the aftermath of a crime that exposes the town's deeply buried issues of privilege and bias.

**A Death at the Party** (SIMON & SCHUSTER, MARCH 7)

BY **Amy Stuart** AGENCY WME

A fancy summer garden party is the setting for this delightfully sinister murder mystery — protagonist **Nadine Walsh's** best-laid plans to fete her mother with a birthday celebration go awry when she discovers a dead body in her basement.

COVER: JEFF LABRECQUE/THE NEW YORK TIMES; OSCAR: GUY LAWRENCE/GETTY IMAGES; GRAMMY: JEFF LABRECQUE/GETTY IMAGES; GOLDEN GLOBE: GUY LAWRENCE/GETTY IMAGES; EMMY: GUY LAWRENCE/GETTY IMAGES; TARANTINO: JEFF LABRECQUE/GETTY IMAGES; ORTEGA: JEFF LABRECQUE/GETTY IMAGES



Anderson

**Jason Clarke (CAA), Scott Eastwood (UTA) and Chaske Spencer (CESD)** are set to star in *Wind River: The Next Chapter* from director **Kari Skogland** and Castle Rock Entertainment.

**Jonathan Majors (WME)** will star in *Da Underground*, from Westbrook and Amazon Studios. **Spike Lee (Gersh)** is in talks to direct a script written by **Tom Hanada, Zach Strauss** and **Tyler Cole**.

**TV**

**Matthew McConaughey (WME)** and **Woody Harrelson (Ziffren Brittenham)** will star in and exec produce an untitled comedy series at Apple TV+ from *Schitt's Creek* alum **David West Read** and Skydance TV.



Moore

**Anthony Anderson (UTA)** will top line and exec produce ABC's comedy pilot *Public Defenders* from 20th TV and Wonderland Sound and Vision.

*The Sopranos'* **David Chase (UTA)** is teaming with *A Teacher* creator **Hannah Fidell (UTA)** to co-write and co-create an untitled witness protection drama series at FX.

**Jason Ritter (CAA)** is joining the cast of CBS' *Matlock* reboot pilot from *Jane the Virgin* creator **Jennie Snyder Urman**.

*Game of Thrones* director **Jeremy Podeswa (CAA)** has signed on to *Prime Video's Blade Runner 2099* to helm the pilot and serve as an executive producer.



Petra Ecclestone's Brentwood estate was built this year.

**Judy Greer (CAA)** and **Ellie Kemper (WME)** will top line an ABC pilot titled *Drop-Off*, based on the BBC series *Motherland*, from Lionsgate Television. **Michael Showalter (UTA)** will direct.

*Dexter* and *Homeland* director **Michael Cuesta (WME)** will tackle the first episode for Marvel Studios' *Daredevil: Born Again* series at Disney+.

**Daniel Brühl (UTA)** will portray style icon **Karl Lagerfeld** in Disney+ series *Kaiser Karl* from directors **Jérôme Salle** and **Audrey Estrougo**.

**J.J. Abrams (CAA)** and **Matt Reeves (CAA)** will exec produce *Batman: The Caped Crusader* for

Amazon Studios, which picked up the animated series for two seasons after the project left HBO Max.

Roast Beef Productions, the documentary shingle run by **Mike Lerner** and **Dorothy Byrne**, inked an exclusive first-look deal with All3Media International.

*The Boys* writer **Anne Cofoff Saunders (CAA)** will adapt **Jennifer L. Armentrout's From Blood and Ash** novels as a TV series for Amazon Studios.

CNN has hired **Lauren Mensch** and **Chris Russell** as exec producers on *CNN This Morning*, anchored by **Don Lemon, Kaitlan Collins** and **Poppy Harlow**.

# \$106M

**Big Number**

BuzzFeed's Q4 2022 loss, largely the result of an impairment charge after a steep decline in the value of the company's stock price in December.



**Allison Janney** found new reps at **CAA**.

**CAA** also inked *House of the Dragon* star **Emma D'Arcy** and writer-producers **Diane Ademu-John** and **Declan de Barra**, who launched the shingle *Wait for Dark*.

**WME** inked Netflix's *Elite* actor **Manu Rios**, singer-actress **Dove Cameron** and Golf Channel veteran **Sean Foley**.

*John Wick* franchise helmer **Derek Kolstad** is now at **UTA**.

**REAL ESTATE**

*Formula 1* heiress **Petra Ecclestone** bought a 13,500-square-foot, seven-bedroom home in Brentwood for \$30.5 million.

Music producer **Irv Gotti** bought a 10,617-square-foot, seven-bedroom mansion in Encino for \$102 million.

**Carey Mulligan** and **Marcus Mumford** listed a 4,593-square-foot, four-bedroom home in West Hollywood for \$6.49 million.

*Tiger King* docuseries director **Eric Goode** bought a 1,502-square-foot, three-bedroom home in the Hollywood Hills for \$2 million.  
— COMPILED BY ERIK HAYDEN

## Congratulations Liz!

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Victoria S. Cook and

**Frankfurt Kurnit Klein + Selz** PC



# About Town

People, Places, Preoccupations

NEXT BIG THING

## Courtney Eaton

The actress' character takes center stage in the new season of *Yellowjackets*  
By Seija Rankin

**A**s the return of *Yellowjackets* looms, there's one question on avid viewers' minds (one that also was asked by Colleen Wheeler's Suzie in the first-season finale): "Who the fuck is Lottie Matthews?"

For **Courtney Eaton**, it's complicated. The actress has now spent more than a year filming the blockbuster Showtime drama about a group of teen girls stranded in the woods 19 months after a plane crash (and the struggles of their adult counterparts to reconcile, among other things, the cannibalism they committed before their rescue). In the cliffhanger episode of season one, the current-day Lottie was — to the sinister delight of viewers — revealed to be a cult leader seemingly responsible for the death of Travis, another survivor. "It doesn't come from not knowing her well, but I have a hard time explaining her," Eaton says.

Eaton, 27, who was born in Western Australia and moved to L.A. to pursue an acting career after scoring a role in 2015's *Mad Max: Fury Road*, has been upped to series regular on *Yellowjackets*, an offer she actually turned down before the pilot. "This was my first TV show, and the idea of signing on to something for six years really scared me," she says. "But then I knew pretty early on that I wasn't ever going to get bored with this character."

*Yellowjackets*, back on March 24, is an ensemble show in every sense of the word, but now

"I'm still figuring out who I am, but at least I know the path I want to take," says Courtney Eaton, who'll also star in the Brittany Snow-directed indie film *Parachute* this year. She was photographed March 2 at PMC Studios in L.A.

Styling by Erica Cloud  
Maggie Marilyn "Fahri", Camilla & Marc trousers, Hereu shoes.

Photographed by **Aaron Fieber**

Eaton's character is squarely in the spotlight, much to her surprise. "I remember getting that script and seeing that I closed out the season and sort of shitting myself, for lack of a better term," she says. Lottie will get even more fleshing out in the episodes to come, with the introduction of her current-day version (played by **Simone Kessell**) and a glimpse into her post-rescue trauma that, frankly, will do little to clear up the big questions around whether the character unlocked supernatural powers in the Canadian wilderness or simply suffered from an unmedicated mental illness.

Eaton says she talked to showrunners **Bart Nickerson** and **Ashley Lyle** about Lottie's potential clairvoyance in season two, coming to an admittedly still-flimsy conclusion that at least helped with her onscreen portrayal. "I've decided that she doesn't have a mental illness but that she's never really trusted her own brain," she says. "In dealing with the trauma of the crash, she's just trying to latch onto



Eaton as young Lottie (with Kevin Alves as teenage Travis) on season two of *Yellowjackets*.

whatever she can, which is often an energy that draws people to her even if she doesn't know how to process it."

Nominated for seven Emmys last year, *Yellowjackets* has already been renewed for a third season. But Eaton says the success never really sank in — and now the pressure of delivering for the fans is beginning to take hold.

It's a lot for any young actor, but especially for someone experiencing their first big moment as an actor. "I only started feeling like I could actually do this as a job in the last year or two," she says. "It came with learning what I want for my life." **THR**

PHOTOGRAPH BY DANIEL DELANEY AT THE WALL GROUP; HAIR: SAM BRIGHT AT A'RA'RAE; MAKEUP: KYLEE SCHWAB; STYLING: THE RENDERING, COURTESY OF THE HAMMER MUSEUM; ORACLE: DANIEL BOESKY



## Hammer Museum Completes Transformational Expansion

With a new entrance to properly welcome visitors and a whopping 40,000 square feet of additional exhibition space, the arts institution is set for a reopening and reveal March 26 **By** Evan Nicole Brown

For so long we've been kind of a hidden gem," says **Connie Butler**, chief curator of the Hammer Museum, which opened in 1990 at the base of an office building in Westwood. In the more than three decades since, the Hammer has gained an international reputation for its talked-about contemporary art shows and culture-shifting programming, including its biennial *Made in L.A.* exhibition, but the museum always lacked a marquee street presence.

That changed March 25 when the final phase of a multyear revamp will be unveiled.

L.A.-based architect **Michael Maltzan**, who was first commissioned in 2000 to create a master renovation and expansion plan for the Hammer, has designed what he calls a new "welcoming porch" at the corner of Wilshire and Westwood boulevards to welcome visitors. "For the first time really, we will have a proper museum entrance," says Butler, adding that the new entry will include a large digital billboard displaying art and museum information.

Inside, the museum will gain 40,000 square feet of exhibition space by expanding into the area next door once occupied by City National Bank. Among the new shows opening March 26 as part of the reborn Hammer are installations by Berlin-based Japanese artist **Chiharu Shiota** (known for threading colored wool yarn through spaces to create "a very enveloping, very physical experience," says Butler) and L.A.-based **Rita McBride**, whose work, *Particulates*, features 16 lasers (which are "activated by a gentle showering of mist that comes from the ceiling," the curator notes).

At the corner of Glendon Avenue, the Hammer also will unveil a massive 25-foot-tall bronze sculpture by artist **Sanford Biggers** titled *Oracle* that had its debut in New York. "It's going to be very exciting to have a piece that has this type of visual gravitas and impact in Westwood," Biggers

tells *THR*. Adds Butler, "The idea of bringing it to Los Angeles where the artist is originally from as a way to mark our reopening ... was a no-brainer."

**Marcy Carsey**, chair of the Hammer Museum's board, tells *THR* that she's proud that the arts institution, overseen by director **Ann Philbin**, has remained open as it has expanded. "The museum has not been very disrupted by this; it's been amazing," says the TV producer, adding that she chose to align with the Hammer because of its ethics. "My interest is not in contemporary art in and of itself ... but what I am interested in is the social justice in its mission statement. It's the Hammer Museum and Cultural Center, and it really does operate as both." Upcoming programs include a talk on originalism and the Supreme Court and a discussion of feminist activism in the digital space.

Butler says she sees the museum's growth as rising in tandem with that of the city it calls home. "We've seen L.A. go from being viewed kind of as an outpost," she says, "to now being viewed as one very important center in the international contemporary art world." **THR**



Above: A rendering of the museum's new entrance. Left: Sanford Biggers' *Oracle* was commissioned for and installed at Rockefeller Center in New York in 2021. On March 26, it will be presented as an ongoing exhibit at the Hammer by the Art Production Fund with Marianne Boesky Gallery.



Quotes

# Yes, I Did Say That!

A look at who's saying what in entertainment

Compiled by Sydney Odman



**"I was hurt, and I discussed it with my family and I cried to my husband."**

**PRIYANKA CHOPRA JONAS**

The *Love Again* actress, at a SXSW event, revealing that she confided in spouse Nick Jonas after being body-shamed for not being "sample-size."

**"Note to Hollywood: It's time for casting directors to come back into the office like everyone else."**

**JANUARY JONES**

The *Mad Men* star, on Instagram, expressing frustration with the new norm of Zoom auditions and self-tapes, which might be convenient for casting directors but are, Jones says, "time consuming, expensive and a drag" for actors.

**"I will literally shove you out of the way."**

**PEDRO PASCAL**

The *Last of Us* star, to *Vanity Fair*, on the lengths to which he would go in order to meet Rihanna at the Oscars.

**"I think a lot of the noise that you hear about this case is actually not about the law. And it's not about journalism. It's really about the politics."**

**LACHLAN MURDOCH**

The Fox Corp. CEO, at a Morgan Stanley conference, weighing in on the ongoing Dominion lawsuit against the company's Fox News division.



**"It's almost like when you have a pro football team ... and then a new owner comes in and says, 'Not my coach, not my quarterback. I'm going to go with somebody new!'"**

**DWAYNE JOHNSON**

The *Black Adam* star, to *Variety*, reflecting on Henry Cavill's DC exit as a result of James Gunn and Peter Safran taking over leadership of the studio.

**"I give up."**

**PATTY JENKINS**

The *Wonder Woman* director, to *Variety*, sharing her exasperation at women having been shut out of the Oscars' directing category. Jenkins emphasized that the industry still has "a long way to go."



**"I don't think I've ever had to put my foot down on a set in a way that I had to on Wednesday."**

**JENNA ORTEGA**

The *Scream VI* star, on Dax Shepard's *Armchair Expert* podcast, on disagreements she had over certain creative choices for her character Wednesday on the Netflix show.

**"We love you."**

**JONATHAN MAJORS**

The *Creed III* actor, onstage at this year's Oscars, giving a nod to Angela Bassett after she lost to Jamie Lee Curtis for best supporting actress. Alongside Majors, co-presenter Michael B. Jordan also acknowledged Bassett in the audience with a "Hey, auntie."



**FLASHBACK!**

**Did I Really Say That?**



**JAN. 7, 2022**

**"The worst thing is how it affected my brain."**

**TILDA SWINTON**

The actress, to *The Guardian*, on her difficult experience with long COVID, during which brain fog made it hard to remember her lines on set. Swinton recently revealed at a SXSW panel that she won't be wearing a mask on the set of her next film: "I'm super healthy and I've had COVID so many times and I'm so full of antibodies ... and I have faith."

CHOPRA: STEVE GRANITZ/GETTY IMAGES; PASCAL: JEFF MAYER/GETTY IMAGES; JONES: JEFF MAYER/GETTY IMAGES; MURDOCH: JEFF MAYER/GETTY IMAGES; JOHNSON: JEFF MAYER/GETTY IMAGES; JENKINS: JEFF MAYER/GETTY IMAGES; ORTEGA: JEFF MAYER/GETTY IMAGES; MAJORS: JEFF MAYER/GETTY IMAGES; SWINTON: DAVID BENNETT/TWINKLE

# WHERE ART MEETS CRAFT

Exploring the crafts & tech behind the biggest films & series with the industry's most celebrated craftspeople



HOSTED BY  
**CAROLYN GIARDINA**  
Tech Editor

The central image is a vertical rectangular panel with a warm, orange-to-yellow gradient background. In the center, a film reel is depicted with its sprocket holes and the circular frame. Overlaid on the reel is the text 'BEHIND THE SCREEN' in a bold, white, sans-serif font. Below the reel, the 'The Hollywood Reporter' logo is visible in a smaller, white, serif font.

## BEHIND THE **SCREEN**

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From left: *Everything Everywhere All at Once* producer Jonathan Wang and directors Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert showed off the film's seven Oscars.

## Rambling Reporter

By Chris Gardner

### Everything Everywhere Team Packs Into Party Bus for Oscars

The makers of *Everything Everywhere All at Once* had a celebratory solution for the task of transporting everyone everywhere all at once on Oscar night: a fleet of party buses. The best picture-winning team hit the town in supersized rides, traversing from the 95th Oscars to afterparties including *Vanity Fair*'s event and A24's private bash at Soho House West Hollywood. Producer **Jonathan Wang** detailed the plan days before the show, saying "the legendary icons with big, beautiful gowns" (aka **Michelle Yeoh**) had to ride separately. Wang credited **Daniel Kwan**, one half of **Daniels** directing tandem, for the convoy idea. "Dan Kwan loves a party bus; who doesn't?" Good point, but it's also worth noting that the idea has roots in the duo's awards show past. "We took a party bus to the VMAs [in 2014] when we were nominated for [**DJ Snake** and **Lil Jon**]'s 'Turn Down for What.' So, this was a nice bookend."

### Oscars Producers Explain That Last-Minute Lady Gaga Performance

The Oscars didn't secure **Lady Gaga** to perform her nominated track "Hold My Hand" from *Top Gun: Maverick* until two days before the broadcast. The makeup-free performance from the singer was entirely her idea, director-producer **Glenn Weiss** tells *THR*. "She wanted to really strip it down and do it not as an 'Oscar performance' but as her,"



Lady Gaga performed a bare-bones rendition of her Oscar-nominated song "Hold My Hand" at the Oscars.

explains Weiss, who teamed with partner **Ricky Kirshner** on the telecast. Conversations kicked off Thursday, and confirmation didn't come until Friday, two days before the show. "Not to pat



Hannah Waddingham and Brett Goldstein flanked boss Jason Sudeikis at the *Ted Lasso* season three premiere.

### Red Carpet

Before Los Angeles was overtaken by Oscar-week events, Apple snuck in the season three premiere of *Ted Lasso*, held March 7 in Westwood. As stars **Jason Sudeikis**, **Brett Goldstein**, **Hannah Waddingham**, **Brendan Hunt** and **Phil Dunster** walked the carpet — with an appearance by Apple CEO **Tim Cook** — the cast told *THR* what Sudeikis has been like as a boss. "The Jason that you see in the press, making jokes and being silly, that's the Jason we get at work, so sometimes *Ted Lasso* doesn't feel like a job," said **Toheeb Jimoh**. "It feels like I'm just with my friends on set, telling jokes, kicking the ball around, getting paid and feeling like I'm stealing money." — C.G.

ourselves on the back," Kirshner says, "but we've built up trust in the relationship with Gaga over the years. I did the Super Bowl with her, and Glenn has done many awards shows with her, including the 'Shallow' performance at the [2019] Oscars."

— WITH REPORTING BY SCOTT FEINBERG

### An Oscar Changed **Sian Heder's** Life (but Not Her Car)

At the March 4 Spirit Awards, *THR* asked **Sian Heder** whether winning an Oscar — for adapted screenplay for *CODA* last year — had changed her life. The answer, she explained, is yes and no. "I wish my house had changed a little bit more. I wish I didn't drive my crappy Subaru and have to park it with my eyes down in an ashamed way," she said with a laugh. "But other things have really changed because as an independent filmmaker, your life is largely built on struggle and fighting to get your projects made. There's an incredible relief that comes when those doors open and you're supported in what you want to make and how to have your voice heard." **THR**

Sian Heder



## About Town

Heard Around Hollywood



Braun



Haddish

### Power Dining

**Adele** paid a visit to Citrin. ... **Scooter Braun** had a night out with friends including **Eiza Gonzalez** and actress **Kyra Santoro** at Craig's. ... **Mindy Kaling** dined at Anjak Thai. ... **Taika Waititi** stopped by Juliet restaurant and another time joined **Rita Ora** at Norah restaurant. ... **Tiffany Haddish** had dinner and a show at The Georgian Hotel, grabbing the mic and serenading a crowd that included **Sharon Stone** and **Gerard Butler**. ... **Will Ferrell** was spotted at Hotel Ziggy. ... Stylist **Brad Goreski** grabbed a meal at Caviar Kaspia. ... **Kim and Khloé Kardashian** partied at The Nice Guy.



HOT NEW RESTAURANT

### Vulcania

#### The Quick Pitch

Food Network celebrity chef brothers **Bryan** and **Michael Voltaggio** have opened a modern Italian American concept in The Village at Mammoth as a tribute to their family heritage and the ski culture of the resort town. The menu mirrors this rustic, luxurious approach to dining, featuring traditional dishes like rigatoni arrabbiata with brown butter sauce, alongside modern twists like octopus macaroni salad with sea urchin cream and bread-crumbs. **6201 Minaret Road, Suite 240**

— EVAN NICOLE BROWN

Got tips? Email [rambling@thr.com](mailto:rambling@thr.com)



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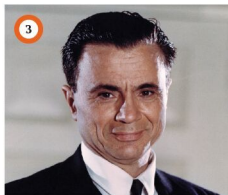
Mileposts



1



2



3

1 Abigail Breslin and Ira Kunyansky  
2 Grace Azalia Brooks  
3 Robert Blake

comedy bits, died March 10 in New York. He was 67.

**Rolly Crump**, the Walt Disney Imagineer who helped design *It's a Small World*, the Enchanted Tiki Room and The Haunted Mansion at Disneyland, died March 12 in Carlsbad, California. He was 93.

**Kristin Bjorklund**, a producer on *Family Feud* for more than 40 years, died March 5 of sepsis in Phoenix after undergoing a kidney transplant. She was 67.

**Peary Reginald Teo**, who wrote and directed *The Gene Generation*, starring Bai Ling, died March 9 of an unknown cause in North Hollywood. He was 44.

**Peter Kelley**, a Broadway actor and singer who spent nearly two decades as an agent at William Morris, died Feb. 28 of natural causes in Suffolk, Virginia. He was 97.

## Hitched, Hatched, Hired

Inside the industry's celebrations and news

### Weddings

*Little Miss Sunshine* actress **Abigail Breslin** married **Ira Kunyansky** on Jan. 28 after getting engaged in February 2022.

### Births

**Kia Brooks**, deputy director of The Gotham Film and Media Institute, and **Nick Brooks**, senior footwear designer at Design Brands Inc., welcomed **Grace Azalia Brooks** on Jan. 23.

### Congrats

**Michele Imperato Stable** was named president of worldwide physical production at Warner Bros. Pictures on March 10.

Former Twitter exec **Sarah Rosen** joined Reddit as senior director of content partnerships March 13.

**Jenna Santolianni** was tapped as MRC's president of television March 7.

**Sonia Coleman** was named senior executive vp and chief human resources officer of The Walt Disney Co., effective April 8.

**Claudia Russo** was hired as senior vp corporate communications at UTA on March 8.

Producer **Gail Berman** and Reddit COO **Jen Wong** joined the Imax board of directors March 6.

**Kelli Buchanan** was tapped as vp non-fiction for Ryan Coogler's Proximity Media on March 6.

**Jen Hollingsworth** was appointed chief commercial officer of generative

AI entertainment tech firm *Flawless* on March 8.

**Caitlin S. DiMotta** was named co-head of the entertainment practice at Cowan, DeBaets, Abrahams and Sheppard on March 8.



Macias

**Stephen Macias** was promoted to head of inclusive diversity worldwide for the Interpublic Group-owned Octagon Sports and Entertainment Network on March 8.

Former Amazon and Stitch Fix exec **Dan Jedda** was named CFO of Roku, effective May 1.



Vaughn

**Bruce Vaughn** returned to co-lead Walt Disney Imagineering as chief creative officer, effective March 20.

### Deaths

**Robert Blake**, who played a crazed

real-life killer in *Truman Copote's In Cold Blood* and the popular TV cop *Tony Baretta* before he was tried, and acquitted, of murdering his wife in 2001, died March 9 of heart disease in Los Angeles. He was 89.

**Rick Scheckman**, who served as David Letterman's film coordinator for more than 30 years while also finding his way on camera for wacky

## Birthdays

### MARCH 16

Alexandra Daddario, 37  
Victor Garber, 74  
Lauren Graham, 56

### MARCH 17

John Boyega, 31  
Rob Lowe, 59  
Kurt Russell, 72

### MARCH 18

Lily Collins, 34 →  
Queen Latifah, 53

### MARCH 19

Glenn Close, 76  
Bruce Willis, 68

### MARCH 20

Holly Hunter, 65  
Spike Lee, 66  
Ruby Rose, 37

### MARCH 21

Matthew Broderick, 61  
Rosie O'Donnell, 61  
Gary Oldman, 65



To submit, send email to [hqh@thr.com](mailto:hqh@thr.com)



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**NOTHING LEFT UNSAID**

**I'LL BE GONE IN THE DARK**

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**ALL IN: THE FIGHT FOR  
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21<sup>st</sup> Annual

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Brendan Gleeson  
Salma Hayek Pinault  
Brian Tyree Henry  
Catherine Martin  
& Baz Luhrmann  
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# The Business

Creative Space

When Ashley Lyle and Bart Nickerson first moved to Los Angeles, working as a dog walker and P.F. Chang's bartender, respectively, the native New Jersey couple liked to splurge on dinner and drinks at Tam O' Shanter — the 100-year-old Scottish house of prime rib in Atwater Village. These days, however, it's where they go to break story on their Emmy-nominated drama, *Yellowjackets*. "It turns out that this place is kind of a writers' haunt," says Lyle, next to one of the Tudor building's dormant fireplaces on a recent March afternoon. "I've seen Dan Harmon here a few times. And Jason Segel, who we worked with on *Dispatches From Elsewhere*, he fucking loves this place."

The husband-and-wife team were not, like so many TV creators these days, an overnight success. Prior to *Yellowjackets*, their co-creation that courted a rabid fan base out of the gate in 2021 and brought much-needed buzz to Showtime, they wrote on The CW's vampire drama *The Originals* and Netflix's *Narcos*. Now, with *Yellowjackets* returning March 24, they talked about the tumult at Showtime, the plight of the screenwriter in 2023 and why they have no interest in debating "likability" in the characters who populate their taut survival mystery that often makes *Lord of the Flies* look like *Madeline* in comparison.

## What's the first thing you two wrote together?

**BART NICKERSON** When we were trying to get out to L.A., we wrote 20 pages of a *Scrubs* spec script super fast. That was the first and last time that our collaboration has allowed us to move quickly.

**ASHLEY LYLE** We both wanted to be comedy writers at first, so we have a suitcase full of spec scripts — *Scrubs*, *30 Rock*, *My Name Is Earl* — because that was still a thing back in the day. We were just at

## Ashley Lyle and Bart Nickerson

The married co-creators of Showtime breakout *Yellowjackets* get real on the pressures to put out a strong second season: "I describe it as ... soul-crushing" By Mikey O'Connell



Ashley Lyle and Bart Nickerson were photographed March 6 at Los Angeles restaurant Tam O' Shanter, where they've been known to break stories.

Photographed by Yessara Gunawardena

the end of that thing where it was like, "Oh, just write a pretend episode of a show that you like."

**So when potential staffers are submitted for your room, you don't get fancy *Yellowjackets* episodes?**

**LYLE** Nope. And, as a showrunner, I really wish we could bring it back. There's development writing and then there's staff writing. They're such different things. When someone wants to come on your staff, what you really want to know is, "Can they write in your voice? Can they write your show?" It's a shame it's gone, because it's a great exercise.

**It's been said you received more than 250 writing submissions for season two staff, well above the norm.**

**LYLE** It was flattering to see how many people wanted to come on board. But we love our writing staff, so we didn't have a ton of room. We didn't for season three, either.

**I imagine it's flattering but also a little intimidating, no?**

**LYLE** It was weird. **NICKERSON** I don't know that we're entirely comfortable judging our peers. You want to just honor that enthusiasm and be like, "Yes, come on in!" But that's not practical. And our show is not going to give us that kind of budget.

**Former Showtime boss David Nevins has been open about not seeing *Yellowjackets* working. Did that trickle down to you? And do you know when you changed his mind?**

**LYLE** It did trickle down that he wasn't sure it was for the network. It's absolutely a credit to him that he listened to his team, who were all very strenuous in their support of the show. Gary Levine's been there 22 years, and he believed in it from the pitch. I know that our team went to bat for us with David.

**How do you feel about the fact that so many of those people aren't sticking around amid all the Paramount consolidation?**

**LYLE** We're obviously heartbroken. Gary has been with his show from the beginning. He bought



The first season of *Yellowjackets* earned seven Emmy nominations, including one for outstanding drama series and two for writing.

the pitch, and he's staying with us throughout the remainder of this season — so that will be a resource for us.

**Did you get a heads-up about all the changes, or were you learning about the network rebrand in the news?**

**NICKERSON** By that point, we knew enough about what was coming that it wasn't destabilizing. And being in the very fortunate position of having a show do well, we felt reasonably confident that the show would survive the merger. It was a little bit less stressful for us than it was for a lot of people.

**New Showtime boss Chris McCarthy has been vocal about leaning into franchises. Are you already being pushed for a spinoff?**

**LYLE** We're aware that it's something they're interested in, and we certainly aren't closed off to the idea. It would have to make sense. We have a couple of ideas.

**How are you metabolizing the pressure on season two? People love to tear down the sophomore season of a first-year hit.**

**LYLE** I describe it as ... soul-crushing. *(Laughs.)* I think we came out of nowhere for a lot of people. Before it premiered, Jason Segel told us, "Don't worry! There are three or four shows that everyone talks about and loves. There are three or four shows that everyone talks about and fucking hates. The other 595 fall right in the middle. Find a little audience and it's fine." We thought we'd be one of those, so this season feels different.

**NICKERSON** As a very insecure person, everything I've ever written has been such a terrifying experience that this actually doesn't feel any different. It takes me forever to send an email, so I live in that baseline of pressure.

**Your co-showrunner, Jonathan Lisco, recently told *EW* that if you do your job right, cannibalism won't be the most transgressive thing to play out on the show. Is there a line you don't want to cross?**

**LYLE** Tony Soprano is an absolute monster — but, because he's so well drawn, you understand him. That's what we're aiming for. We have conversations about what could be too far, but it's less about likability for the characters and more about the type of story. We never want to be shocking and salacious for the sheer joy of it.

**Your season three renewal came early. Was that to get a jump on a potential writers strike?**

**LYLE** The possibility of the strike is very real. All we can do is keep moving forward until we have to put our pencils down.

**What do you want out of this negotiation — for your peers, if not yourselves?**

**LYLE** The main issue is the future of the livelihood of writers. Frankly, it's not tenable right now. We were incredibly fortunate that our first job was with Julie Plec on *The Originals*. She was an incredible mentor and threw us into the fire. We were first-year staff writers covering set, running tone meetings and working with actors. That's invaluable. Nowadays that's not the reality. I think it's really shortsighted of the studios and the networks to create a scenario where only upper levels are being sent to set.

**Do your staff writers go to set for their own episodes?**

**LYLE** We had three writers who came to set and worked for free. We did our best to make that as painless as possible, bought them all their dinners. But we fought and ultimately lost to be able to

pay their way. They were so hungry for that experience that they did it on their own dime.

**NICKERSON** There is a devaluing of the place that the writer should occupy — both literally and metaphorically. Overall production budgets have grown, as the writing budget for most shows has shrunk or stayed the same. In some quarters of the industry, there is this idea that writers are interchangeable — that it's more about the idea.

**Speaking of Julie, how did working on a CW drama prepare you for the level of fan scrutiny *Yellowjackets* courts online?**

**LYLE** There was this infamous moment with our showrunner, Mike Narducci. Every morning, we would all meet in the writers room. But one day, the door was closed. Everyone was wondering what was happening inside — and it turned out that Mike was fighting on Twitter, probably with a 13-year-old. He came out all frustrated, like, "You can't reason with these people!" **NICKERSON** He's a former English teacher, so he was trying to talk about theme and story and just got nowhere. Fuel for a different kind of fire.

**Are you taking any time off when you finish post on season two?**

**LYLE** We go right into season three. We're starting the writers room in April. No break. **NICKERSON** We hope to take a little one at the top of the summer. Otherwise, we might die.

**Well, it may be a very long break.**

**LYLE** The network is like, "You can take a break in May and June!" I see what you're doing ... so generous. *(Laughs.)*

*Interview edited for length and clarity.*



In the dual-timeline drama, Jasmin Savoy Brown (*Girls*) and Liv Hewson play the younger versions of characters played by Tawny Cypress and, in a season two addition, Lauren Ambrose.





INTERNATIONAL | PATRICK BRZESKI

## Is Crunchyroll the Right Specialty Streamer for the Moment?

When Sony purchased the service in 2020 for \$1.18 billion, some said it overpaid for the niche outlet that specializes in Asian content. Now, as the global streaming giants downsize, the company's bet on diversified revenue and a tiered subscription model is ahead of the curve

As the global streaming business underwent a surprise secular reassessment last year, Sony's anime service, Crunchyroll, found the whole industry suddenly contemplating the same strategies it had been prioritizing for years. Out was the gusher approach to content spending in pursuit of limitless subscriber growth. In were financial discipline, multi-tiered subscription options and a more diversified approach to revenue generation.

Today, Crunchyroll is a merged service comprising two former U.S.-based entities: Funimation, an anime platform founded by industry pioneer Gen Fukunaga in 1994, which Sony snapped up for \$143 million in 2017; and Crunchyroll, the then-second-largest dedicated anime service, which the Japanese entertainment giant bought from AT&T in 2020 in a deal valued at \$1.18 billion. Sony was thought to be paying a steep premium in the latter acquisition, but given the success and opportunity the company has created for itself in consolidating the anime niche, many analysts would now argue it was a bargain.

"A couple of themes have emerged in the latest iteration of the disruption that streaming has brought to the entertainment space — the focus on profitability and the flywheel effect, or having

a mix of mutually compounding revenue streams," says Rahul Purini, a Funimation veteran since 2015 who was appointed Crunchyroll's CEO last year. "And these are the things we've always been focused on — not that we knew this was coming, but simply because Crunchyroll and Funimation spent many years as startups that needed to grow profitability to survive, and because a 360-degree flywheel approach



Purini

is how the anime community actually wants to be served." Anime fans are a uniquely passionate community, and

Crunchyroll has long described its business as meeting its audience wherever they might be. At the core of the service is a streaming platform boasting the largest online library of new and catalog anime content, with subscription options ranging from a free, ad-supported tier to three paid tiers (from \$7.99 to \$14.99) offering ad-free viewing and varying degrees of perks. Crunchyroll reported earlier this year that it had 10 million paying subscribers, and Purini says the streaming operation is "solidly profitable" (although Sony doesn't break out details). The company is also the leading theatrical distributor of anime movies in North America, where it has released 10 of the top 20

all-time highest-grossing titles in the category (more on this later). It also hosts a growing number of regular live events — mostly in the U.S., including anime fan conventions, expos and an awards show — and is busily expanding its merchandising operations, catering to anime fandom's penchant for collecting (in August, Crunchyroll acquired Right Stuff, the top online retailer of anime goods and manga in North America). Nascent mobile gaming and an anime music streaming service are also gaining momentum on the service. The perks that come with the priciest Crunchyroll subscription span all these categories (special access to Crunchyroll events, screenings, merch, etc.).

But this solidly diversified business ecosystem would mean far less to Sony if anime culture weren't undergoing a global explosion of popularity — and it most certainly is. "We have made internal estimates of how big the anime market will be, and we've underestimated its growth every year," says Purini.

In 2020, the Association of Japanese Animators reported that the international market for Japanese anime surpassed the domestic Japanese market for the very first time (about \$11.5 billion versus \$11 billion). The growth is most readily visible in the outsized sums anime titles have

been earning at the box office, even in the pandemic era. In 2020, Crunchyroll released *Demon Slayer the Movie: Mugen Train*, earning \$50 million in North America, contributing to the film's \$453 million worldwide total. Other successes have included 2021's *Jujutsu Kaisen 0* (\$34.5 million in North America, \$166.7 million worldwide) and last year's *Dragon Ball Super: Super Hero* (\$38 million/\$86.6 million). Crunchyroll's next major theatrical outing will be anime hitmaker Makoto Shinkai's *Suzume*, which has already earned \$103 million in Japan. It opens stateside and in Europe on April 14.

Crunchyroll says its research shows that about 300 million people around the world watched Japanese anime in some form or another in 2022 — which is double 2020's total viewership. The company also says that its user base — primarily centered in the U.S., followed by Western Europe, Mexico, Brazil and Australia, with plans to expand in Southeast Asia — is growing meaningfully across all age groups, but it's exploding in the 13-17 and 18-25 age segments. "If it's a niche, it's a pretty huge niche nowadays," Purini adds.

Observing the same trends as Crunchyroll, and also keen to grow their services within the large Japan market, the major streamers have been spending aggressively on rights to top anime titles. Netflix launched 40 anime titles on its service just last year, while Disney inked a deal in November with Japanese publishing powerhouse Kodansha to boost its anime originals output. The cost of licensing exclusive anime content has climbed accordingly.

Whether Crunchyroll can come to occupy more than just a niche within Sony Corp.'s sprawling global business portfolio remains to be seen, analysts say.

"Can they now scale the Crunchyroll service on a meaningful global basis — without breaking the bank?" asks Vivek Couto, executive director of Media Partners Asia. "That's the next significant challenge." **177B**

Crunchyroll will release Makoto Shinkai's blockbuster *Suzume* (far left and far right) in the U.S. on April 14; 2020's *Demon Slayer the Movie: Mugen Train* (center) earned \$453 million worldwide.

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# HEAT VISION

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# Style

Red Carpet



## Oscar Night: Grand, Golden and Everything

Hollywood's A-list embraced elegant style at the 95th Academy Awards, where ratings hit a three-year high with 18.7 million viewers, host Jimmy Kimmel delivered a telecast without incident but with plenty of emotion, and *Everything Everywhere All at Once* made history, winning seven awards including best picture: 'This is a beacon of hope and possibilities' *By Laurie Brookins*

High style among the *Everything Everywhere All at Once* team included, clockwise from upper left, best supporting actress winner Jamie Lee Curtis in Dolce & Gabbana; best supporting actor winner Ke Huy Quan in Giorgio Armani Made to Measure; James Hong; producer Jonathan Wang; best actress winner Michelle Yeoh in Dior Haute Couture; Stephanie Hsu in Valentino Haute Couture; and winning directors Daniel Scheinert (in a tuxedo from lost-luggage dealer Unclaimed Baggage) and Daniel Kwan (wearing AAPI-owned label Goodfight).



THE  
BEST  
DRESSED  
STARS

**Angela Bassett in Moschino**

Equal parts regal and romantic, the *Black Panther*: *Wakanda Forever* nominee drew raves for this powerful custom gown, accented with a stunning Bulgari Serpenti high-jewelry necklace. Bassett posted on Instagram, "What a night filled with glamour and excitement!"

**Florence Pugh in Valentino Haute Couture**

"A bit romantic and a bit of punk" is how Pugh, one of the night's presenters, described her forward-thinking look, which combined voluminous silk taffeta with black bike shorts. Her Tiffany & Co. jewels included the house's diamond Orchid Curve necklace.

**Rihanna in Alaïa**

The best song nominee arrived in a custom look that combined a leather band dress with a jersey bodysuit that highlighted the imminent arrival of her second child, accessorized with colored diamonds by Mousaieff. "Baby Fenty's first #Oscars," she posted on Instagram.

ANGELA BASSETT: ANDREW HANAUER/GETTY IMAGES; FLORENCE PUGH: ANDREW HANAUER/GETTY IMAGES; RIHANNA: EVYR MADRIGAL/GETTY IMAGES



## BEST DRESSED

### 1 Cate Blanchett in Louis Vuitton

The *Tár* best actress nominee put a spotlight on sustainability throughout awards season, including her Oscar-night look by Louis Vuitton. "This sustainable look is designed with a top from an archival collection and a skirt cut from fully sustainable silk," posted her stylist, Elizabeth Stewart. This year, for the first time, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences distributed a style guide encouraging sustainable choices on the carpet.

### 2 Halle Bailey in Dolce & Gabbana

On the carpet, the star of the upcoming live-action *The Little Mermaid* said she loved the feel of her custom tulle turquoise gown that allowed her to "go into the fairy-tale world and give 'em princess for one day." Diamonds by De Beers Jewellers completed her look.

### 3 Paul Mescal in Gucci

Most of the A-list actors embraced classic elegance on the Oscars' red carpet, including *Afternoon* nominee Mescal, who paired his ivory Gucci dinner jacket with wide-cuffed trousers that felt both modern and '70s-inspired. He also wore a Cartier earring and brooch and the house's Privé Tank Chinese watch.

### 4 Danai Gurira in Jason Wu

The *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* star wore a strapless black gown that felt modern thanks to its distressed neckline, as well as an abundance of Messika diamonds, including a choker woven into her towering hairstyle by Larry Sims. "This is my African self coming out here," Gurira said of her look on the carpet.

### 5 Janelle Monáe in Vera Wang Haute

Color blocking was a big trend on the Oscars' champagne-hued carpet, and Monáe stood out in a midriff-baring cut in brilliant orange and classic black, enhanced by heritage and current diamonds by Paris-based Reza.

### 6 Michael B. Jordan in Louis Vuitton

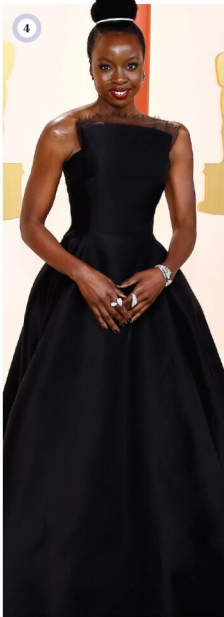
The *Creed III* star's black double-breasted tuxedo, accented with a pair of "Tiffany & Co.'s iconic 'Bird on a Rock' brooches, perfectly played into the evening's elegant vibe.

### 7 Hong Chau in Prada

The nominated star of *The Whale* was intimately involved in the creation of her pink Prada gown, requesting a longer train and the addition of a Mandarin collar to honor her heritage. Mikimoto pearl and diamond jewels finished her look.

### 8 Elizabeth Olsen in Givenchy

Among the night's edgier outfits, Olsen's halter-neck dress was crafted of black chain mail, embellished with beaded fringe and finished with a sheer silk overlay.







# Style

Red Carpet

## EXECS ON PARADE

1 Universal Filmed Entertainment chair **Donna Langley** and her son **Paolo**.  
 2 From left: Disney entertainment co-chairman **Dana Walden**; Bob Iger, who returned last year as chair-CEO of The Walt Disney Co.; and Disney Entertainment co-chairman **Alan Bergman**.  
 "This is my 32nd time attending the Academy Awards, with a few years off. It feels good to be here," Iger told THR.

3 David Zaslav with his wife, **Pam**, made his first trip down the Oscars carpet as president and CEO of Warner Bros. Discovery, where he teased the tribute to the studio's 100th anniversary, which aired during the show. "This couldn't be a more appropriate launching pad," he told THR.  
 4 Comcast CEO **Brian Roberts**, who oversees NBCUniversal, and wife **Aileen**.  
 5 **Tony Vinciguerra**, chair of Sony Pictures Entertainment, with his daughter **Olivia**.

6 From left: Apple's **Matt Dentler**, **Zack Van Amburg**, **Jay Hunt** and **Phillip Matthys**.  
 7 Netflix co-CEO **Ted Sarandos** and wife **Nicole Avant** celebrated Oscar wins for *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio*.

8 Paramount Pictures and Nickelodeon chief **Brian Robbins** with his boss, **Shari Redstone**.  
 9 NBCUniversal CEO **Jeff Shell** with wife **Laura**.

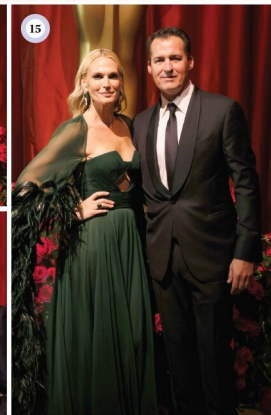
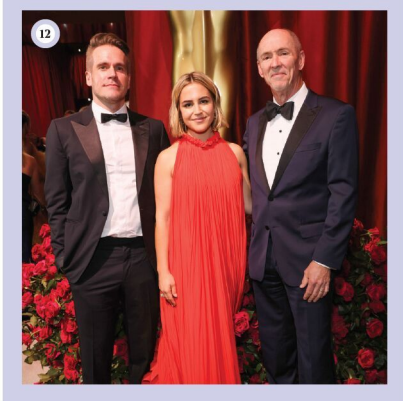
10 Amazon and MGM Studios chief **Jennifer Salke** (left) with her new head of film, **Courtenay Valent**.  
 11 Searchlight Pictures co-presidents **David Greenbaum** (second from left) and **Matthew Greenfield** flanked by their wives, VC investor **Jamie Kantowitz** and **Laurence Dumortier**.

12 From left: Paramount Motion Pictures Group co-presidents **Michael Ireland** and **Daria Cercek** with Paramount domestic distribution president **Chris Aronson**.

13 Co-chair and CEO of Warner Bros. Film Group **Pam Abdy** and daughter **MacKenzie Whitaker**. "She is 10, on her way to 11, and loves movies," said **Abdy**.  
 14 **Michael De Luca**, co-chair and CEO of Warner Bros. Film Group, with guest **Deborah Kaplan**.

15 **Scott Stuber**, chairman of Netflix Films, with wife **Molly Sims**.  
 16 From left: 20th Century Studios president **Steve Asbell**, Walt Disney Studios marketing president **Asad Ayaz**, Marvel Studios president and producer **Kevin Feige** and Marvel production & development executive **Nate Moore**.

17 "Being here is always amazing," said Neon founder **Tom Quinn**, with wife **Celeste**. (Neon threw an afterparty at Saddle Ranch that included mechanical bull-riding.)





## Partying All the Way to the Big Night

Stars both in and out of this year's awards race started the Oscar celebrations early *By Kirsten Chuba*

### CHANEL X CHARLES FINCH



Kristen Stewart (left) and Nicole Kidman were among the A-list arrivals at the 14th annual Chanel and Charles Finch dinner at Polo Lounge on March 11.

### ESSENCE BLACK WOMEN IN HOLLYWOOD AWARDS



From left: Gina Prince-Bythewood, Tara Duncan, Dominique Thorne, Danielle Deadwyler and Sheryl Lee Ralph were honored at the March 9 Essence event.

### MPTF 'NIGHT BEFORE'



From left: George Clooney, Cate Blanchett and Angela Bassett co-chaired the Motion Picture & Television Fund party on March 11, with Ana de Armas and Hong Chau in attendance.

### WIF (WOMEN IN FILM, LOS ANGELES)



Sian Heder (center) and Marlee Matlin (right) hosted the March 10 WIF party, with guests including Chloé Zhao.



3



5



4



10



11



16



17

(3) COURTESY OF A&C; (4) COURTESY OF A&C; (5) COURTESY OF A&C; (10) COURTESY OF A&C; (11) COURTESY OF A&C; (16) COURTESY OF A&C; (17) COURTESY OF A&C; (ESSENCE) COURTESY OF ESSENCE; (CHLOE ZHAO) COURTESY OF MPTF; (FINCH) COURTESY OF MPTF; (STEWART) COURTESY OF MPTF; (KIDMAN) COURTESY OF MPTF; (PRINCE-BYTHEWOOD) COURTESY OF MPTF; (DUNCAN) COURTESY OF MPTF; (THORNE) COURTESY OF MPTF; (DEADWYLER) COURTESY OF MPTF; (RALPH) COURTESY OF MPTF; (CLOONEY) COURTESY OF MPTF; (BLANCHETT) COURTESY OF MPTF; (BASSETT) COURTESY OF MPTF; (DE ARMAS) COURTESY OF MPTF; (CHAU) COURTESY OF MPTF; (HEDER) COURTESY OF MPTF; (MATLIN) COURTESY OF MPTF; (ZHAO) COURTESY OF MPTF.

PARTIES

1 Basset and Yeoh kept close at the *Vanity Fair* party, hosted by editor-in-chief Rachika Jones and held in a custom space next to the Wallis Annenberg Center.

2 *Euphoria*'s Hunter Schafer (in Ann Demme's ensemble) on the *Vanity Fair* red carpet.

3 Talka Walitti (left) and J.J. Abrams caught up at the *Vanity Fair* party after Walitti and Rita Ora shared a kiss on the carpet. Abrams wrapped up a busy week after hosting the US-Ireland Alliance's Oscar Wilde Awards on March 9.

4 Elton John (front left) and David Furnish (back right) were joined by special guest co-hosts Eric McCormack and Michaela Jaé Rodriguez at the 31st annual Elton John AIDS Foundation Academy Awards Viewing Party, which raised more than \$9 million to help end AIDS. Singer-songwriter-actress Rita Sawayama also performed at the West Hollywood event.

5 Ouan got his best supporting actor Oscar engraved at the Governors Ball, then jumped onto the engraving station table to express his excitement before starting a night of party-hopping.

6 *Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania* co-stars Kathryn Newton and Jonathan Majors posed at the WME pre-Oscars celebration hosted by agency co-chairmen Christian Muihead and Richard Weitz.

7 Curtis held her Oscar close at the Governors Ball after embracing fellow winner Polley as they waited for their statues to be engraved.

8 Andrew Garfield, who presented at the ceremony, brightened things up in Valentino at the *Vanity Fair* bash, where he shared a hug with Shawn Mendes and chatted with Jason Bateman.

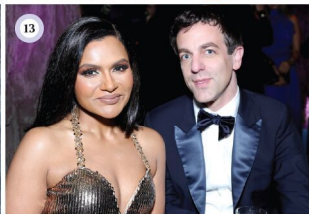
9 From left: Larry David, Sienna Miller, Jake Gyllenhaal and Orlando Bloom attended the WME party in Beverly Hills at the Hearst Estate, seen in *The Godfather*.

10 From left: Trevor Noah, Donald Glover and Quinta Brunson met up at the CAA party, which moved its pre-Oscar celebration from the San Vicente Bungalows to Sunset Tower because of the rain.

11 Pedro Pascal and Olivia Wilde, who rang in her 39th birthday at the CAA soiree and was spotted blowing out candles on a cake.

12 Cardi B (in Robert Wun) brought the color to the *Vanity Fair* carpet, which she walked with husband Offset.

13 Oscar presenter Mindy Kaling and B.J. Novak had a night out — with some h-h-O burgers on hand — at the *Vanity Fair* party.



1: JANELLE MONÁE: MICHAEL OCHS; 2: HUNTER SCHAFFER: PHILIPPE LEBLANC; 3: J.J. ABRAMS: JEFFREY MAYER; 4: ELTON JOHN: JEFFREY MAYER; 5: OUAN: JEFFREY MAYER; 6: KATHRYN NEWTON: JEFFREY MAYER; 7: RITA SAWAYAMA: JEFFREY MAYER; 8: ANDREW GARFIELD: JEFFREY MAYER; 9: LARRY DAVID: JEFFREY MAYER; 10: TREVOR NOAH: JEFFREY MAYER; 11: PEDRO PASCAL: JEFFREY MAYER; 12: CARDI B: JEFFREY MAYER; 13: MINDY KALING: JEFFREY MAYER.



# CONGRATULATIONS

## TO OUR ALUMNI OSCAR WINNERS

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At the Oscars, Emily Blunt (left) wore triple-tiered chandelier earrings with pink sapphires and diamonds, while Sofia Carson donned a necklace with seven emeralds totaling 122.49 carats and 92.57 carats of diamonds.



## Style

Fashion

# Chopard on the Champagne Carpet, and a New Ambassador in Julia

As it continues to up the ante in its use of ethically sourced and recycled materials, the Swiss jeweler and watchmaker wowed at the Oscars on Sofia Carson, Emily Blunt and Eva Longoria ahead of announcing Julia Roberts as its new global face *By Ingrid Schmidt*



Scheufele

Among Chopard's many bedazzling moments this awards season, **Jodie Turner-Smith** wowed in a jaw-dropping sapphire-and-diamond choker from the jeweler at the BAFTAs, while **Emily Blunt**, **Sofia Carson** and **Eva Longoria** shimmered in high-wattage Chopard creations at the 95th Academy Awards.

Now — having already starred in Chopard's Happy Sport and Happy Diamonds campaigns since 2021 — **Julia Roberts** is stepping up as global ambassador for the Swiss jewelry and

timepiece brand. In her new multiyear role, the Oscar-winning actress will represent all women's watch, high jewelry and luxury jewelry collections.

"She incorporates all the collections perfectly," artistic director and co-president **Caroline Scheufele** told *THR* over a recent lunch at the Polo Lounge, adding that the partnership developed organically. "Julia was very sensitive to our initiative with ethical gold and the whole journey with sustainability." In 2018, the family-owned brand hit the mark of crafting all watches and jewelry from ethically sourced gold, and

this year will incorporate its proprietary Lucent Steel (which is 70 percent recycled material) into all its watches.

Scheufele and Roberts first connected at the Cannes Film Festival in 2016, when the actress donned a statement emerald-and-diamond Chopard necklace with a



Director James Gray with Julia Roberts on the set of Chopard's campaign shoot.

black Armani gown and no shoes for the *Money Monster* premiere. "She said, 'If I wear this emerald necklace, I don't need shoes!' That's how Julia is, very spontaneous," recalls Scheufele, who has worked hand in hand with Cannes for more than 25 years, since redesigning the Palme d'Or — which she describes as originally looking like a "Plexiglas pyramid" — to be "more glamorous and more elegant" in 1998.

The latest campaign, shot by **Alasdair McLellan**, features black-and-white portraits of Roberts with jewelry and watches that pop in color. An accompanying series of 12 video vignettes, filmed by director **James Gray**, a friend of Roberts', include cameos by Roberts' longtime hairstylist **Serge Normant**, makeup artist **Genevieve Herr**, fashion stylist **Elizabeth Stewart** and even the actress' dog **Myrtille**. The first video will release March 20.

"Julia's always loved jewelry, and we had fun, playing with all the Chopard jewelry, like we do in real life," Stewart says. Adds Scheufele, "The new campaign is a lot of smiles, because there are enough sad things on the planet." *THR*



## Zoe Saldaña and an Oscar Spotlight on Sustainability

For **Zoe Saldaña**, the 2023 Oscars presented an opportunity to become part of the sustainability discussion — starting with the pinnacle champagne carpet.

As a new ambassador for **Suzy Amis Cameron**'s RCGD (Red Carpet Green Dress) Global, the Academy's official sustainability partner, the *Avatar: The Way of Water* star and award presenter accessorized a Fall 2022 Fendi Couture mesh and lace-paneled slip-gown with vintage (rather than new) Cartier jewels. "I love that idea of loving beautiful pieces with a history. There is a beauty in the doable, simple things for me," says Saldaña.

She also carried a Tyler Ellis envelope clutch, constructed from perfluorinated, chemical-free satin and leather from ethical tanneries.

Her *Avatar* co-star **Bailey Bass** and *The Fabulists*' **Chloe East** joined Saldaña as ambassadors this year. Creating a custom gown for East, designer **Monique Lhuillier** modified remnant fabric from an archival dress and integrated Tencel Luxe (derived from wood pulp from sustainably managed forests) into a bow-flourish at the back.

For Bass, **Zac Posen** custom designed an old-Hollywood-referential lantern-sleeve gown made with a biodegradable Tencel Luxe textile in a cream ivory [from] a nontoxic, clean and safe dye," explains RCGD Global CEO **Samata Pattinson**.

Adds Saldaña, "The [Oscars] ceremony is a celebration and why can't that be a celebration of sustainable design talent, too? To me that is interesting and nuanced. It's cool!" — *FAWNIA SOO HOO*

From left: Zoe Saldaña in Fendi Couture, vintage Cartier and Tyler Ellis' Lee Pouchet bag; Chloe East in custom Monique Lhuillier; Bailey Bass in custom Zac Posen.



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The actor, writer, director and now budding mogul on the upsides

# BEN'S

and pressures of launching a profit-sharing production company

# NEXT

with Matt Damon, securing Michael Jordan's blessing to make *Air*

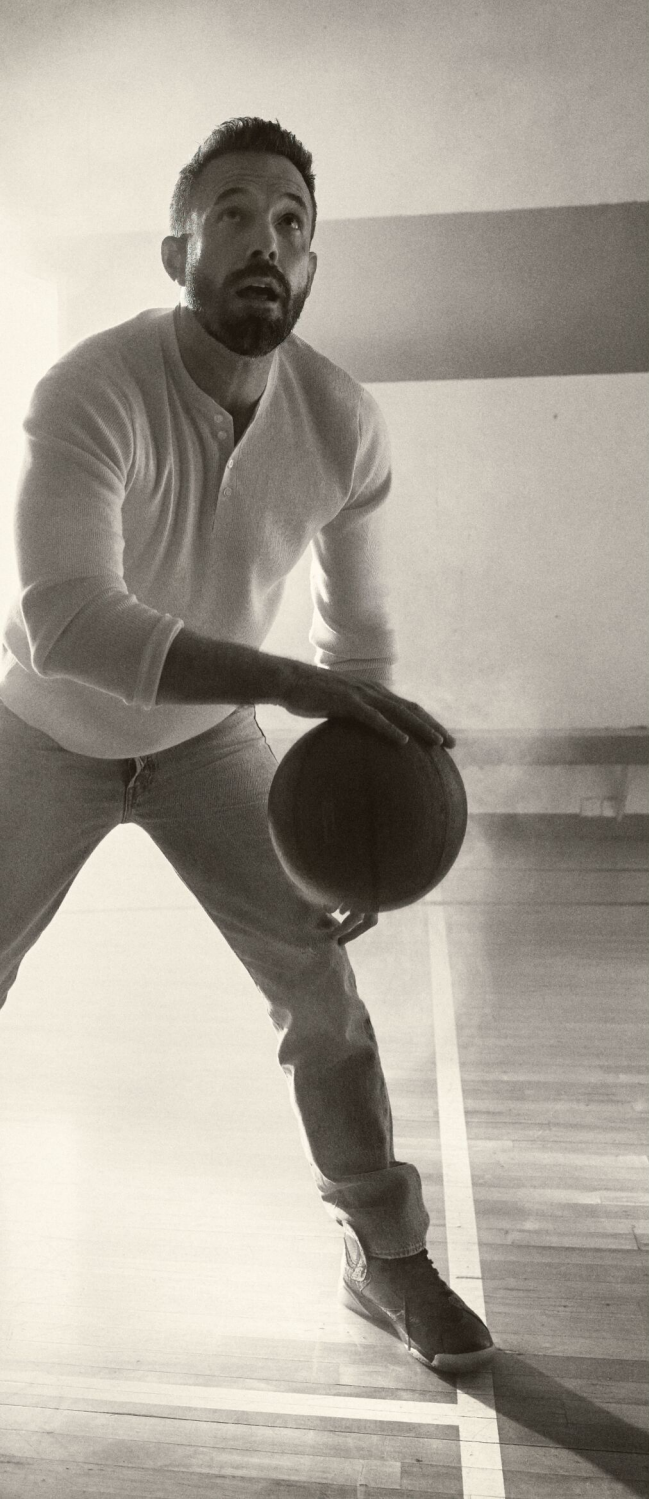
# SHOT

and what wife Jennifer Lopez advised him before this interview

By REBECCA KEEGAN Photographed by AUSTIN HARGRAVE







It's been 25 years since Ben Affleck became the youngest person to win the Oscar for best original screenplay at age 25 for *Good Will Hunting*, which he wrote with Matt Damon; 16 years since he directed his critically acclaimed first feature, *Gone Baby Gone*; and a decade since he won best picture for *Argo*, a film Affleck directed, starred in and produced. His four features as a director — all thrillers and dramas instead of the kind of franchise films that drive the modern box office — have made nearly \$450 million worldwide.

It's an enviable filmmaking résumé, and one that pretty much nobody brings up when you say the name Ben Affleck. But while the world has been scrutinizing his marriage, his mood and his coffee order, Affleck has been quietly building a new production company, Artists Equity, with Damon, founded on the premise of profit-sharing among not only directors, producers and actors but also crewmembers such as cinematographers, editors and costume designers.

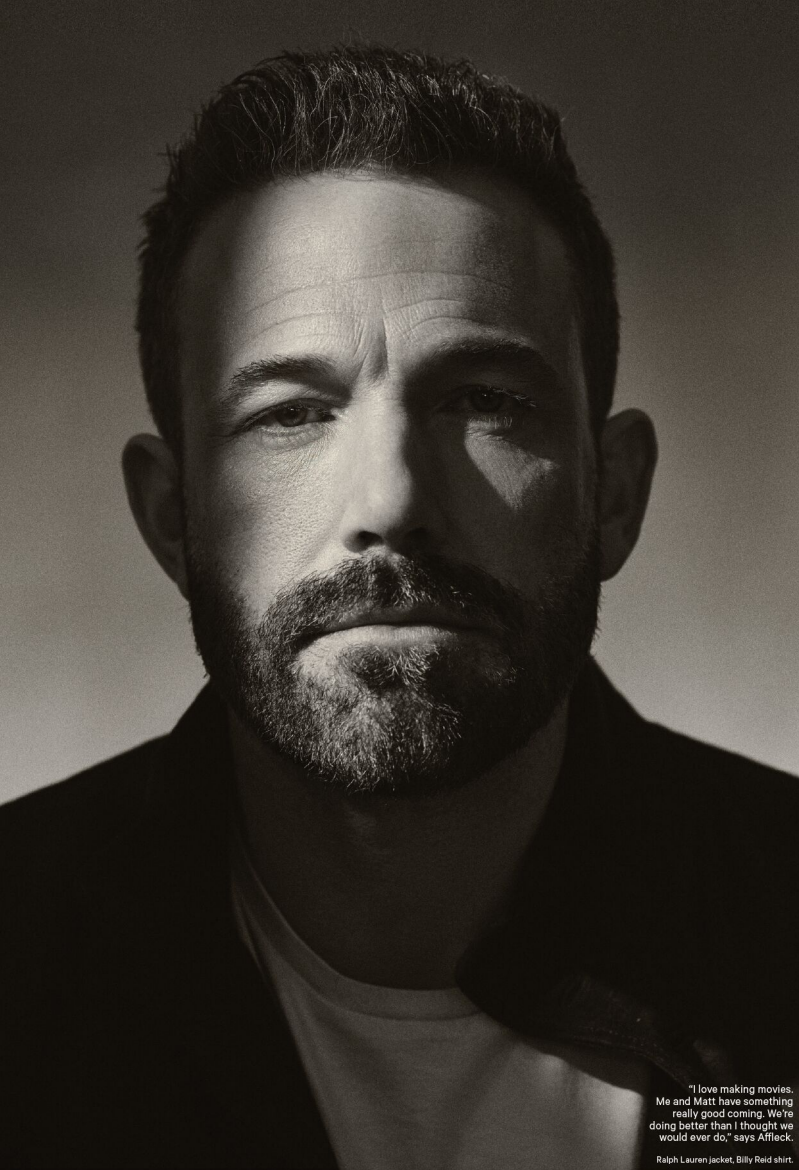
Affleck and Damon obtained at least \$100 million in financing from investment firm RedBird Capital Partners to start and made their own financial contributions to Artists Equity, with Affleck, 50, serving as CEO, and Damon, 52, as chief creative officer. "Ben and I have both been making movies for over 30 years," says Damon. "We know the things that actually matter to people — but ask Ben to see the spreadsheets."

Their company's first movie and Affleck's latest as a director, is *Air*, the story of how Michael Jordan's family and a group of executives at Nike revolutionized the business with one historic sneaker deal. *Air*, which Amazon

Ben Affleck was photographed March 6 at Hollywood Vintage Gym in Los Angeles.

Styling by Iliaria Urbinati  
Ralph Lauren shirt, Levi's vintage jeans,  
Nike Air Jordan sneakers.

On the cover: Loro Piana sweater.



"I love making movies. Me and Matt have something really good coming. We're doing better than I thought we would ever do," says Affleck.

Ralph Lauren jacket, Billy Reid shirt.

will release wide theatrically April 5 ahead of its premiere on Prime, stars Viola Davis as Jordan's mother; Damon, Chris Tucker and Jason Bateman as execs at Nike; and Affleck as Nike co-founder and former CEO Phil Knight. Making *Air* was "an

unbelievable experience that me and my husband and even my hair and makeup team still talk about to this day," says Davis, whose husband, actor and producer Julius Tennon, plays Jordan's father in the film. "Ben's an auteur and so unbelievably kind

and respectful. It was one of our top experiences of being treated the way we felt we deserved to be treated."

Over the course of two wide-ranging interviews in March, Affleck spoke with *THR* about what he's learned from his ups

and downs — from a tearful moment in 2007, when he realized his career wasn't actually over, to the agony of almost wishing that it was, on *Justice League*. Affleck describes what it was like to wear the Batsuit once more for this summer's *The Flash*, how he secured Jordan's blessing for *Air*, what advice wife Jennifer Lopez gave him for the movie and this interview, and what it's like to be a walking meme: "At a certain point," says Affleck, "I am who I am."

#### **You recently had COVID. How are you feeling?**

I'd had it a couple of times and been asymptomatic, and so I got kind of cavalier and a little bit like, "Wow, COVID doesn't really actually affect me. I'm one of those people." And then I just got annihilated. I had the no-energy COVID, where it was too much work to pick up the phone to play Octordle.

#### **To play what?**

Octordle. It's just Wordle with more words. Don't be impressed, it's not harder. I was invited to join a cool little red velvet rope celebrity Wordle group. Matt [Damon]'s one of them. Jason Bateman and Bradley [Cooper], and... Actually, the first rule of Wordle is don't talk about Wordle. Unless you get it in three guesses. I used to do the crossword compulsively in the mornings and think I was good at word games. And let's face it, going up against actors, it's not a high bar. I expected to do fairly well, so I was seriously humbled. You have to do the Wordle, the Quordle and the Octordle, and add up your score, and then whoever gets the lowest score wins for the day. It's fiercely competitive, and there's a lot of mockery and derision. So I'm in training.

**You and Matt Damon are starting a company together more than 40 years after you became friends. I'm curious about the longevity of the friendship and the business relationship, and how that works.**

I suppose the reason it works is that I trust him and love him, and I know that this is somebody with integrity. In this business, failure



is hard, and success is confusing and can make you lose your bearings. Having that friendship as a touchstone over the years was really meaningful. One of the things we reflected on when we did *The Last Duel* that caused us to want to do this company together was the fact that we wished we'd kept working together more over the years. We fell prey to this idea that, "Well, if you don't individuate your careers and do your own things, people will always associate you together. That will be limiting."

#### Was that advice you got?

That was advice we got. And also just a function of the fact that our goal was to work as actors. The motivation behind making *Good Will Hunting* was to serve as an acting reel so that we could get jobs as actors, not because we wanted to be writers. So when we became successful and had the opportunity to do movies, we took them. And it's very hard to let go of that hand-to-mouth mentality you have as an actor. The phone could stop ringing at any time, and especially where Matt and I grew up pretty modestly, it was almost irresponsible to not take a job where they were going to pay you a lot of money. My mother made, I don't know, \$30,000 a year as a public school teacher in Boston. And I remember making \$600,000 for *Armageddon* and thinking, "This is 20 years of my mother's salary." It just seemed absurd that you would pass on that opportunity, no matter what it was. A thing that you have to learn — one of many things we helped one another with — is that at a certain point, it becomes very meaningful the things you turn down, in terms of the kind of career that you create.

**There's a version of your life now where you direct a movie every couple of years, go to your kids' basketball games and hang out by the pool with your wife. So why are you adding this new role of running a company?**

My wife doesn't have a lot of downtime. But that does sound great. You're making assumptions that I wish were true but aren't, which is ... I've had a

number of movies I wanted to direct that were like, "Yeah, we want to do it in Bulgaria." And I'm like, "In Bulgaria?"

One of the reasons I did it was, I'm divorced. I share custody. I don't want to go to Austin and New Orleans and Georgia anymore and not see my kids. It just doesn't work. These years are too important. If I miss them, I'll

**"I WAS GOING TO DIRECT A BATMAN, AND JUSTICE LEAGUE MADE ME GO, 'I'M OUT. I NEVER WANT TO DO ANY OF THIS AGAIN. I'M NOT SUITED.'"**

regret it for the rest of my life. And then I thought, "OK, well, if I'm in Los Angeles and I'm in an office and I'm doing this work, I can step out for the basketball game or the jazz performance." So I protect those things.

#### Is that working?

I've found that people are taking me quite seriously. As an actor, people look at you, like, "He doesn't really mean that." But [in business] they treat it as sacrosanct. They'll go, "Yeah, well, we were going to have that meeting with the heads of the Five Families, but you had your kid's basketball game." Now, my parents never came to one Little League game ever, once. But in the modern era of raising children, with three kids, 11, 14, and 17, and three schools with their individual activities, it turns out that is in and of itself a total full-time job.

**You're launching this company at a time when the movie business is changing.**

When *The Way Back* came out, I knew. It came out the weekend

they shut the theaters down with COVID. But that's not an excuse. Because I knew as it was coming out, just the tracking, I was like, "OK, here's a movie about a guy, son dies, gets divorced, alcoholic. Nobody's going to go to the theater to see this fucking movie. They're just not." I felt it. *Succession* is on. *Ozark*. *Narcos*. *Game of Thrones*. You're

I went into it going, "OK, these movies aren't fucking working anymore. And these are the ones I like."

#### As opposed to —

*The Justice League* experience, the fact that those stories became somewhat repetitive to me and less interesting. Yeah, I did finally figure out how to play that character [Batman], and I nailed it in *The Flash*. For the five minutes I'm there, it's really great. A lot of it's just tone. You've got to figure out, what's your version of the person? Who is the guy that fits what you can do? I tried to fit myself into a Batman. And by the way, I like a lot of the stuff we did, especially the first one [*Batman v Superman*].

#### But not *Justice League*. What went wrong there?

*Justice League* ... You could teach a seminar on all the reasons why this is how not to do it. Ranging from production to bad decisions to horrible personal tragedy, and just ending with the most monstrous taste in my mouth. The genius, and the silver lining, is that Zack Snyder eventually went to AT&T and was like, "Look, I can get you four hours of content." And it's principally just all the slow motion that he shot in black-and-white. And one day of shooting with me and him. He was like, "Do you want to come shoot in my backyard?" I was like, "I think there are unions, Zack. I think we have to make a deal." But I went and did it. And now [*Zack Snyder's Justice League*] is my highest-rated movie on IMDb.



Affleck (left) and Matt Damon accepted their Oscars for *Good Will Hunting* in 1998. "I suppose the reason it works is that I trust him and love him," Affleck says of Damon.

**Isn't that because Zack Snyder's fans are so intense online?**

Say what you want, it is my highest-rated career movie. I've never had one that went from nadir to pinnacle. Retroactively, it's a hit. All of a sudden I was getting congratulated for the bomb I'm in. But I was going to direct a *Batman*, and [*Justice League*] made me go, "I'm out. I never want to do any of this again. I'm not suited." That was the worst experience I've ever seen in a business which is full of some shitty experiences. It broke my heart. There was an idea of someone [Joss Whedon] coming in, like, "I'll rescue you and we'll do 60 days of shooting and I'll write a whole thing around what you have. I've got the secret." And it wasn't the secret. That was hard. And I started to drink too much. I was back at the hotel in London, it was either that or jump out the window. And I just thought, "This isn't the life I want. My kids aren't here. I'm miserable." You want to go to work and find something interesting to hang onto, rather than just wearing a rubber suit, and most of it you're just standing against the computer screen going, "If this nuclear waste gets loose, we'll..." That's fine. I don't condescend to that or put it down, but I got to a point where I found it creatively not satisfying. Also just, you're sweaty and exhausted. And I thought, "I don't want to participate in this in any way. And I don't want to squander any more of my life, of which I have a limited amount."

**So if DC came to you now and said, "Do you want to direct something?"**

I would not direct something for the [James] Gunn DC. Absolutely not. I have nothing against James Gunn. Nice guy, sure he's going to do a great job. I just wouldn't want to go in and direct in the way they're doing that. I'm not interested in that.

**I heard you say recently, "Fifteen percent of movie budgets are waste." Which 15 percent are you talking about?**

I don't believe in the whole "I get paid even in failure" thing. It



Damon with Viola Davis, Michael Jordan's choice to play his mother in *Air*, which chronicles Nike's quest to sign the basketball superstar.

always struck me as bizarre that I walked away with so much money from *Gigli* and everyone else got flattened. Seems a little bit like I was not aligned quite with the investors in that regard.

The studios and the people who make the movies are increasingly separate, from different

were waiting while they did the touch-ups. And it was just like, "Guys. This is not meaningful, but it's taking away from the time and the resources we have to do something authentically enough that it moves the audience. They don't care if the curls are 1930 or 1920."

**"I DON'T BELIEVE IN THE WHOLE 'I GET PAID EVEN IN FAILURE' THING. IT STRUCK ME AS BIZARRE THAT I WALKED AWAY WITH SO MUCH MONEY FROM GIGLI."**

worlds. They don't understand one another's values, and there's suspicion. And it creates conflict. I was on [my 2016 movie] *Live by Night*, and they were dressing an extra — it must have cost \$700 to dress this extra in the period. Five hundred feet away from the camera. And we

**How did you approach Michael Jordan about the story you're telling in *Air*? Did you know each other?**

I periodically play cards sometimes with Michael, and we've got mutual friends, and ... None of it sounds good, OK? And it's not like he'd be like, "Oh yeah. Ben's

my boy." (*Imitating Jordan's voice.*) He'd be like, "Yeah, I know him." Jordan is — he's a hero to me. And I know how important and meaningful a figure he is, in particular in the African American community. If you're going to fuck around with talking about Michael Jordan, do it respectfully. Nobody's asking you to do a hagiography, but get it fucking right. I've never known anybody with that kind of charisma and power who walks into a room and it just reverberates. And is it him or is it the way people treat him? Is it your memories of him? I don't know, but it's powerful. I said, "Please, can I come out?" And he was great. "Yeah, no problem. Come to the golf course." Went out, met with him. I waited for him to finish playing. I don't golf myself. Because I just feel like it eats people's lives up.

**Golf?**

I look at golf like meth. They have better teeth, but it doesn't seem like people ever come out of that. Once they start golfing, you just don't ever see them again. So anyway, I waited. I have to be very clear, this is not the authorized Michael Jordan story. He was not compensated in a way that would be appropriate if this were that. If you're going to do a Michael Jordan story, they should back the fucking truck up. This was me



saying, "Mike, I'm not going to make the movie if you're not cool with something about it. I just won't do it. I want to know what's important to you." He was very clear. He was the one who told me about [Nike executive] Howard White, who wasn't in the original script, who's played by Chris Tucker. And I said, "Any anecdotes about your dad?" And without going into any more detail, he actually talked about his mom, who wasn't really in the script. That's when I understood what the movie was. Talking to him about his mom was incredibly moving, and I realized, "Oh, this isn't about Nike."

I said, "So, do you have any ideas about who would ...?" And immediately I was like, "Oh, fuck." Because I'm about to ask him who to cast. And if I don't get them, it's going to look to him like I ignored him. It's actually hard to get actors. And I knew who he was going to say because it was the same person that I've wanted to direct for so long, who I think is ... I don't think there's an objective best actor. But I do think there's a group of people who you can say, "These are the best actors in the world." And Viola's quite obviously among them. And [Jordan] looked at me real straight and — by the way, there's one line for the mother character in the movie at this point — and I'm thinking, "Oh my God, he wants me to offer this to Viola Davis. How am I going to offer Viola Davis a movie with one line? That's not going to happen." But he was like, "That's my mom." He was dead serious. "Viola Davis, that's my mom." And that was it. Discussion was over. However it happened, it wasn't his problem, but it was going to fucking happen. And I was like, "OK, Mike."

#### How did you get Viola Davis?

Begging. I'm sure it was because I said, "Michael Jordan wants you to play his mom." It certainly wasn't "Ben Affleck wants you to be in his movie." She's not comfortable with sycophancy or obsequiousness. You can tell it chafes her. I just treated her with respect, which is to say, "When you're ready, let me know. We'll be here." I want what she does in the

movie to be a surprise — because as I started writing and working with Matt, and Jen [Lopez] gave me some great lines too — it just started getting better.

#### What was Jen's input on the script?

Oh my God, she's brilliant. She is incredibly knowledgeable about the way fashion evolves through the culture as a confluence of music, sports, entertainment and dance. She helped me in talking about the way in which a part of the reason why Jordans [the shoes] were so meaningful is because culture and style in America is 90 percent driven by Black culture. Black culture has historically pioneered music, dance, fashion, and it's then been stolen, appropriated, remarketed as Elvis or whatever. And in this case, [Nike], a white-run corporate entity, was starting to do business with African American athletes in an identity affiliation sales thing. They were really taking value from what Michael Jordan represents and who he is. I don't think the meaning can be overstated. They're going to switch from "Hey, guys, we are a nice shoe," to "If Mike has it, you want it."

#### What you expressed about white America using Black culture, as a white filmmaker telling this story, do you risk replicating that dynamic?

I wouldn't make a movie whose central premise is the appropriation of Black culture for profit by white Americans. That's not my film to make. I'm telling a story that's about a combination of things, and this is one aspect of it. I'm not going to omit it because to omit it would further compound the disrespect. What I am

going to do is talk to people who understand it better than I do and who can help me contextualize it, and that was [costume designer] Charlese [Antoinette Jones], that was Viola. Chris [Tucker], he gave me monologues, he gave me scenes, and it was very organic. And that's why I was like, "I want Chris paid as a writer also. I want to be very clear that he is a contributing voice to this movie." We [Affleck, Damon and Tucker] didn't end up asking for [writing] credit on the movie. But it's important for me to say Chris Tucker is a fucking really good writer.

#### Why did you make the choice to never show Michael Jordan's face in this movie? You cast a body double and you shot him from behind or in profile.

Jordan is too big. He exists above and around the story, but if you ever concretize him, if you ever say, "Yes, that's Michael Jordan," we know it's not, really. It's fake. I thought if the audience brought everything they thought and remembered about him and what he meant to them to the movie and projected it onto the movie, it worked better.

#### What kind of conversation did you have with Nike about how you would portray the company?

I did not have a conversation with Nike because I didn't feel the same sense of personal responsibility [as I did to Michael Jordan] because it's not a history of Nike. There's interviews and books about that.

#### The operating principle of Artists Equity is that people who work on a film have an ownership stake in it. How did that work on *Air*?

I was talking to [cinematographer] Bob Richardson. He's a genius. And I said, "Bob, what if I gave you a million bucks to save me five [million]? Could you do it?" And he goes, "Fuck, I'll save you 10." There are people who just have their hand on the wheel in ways people don't understand. Your editor, producer, DP, first AD, production designer. The idea is you get really good people, and you say to them, "Look, if we're able to accomplish what we set out to accomplish, you're going to participate in a very significant way in the delta between what the movie costs to make and what we sell it for." The people who were bonused on this movie, like Bob and all the crew, their bonus was a piece of the pool of the sale [to Amazon]. Almost all of them are, on a weekly basis now, the highest-paid crewpeople in history, by a multiple.

#### Do you want Artists Equity to stay independent or do you want a studio deal?

The first-look deal is going to be a dinosaur very soon. It's a horrendous deal. You're restricting yourself in unimaginably disastrous ways for a few shiny trinkets. The experiment for me is to say [to the studio], "Don't worry about what the budget is. That's my job. I'm going to do my best with the budget. I'm going to guarantee you and cover all the overages. And, by the way, director, actor, company, all on the hook for overage."

#### So is there a scenario where your DP would have to pay money if you went over budget? Crews usually don't assume that kind of risk.

They'd make much less because we'd go, "We went over, guys, so



From left: Affleck with Gal Gadot and Zack Snyder on 2017's *Justice League*; with John Goodman and Alan Arkin in 2012's *Argo*, which he directed.

you're going to get paid like a scale movie." So the compensation is, if we do very well, Bob should do galactically well, so should our first AD, and so should Chris Tucker, Viola Davis, Matt Damon, who are driving the value. At studios, historically you'd go in, pitch, and then they'd quietly go back to marketing and distribution and say, "Well, let's run the numbers." And they'd go to the territories and talk about genre and stars. Now, it's a much more coarse process. They say, "Well, we have 118 categories [for content]. We know X works and Y, and so we'll pay Z for that." But there's no formula for something being good. At Artists Equity, we have a joint venture with a data research AI-modeling company that has a lot of consumer information. We can reach out to people and go, "What are you watching? Do you like this?" The inscrutability around the streamers is very frustrating because you go, "Are people watching this or not?"

**Do the streamers give you data on your movies?**

No, they won't.

**Let's say one of your old movies is a hit on a streaming service and —**

Well, last year, [my 2010 movie] *The Town* licensed for \$15 million again. Because it streams. That's the other big tenet of our company: We seek to retain the negative, to be the copyright holder, which we share with the artist. Being the copyright holder, even if it's in 15 years when it reverts — and it should revert — you should own it because if it works, if it's *Shawshank Redemption*, they're still fucking watching it. The biggest thing on Netflix is *Friends*. There's enormous value in libraries. And the streamers have overreached and recaptured too much value. The old gross days, you could really make money. They've taken away some of that value, so I need at least to be able to know, "Hey, look, I know people are watching. I know what this is worth to you."

**Amazon is releasing *Air* in theaters. When you started on this movie, did you envision it for streaming or theaters?**

I assumed it would be a streaming movie because I thought maybe dramas would never come out again in theaters. *The Way Back*, when he pulled it, I was so heartbroken. And then [former Warner Bros. Pictures chairman

Toby Emmerich] was like, "We're going to rush it onto iTunes." And then I got all these emails and calls and people saw it. That was the day I thought, "Well, shit, I'd rather people see the movie. I like a theater as much as the next guy, but a tree falling in the woods." And now there's an enormous pressure that I feel here. I mean, I hope that it works.

**Why aren't you on Instagram? Your wife is very good at it.**

My wife's a genius at that. I don't know if there's anybody who understands Instagram better than her. In fact, she gave me a talk this morning before this interview. She thinks that because of experiences that I've had, I've become very guarded. And she's right. I view these things as land mines, where if you say one wrong thing, your career might be over. I had a really painful experience where I did an interview where I was really vulnerable, and the entire pickup was something that was not only not right, it was actually the opposite of what I meant.

**This is when you were on Howard Stern and you talked about drinking toward the end of your marriage to Jennifer Garner?**

The idea that I was blaming my wife for my drinking. To be clear, my behavior is my responsibility entirely. The point that I was trying to make was a sad one. Anyone who's been through divorce makes that calculus of, *How much do we try?* We loved each other. We care about each other. We have respect for each other. I was trying to say, "Hey, look, I was drinking too much, and the less happy you become, whether it's your job, your marriage, it's just that as your life becomes more difficult, if you're doing things to fill a hole that aren't healthy, you're going to start doing more of those things." I think I was pretty articulate about that. It was the *New York Post* who deliberately mischaracterized it in order to make it clickbait, and everyone else then picked it up, and it didn't matter how many times I said, "I do not feel this way. I'm telling you, I don't blame my ex-wife for my

alcoholism." So, yeah. It's hard. But anyway, so [Jennifer Lopez] tells me today, "Relax, be yourself. Have fun. You're actually a fun guy who is real and genuine and you just seem so serious." Do I seem serious? But as in many things, she's really right. And she loves me. She's looking out for me. She's trying to help me. So it's like, maybe I ought to fucking listen to her.

**Yesterday there was a news cycle devoted to your parallel parking.**

Dude, you know how many people can get in that spot? That was world-class Boston finesse. Granted, I did decide maybe I'm not going to bump these people anymore because it's the Pacific Palisades and they may view bumping the bumper differently than we did back home, but it was so fucking snug. I've never gotten a spot that good. It was not parking assist either. It wasn't blocking anything, but I'm sure it was like, "Ben Affleck blocks traffic."

**Did you mind the "Ben Affleck having a bad time at the Grammys" meme?**

No. I had a good time at the Grammys. My wife was going, and I thought, "Well, there'll be good music. It might be fun." At movie award shows, it's speeches and, like, sound-mixing webinars. But I thought this would be fun. I saw [Grammy host Trevor Noah approach] and I was like, "Oh, God." They were framing us in this shot, but I didn't know they were rolling. I leaned into her and I was like, "As soon they start rolling, I'm going to slide away from you and leave you sitting next to Trevor." She goes, "You better fucking not leave." That's a husband-and-wife thing. I mean, some of it is, I'm like, "All right, who is this act?" Like, I don't keep up. My wife does, obviously. And yeah, it is your wife's work event. And I've gone to events and been pissed off. I've gone and been bored. I've gone to award shows and been drunk, a bunch. Nobody ever once said I'm drunk. [But at the Grammys] they were like, "He's drunk." And I thought, that's interesting. That raises a whole other thing



Affleck with wife Jennifer Lopez, who gave him a pep talk for this interview. "She thinks that because of experiences that I've had, I've become very guarded," he says. "And she's right."





Lois Pians sweater, Levi's vintage jeans, Nike Air Jordan sneakers

about whether or not it's wise to acknowledge addiction because there's a lot of compassion, but there is still a tremendous stigma, which is often quite inhibiting. I do think it disincen- tivizes people from making their lives better.

**How has talking publicly about your alcoholism impacted you?**

I became — out of no desire of my own — one of the poster boys for actor alcoholism and recovery and the whole thing. And the best part about that is that sometimes people call me up and they're like, "Hey, can you help me out?" And it makes me feel so good to do that. The big trick of 12-step is the reason they want you to help other people is because it actually helps you more. And often

what I'll say to people is, I would avoid [your addiction] coming out if I were you. You don't need to be anybody's poster child. You don't need to fucking tell anybody. That's why there's two words on the front of the book. They're just as important, both of them: Alcoholics Anonymous. It's always anonymous.

**Can you tell me about your performance in *Air* as Nike founder Phil Knight?**

Phil is an interesting guy. I got really interested in Buddhism because I have a difficult time with the theistic aspects of AA. I've just always been a skeptic. One of the things I like about Buddhism is it's like, believe what you believe. If this doesn't seem true to you, don't believe.

We're not going to burn you alive. Anyway, so here's this guy [Phil Knight]. He talks about Buddhism, Eastern philosophy. He also talks about being a ruthless capitalist. So right there, I think this is a guy of many contradictions, which is fun to play. There's a tension between having once been the entrepreneur, the guy selling shoes out of your car, and now running a big company, being responsible for everyone's jobs. That's a real change. And how do you reconcile that? The way he vacillates [about spending to sign Michael Jordan] but in the end goes for it. When we tested the movie in Vegas, people cheered. I was happy because I thought, "Good, they get it." But I did not expect the audience to stand up and

cheer for Phil Knight. I think it speaks to the fact that in this culture, we venerate capitalists. It's our version of the divine right of kings.

I showed it to Paul [Thomas] Anderson, my favorite director of all time. He knows I really look up to him. And he was like, "This is just a fun movie. I like this movie." And I'm thinking, "Is it a masterpiece?" Because I think he really is a genius. This guy knows how to do this. Sometimes I get a sort of a [Antonio] Salieri feeling around him. Yeah, I'm good enough to know how great you really are. See, this is me being myself. Let's find out if it becomes clickbait.

*Interview edited for length and clarity.*



# SXSW

FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, THR TOOK ITS PHOTO TEAM TO TEXAS FOR A WEEKEND FULL OF TACOS, TEQUILA AND TALENT FROM THE SPRING'S HOTTEST MOVIES AND TV SHOWS by SELJA RANKIN

Photographed by JASMINE ARCHIE  
Produced by KAYLA LANDRUM AND KAYLA MIRACLE



1

Photographed  
March 10-12 at The Line  
hotel in Austin for  
*The Hollywood Reporter*  
—all photos brought  
to you by Canon digital  
imaging technology.





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**1** From left: Ayden Mayeri, Megan Stalter, Jojo T. Gibbs, Hannah Pearl Utt  
**Cora Bora**

Hacks breakout Stalter gets her first starring role as Cora, whom she describes as less confident than her sitcom character. "They're both gorgeous," she jokes. "But I think Cora struggles with her self-image more."

**2** Leon Bridges  
**The Young Wife**

The Grammy winner turned down the offer to star in his first movie at least twice, but was eventually lured by *Wife* director Tayariisha Poe's mood board, which he says had a "psychedelic" feel, and the chance to learn choreography that reminded him of his earliest days as a dancer.

**3** Elizabeth Olsen  
**Love & Death**

After starring in *Sorry for Your Loss* and *WandaVision*, Olsen was trying to avoid another TV role, but the darkly comedic HBO Max series about killer Candy Montgomery was too good to turn down. "Here we go again, seven months of never seeing anyone again," she tells *THR* with a laugh.



5

**4** From left: Marque Richardson, Tracy McMillan, Delroy Lindo, Faly Rakotchavana, Kerry Washington, Jordyn McIntosh  
**UnPrisoned**

On the set of the family-centric drama inspired by McMillan's life, the admiration went in all directions — Richardson describes Washington as his "Mount Rushmore of actors," and Washington adds, "It's so funny, because Delroy is my Mount Rushmore. To see him stepping into his path helps give me permission to step into my path."

**5** Samantha Hanratty  
**Yellowjackets**

"When there are dead animals on set, even if it's fake, I get really emo," admits the actress, who plays Misty on the gory Showtime drama. "I'm like, that animal had a family!"



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**6** Bob Odenkirk  
**Lucky Hank**

"I was shooting *Better Call Saul* and trying to die," the actor jokes of his new AMC series, which was first pitched to him shortly before his near-fatal heart attack. "But I liked it, and I liked the way it was different from *Saul*."



**1**  
**Jake Johnson**  
**Self Reliance**

"I had an executive tell me that the film business as I knew it was going away, and that it was going to be more selfies and things you filmed in your backyard, and I thought, 'Oh, pass, this is not for old Jakester,'" says the first-time director, whose dark comedy follows a man on a deadly reality show. "So I started writing something that I thought, 'This is what I'd like to do.'"

**2**  
**Karen Gillan**  
**Late Bloomers**

The *Guardians of the Galaxy* actress says she enjoyed the pared-down shoot of her new indie flick about a young woman in Brooklyn who breaks her hip and subsequently experiences an existential crisis. "There's something to not having this big huge trailer, with everything you could possibly want, to disappear into," she says. "It's nice to all be in [the shoot] together and to feel a little more connected."

**3** From left:  
**Regé-Jean Page,**  
**Daisy Head,**  
**Justice Smith,**  
**Michelle Rodriguez,**  
**Sophia Lillis, Chris Pine**  
**Dungeons & Dragons:**  
**Honor Among Thieves**

The cast watched the fantasy film with fans for the first time at the festival's opening night, and tell *THR* they were blown away by the reaction. "Things played hugely different with a room full of people," says Page, who plays Xenk in the adaptation of the board game. "It was far more emotional, it was funnier, the action was more exciting, which was a revelation to us."

**4**  
**Boots Riley**  
**I'm a Virgo**

"When we sold *Sorry to Bother You* at Sundance [in 2018], I was broke, and WME said, 'If you've got ideas, we can get you some money,'" the director says about the genesis of his new Prime Video series. "The idea I had was a 13-foot-tall black man and the contradiction it posed. I started writing the pilot and was saying Jharrel Jerome [for the lead] all along. I thought, 'This is the only person that could do it!'"

**5**  
**Luke Gilford**  
**National Anthem**

For his feature directorial debut, Gilford was inspired partly by queer ranching and rodeo communities. "I was at a pride event and heard a Dolly Parton song playing in the distance," he explains. "I was pulled in, and because I grew up around cowboys and cowgirls, I could tell they were authentic. They welcomed me immediately."



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**6** From left:

Miles Fowler, Rachel Sennott, Ayo Edebiri, Emma Seligman, Ruby Cruz, Havana Rose Liu  
**Bottoms**

The raunchy comedy, about high school girls who start a fight club as a way to hook up with cheerleaders, stars a host of young comedians, including the newly well-known Edebiri. "I think a lot of people met me on *The Bear*, which is really dramatic, but I got my start as a comedian." "I think a lot of people met me on *The Bear*, which is really dramatic, but I got my start as a comedian," she says. "For me, especially as a young Black woman, getting to do stuff that is straight-up funny is just a dream."

**7**  
**Brittany Snow**  
**Parachute**

"This movie was a long time coming," says the actress of her writing-directing debut, *Parachute*, which stars *Yellowjackets*' Courtney Eaton (see page 18). "I was in my early 20s and always wanted to see a story about falling in love when you're also dealing with trying to love yourself. I couldn't find one, so I wrote it. It took me four years."



**8**  
**Chloe Bailey**  
**Swarm**

The new series from longtime collaborators Donald Glover and Janine Nabers is garnering buzz for its ripped-from-the-Beyhive-headlines plot about the dark sides of extreme fandom, but it was also a reunion of sorts for Bailey and staff writer Malla Obama, who first met during White House events: "Seeing her again as we were older, and owning ourselves and our creative minds, was really cool," Bailey recalls. "It felt like a group of girlfriends on set."



**9**  
**Lukas Gage**  
**Down Low**

Gage stars opposite Zachary Quinto in *Down Low*, and wrote the script with friend Phoebe Fisher, whom he met while working on *Euphoria*. "I sent her my first-ever writing on that set, and she taught me how to place a comma," he jokes. "I would also read Sam [Levinson]'s scripts and be inspired by him. I think *Euphoria* and *Down Low* are pretty unapologetic. They're not afraid to go to super dark places."



**10**  
**Eva Longoria**  
**Flamin' Hot**

The actress stepped behind the camera for the biopic about a janitor at Frito-Lay who helped invent the spicy Cheetos flavor. "When the script came along, I really felt like no one else can direct this, I felt it in my bones," she says of taking on the project, before adding with a laugh: "Maybe they gave it to me because they were scared of me."



# 'I'M GRATEFUL THAT I'M THERE TO BEAR WITNESS'

It's been 25 years since she was first Oscar-nominated, and in that time, documentarian Liz Garbus has talked to death row inmates, contributed to solving the Golden State Killer case, directed *Harry & Meghan*, and now helms TV and movies **BY PAMELA MCCLINTOCK**



Twenty-five years ago, Liz Garbus pulled out her Cover Girl compact at the Oscars just before the winner of best documentary was announced. The Manhattan-raised filmmaker didn't think her 1998 doc, *The Farm: Angola, USA*, would win, but wanted to be prepared. Caked powder spilled all over her gown. "As soon as they did not call us, I thought, 'Phew, I don't need to go up there with powder all over my dress,'" she says of the fleeting moment when losing felt like a blessing. "And then being like, 'Wait, no,'" she recalls of the disappointment settling in.

Adam Del Deo, Netflix vp original documentary features and series, had kept close track of Garbus since seeing *The Farm* at Sundance, captivated by her deep curiosity and ability to tell incredibly complex stories in a cinematic way, as well as her knack for building trust with her subjects. In 2013, he helped commission the streamer's first feature doc, *What Happened, Miss Simone?*, which was also Oscar-nominated. Garbus has spent her career zeroing in on social justice, women's issues, the First Amendment, true crime and intensely personal stories. "I wanted people to see what my mom was actually like, and not a guarded version of herself. Liz was great in making that possible," says Anderson Cooper of 2016's *Nothing Left Unsaid: Gloria Vanderbilt & Anderson Cooper*. She was his first choice to direct. Garbus helmed last year's doc series *Harry & Meghan* while directing episodes of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Yellowjackets*, developing an untitled Ellen Pompeo movie and running Story Syndicate alongside her husband, Dan Cogan.

**Can you talk about your earliest experiences behind the camera?** My big hurrah was the last week of my senior year in high school, when I managed to bring this video camera my parents had bought into my school. Cameras weren't as common at that time. I ended up making this film about my last week of school, about everybody misbehaving and being

sad and the teachers and all the connections. And myself getting thrown out of class because people were annoyed.

**Your father, Martin Garbus, is a famed civil rights attorney. Have any of his cases influenced you?**

My father represented Kathy Boudin, who was part of the

Right: Documentarian Liz Garbus. Below: Her first Oscar-nominated doc feature, *The Farm: Angola, USA*, an intimate look at life inside the country's biggest max-security prison.



Weather Underground and part of the Brink's robbery case. She was a highly educated young woman who had chosen to join this armed political movement. Kathy's father was a civil rights lawyer named Leonard Boudin, and so it was sort of a mirror of what our own family could be. We were somewhat under siege during it because there was so much anger at them for the murder, of course. [The 1981 armored car heist resulted in the death of two police officers and a security guard. Boudin served 23 years for felony murder.] My family received death threats.

**How did you come to make the *The Farm*?**

I started working with Jonathan Stack, my co-director, and the director Beeban Kidron. She directed one of the Bridget Jones movies and a wonderful British drama called *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*. She was coming to America to make a documentary, and I ended up working with her. And then she brought me along on *To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar*. I was her assistant. It turned out that the costume designer on *To Wong Foo*, whose name was Marlene Stewart, had worked on the movie *Dead Man Walking*, which they shot in Angola [Louisiana State Penitentiary]. She had fallen in love with someone there. Through

GARBUS' GREATEST HITS



**There's Something Wrong With Aunt Diane** (2010) The doc centers on Diane Schuler, at the center of a 2009 wrong-way crash on a New York highway, and pieces together events leading up to the multiple-fatality accident.



**What Happened, Miss Simone?** (2015) Garbus' Oscar-nominated film was Netflix's first commissioned feature doc. "She's one of the most remarkable documentarians that is working today," says Netflix's Adam Del Deo.



**Nothing Left Unsaid: Gloria Vanderbilt & Anderson Cooper** (2016) "She made connections I thought were really interesting," says Cooper of Garbus. "She saw things I didn't see, and I'm pretty good in the edit room."



**Lost Girls** (2020) The mystery-drama about the unsolved serial-killer murders of young sex-worker women on Long Island, based on a nonfiction book, was the first narrative feature directed by Garbus.

GARBUS: TREVINO/GETTY IMAGES; EYE-BROWNE; DANE: COURTESY OF NETFLIX; COOPER: BOYD/OLLY/FLAMINGO; LOST GIRLS: COURTESY OF NETFLIX; MARTIN GARBUS: COURTESY OF NETFLIX; ANDERSON COOPER: BOYD/OLLY/FLAMINGO; LOST GIRLS: COURTESY OF NETFLIX; TOP: JEFFREY MAYER/GETTY IMAGES; BOTTOM: JEFFREY MAYER/GETTY IMAGES





over their own story felt OK, as long as the viewer is aware of that contract. It's like if you're making a documentary with re-creations, just let your viewer know that they're re-creations.

**You've been pressed on the issue of whether the Duke and Duchess of Sussex had final cut on *Harry & Meghan*; you've said it was a collaboration. Anything to add?**

It was a collaboration, and on all levels that is true. If I wanted to push for something, I did. That's exactly that sort of contract between filmmaking and viewer that I think is key so that your audience is aware that this is not an investigative documentary; it was something done in partnership with the principals.

**Any misgivings about *Harry & Meghan*?**

I have no regrets. I don't know if it was the most watched doc series on Netflix ever, but it certainly was in the first few weeks. [Viewers] came for the love story, or the hot gossip, but were able to stay for other provocative and important stuff. To be able to discuss the history of colonialism with billions of people — when else are people going to pay attention to issues like this?

**What are your favorite projects among the films you've directed?**

*The Farm* has always got to be one of my favorites. It was the O.G. for me. It made everything else possible. *Lost Girls* being my first feature; *The Handmaid's Tale* being my first scripted television work [as a director]; *What Happened, Miss Simone?*; *There's Something Wrong With Aunt Diane* — they're all cherished.

*Interview edited for length and clarity.*



**Untitled *Ellen Pompeo Project*** Garbus is working on her first pilot for Hulu and ABC Signature, an untitled project about Ukrainian orphan adoption starring Ellen Pompeo that's set to start shooting sometime this year.

that, I started talking to these different guy inmates, the warden and everybody else at the prison.

**How are you able to talk with people about the most difficult, intimate topics of their lives: Gloria Vanderbilt recounting the suicide of her son Wyatt in *Nothing Left Unsaid*, or Patton Oswalt speaking of his late wife, Mary McNamara, in *I'll Be Gone in the Dark*?**

In those moments, I'm often feeling very grateful that I'm there to bear witness. My first directing gig for the Discovery Channel, I was talking to an inmate who was facing execution in two weeks. We're two

humans. He wants his story told. He wants that moment to matter. He wants to be understood. And I am a vessel for that. For me, that entails both chatting somebody up and making them feel super comfortable, as well as handling silence. I realized in that moment the power of that dialectic. And also just how much it meant to the other person to be able to share. He was a person who probably wasn't going to be alive in 15 days. Now, clearly that's very different in the case of Gloria and Patton, but it's not. Because they're talking about their loved ones. They're talking about their trauma and wanting it to be understood, respected and

treated with compassion. That's really the kind of documentary I've sought. It's not a Michael Moore-style doc.

***Harry & Meghan* was another case where you had to make them feel comfortable.**

That project was very different from most of my career in that we partnered with Archewell, their company, to make this show. Harry had a lifetime of experience of sharing stories with media and feeling that they were twisted into something he could not recognize, and, of course, Meghan had a short but very violent experience of that. For them to exert some control



***I'll Be Gone in the Dark* (2020-21)** The acclaimed HBO documentary series was based on the late author Mary McNamara's seminal investigation of the Golden State Killer. McNamara was Patton Oswalt's wife.



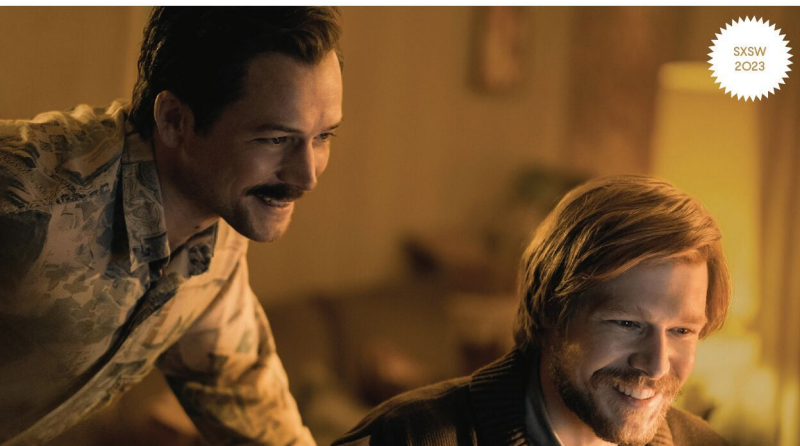
***The Handmaid's Tale* (2021)** Directors of episodic TV don't often get much attention, but actress Elisabeth Moss credited Garbus with bringing her own distinct voice to the Emmy-nominated finale of season four.



***Harry & Meghan* (2022)** "[Viewers] came for the love story, or the hot gossip, but were able to stay for other provocative and important stuff, [such as] the history of colonialism," says Garbus of the popular Netflix doc.

# Reviews

Film



Taron Egerton (left) as video game designer Henk Rogers and Nikita Efrimov as Alexey Pajitnov, his partner in commerce and creation.

## Tetris

Taron Egerton headlines a socioeconomically and geopolitically fraught video game origin story that's zippy and compelling, but could have cut deeper

By Lovia Gyarkye

Somewhere along the way in Jon S. Baird's fleet and compelling fictionalized look at the invention of Tetris, you forget you're watching a film about a video game.

Zippy car chases, farcical negotiation scenes and a tour of 1980s-era conference rooms around the world make *Tetris*, which premiered at SXSW and airs on Apple TV+ at the end of March, more than an ordinary origin story. Baird (*Stan & Ollie*) uses the convoluted licensing battle around the game to frame a sturdy and occasionally amusing drama about capitalism, intellectual property and the specter of the Soviet Union's dissolution. *Tetris*' willingness to tackle these themes makes it more absorbing

than your average streamer film, but it also makes you wish the movie further developed its ideas about the relationship between creative expression and greed.

The story starts in 1980s Las Vegas, where Henk Rogers (Taron Egerton), a Dutch national raised in New York and living in Japan, is trying to sell his game, Go, at a convention. His efforts to corral passersby are unsuccessful. Not only is Henk competing with the city's promise of slot-machine riches, but he's stationed next to a more gripping game: Tetris. The falling tetriminoes, which must be turned and flipped to create a complete line, have even stolen his salesgirl, who floated to the next station and never returned.

Like any good businessman, Henk investigates the competition. What he finds just a few feet away is an addictive puzzle, an enthralling composition of multicolored blocks. He impulsively buys the computer and arcade rights for Japan (a move he clumsily rationalizes to his bank manager, played by Rick Yune).

*Tetris* enralls everyone who

encounters the game, much as it does Henk. The game, invented by Russian computer engineer and game designer Alexey Pajitnov (portrayed by Nikita Efrimov) in 1984, was unlike anything on the market at the time. The simple aesthetic and straightforward goal (to create a complete row, which then disappears) drew players in. The brief thrill of incremental problem-solving kept them hooked.

*Tetris*' widespread appeal has been attributed — as it is by Pajitnov and a gallery of talking heads in the 2004 documentary *Tetris: From Russia With Love* — to its capacity to tap into a more creative part of the human psyche. The game inspired you to build something; it was, in Pajitnov's words in the doc, imbued with the “spirit of constructing.”

I suspect timing also played a part in the game's success. Tetris breached the digital walls of the

RELEASE DATE Friday, March 31  
(Apple TV+)

CAST Taron Egerton, Nikita Efrimov, Sofiya Lebedeva, Anthony Boyle, Ben Miles

DIRECTOR Jon S. Baird  
Rated R, 1 hour 58 minutes

Iron Curtain as the Soviet Union was on the brink of collapse. The game gained notoriety in Russia and then the rest of the Soviet countries before its license was acquired by Robert Stein (played by Toby Jones), a shrewd businessman who created a market out of sketchy license acquisitions. It linked, however tenuously, people around the world to a place they had been taught to fear.

*Tetris* efficiently covers this history in its opening moments through Henk's voiceover narration and expository sales pitch to his bank manager. But Baird is more interested in the bizarre events that subsequently made the game a runaway success internationally and eventually secured a credit for its creator. By truncating the early part of the game's origin story, the film pushes interesting questions about its underground distribution (Pajitnov copied it for friends, who copied it for other friends, etc.) to the margins.

Baird's approach is similar to David Fincher's in *The Social Network*, another film that uses a protracted legal battle to frame inquiries about greed and capitalism. Like the earlier movie, *Tetris*, with its dour visual palette, menacing score and jittery camera angles, plays like a thriller. But Baird adds flourishiness that save the film from cynicism, most notably the 16-bit animated interludes introducing characters as players and chapters as levels, and using Europe's “The Final Countdown” as a musical motif.

Noah Pink's screenplay gives us sound enough foundations to understand the motives of every character, but not enough to prevent them from occasionally feeling like avatars. Egerton's Henk, played with an earnest goofiness, becomes a symbol for integrity and honesty. More than





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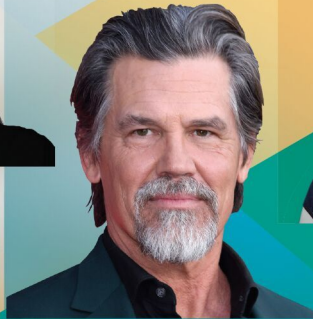
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## Reviews

Film & Television

the license for distribution, he wants Alexey, with whom he tries to develop a friendship, to receive credit and royalties. The other businessmen, like Robert and the billionaire Maxwells (Roger Allam plays shady patriarch Robert and Anthony Boyle is his thin-skinned son Kevin), couldn't care less about the inventor.

When Henk lands in Russia, he discovers a system unsympathetic to his Western ideals, and even more cultures. There's Nikolai Belikov (Oleg Stefan), the manager of Alexey's company, whose motivations boil down to getting the best deal for the Soviet Union. And corrupt KGB officer Valentin Trifonov (Igor Grabuzov) wants to secure a personal safety net before the regime topples. As the cadre of businessmen convene in Russia, the stakes get higher and the ridiculousness of the situation more apparent, making for an entertaining sequence of events. Desperate attempts to outbid one another land the businessmen in wild scenarios as the corrosive mix of money and power in the collapsing Soviet Union becomes clearer.

As *Tetris* hurtles toward its final act, the film raises more questions about intellectual property, capital and who loses when greed is prioritized above all else. There's also an attempt to punch up the thread about Henk and Alexey's friendship — they have a heart-to-heart dinner and then go dancing at a club — though that doesn't land as gracefully as the licensing storyline, with its more natural-feeling twists and turns.

Tucked into the film's triumphant ending are traces of a more provocative thesis about the geopolitical landscape into which *Tetris* was born. Who were the real winners and losers of this fraught licensing battle unfolding against the backdrop of a changing world order? With *Pet Shop Boys'* irony-steeped "Opportunities" playing over the end credits, I longed for a film that leaned into complexity as much as enjoyability. **B+**

Dominique Fishback (Bottom, with Chloé Bailey) plays a spiraling superfan.



## Swarm

Dominique Fishback's brilliant lead turn as a young woman obsessed with a pop star boosts a slippery new Amazon series

By Daniel Fienberg

Dominique Fishback's stretch as one of our most reliable and overlooked actresses should reach a turning point with Amazon's *Swarm*, a new seven-parter from Janine Nabers and Donald Glover. Anchoring nearly every second of the horror-comedy, Fishback (HBO's *The Deuce*, *Judas and the Black Messiah*) is scintillating, giving the sort of performance that had me instantly rewatching individual laugh-out-loud or heartbreaking moments.

The series itself is audacious, provocative and hard to describe. It commits fully, but goes after its satirical targets with a sledgehammer when occasionally a precision tool might have been preferable. It's also the kind of show that you want to sit with for a while, to allow it to marinate. I would be equally unsurprised if, with a bit more distance, it emerged as one of my favorites of the year or, conversely, curdled with time.

Fishback plays Dre, an awkward young woman living with her sister, Marissa (Chloé Bailey), in Houston. Marissa has a promising career as a makeup artist and a hunky boyfriend (Damson Idris). Dre has... Well, Dre has a deep affection for pop sensation Ni'Jah, even operating a Twitter feed catering to The Swarm, Ni'Jah's fearsome fan base. OK, fine. It's not just affection; it's obsession and, after Dre maxes out a credit card for Ni'Jah tickets, things begin to go very wrong.

With Glover behind the camera for the pilot, followed by Adamma Ebo (*Honk for Jesus. Save Your Soul*) and *Atlanta* vets Stephen Glover and Ibra Aké, *Swarm* feels like one of the unsettling stand-alone episodes that peppered the second half of *Atlanta*'s run, with layered allegory and varied genre beats. Without spoiling anything, there are installments (ranging from 26 to 37 minutes) that are disturbing and shockingly violent

and others that are ridiculously funny (and sometimes still shockingly violent). There are guest stars ranging from the underused (Rory Culkin) to the amusingly deployed (Paris Jackson) to a cameo in the fourth episode that's so perfect that anybody who ruins it beforehand should be cursed by an unfortunate run-in with Dre.

The most remarkable thing about the show's central performance is that while Dre seems to be a slightly different person in each episode, Fishback makes each transition feel organic. She's has a dull-eyed zombie quality one moment, proves an adroit physical comedian the next, is sympathetic and relatable in one interaction and chillingly sociopathic in the next. The characterization only grows richer and more complex in the second half of the season, as *Swarm* leans into efforts to pathologize Dre, spelling out factors that make her tick with a self-aware obviousness that suggests a satirizing of a popular corner of the Ryan Murphy oeuvre.

That obviousness may stick in your craw. There's mirth in the "Tee-hee, Ni'Jah is a lot like Beyoncé!" recognition of the first episode, but the more evident the parallel becomes, the less rewarding it is. Nor do I know how many points for perceptiveness I'm willing to give *Swarm* for its evisceration of toxic fandom and the performativity of online trolling. This is an instance where the show's tendency toward evasiveness and restlessness, which may alienate some viewers, becomes an asset: If you don't buy into the critiques of social media or celebrity culture, just stick around and you'll get to the tweaking of true crime or cult documentaries. There are a lot of targets.

You will not know what *Swarm* is after the pilot. Don't be concerned. It shape-shifts from love story to domestic melodrama to raucous adventure with a gang of strippers. And then there's an episode that completely turns the show's tone, style and structure on its head. Enjoy the warped shell game, treasure (and reward) Fishback's performance, and join me in waiting to see how the breadth-over-depth approach ages.

AIRDATE Friday, March 17 (Amazon)  
CAST Dominique Fishback, Chloé Bailey  
CREATORS Janine Nabers and Donald Glover





# THE FIRST STOP FOR FILM

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## Why is Hollywood afraid of Vietnam?

At 24 I volunteered for Vietnam as a civilian nurse in a primitive Vietnamese hospital caring for people caught in the crossfire. I opposed the war but fell in love with a gung-ho Marine who was involved with the CIA. Watch excerpts of a documentary on my medical team at [patriciawalsh.com](http://patriciawalsh.com) and download the screenplay I adapted from my memoir.

Peace, *Patricia L. Walsh*

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## On *Bosom Buddies*, Tom Hanks Became a Star in Drag

In 2023, anti-drag laws are being debated in at least 14 states, including Tennessee, the first to officially ban “adult cabaret performances” — which includes male or female impersonations — in public spaces or in the presence of children. But in 1980, drag formed the centerpiece of a new ABC sitcom. *Bosom Buddies* is notable for being the first big break for Tom Hanks, then 24, and paired him with relative newcomer Peter Scolari, then 25. They played Kip Wilson and Henry Desmond, respectively — two pals who assume female alter-egos named Buffy and Hildegard in order to live in an affordable women’s hotel in New York City. The show was conceived almost by accident by

Thomas L. Miller and Robert L. Boyett, the duo behind a raft of 1970s hit sitcoms including *Happy Days*, *Mork & Mindy* and *Laverne & Shirley*. *Buddies* was pitched to ABC as a male version of the latter, reminiscent of “a sophisticated Billy Wilder comedy.” Asked to elaborate, Miller and Boyett mentioned Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis’ rapport in 1959’s *Some Like It Hot*, leading ABC to order a pilot on the condition that the series also feature drag. With several key female parts already cast — including Holland Taylor as their ad agency boss — producers scoured New York, Chicago and Los Angeles for a couple of unknowns to play Kip and Henry. “One of them was this kid they found out of New York who was

understudying off-Broadway,” recalls *Buddies* director Joel Zwick of Hanks. “This was a guy with no real experience, but he knew exactly what he did well, and he just did it.” The show, which filmed at Paramount’s Stage 25 (later home to *Cheers* and *Frasier*), launched to strong ratings but was hampered by the 1980 SAG strike and network schedule tinkering. Then it lost some magic at the start of the second season, when Kip reveals his ruse to love interest Sonny (Donna Dixon). The comedy was not renewed. Even so, it remains beloved to many, including Hanks, who stayed close to his co-star until Scolari’s death in October 2021 from leukemia. Of the current wave of anti-drag legislation,

Zwick, 81, says: “They claim children are going to be hurt by drag shows. Well, might I suggest the parents don’t take their children to that drag show? The kid probably has no idea it’s not a woman anyway.” —SETH ABRAMOVITZCH

### TV REVIEW

#### *Bosom Buddies*

ABC, Nov. 27, 8:30-9 p.m.

“*Bosom Buddies*” is back on ABC’s schedule — thanks to the recent demise of “Maggie” — after a brief “hiatus,” and following an “interim” fall season appearance. The “*Buddies*” are Peter Scolari as Kip Wilson and Tom Hanks as Kip Wilson and Hildegard when they are dressed up in women’s clothing. Kip and Henry masquerade as women, it

Tom Hanks (left) and Peter Scolari as ad men masquerading as women on *Bosom Buddies*, which lasted two seasons on ABC.

The Hollywood Reporter, Vol. CDDXX, No. 10 (ISSN 0018-3660; USPS 247-580) is published weekly, 38 issues — two issues in April, July, October and December; three issues in February, June and September; four issues in January, March, May and August, and five issues in November; plus 28 special issues during the year, subject to change — by The Hollywood Reporter, LLC, at 11175 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90025. Periodical postage paid at Los Angeles, CA, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send all UAA to CFS. Non-postal and military facilities, send address changes to The Hollywood Reporter, P.O. Box 125, Congers, NY 10920-0125. Under Canadian Publication Mail Agreement No. 44650540, return undeliverable Canadian addresses to MSI, P.O. Box 2600, Mississauga, ON L4T 0A8. Direct all other correspondence to The Hollywood Reporter, 11175 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90025. Subscription inquiries: U.S., call toll-free (866) 555-2150. Outside the U.S., call (845) 267-4192, or email subscriptions@hollywoodreporter.com. Copyright © 2023 The Hollywood Reporter, LLC. All rights reserved. THR.com PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.



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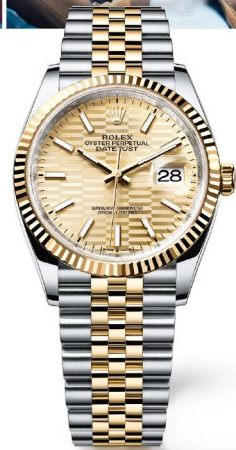




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