

Thurman, Daddario join Satrapi's 'Extraordinary Journey'

LOS ANGELES, Jan. 26. (Agencies): Uma Thurman ("Kill Bill"), Barkhad Abdi ("Captain Phillips") and Laurent Lafitte ("Little White Lies") have joined Bollywood star Dhanush in Marjane Satrapi's "The Extraordinary Journey of the Fakir." Alexandra Daddario ("True Detective," "San Andreas") is in advanced negotiations to take one of the lead roles.

TF1 International reps the English-language project and will kick off pre-sales at Berlin's European Film Market.

Gemma Arterton ("Hansel and Gretel"), Abel Jafri ("Timbuktu") and Seema Biswas ("The Queen of Hearts") complete the cast.

"Extraordinary Journey" will mark the most ambitious project

undertaken by Satrapi, the Iranian-born French comicbook artist and filmmaker behind Cannes jury prize winner "Persepolis" and "Chicken With Plums."

Satrapi made her English-language debut with "The Voices" starring Ryan Reynolds. Luc Bossi's Brio Films is lead producing. Vamonos Films, Italy's Paco Cinematografica and India's Little Red Car are co-producing. "Extraordinary Journey" has already been picked up by SquareOne in Germany.

Adventure

The comedy adventure tale is based on Romain Puertolas' best-selling debut novel "The Extraordinary Journey of the Fakir Who Got Trapped in an Ikea Wardrobe,"

which came out in 2014 and has been translated into 35 languages. The novel follows the pilgrimage of a con man from India to an IKEA in Paris.

Satrapi's film will follow the epic journey of a wild storyteller from New Delhi to Paris, where he falls in love with a woman and accidentally gets deported, along with a band of African refugees, to the far corners of Europe.

"It's a story about love, magic and adventure and it takes place across three continents. I'm drawn to fantasy stories and I love creating worlds that don't exist, imagining things in bigger and more beautiful ways," said Satrapi, who aims at weaving fantasy with realism, grounding the story in today's world and touching

on the condition of refugees.

Bossi, who co-wrote the big screen adaptation with Puertolas and Jon Goldman ("Diplomacy"), said the film shared similarities with Wes Anderson's "Grand Budapest Hotel," Woody Allen's "Midnight in Paris" and Roberto Benigni's "Life Is Beautiful." Spearheaded by Avy Kaufman, the international casting is a key element of this project. Satrapi placed a large emphasis on bringing together a wide range of actors coming from diverse horizons to reflect the book's spirit.

Dhanush follows the footsteps of a growing number of Indian stars who have been getting international parts over the last year. Recent examples include Irrfan Khan ("Jurassic World"), Anil Kapoor ("24"),

Priyanka Chopra ("Quantico") and Om Puri ("The Hundred Foot Journey").

Pic will be shooting in June in Paris, Rome, Jodhpur and Casablanca with a crew that includes cinematographer Maxime Alexandre ("Warrior's Gate," "The Voices").

Satrapi is repped by UTA, Thurman is repped by CAA and Abdi is repped by SMS Talent. Daddario is repped by UTA and Untitled Entertainment.

Patrick Frater contributed to this report.

German filmmaker Werner Herzog on Monday blasted social media as a forum for "stupidity" as he presented his new documentary about

the Internet at the Sundance Film Festival.

"What does impress you about 100,000 tweets, 100,000 times stupidities in 140 characters?" the legendary director told reporters when asked about the importance of Twitter and other social media in today's society.

"What is so phenomenal about it?" he asked. "I have never seen a single tweet that I found interesting at all."

He said he hoped "Lo and Behold: Reveries of the Connected World," a 10-part essay that explores the birth of the Internet and its repercussions, would spur people to reexamine their addiction to the Internet and "pay attention to what is going on."

Film

Variety



A model presents a creation for Christian Dior during the 2016-17 spring/summer Haute Couture collection fashion presentation on Jan. 25. (AFP) — See Page 23

Film

'A Good Wife' classically styled directorial debut by Karanovic

'Halal Love' comedy related to culture

LOS ANGELES, Jan. 26. (RTRS): Lebanese helmer Assad Fouladkar's "Halal Love (and Sex)" just received its North American premiere in Sundance, following a gala screening at the Dubai Intl Film Festival in December. The film's comedic take on issues of love and sex have a specific Middle Eastern flavor, addressing topics usually considered taboo, yet they're also universal in addressing the eternal male-female divide. Fouladkar received multiple awards with his 2001 debut feature, "When Maryam Spoke Out," and is the director of the hit Egyptian sitcom "A Man and Six Ladies" (Ragel W Sit Sitat).

Question: How would you describe comedy in the Middle East?

Answer: Comedy is very related to culture. It's so hard to find something funny when it's related to a country you don't know. For comedy, how it translates depends on the audience. Are they laughing at the film, or are they laughing at the religion, or laughing at the people? This is why I've been very nervous about the different reactions: will Arabs feel offended? And in the West, will they think they're watching people doing something weird?

I feel my film is real, because I'm living in a place with real difficulties, real problems, and this is how we express ourselves in that place. It was a very tough script at the beginning. I was so free, I was just writing, and then when I started to realize that I'm going to direct this, and this is going to be a real film, this is when I felt, wow, you know, it could be a bit different. And sometimes some scenes could be understood differently. Sometimes I wish I did drama, which is much, much, easier than making comedies. Especially about this kind of issue.

Q: There's been a big gap between your last feature and this one. What have you been working on during this period?

A: It's not that it took me a long time to get back to making another movie; it took me a long time to get this script done. Almost eight

years. And then I had another script that also went to Sundance Lab, more than 10 years ago. I got an award from another festival for that script, but it's still not produced. Hopefully now it's time to do the other scripts.

We don't have much of a film industry in Lebanon, so every time you're starting from scratch. And no one is supporting the film industry, so you have to find other work as well. I worked in TV, I was also teaching, and this took a lot of my time. And then I went to Egypt and did TV work, which I'm still doing. And I enjoy this work.

Q: Have you found room for creativity in your television work?

A: I was limited by the format, which is a sitcom. There were practically no Arab sitcoms before, at least no successful sitcoms before. Mine was very successful, and now we've finished the 10th season. It's called "A Man and Six Ladies." I got myself more into comedy with that sitcom, with the situations, the stories and the way people laugh. How they laugh, and why.

Q: What would you say are your comic influences?

A: This is a cliché, but definitely Fellini. "Amarcord." The Italian way is very close to the Middle Eastern way. With Fellini, you don't feel there's a difference between drama and comedy. I love laughing while watching a drama, and crying while watching a comedy. When it's a black comedy, we don't watch only to laugh; when we observe the characters, we laugh because of the ways they react to their problems. This is how Fellini was in his movies. We cannot simply place him as a comedian. He was just very real.

Q: How did Germany's Razor Films come on board for "Halal Love (and Sex)"?

A: The whole thing started seven, eight years ago. I had a Lebanese producer, and we decided this is the kind of film that will have international interest, so the first step was

looking for a foreign producer. When Gerhard Meixner and Roman Paul from Razor got the script, the whole thing started to speed up; they made things possible. Razor was the right company to work with.

Q: Were they with you on the shoot in Lebanon?

A: Oh, they were with me during the whole process. We went through script editing — it was very interesting for me to get the opinion of someone in the West, because I'm very involved in the whole issue, and I needed opinions from someone from a different country that what I'm doing is working, and what I'm doing is funny.

Q: What are you hoping for from the Sundance audiences?

A: Sundance is kind of a dream for me. Having my film in Sundance is a big thing. Seriously. What am I looking for there? Getting to the audiences in the West, in America. It's a totally different opinion in America, and I'm interested to see how it's going to be received. I'm not thinking beyond this, other than the personal pleasure of being there.

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The repressed return with a vengeance in "A Good Wife," a classically styled directorial debut for acclaimed actress-turned-helmer Mirjana Karanovic, who also takes the lead role in this tale of a middle-aged woman in postwar Serbia forced to face several unpleasant truths. Brave on many levels, it may be perceived by some as naive — or, with regard to its political context, simply too little, too late. Karanovic's reputation and the pic's femme p.o.v. should see it hitched to further fests, with niche distribution a possibility in sympathetic territories.

Milena (Karanovic) is a nice-looking, 50-ish housewife with a comfortable home in a small Vojvodina suburb, not far from Belgrade. As part of a generation of women in thrall to their husbands, who consider motherhood and

homemaking their primary role, Milena feels well off compared to many of her friends. Although hubby Vlada (Boris Isakovic, who recently played a nasty piece of work in the Dutch Oscar submission "The Paradise Suite") may not be the tenderest or most sensitive man in the world, he is a good provider of material things — and not a skirt chaser, unlike others in his former paramilitary unit. Yet it also saddens her that he is estranged from their eldest daughter Natasha (Hristina Popovic), who works for a human rights NGO in Belgrade.

After a doctor's appointment confirms something she was trying to ignore — a lump in her breast — Milena embarks on a furious bout of cleaning. She happens upon a videotape from happier times, but to her surprise, it also contains some shocking wartime footage of Vlada's unit arbitrarily executing bound and frightened Bosnian civilians. Now viewing the world through more alert eyes, Milena must reconsider everything that she once took for granted in her life; as she continues to study her husband and their milieu, a craving for justice subsumes her desire for affection.

Karanovic and her co-screenwriters Stevan Filipovic and Darko Lungulov (who directed Karanovic to great effect in "Here and There") apply the metaphor of removing a malignancy both to the cancer in Milena's breast and to the war criminals still extant in Serbian society. The extended opening and closing images of Karanovic's rep courage on her part; so, at a more practical level, does her delving into crimes committed by the paramilitaries.

As a performer, Karanovic has continued to collaborate with filmmakers from other parts of former Yugoslavia after the country's dissolution. Certain significant roles, such as the raped Bosnian mother in "Grbavica" (also from "A Good Wife" co-producer Jasmila Zbanic) and the Croatian widow in Vinko Bresan's "Witnesses," have not endeared her to political elements back in Serbia.

LOS ANGELES: Nate Parker's "The Birth of a Nation," a brutal, emotionally charged drama about Nat Turner, who led a slave rebellion in 1831, received the most enthusiastic standing ovation at this year's Sundance Film Festival so far.

The movie, which premiered on Monday afternoon, had the crowd at the Eccles Theater in Park City, Utah, cheering for Parker, who not only stars as Turner, but also directed, produced and wrote the picture.

"I made this film for one reason: creating change agents," Parker said after the premiere in a Q&A where he brought more than 40 members of the cast and crew onstage. He noted that there are "systems in place that are corrupt and corrupted people, and the legacy of that still lives with us."

Parker said he spent seven years working to get the film to the big screen. "It was extremely difficult for many reasons," he said. "The first was our subject matter: anytime we are dealing with our history, specifically slavery, I found that desperately sanitized. There's a resistance, I'll say, to dealing with this material." He said that financiers told him they weren't sure there was an audience for the story, and that "people overseas don't want to see people of color" in a movie. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: Sony Pictures has landed international distribution rights for Alcon Entertainment's "Blade Runner" sequel.

Warner Bros Pictures is distributing in North America and Canada through its output agreement with Alcon.

Denis Villeneuve is directing the film, starring Ryan Gosling and Harrison Ford, who is reprising his role as Rick Deckard. Hampton Fancher (co-writer of the original movie) and Michael Green have penned the original screenplay based on an idea by Fancher and Ridley Scott.

The story takes place several decades after the conclusion of Scott's iconic 1982 original, which was set in a 2019 Los Angeles, and based on the Philip K.

Dick short story "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?"

Alcon Entertainment acquired the film, television and ancillary franchise rights to "Blade Runner" in 2011 from the late producer Bud Yorkin and Cynthia Sikes Yorkin to produce prequels and sequels to the iconic science-fiction thriller. Sikes Yorkin will



Gosling



Ford

produce along with Johnson and Kosove. Bud Yorkin will receive producer credit.

Frank Giustra and Tim Gamble, CEOs of Thunderbird Films, will serve as executive producers. Scott will also executive produce. (RTRS)

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LOS ANGELES: Leading

Chinese actress and director Vicky Zhao Wei is to direct an animated feature film version of "My Fair Princess," the show that made her a star. Production will be through Alibaba Pictures Group, the film production and investment arm of Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba.

Zhao was the star of the 1990s period drama show

that is arguably one of the most commercially-successful Chinese-produced TV series of all time. The show in which an orphaned girl unexpectedly rises to become royalty, was widely exported within Asia.

The show propelled Zhao and co-star Fan Bingbing to celebrity. It was jointly produced by Taiwan's Yi Ren Communica-

tions and China's Hunan Broadcasting, a production which helped Hunan to become one of China's biggest TV groups.

Alibaba Pictures confirmed the information in emails to Variety. Zhao who was star of "ShaoLin Soccer," "Red Cliff," and "Painted Skin," switched tack and in 2014 directed hit drama film "So Young." (RTRS)