

From 'Kane' to 'Post', a history of newspaper film scores

LOS ANGELES, Dec 25, (RTRS): When Steven Spielberg's "The Post" opened last Friday, John Williams joined an exclusive club: that handful of composers who have successfully tackled one of the most difficult genres to score: the newspaper movie.

"The Post" is Williams' 28th film for the director and could, when the Oscar nominations are announced a month from now, become his 51st. He already has five Academy Awards and is the most-nominated living person.

In general, composers say, newspaper movies are tough assignments. First, they tend to be verbose and expository; and second, they are often as objective as the journalists they depict, and manipulative music may seem out of place. Yet, over the years, some have produced compelling music to complement powerful dialogue.

Orson Welles' "Citizen Kane" (1941) was the first film score to be composed by the legendary Bernard Herrmann, who had spent much of the previous decade working with Welles in radio. Here, the Boston Pops (with Williams conducting) performs "The Inquirer," a boisterous 19th-century-style can-can for newspaper magnate Charles Foster Kane and the war between his Inquirer newspaper and the rival Chronicle.

Herrmann was Oscar-nominated for the "Kane" score but actually won for another RKO movie the same year: "All That Money Can Buy," also known as "The Devil and Daniel Webster."

For "Sweet Smell of Success" (1957), about a powerful newspaper columnist (Burt Lancaster) and a press agent (Tony Curtis) who carries favor with him, composer Elmer Bernstein wrote a jazzy theme that suggested the seedy side of midtown Manhattan.

"I was struck by the kind of raw, nasty quality of the film," Bernstein

said years later. "The score really starts with a kind of anger, a screaming energetic nastiness." Bernstein's music reflected the bitter, cynical tone of the film as well as the high-pitched energy of New York's theater district in the 1950s.

The most evocative title in this genre is undoubtedly "The Front Page," which originated as a 1928 play by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur and was turned into a movie in 1931, then remade in 1940 as "His Girl Friday." But the best of the "Front Page" scores is the one that famed big-band arranger Billy May wrote for Billy Wilder's 1974 remake with Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau.

Stylistic

Borrowing from the stylistic success of "The Sting," whose Scott Joplin rags won the adaptation-score Oscar the previous year, May wrote "The Front Page Rag" as a lively accompaniment to a main-title montage of typesetting and newsprint in late 1920s Chicago. May's single reached no. 20 on the adult contemporary charts in early 1975.

Another film from decades past focused on the Washington Post: "All the President's Men" (1976), about Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's Watergate expose that ended up toppling a president. It won four Oscars, but not for its music, which was disqualified as being too short a score. There is less than 12 minutes of music in the film.

Composer David Shire remembers: "It was particularly difficult because when I first saw it, I said to Pakula, 'I'd love to be part of this but I can't think of how I could help it. Where are we going to put a score that won't take away its edge?'"

Pakula's idea, Shire says, was that "at the heart of it is two guys

whose hearts are beating faster and faster." The score is minimal and low-key, like the journalists themselves, constantly moving forward as the reporters push and prod their way to the truth. Says Shire: "It was harder to write that score than a lot of the big, bombastic ones." (He later won his Oscar for the song from 1979's "Norma Rae.")

Ron Howard's "The Paper" (1994) focused on a day in the life of a New York tabloid editor (Michael Keaton), his reporter wife (Marisa Tomei), his boss (Robert Duvall) and a fellow editor (Glenn Close). This was the second of two movies that composer-songwriter Randy Newman did for Howard ("Parenthood" was five years earlier) and he earned Best Song Oscar nominations for both.

Newman's score makes great use of percussion to emphasize the never-ending deadlines in the news business. And his irreverent end-title song "Make Up Your Mind" - the sixth of his 20 Oscar nominations for either song or score (he later won two for Pixar films) - is classic Newman in style and tone:

The only newspaper movie to win a Best Picture Oscar, "Spotlight" (2015) was based on the true story of the Boston Globe team that exposed the child sex-abuse scandal in Boston's Catholic diocese. Mark Ruffalo and Rachel McAdams portrayed dogged reporters, Michael Keaton and Liev Schreiber their hard-nosed editors.

Howard Shore's score was alternately propulsive, thoughtful, melancholy and questioning, mirroring the moods of the film. The piano is its primary voice. "The movie is about truthfulness," Shore told Variety at the time, "and the piano has a certain gracefulness and honesty about it. Its essence is this black-and-white world. I thought it related to the black-and-white journalistic aspects of the paper."

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This image released by STXFilms shows Idris Elba (left), and Jessica Chastain in a scene from 'Molly's Game' which releases in the US on Jan 5. (AP)

Film

Spielberg's 'Post' performs powerfully

'Last Jedi' dominates movie galaxy

LOS ANGELES, Dec 25, (Agencies): "Star Wars: The Last Jedi" is continuing its dominance over the movie galaxy as expected, outpacing three new releases. The eighth installment in the Disney-owned space saga is expected to add another nearly \$69 million to its coffers over the weekend, according to studio estimates Sunday.

Sony's adventure caper "Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle" debuted in second place with \$34 million. A pair of critically panned new musicals followed: Universal's "Pitch Perfect 3" opened in third place with \$20.4 million and Fox's "The Greatest Showman" debuted in fourth with \$8.6 million.

These three new releases collectively earned less than "The Last Jedi" since opening on Friday.

"It's an overwhelming array of options at the movie theater, which could prove daunting to most moviegoers," said box office analyst Paul Dergarabedian of comScore. "But you'd have to be a Scrooge not to find a movie you like in this marketplace." Sony's president of distribution, Adrian Smith, said he was "absolutely pleased" with the performance of "Jumanji" so far.

"It's above our expectations," he said. "We have incredible momentum as we head into one of the biggest movie-going weeks of the year." Dergarabedian said the period between Christmas and New Year's Day is traditionally among the busiest times at the Cineplex. Families are together and theaters are brimming with blockbusters and awards-season hopefuls. Two celebrated films, "Darkest Hour" and "The Shape of Water," expanded to hundreds more screens this weekend.

Steven Spielberg's "The Post" has debuted strongly in its platform opening with \$495,000 at nine sites for Friday-Sunday for an impressive \$55,000 per location average.

"The Post," starring Tom Hanks as Ben Bradlee and Meryl Streep as Katherine Graham, is projected to take in another \$215,000 on Christmas Day on Monday for a \$720,000 four-day domestic total for Fox. The film - playing at three Los Angeles locations, three in New York City and three in the Washington, D.C., area - will go into wide release on Jan. 12.

The National Board of Review has named "The Post"

as the best film of 2017 with Hanks and Streep taking the top acting awards. The film also received six Golden Globe nominations.

"The Post" centers on the 1971 legal battle faced by The Washington Post over publication of the Pentagon Papers, which provided previously undisclosed details over the involvement of the US government in the Vietnam War. The cast includes Alison Brie, Carrie Coon, David Cross, Bruce Greenwood, Tracy Letts, Bob Odenkirk, Sarah Paulson, Jesse Plemons, Matthew Rhys, Michael Stuhlbarg, Bradley Whitford and Zach Woods.

The launch for "The Post" represents the seventh-best average per screen opening of 2017. "Call Me By Your Name" posted the best average for a three-day limited opening of the year during the Nov 24-26 weekend with \$412,932 at four locations for a per-screen of \$103,233 for Sony Classics.

A24's "Lady Bird" had the second best opening during the Nov 3-5 frame with \$364,437 at four sites for a \$91,109 average, followed by Focus Features' "The Shape of Water" with \$166,564 at two venues during Dec. 1-3 for an \$83,282 per-screen average. Fox Searchlight's "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri" debuted with \$322,168 at four screens on Nov 17-19 for an \$80,542 average.

Neon-30West's launch of "I, Tonya" took in \$264,155 at four sites on Dec. 8-10 for a \$66,039 average and A24's opening of "The Disaster Artist" launched with \$1.2 million at 19 locations on Dec. 1-3 for a per-screen figure of \$63,755.

Multiplexes

Disney-Lucasfilm's "Star Wars: The Last Jedi" is showing plenty of force at multiplexes worldwide with \$745.4 million globally as of Sunday.

The North American take has hit \$365 million in its first 10 days as of Sunday with the studio projecting another \$32 million on Christmas Day on Monday - making it the third highest domestic release in 2017 following "Beauty and the Beast" with \$504 million and "Wonder Woman" at \$412 million.

"Star Wars: The Last Jedi" took in \$75.1 million in 55 markets for the weekend and has totaled \$380.3

million in international box office. It is already the top grossing film of 2017 in both Denmark and Sweden and this fourth highest grosser in the overall European market. The U.K. is the top market with \$67.4 million, followed by Germany with \$40 million, France with \$29.3 million and Australia with \$26.9 million.

"The Last Jedi," which picks up following the events of 2015's "Star Wars: The Force Awakens," is so far the 87th highest worldwide grosser of all time, trailing 2016's "Suicide Squad" by \$1.4 million. Rian Johnson directed with Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher, Adam Driver, Daisy Ridley, John Boyega, Oscar Isaac, Andy Serkis, Lupita Nyong'o and Domhnall Gleeson reprising their roles. It's the final screen role for Fisher, who died a year ago.

"The Last Jedi" has lifted 2017's overall domestic box office to \$10.6 billion as of Sunday, 2.6% behind 2016 at the same point, according to comScore. That gap has been as high as 6.1% at the end of August as this year's box office was pulled down by the slowest summer in a decade.

Sony's "Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle" and Universal's "Pitch Perfect 3" have also opened solidly while Fox's "The Greatest Showman" is drawing respectably at the domestic box office. Fox also saw an impressive platform debut for awards contender "The Post." But moviegoers are showing little interest in Paramount's "Downsizing" and Warner Bros.-Alcon's "Father Figures."

"As we hit the home stretch of 2017, an incredibly crowded movie marketplace drives a respectable holiday frame as moviegoers faced a daunting decision making process with an almost insurmountable number of movies from which to choose over this holiday season as we head toward the end of one of the craziest and most volatile box office years on record," said Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst with comScore.

"Star Wars: The Last Jedi" opened with the second-largest North American launch ever in its first weekend with \$220 million. It faced competition for the first time on Dec. 20, with Sony's action comedy "Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle," which is leading the rest of the pack with \$34 million at 3,765 sites for Friday-Sunday and a six-day total of around \$64 million.

LOS ANGELES: How can you resist the trailer for "Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again"?

Universal Pictures has debuted the first look at the highly-anticipated sequel to 2008's "Mamma Mia!" last week. The footage shows a pregnant Sophie (Amanda Seyfried) welcoming her mom's best friends Tanya (Christine Baranski) and Rosie (Julie Walters) back to Greece to help her prepare for motherhood.

"Your mother was the bravest person we ever knew," Rosie says. "Let me tell you how she did it, all on her own."

Through a series of flashbacks featuring Lily James' young Donna, we learn about her mom's (Meryl Streep) youth. In a shocking twist, the trailer seems to tease Donna's untimely death. The footage also offers a glimpse at Cher, who plays Sophie's grandmother. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: Malaysian film, "Redha" was named as the winner of the audience prize at the Luang Prabang Film Festival, in Laos. The 8th edition of the festival, concluded recently.

The film, directed by Tunku Mona Riza, is the story of a couple who struggle to come to terms with the disabilities presented by their autistic son.

The festival, which focuses on Southeast Asian cinema, played 32 feature films and four programs of short films.

Variety contributor, Kong Rithdee curated the spotlight on Thailand section comprising a full day of screenings and discussion of the issues facing Thai filmmakers today. Filmmakers in attendance included Anocha Suwichakornpong ("By the Time it Gets Dark"), Sompol Chidgasornpongse ("Railway Sleepers"), Boonsong Nakphoo ("Wandering"), Laddawan Rattanadilokchai ("The Couple"), Sakchai Deenan (the upcoming "Memories of New Years"), and Sanchai Chotirosaranee (Thai Film Archive, representing "Santi-Vina"). Other discussions included one on Muslim voices in cinema, and another on documentary film

making. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: China's Film Bureau has announced an incentive scheme to reward movie theaters that increase box office scores for local films. The move will take effect from Jan 1, 2018. The scheme rewards theaters that derive more than 55% of their



Seyfried



Streep

box office revenues from Chinese films, allowing them to keep half of a 5% tax they pay on ticket sales. There are bigger bonuses for those that score 60% and 66%.

This is not the first time that China has announced such a scheme. In March last year it said that theaters earning 66% could keep half the tax. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: Deon Cole and RonReaco Lee have both joined the cast of "#2Minute-softFame." Variety has learned exclusively.

The movie is centered on an up-and-coming social media sensation attempting to become a stand-up comedy star. Jay Pharoah is playing the lead, along with Katt Williams, Keke

Palmer and Andy Allo. Leslie Small is directing the from a script by Devon Shepard and Yamara Taylor. Jeff Clanagan and Paul Hall are producing.

The movie's plot ties in with Laugh Out Loud, the streaming network which helps to break comic talent. Lionsgate's Codeblack Films will handle the release. (RTRS)