

Film

Queen Latifah to star in true-life drama 'Hope's Wish'

LOS ANGELES, Feb 27, (RTRS): Queen Latifah will star in the inspirational true-life drama "Hope's Wish."

Production will start on April 9 in North Carolina. Alcon Entertainment co-founders and co-CEOs Andrew Kosove and Broderick Johnson made the announcement on Monday. Los Angeles-based finance and production company Torridon/16:14 will finance and produce with Alcon Entertainment, continuing the companies' collaboration that began with "Blade Runner 2049."

Walden Media is set to produce alongside Steven P. Wegner, and Val Hill and Yale Badik of Torridon/16:14. Alcon's Kosove and Johnson will executive produce. The film will be released by Warner Bros. via Alcon's output deal with the studio.

Laurie Collyer, whose credits include "Sherrybaby" and "Furlough," will direct the film from screenwriter Diana Ossana ("Brokeback Mountain"), adapted from Stuart & Shelby Stout's non-fiction "Hope's Wish: How One Girl's Dream Made Others Come True."

"Hope's Wish" is based on the true story of Hope Stout, a precocious 12-year-old girl, who, when diagnosed with a life-threatening disease, sets out on a mission to fund the wishes of 155 other health-challenged children with the help of Make-A-Wish Foundation executive Toni Dubois (Latifah) and the community of Charlotte, N.C.

Latifah's recent acting credits include the Universal comedy "Girls Trip," co-starring Tiffany Haddish and Jada Pinkett Smith, and the Emmy-winning HBO film "Bessie." She is repped by CAA, Shakim Compere, and Randi Michel.



Lionsgate has moved back Taron Egerton's "Robin Hood" back two months from Sept 21 for a Nov 21 release — the second time the movie has been pushed back.

Taron Egerton's 'Robin Hood' moved back

Lionsgate announced Monday that it had set a Sept 14 slot with its film noir thriller "A Simple Favor," starring Anna Kendrick, Blake Lively, and Henry Golding.

Egerton is starring in the Robin Hood origin story along with Jamie Foxx as Little John and Eve Hewson as Maid Marian. "Fifty Shades of Grey" star Jamie Dornan will portray Will Scarlett, the half-brother of Robin Hood.

Otto Bathurst is directing "Robin Hood" from Joby Harold's script. Producers are Leonardo DiCaprio, Jennifer Davisson, Basil Iwanyk, Tory Tunnell, and Harold. Production companies are DiCaprio's Appian Way, Safehouse Pictures, and Iwanyk's Thunder Road Pictures. The story will center on Robin Hood being a war-hardened crusader and joining with a Moorish commander in an audacious revolt against the corrupt English crown.

"Robin Hood" is opening against four other wide releases on the pre-Thanksgiving weekend — MGM's "Creed 2," Disney's "Ralph Breaks the Internet: Wreck-It Ralph 2," STX's Jennifer Lopez comedy "Second Act," and Universal's untitled Robert Zemeckis project. "Robin Hood" was originally set to open on March 18 of this year.

"Robin Hood" received strong recently response from buyers at the Berlin Film Festival.

"A Simple Favor" centers on Kendrick's character trying to uncover the truth behind the disappearance of her best friend, portrayed by Lively. Golding plays the husband of Lively's character. Paul Feig is directing the film. Feig and Jessie Henderson are producing through their Feigco production company. Jessica Sharzer wrote the script based on Darcy Bell's book of the same name.



After bowing out to direct the sequel to "The Equalizer," director Antoine Fuqua looks to have come back into the fray to direct Univer-

sal's new re-imagining of "Scarface." Sources tell Variety that, while an official offer is not yet on the table, discussions are underway for Fuqua to direct the film.

Fuqua left the project just over a year ago when his commitments to "The Equalizer" sequel forced him to drop out. The studio would eventually turn to David Ayer to helm the project, but the "Suicide Squad" and "Bright" director ended up parting ways with movie due to scheduling conflicts, which opened up the door for Fuqua's return.

Universal originally set the film to open this August, but it was recently taken off the calendar.

The latest script was written by Ayer, Jonathan Herman, and Joel Coen and Ethan Coen. The film will be produced by Dylan Clark for his Dylan Clark Productions. Scott Stuber will executive produce. Martin Bregman, producer of the 1983 "Scarface" film, will also produce.



Paramount Pictures has given its live-action "Dora the Explorer" movie a late summer release date of Aug 2, 2019.

Michael Bay and his Platinum Dunes partners, Andrew Form and Brad Fuller, are producing the movie, which has been in the works since 2015. "Dora the Explorer" is being developed through the studio's Paramount Players division, which hired writer-director Nick Stoller in October to work on the script. James Bobin, whose credits include "Alice Through the Looking Glass" and "Muppets Most Wanted", is attached to direct "Dora."

The animated "Dora the Explorer" television series ran on Nickelodeon from 2000-2014 for eight seasons with 172 episodes aired, and followed a young Latina girl who went on adventures around the world. The movie will center on Dora as a teenager moving to the city and living with her cousin.

Variety



Models wear creations part of Atsushi Nakashima women's Fall/Winter 2018-2019 collection, presented during the Milan Fashion Week in Milan, on Feb 26. (AP) — See Page 17

Film

Oscars forge new credibility in the furnace of scandal

Leading movies hit with backlash

LOS ANGELES, Feb 27, (Agencies): For some, "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri" is a movie about an angry mother seeking justice. But others cannot get past its racist cop, who they feel is unfairly redeemed.

"Call Me By Your Name" is hailed as a heartbreaking gay romance, but some are puzzled that the filmmakers cast two straight actors to play the lead roles.

While recent years have seen the Oscars attacked for under-representing women or people of color, this year's contenders have been plagued by backlash and scandals ranging from accusations of plagiarism, sexual misconduct, and criticism from gay and African-American communities.

"Every main contender seems to have a knock on it," said Dave Karger, special correspondent for movie database IMDb.com.

Hollywood's three-month-long awards season, culminating in the Oscars ceremony on Sunday, along with the influence of social media, has fueled such criticism.

Fantasy "The Shape of Water," which has a leading 13 nominations, was hit with a copyright infringement lawsuit last week alleging that its plot about a mute cleaner who falls for a mysterious river creature was lifted, without credit, from a 1969 play by late American playwright Paul Zindel.

Studio Fox Searchlight said the claims are "baseless (and) wholly without merit."

20th Century Fox's press freedom movie "The Post" has seen sniping over misperceptions that The Washington Post broke a story in 1971 about the classified Pentagon Papers study of the Vietnam War, and not the New York Times.

The loudest complaints have been leveled at Fox Searchlight's best picture front-runner "Three Billboards." Critics feel the dark comedy's portrayal of a dim-witted and small-town racist cop, played by Sam Rockwell, is an affront to deep-seated prejudice that still exists in the United States and have called it "tone-deaf" and "hopelessly bad on race."

British director Martin McDonagh, who also wrote the screenplay, has defended the film.

"I don't think his (Rockwell's) character is redeemed at all. He starts off as a racist jerk, he's pretty much the same at the end, but by the end he's seen that he has to change," McDonagh told Entertainment Weekly in a February interview.

"It's supposed to be a deliberately messy and difficult film. Because it's a messy and difficult world," McDonagh added.

Backlash

The backlash has not so far derailed the path of "Three Billboards" to best picture wins at the Golden Globes, Screen Actors Guild and British BAFTAs, as well as multiple awards for Rockwell and lead actress Frances McDormand.

"People often latch onto the Oscars as a way of promoting their causes," said Tim Gray, awards editor at Hollywood trade publication Variety.

The #MeToo movement likely benefited Christopher Plummer, who got a supporting actor Oscar nod after replacing Kevin Spacey last November in Sony Pictures kidnapping drama "All the Money in the World." Spacey's scenes were reshot after he was accused by multiple men of sexual harassment. He apologized for one incident and has retreated from public life.

As for Sony Pictures Classic's "Call Me By Your Name," director Luca Guadagnino, who is gay, said he cast straight actors Armie Hammer and Oscar nominee Timothee Chalamet as the film's young lovers based on what he thought they could bring to the roles.

Final ballots went out to the 8,000 or so Academy members on Feb. 20, but Karger thinks voters pay less attention to such controversies than the media.

"I think a lot of voters are really focused on the films and the performances and not the noise," he said.

With the Oscars just days away, industry figures have tried to strike a reflective, humble tone in light of a glut

of recent controversies that have dogged Hollywood.

From the #OscarsSoWhite row of 2016 to the Weinstein sexual misconduct scandal currently engulfing the business, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences is acutely aware of the need to project a more wholesome image.

The good news is that both the viewing public and the deep-pocketed advertisers who make the annual telecast so lucrative, far from being fazed by Tinseltown's manifold iniquities, seem to trust the Oscars brand more than ever.

"There is no doubt that Oscar has made a total turnaround," said celebrity branding expert Jeetendr Sehdev, author of a recent study on attitudes to the glitzy climax of Hollywood's annual awards season.

"It's a phenomenal achievement for the leaders of the Academy, not only because the brand has been highly discredited and distrusted over the past few years but also because of the politically charged environment in Hollywood."

Sehdev, an influential academic with more than a million followers on social media, solicits opinions about the rich and famous from 2,000 randomly-selected adults in the US as part of an ongoing study established in 2012.

In his most recent survey, entitled "The Power of the Oscar," 71 percent of respondents said they saw the Oscars brand as trustworthy — up from 51 percent in 2015.

Around three quarters agreed that the Oscars was a premium entertainment brand and that the annual show is "innovative," while 69 percent said the brand was "visionary" — a rise from less than half in 2015.

This is despite a now-infamous mixup in the 2017 ceremony that resulted in Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway being handed the wrong envelope for the best picture announcement.

A big factor in improving trust has been major reforms within the 8,500-strong Academy after a second consecutive crop of all-white acting nominees in 2016 prompted calls for a boycott and widespread outrage on social media.

LOS ANGELES: Disney-Marvel's "Black Panther" wound up with a \$111.7 million second weekend in North America — \$3.7 million above Sunday's estimates.

The studio's final figures showed \$28.8 million on Friday, \$47.6 million on Saturday, and \$35.3 million on Sunday. That brings the 10-day domestic total to \$403.6 million.

The figures mean that "Black Panther," starring Chadwick Boseman, declined only 45% in its second weekend for the second-highest second weekend of all time, behind only "Star Wars: The Force Awakens" at \$149 million. It's now the 26th-highest domestic grosser of all time, trailing Sony's 2002 "Spider-Man" by \$100,000 (RTRS)



LOS ANGELES: HBO released its first look at "Fahrenheit 451," starring Michael B. Jordan and Michael Shannon.

Based on Ray Bradbury's 1953 dystopian novel of the same name, the film follows a futuristic American society where books are burned to censor and destroy knowledge.

"By the time you guys grow up, there won't be one book left," Jordan's character Guy Montag, a "fireman" in charge of burning the novels who struggles with his role of erasing history, says in the clip before an auditorium of children. (RTRS)



LOS ANGELES: John Gallagher's indie drama "Sarah Q," starring Academy Award nominee Burt Young and Sally Kirkland, has wrapped production.

The cast includes "The Sopranos" stars Tony Sirico, Vincent Pastore, Federico Castelluccio, William DeMeo, and Artie Pasquale. Emmy James stars in the title role, with newcomers Ashlee Macropoulos, Samantha Schaffidi, Tamara Skylar Jones and Sarah Seeds — alumni of Gallagher's acting classes at One on One NYC. (RTRS)



LOS ANGELES: Actor-producer-director Danny DeVito has been named the recipient of the 2018 Jack Valenti — Los Angeles Italia Legend Award.

Named in memory of Valenti, it is the festival's highest honor and is given annually to an outstanding Italian-American who has made major contributions to the global motion picture industry. AI



Jordan



Young

Pacino, Anjelica Huston, Liza Minnelli and Sylvester Stallone are the prior recipients.

The award will be presented to DeVito on March 2 during the festival's closing night ceremonies at the TCL Chinese Theatres. This year's festival is dedicated to Italian icons Lina Wertmuller, Franco Zeffirelli and Bernardo Bertolucci. (RTRS)



LOS ANGELES: Paladin has made a deal for the US distribution of OR Media's documentary feature, "Path of Blood," described as a glimpse into the world of jihad terrorism.

Directed by Jonathan Hacker and based on his book of the same title, the film was executive produced by Mark Boal ("Zero Dark Thirty"), "The Hurt Locker" and Megan Ellison's Annapurna

Pictures. The Film Sales Company represented the filmmaker in striking the deal with the distributor.

Paladin plans a multi-city summer release in 2018. The movie was drawn from jihadi home-movie footage that was captured by Saudi security services and centers on Muslim terrorists targeting Muslim civilians and brought to justice by Muslim security agents. (RTRS)