

People & Places

Film

Williams honored

Diverse audiences drive blockbusters

NEW YORK, Feb 27, (Agencies): Just as "Black Panther" starring **Chadwick Boseman**, is setting records at the box office, a new study finds that diverse audiences are driving most of the biggest blockbusters and many of the most-watched hits on television.

UCLA's Bunche Center released its fifth annual study on diversity in the entertainment industry Tuesday, unveiling an analysis of the top 200 theatrical film releases of 2016 and 1,251 broadcast, cable and digital platform TV shows from the 2015-2016 season. Among its results: minorities accounted for the majority of ticket buyers for five of the top 10 films at the global box office, and half of ticket buyers for two more of the top 10.

"There has been some progress, undeniably. Things are not what they were five years ago," said Darnell Hunt, director of the center, which focuses on African American studies, at the University of California, Los Angeles. "People are actually talking about diversity today as a bottom-line imperative as opposed to just the right thing to do. We've amassed enough evidence now that diversity does, in fact, sell."



Boseman

Minorities make up nearly 40 percent of the US population, but Hispanic and African-American moviegoers over-index among moviegoers. According to the Motion Picture Association of America, Latinos make up 18 percent of the US population but account for 23 percent of frequent moviegoers. Though African Americans are 12 percent of the population, they make up 15 percent of frequent moviegoers.

UCLA found that films with casts that were 21 to 30 percent minority regularly performed better at the box office than films with the most racially and ethnically homogenous casts.

Successes

Hunt believes that the wealth of data, as well as box-office successes like "Black Panther," have made obvious the financial benefits of films that better reflect the racial makeup of the American population.

"I think the industry has finally gotten the memo, at least on the screen in most cases, if not behind the camera," said Hunt. "That's where there are the most missed opportunities."

The report, titled "Five Years of Progress and Missed Opportunities," covers a period of some historic high points for Hollywood, including the release of the best picture-winning "Moonlight," along with fellow Oscar nominees "Hidden Figures" and "Fences."

But researchers found the overall statistical portrait of the industry didn't support much improvement in diversity from 2015 to 2016.

"With each milestone achievement, we chip away at some of the myths about what's possible and what's not," said Hunt. "Every time a film like this does really well, every time we see a TV show like 'Empire,' it makes it harder for them to make the argument that you can't have a viable film with a lead of color. Or you can't have a universally appealing show with a predominantly minority cast. It's just not true anymore because the mainstream, itself, is diverse."

Some of the largest disparities for minorities detailed by the UCLA report were in roles like film writers (8.1 percent of 2016's top films) and creators of broadcast scripted shows (7.1 percent). Hunt blamed the lag behind the camera on, among other factors, executive ranks that are still overwhelmingly male.

**Billy Dee Williams** proved to be the man of the hour as he received the Hollywood Legacy Award at the 2018 ABFF Honors, presented by the American Black Film Festival, Sunday night at the Beverly Hilton. His role in the original "Star Wars" trilogy was given special mention in a video tribute, where the actor noted how director **George Lucas** cast him after receiving "a lot of flack" for making a big, black figure (Darth Vader) the villain of the first film.

"I thought, I want to make (Lando Calrissian) bigger than life. I want to make him into a hero, kind of a charming, wonderful individual," Williams recalled in the clip, which also included kind words from **Harrison Ford**.

"Being an African-American actor in the 1960s through the 2000s looks different each and every decade," Williams added on stage while accepting his prize. "I can tell you that my journey has not always been smooth, but ultimately a positive one that went the right direction. And if on that journey, I helped pave just a little bit of the way for black talent — actors, writers, directors, producers and crew members — that'll have more opportunities today compared to yesterday, then I can say that has been the greatest role of my lifetime."

Attention

The 80-year-old, who also called attention to his 60 years in showbiz, continued, stating that "we still have work to do" when it comes to industry inclusion. The thesp ended his speech in tears as he thanked the festival for its honor.

Industry Visionary Award recipient **Ava DuVernay** also saluted Williams for his "Star Wars" role that, she said, broke "boundaries that no one even thought could be broken." The "A Wrinkle in Time" director said, "For me, especially as I'm moving into this space with sci-fi, he was the first vision of black masculinity in a sci-fi character with Lando in 'Star Wars.'"

On the carpet, "Girls Trip" helmer **Malcolm D. Lee** had some ideas of how to diversify the franchise, which has had 96% of its writers and directors be white men over its 41-year history.

"If someone wanted to talk to me about it, I wouldn't say no," Lee posited. "There's plenty of people who can do it. **F. Gary Gray**, **Steve McQueen**, obviously **Ryan Coogler**. There's a lot of talent out there now."

The evening also gave special honors to the cast of "Martin," who were introduced by one of the series' most memorable guest stars, **Snoop Dogg**. **Martin Lawrence**, who was joined by stars **Tisha Campbell**, **Carl Anthony Payne II**, and **Tichina Arnold** on stage, took time to recognize his late "Martin" co-star, **Thomas Mikal Ford**.

"I know y'all wanna know about the #reboot, but for us the most important thing is the #reconnection," Campbell told the crowd. Arnold, however, wasn't as tight-lipped with reporters on the subject. The actress said that they have some ideas to update the '90s series, and hope to gain a lineup of special guests that were in the original — namely **Tracy Morgan**.

"I'll kick his ... (if he doesn't come back)," Arnold quipped.



Jennifer Lawrence attends the premiere of her high-impact thriller, 'Red Sparrow,' co-hosted by Stoli Vodka on Feb 26, in New York. (AP)



Reese Witherspoon arrives at the world premiere of 'A Wrinkle in Time' at the El Capitan Theatre on Feb 26 in Los Angeles. (AP)



Cosby



Locklear

Variety

**BOSTON:** **Bill Cosby**'s 44-year-old daughter **Ensa Cosby** died in **Massachusetts** from kidney disease, a spokesman for the comedian said Monday.

Spokesman **Andrew Wyatt** did not immediately offer other details about her death on Friday. "Please keep the Cosby family in your prayers and give them peace at this time," he said.

**Bill Cosby** lost another of his five children in 1997 when his 27-year-old son, **Ennis**, a graduate student at Columbia University, was shot to death while changing a flat tire near a freeway off ramp in **Los Angeles**.

A 22-year-old man was later convicted and sentenced to life in prison without parole. (AP)

**LOS ANGELES:** **Heather Locklear** was arrested on Sunday night in **Thousand Oaks, Calif.**, on suspicion of domestic violence and battery on a police officer, **Capt Dean Cook** of the Thousand Oaks Police Department told Variety.

Locklear, 56, was charged with one count of domestic violence — a felony — and three counts of battery on emergency personnel, which are misdemeanors.

Police responded to the scene around 9:40 p.m. According to the Los Angeles Times, Locklear claimed an injury prior to cops' arrival and was taken to a hospital before she was booked at Ventura County Jail. She has since posted \$20,000 in bail. (RTRS)

**LOS ANGELES:** Director and actor **Kevin Smith**, best known as the laconic sidekick "Silent Bob" of his 1990s cult comedies, said on Monday that he suffered a "massive heart attack" after taping a standup comedy show in the Los Angeles suburb of **Glendale**.

The 47-year-old "Dogma" filmmaker said on Twitter that he fell ill after completing the first show of two scheduled performances on Sunday evening.

"The doctor who saved my life told me I had 100% blockage of my LAD artery (aka 'the Widow-Maker')." Smith said. He was referring to the left anterior descending artery, or left coronary artery, which is considered the most important for blood supply to the heart. (RTRS)

Film

Oscar predictions

What will win, what should win

By Lindsey Bahr and Jake Coyle

Ahead of Sunday's 90th Academy Awards, Associated Press film writers Lindsey Bahr and Jake Coyle share their predictions for a ceremony that at least at the end should be a nail biter.

Expanded predictions by Bahr and Coyle are available here.

Best Picture

The Nominees: "Call Me by Your Name," "Darkest Hour," "Dunkirk," "Get Out," "Lady Bird," "Phantom Thread," "The Post," "The Shape of Water," "Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri"

Bahr:

Will Win: No controversy, timely messages, a dash of fantasy and a love of movies, "The Shape of Water" seems to be the safe, if a little boring, front-runner.

Should Win: "Lady Bird" is the movie I want to watch over and over again. It is such an effortlessly perfect slice of life film that will be around far after this awards season noise comes to an end.

Coyle:

Will Win: There are five movies with a legitimate shot to win, which makes this year more difficult than usual to call. I'm going to say Jordan Peele's cultural sensation "Get Out" wins because it has two crucial things going for it: the all-important SAG ensemble nomination and a good shot at a recently highly predictive screenplay award. That, and it did more to re-energize genre filmmaking than anything in a decade.

Should Win: "Call Me by Your Name" stood apart for me. It's a movie that feels like it has the windows open, and life just flows through it.

Best Actor

The Nominees: Timothee Chalamet ("Call Me by Your Name"), Daniel Day-Lewis ("Phantom Thread"), Daniel Kaluuya ("Get Out"), Gary Oldman ("Darkest Hour"), Denzel Washington ("Roman J. Israel, Esq.")

Bahr:

Will Win: Gary Oldman has won most of the major awards so far and there's no

reason he wouldn't continue the streak at the Oscars, much to the chagrin of the internet's darling, Timothee Chalamet, who will definitely get another shot at this award down the line.

Should Win: Gary Oldman's full and complete transformation into Winston Churchill is something they should teach in acting (and makeup) classes forever.

Coyle:

Will Win: Oldman has this one in the bag.

Should Win: I wouldn't begrudge Oldman his moment in the sun. But I'll say Day-Lewis is simply the best there is. Maybe a surprise Oscar would coax him into rethinking retirement.

Best Actress

The Nominees: Sally Hawkins ("The Shape of Water"), Frances McDormand ("Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri"), Margot Robbie ("I, Tonya"), Saoirse Ronan ("Lady Bird"), Meryl Streep ("The Post")

Bahr:

Will Win: It's funny how uninspired the acting categories can seem when the same people win every award. This is Frances McDormand's year, plain and simple.

Should Win: This is an extremely tough category, but out of this batch, it was Margot Robbie who stretched herself beyond anything I might have assumed her capable of as the proud, defiant and unapologetic Tonya Harding.

Coyle:

Will Win: McDormand is a virtual lock.

Should Win: The most deserving is Ronan, who's perpetually playing a jumble of emotions, most of them contradictory, at once.

Best Supporting Actor

The Nominees: Willem Dafoe ("The Florida Project"), Woody Harrelson ("Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri"), Richard Jenkins ("The Shape of Water"), Christopher Plummer ("All the Money in the World"), Sam Rockwell ("Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Mis-

souri")

Bahr: Will Win: Sam Rockwell went big in "Three Billboards" as the racist cop who decides to (maybe) start rethinking (some of) his ways.

Should Win: It is Willem Dafoe who gives "The Florida Project" its beating heart.

He makes every moment he's in memorable, whether he's escorting a suspicious character off of the property of a low-rent motel on the outskirts of Orlando, or just trying to count the rent money.

Coyle:

Will Win: Rockwell is the favorite but I smell an upset. There's not much evidence for it. I just think good sense will prevail and Dafoe will win his first Oscar.

Should Win: Would it not be great to see Jenkins win? Would anyone not cheer seeing Harrelson at the podium? But Dafoe's low-rent motel father-figure will go down as the iconic performance of the bunch.

Best Supporting Actress

The Nominees: Mary J. Blige ("Mudbound"), Allison Janney ("I, Tonya"), Lesley Manville ("Phantom Thread"), Laurie Metcalf ("Lady Bird"), Octavia Spencer ("The Shape of Water")

Bahr:

Will Win: Allison Janney, who is very excellent as the caustic, complicated mother LaVona in "I, Tonya," and everyone has noticed.

Should Win: Lesley Manville upstaged Daniel Day-Lewis (in a good way) as the steadfast Cyril, who can be sometimes terrifying and often funny and without whom "Phantom Thread" would have come crashing to the ground.

Coyle:

Will Win: Janney, a riot in "I, Tonya," is the favorite.

Should Win: I'd cast my non-existent vote for Metcalf, in her first film in almost a decade. Her character in "Lady Bird" is one of the finest working mothers I've ever seen in movies. (AP)

**LOS ANGELES:** Actress **Stacey Dash**, who starred as **Dionne Davenport** in the 1995 film "Clueless," is planning to run for

public office.

Dash has filed to run as a Republican for the House of Representatives seat in the

44th district in **California**.

The district, which includes **North Long Beach, San Pedro, Watts, and Compton**, is currently represented by a Democrat.

On Feb. 9, Dash teased her campaign tweeting, "A number of people online and off have suggested I run for political office. I want to see what my online community thinks of this ideas as I mull the possibilities." (RTRS)



In this file photo taken on July 6, 2017, Ed Sheeran performs on NBC's 'Today' at Rockefeller Plaza in New York City. British folk-pop phenomenon Ed Sheeran on Feb 26, was named the best-selling artist in the world in 2017 by the global recorded music industry group IFPI. Sheeran's + (Divide) was the best-selling album of last year and 'Shape of You' was the best-selling single, London-based IFPI said in its announcement. (AFP)

**DUBAI:** An investigation into the death of Bollywood superstar **Sridevi Kapoor**, who drowned in her bathtub in a Dubai hotel, has been closed, police said Tuesday.

"The Dubai public prosecutor's office has decided to release the body of Indian actress Sridevi to her family today (Tuesday) after the investigation into the incident was concluded and the case closed," read a tweet by the Dubai police. Sridevi, 54, drowned in her bathtub after losing consciousness at the weekend in a hotel in Dubai, where she was attending a wedding.

Dubai had held the superstar's body since Saturday, pending the results of the post-mortem investigation. Born **Shree Amma Yanger Ayappan** in the southern state of **Tamil Nadu**, Sridevi appeared in around 300 films and was awarded the **Padma Shri**, **India's** fourth highest civilian award, for her service to the film industry. (AFP)