

People & Places

Film

Haddish's star rising

'CinemaCon' shows diversity & musicals

LAS VEGAS, May 3, (AP): The summer movie going season roared to life with the record-breaking opening weekend for "Avengers: Infinity War," but industry leaders want audiences and theater owners to know that a healthy movie business is not just about the superheroes.

Last week at the 2018 CinemaCon convention, where movie theater owners, exhibitors, celebrities and studio executives gather in Las Vegas to preview their upcoming slates, attendees got a look at what's to come in the next calendar year — and what's worth getting excited about — from **Tiffany Haddish** to the irresistible movie musical.

It's funny to think that last year at this time, most people didn't know who Tiffany Haddish was. Her star-making film, "Girls Trip," didn't arrive in theaters until July and when the cast took the stage at the convention one year ago, she was the unknown alongside her more famous co-stars. This year, the tables were turned. Haddish brought her high-wattage star and irresistibly funny honesty to multiple presentations, including Universal for "Night School," with Kevin Hart, and "The Secret Life of Pets 2," and Paramount for a Tyler Perry comedy and then again for Lionsgate's "Uncle Drew." Haddish had the notoriously staid crowd in stitches, talking about everything from her aching big toe to how she knows when a movie is going to be funny. (It's when the crew is laughing, she says.)



Haddish

Live-action

Superheroes and brands are only part of the equation, said basically every studio except Disney, which has become the king of the box office relying on both, with brands that include Star Wars, Marvel Pixar and its live-action and animation properties. Instead of trying to copy the Hollywood behemoth, the other studios talked up their differences.

For some, like Amazon and STX, that meant going for a shock-factor. Amazon Studios turned some stomachs showing a scene from Luca Guadagnino's "Suspiria" remake over lunch. The thriller, starring Dakota Johnson, looks like a cross between "Black Swan" and "The Exorcist" and had some attendees tweeting about being "traumatized" over the images. The smaller distribution label STX went for the shock factor with a red-band trailer for "The Happytime Murders," which featured Melissa McCarthy snorting drugs alongside some puppet detectives in the very R-rated comedy.

Others talked up their prestige dramas, like "La La Land" director Damien Chazelle's Neil Armstrong biopic "First Man," starring Ryan Gosling, and "12 Years a Slave" director Steve McQueen's intense revenge drama "Widows," with Viola Davis.

Diverse slates also meant diverse casts and filmmakers which, John Fithian, the President and CEO of the National Association of Theatre Owners said customers are demanding.

"We are optimistic that 2017 and 2018 will one day be viewed as a turning point on this front," Fithian said. Films like "Widows," "The Hate U Give," "Miss Bala," "Kin," "Superfly," "BlackKlansman" and "Uncle Drew" were just a few on the roster.

Have you heard? "The Greatest Showman" was a hit, and the story of its unconventional success was a refrain heard over and over at the convention. The Hugh Jackman-led musical defied all industry models and came back from a deadly opening weekend to become a veritable global blockbuster. And this year, some of the biggest crowd-pleasers had an overt musical element, whether it was Cher performing Abba's "Fernando" with a dozen backup dancers to promote "Mamma Mia: Here We Go Again!," some tear-jerking footage from Bradley Cooper's "A Star is Born" remake, with Lady Gaga, or a "We Are The Champions"-scored trailer for the Freddie Mercury biopic "Bohemian Rhapsody."

Rocked

At the first CinemaCon since #MeToo and Time's Up rocked society, the industry convention took a collective hard pass in acknowledging the movement at all.

Quentin Tarantino, who came under fire for subjecting Uma Thurman to a dangerous stunt in "Kill Bill," and a 2003 interview about Roman Polanski, was given a king's welcome by Sony Pictures Chairman Tom Rothman who surprised theater owners with Tarantino and Leonardo DiCaprio to hype "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood." Popularly known as Tarantino's "Manson" film, none uttered the name Charles Manson or Sharon Tate Polanski.

During the 20th Century Fox presentation, a new trailer for "Deadpool 2" prominently featured T.J. Miller. And then, during the segment promoting the Freddie Mercury biopic "Bohemian Rhapsody," Bryan Singer, who was fired during production, was not mentioned (Singer was replaced with director Dexter Fletcher). Instead, the studio had producer Graham King and star Rami Malek focus on the 10-years of trying to get the film made, and how it honors the Queen front-man. And Amazon Studios, which saw their program chief Roy Price resign in October amid sexual harassment allegations, only alluded to "a time of change," mentioning new studio chief Jennifer Salke, but not Price.

"There's a big difference between disruption and destruction," said 20th Century Fox's distribution head Chris Aronson, who crystallized a point many studio executives had been trying to convey throughout the week — that the rise of streaming does not have to mean the death of movie theaters.

The studios touted a combination of product (i.e. blockbusters like "Infinity War" to "Jurassic World") and experience (luxury seats, high-end snacks, IMAX and even ideas as wild as CtrlMovie, which would allow audiences to "choose-your-own-adventure") as ways to keep the theatrical market thriving.

But the fact remains that movie admissions in North America hit a 10-year low in 2017 according to a report from the Motion Picture Association of America, and the domestic box office was down two percent from 2016's record-breaking year.

Still, everyone remains optimistic. And it doesn't hurt that the first movie to open after the convention, "Infinity War," just became the highest-grossing global debut of all time.



In this file photo taken on May 24, 2015, Lebanese director and member of the Un Certain Regard Jury Nadine Labaki poses as she arrives for the closing ceremony of the 68th Cannes Film Festival in Cannes southeastern France. Lebanon can count on its best-known directors, Nadine Labaki and Ziad Doueiri to shine in international festivals, including Cannes, but the country is still far from having a film industry. (AFP)

Film

Knoxville on his eye-popping role in 'Action Point'

'I've used up most of my 9 lives'

LOS ANGELES, May 3, (Agencies): Slapstick superstar Johnny Knoxville was relaxing in his hotel after his latest on-set mishap when some dried blood in his nostril caused him to blow hard and his eyeball popped out.

Luckily, he hadn't been eating hot and sour soup or taking a bubble bath, and he was able to reach under, scoop it up and push it back into the socket.

It was the latest in a litany of injuries that would make the blood drain from the toughest stunt professional's face — but it was far from the most stomach-churning.

"I have, like, 15 doctors for different parts of my body and they all have a special talk with me. I don't know what to tell 'em," Knoxville shrugs in an interview with AFP.

The star — who rose to fame mesmerizing fans with his shocking stunts in MTV's 2000-2002 reality prank series "Jack..." — was at Las Vegas CinemaCon to promote his new movie "Action Point."

He recalls a day's shooting for the comedy about a disastrous theme park when he landed flat on his face after flying 20 feet (six meters) through the air off a slide.

Knoxville, whose 31 movies include "Men in Black II," "The Dukes of Hazard" and four releases in the "Jack..." canon, was rushed to the emergency room with a bad case of concussion and a fractured eye socket.

"I go back to the hotel room and I blow my nose because I had blood there. My left eyeball just pops out of my head. It's like a cartoon. I was like, 'Oh no!' I pushed it back in and I called the producer," he said.

"I was like, 'You've got to come get me. My left eyeball just popped out of my head.' He's like, 'Ah ha ha ha ha!' I'm like 'I'm serious.' He goes, 'I'll be right there.'"

The actor, born Philip John Clapp Jr, came up with the idea for "Jack..." 20 years ago, and it quickly became a hit among the skating crowd, making stars of Knoxville, Ehren "Danger Ehren" McGehehey and Stephen "Steve-O" Glover.

Cast members struggled with alcoholism, drug addiction and depression, however. And the series was rocked by the 2011 death of Ryan Dunn in a drunk driving accident.

Knoxville, devastated by the loss of his friend, threw himself back into work, writing and appearing in "Movie 43," "Jack... Presents: Bad Grandpa" and "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles."

In "Action Point," due out on June 1 in the US, Knoxville plays a daredevil who designs and operates his own theme park with his friends.

The comedy is inspired by Action Park, which opened in 1978 in Vernon, New Jersey, and built up a reputation for poorly designed, unsafe rides and intoxicated and underage staff.

Six people are known to have died at the center — dubbed "Accident Park" by nearby hospitals — and eventually it was buried under an avalanche of personal injury lawsuits.

"Gene Mulvihill ran it and he didn't have any rules for the kids. He let them design their own rides. I mean, it was just complete anarchy," said Knoxville.

The movie contains some of the daredevil's most hair-raising stunts yet, but he insists he doesn't actually enjoy pain. He's not even that addicted to the adrenaline rush, he says.

"It's the footage. I'm just trying to get footage. The producer side overrides the performer's nervousness," he explains.

Over the years, his injuries have included a torn urethra in a 2007 bike stunt that forced him to perform urinary catheterisation on himself twice a day for almost four years.

The fact that he managed to father two of his three children after that incident is all the more remarkable when you consider his gruesome medical record.

Knoxville has been treated for four concussions, a broken hand, a torn meniscus and whiplash — all on "Action Point" alone.

As a child he was hospitalized for severe asthma and over his career he has fractured bones, torn tendons and been knocked out numerous times.

"I've used up most of my nine lives. I've been very, very lucky," he tells

AFP.

"I don't know if I'm ready to stop right now. But I know it's getting to a point where I don't have a lot of chances left."

Also:

LOS ANGELES: Mexico's most bankable star, **Eugenio Derbez**, will be looking to make a splash with this Friday's release of "Overboard," a remake of the 1987 romantic comedy of the same name starring **Goldie Hawn** and **Kurt Russell**.

Derbez has already proven there's an underserved and largely untapped US audience for Spanish-language films. His 2013 passion project, "Instructions Not Included," grossed nearly \$100 million on a \$5 million budget, becoming the best-selling Spanish-language film of all time. His follow-up comedy, "How to be a Latin Lover," earned \$62 million and was one of the top 10 films in Mexico last year.

But "Overboard" — where Derbez stars as a hyper-wealthy Mexican playboy opposite **Anna Faris** — marks his first attempt to expand his fan base to include non-Latino audiences. The film reverses the roles played by Hawn and Russell, with Derbez playing Hawn's part as a rich heir of a multinational company stricken with amnesia. Faris is the single, working-class mother who tricks Derbez's character into believing they are married and swiftly puts him to work so she can better make ends meet while studying to be a nurse.

Some fans of the original picture expressed skepticism on social media about the remake of the Hawn-Russell picture, shot shortly after the longtime couple first got together. The prospect of falling short in remaking a classic '80s romantic comedy is not lost on Derbez.

"This might be my real crossover movie into this market, but at the same time, I feel a little bit nervous because it's a big responsibility to have such an iconic film in my hands," Derbez told Variety in a recent interview. "To try to crack into Hollywood, it's a dream come true."



Polish actress Kasia Smutniak poses during the photocall of the film 'Loro 2' on May 2 in Rome. (AFP)



Blum



Rudin

Variety

LOS ANGELES: "Get Out" producer **Jason Blum** is having a busy week.

He's been in **New York** to present his new horror anthology series "Into the Dark" at Hulu's Upfront presentation. But that's not the only thing worth celebrating in the Blum household. The horror movie maestro is now a Tony Award-nominated producer.

Blum has credits on both "The Iceman Cometh" and "Three Tall Women." His involvement in both shows is somewhat below-the-radar. **Scott Rudin**, the Oscar-winning producer of "No Country for Old Men," was the lead creative producer on the two plays. "The Iceman Cometh" and "Three Tall Women" both boast starry casts, with **Denzel Washington** headlining the former and **Glenda Jackson** and **Laurie Metcalf** anchoring the latter. "The Iceman Cometh" earned eight nominations and "Three Tall Women" nabbed six nominations. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: **Matthias Schoenaerts** ("The Danish Girl"), **Garrett Hedlund** ("Mudbound") and **Scott McNairy** ("Gone Girl") will star in "The Sound of Philadelphia," a story of family and loyalty set in the violent world of the **Philadelphia** mob.

The American crime story is adapted from the **Pete Dexter** book "Brotherly Love." It is written and directed by **Jeremie Guez**, whose directorial debut "A Bluebird in My Heart" had its world premiere at SXSW.

The cross-generational story follows events after a young girl is killed by a reckless driver and her family seek revenge. Two decades later, Peter Flood (Schoenaerts) is still tormented by his baby sister's death. As his cousin Michael (Hedlund) grows more powerful in the hierarchy of the family crime business, a cycle of betrayal and retribution starts. Shooting gets underway in August, in Philadelphia. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: The story of **Martin Margiela** will be traced in "Without Compromise," a new feature doc that is being made with the cooperation of the influential Belgian fashion designer. Margiela changed the fashion world. He was part of the avant-garde **Antwerp** movement and founded the Maison Margiela fashion house.

Film-meets-fashion project "Without Compromise" is in production for a 2019 release. It

will be the first doc on the complete career of Margiela, a man so elusive and private that no official photograph has ever been released and who has been dubbed "the fashion world's

answer to Banksy."

The feature comes from **Reiner Holzemer**, whose previous work includes "Dries," the film about designer **Dries Van**

Noten. That was sold by Dogwoof, which has also boarded "Without Compromise." It will present the project to buyers at **Cannes**. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: Actress-director **Liv Ullmann** served on the **Cannes** jury twice: once as a member in 1978, then as president in 2001. She also knows new president **Cate Blanchett** personally, having directed the two-time Oscar winner in the Sydney Theatre Company's production of "A Streetcar Named Desire," in 2009.

Ullmann is confident that Blanchett will be "fantastic" at the helm of the prestigious panel: "She's a very honest person, very fair. And she likes to work."

Her own stint as jury president was freighted with some anxiety. By that point, Ullmann — who became an international star in **Ingmar Bergman's** 1966 "Persona" — was concentrating less on acting and more on directing. "I felt added pressure, but that did not come from anyone there," she says. "It was from myself. I am a woman and an actress, and I was a woman of some age. And those things worried me, because I imagined bigger expectations. I was always afraid, 'Will they accept what I say?' I think that's very much built into my generation. But Cate won't feel that." (RTRS)



Actress **Laura Dern** (left), and **Kyle McLachlan** arrive at the For Your Consideration Event for Showtime's "Twin Peaks" at Paramount Theatre on May 2, in Hollywood, California. (AFP)