

People & Places

Film

Dream Factory

Why everyone so scared of Disney?

By Owen Gleiberman

Like more or less everyone I know, I have no desire to see a single entertainment company take over the future, dominating what had been a movie industry of multiple entities, each one fighting for their slice of your attention span. Disney, the movie studio so powerful that it ate another movie studio, looks, to many, like it could be that company. The full impact of its absorption of 20th Century Fox has yet to be felt, but now that the smoke has cleared, the mega-corporation that was formed stands before us like an unprecedented colossus, looming over all other studios, maybe over the entertainment business itself.



Orwell

Yet let's be clear: It's not just, or maybe even primarily, the size of the company that is giving people the shakes. It's the fact that a single film corporation now seems to own everything worth having – at least, in stark capitalistic blockbuster terms. Disney owns Marvel, it owns "Star Wars", it owns "Avatar", it owns the fabled animated features that it has been using to mint live-action-remake mega-hits as if it were printing money. What's still on the table – "Godzilla"? The shards of "Harry Potter"? The fumbling-out-of-the-vampire-gate Dark Universe? You can make the case that the merger of Disney and Fox, when you boil out of the feathers, really comes down to the merger of Marvel and "Star Wars". That sounds like the merger of Christmas and the Fourth of July, with Halloween thrown in as a bonus.

Fantasy

Viewed according to the logic of 21st-century fantasy culture, Disney doesn't just suddenly own all the properties. It owns all the mythologies. Long ago, Hollywood was called the Dream Factory. The intimidation factor of the new bulked-up, bursting-with-franchise-moxie Disney is the suspicion that a single company has become the Dream Factory. And the anxiety this has provoked is about something beyond market share. What a lot of people are wondering is: Will Disney now have the power to control our dreams?

That power has long been implicit in the word "Disney". Walt Disney started off as a hand-drawn rebel visionary, rooting his rise in the scrappy image of Steamboat Willie (i.e., Mickey Mouse), and starting in 1937, the animated films that became the foundation of the Disney empire ("Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", "Pinocchio", "Fantasia", "Dumbo", "Bambi") were, one after another, astonishing works of art.

It was with the opening of Disneyland, on July 17, 1955, that Disney began to take over our consciousness in a new way. Disneyland was more than a rollicking fun place to visit. It was the foundation stone of virtual reality, a place that turned amusement into "magic", that made you feel like you were entering into the fantasies the movies had only shown you. It was more than a theme park – it was a looking glass, and you can make the case that as all of us passed through it, we began to enter the zone we're now in, where everything in American life, from consumer shopping to social media to presidential politics, has become a form of entertainment. If it suddenly seems like the new Disney might own the future, maybe that's because Walt Disney was so instrumental in creating the future.

To me, though, the fear of Disney is unwarranted in several ways. Make no mistake: I believe it's possible, in any industry, for a company to get too big, and if it were up to me, the kind of antitrust, anti-monopoly consciousness that was, for a while, a pillar of American lawmaking, and that has gone out of style in our top-down age of corporate favor trading, would make a roaring comeback. Is the new Disney too big? Maybe it is. I'm sure there are metrics involved in the future of streaming that I couldn't even wrap my head around, and that are all wired into Disney's master plans. But in the concern over the new company's monolithic import, a couple of key issues have been lost.

In case you hadn't noticed, the Hollywood future that's being fretted about, one that's dominated in economy and in spirit by Disney, is already here. It's called the New Fantasy Entertainment State. It started 42 summers ago, with the release of "Star Wars", and to say that it has been growing ever since would be an understatement; it's been metastasizing. It includes comic-book movies and space operas and violent action thrillers and immersive video games and theme parks that are like national capitals and fantasy conventions that are like hub with Chewbacca and Wonder Woman costumes.

More to the point, though, it includes the merger of all those things. The literal and psychological merger. The video games that are knockoffs of combat films that form the climax of space operas that create the paradigm of intergalactic superhero teams, and on and on. All consumed on the same devices! **George Orwell's** "Nineteen Eighty-Four" is the most prophetic novel of the 20th century, but the one thing Orwell left out is that in the cold gray uberstate of Oceania, there's a television in every room, and it's used for surveillance, but it's not used for entertainment, which – with apologies to religion – is the new opiate of the masses. (It's what we're now using to fiddle while Rome burns.)

Dominating

In a highly thoughtful piece about the new Disney empire, entitled "For the Sake of Cinema, Disney Needs to Be Broken Up", my colleague Guy Lodge, writing in The Guardian, argues that the company's dominating might now poses an existential threat to the art and innovation of motion pictures. Sounding a bit like the Bernie Sanders of cinephilia, Guy exquisitely articulates the threat, yet where I disagree with him is that the threat transcends Disney, because it was already here. The movie studios of Hollywood ruthlessly compete, but where they've colluded is in the creation of a brash hypnotic fantasy-based theme-park movie culture that's the enemy of organic cinematic intimacy.

And the ultimate colluder, of course, is the audience. We the people. It's become de rigeur for film critics to grouse on a regular basis, in their reviews, about the state of blockbuster cinema. And while I'm as guilty as anyone, what I don't share is the left-wing perception that the movie industry has become the aesthetic equivalent of an oppressive political force, jamming all these junk sequels and reboots and fantasy narcotics down our throats. To a degree, I blame them, but I really blame us, the moviegoers, who vote, week in and week out, with our ticket dollars. We exist in a democratic landscape of entertaining ourselves to death. We have chosen the post-"Star Wars" universe we now live in. To blame the studios seems, to me, a fundamentally misplaced sentiment. (RTRS)



US singer Sheela reacts during the Quincy Jones soundtrack of the 80's celebration evening at the Auditorium Stravinski during the 53rd Montreux Jazz Festival (MJF), in Montreux, Switzerland on July 13. (AP)

Music

Ritter's 'Fever Breaks' engaging

Tycho takes new direction on 'Weather'

By Ragan Clark

Tycho, "Weather" (Mom + Pop/Ninja Tune)

California-artist Scott Hansen, better known as Tycho, is back with his fifth studio album "Weather", one that begins much as one might expect.

Opener "Easy" is an instrumental, electronic track in the same vein as his previous work – atmospheric and upbeat. A woman's voice pushes through, but her words are indistinct.

By the second song, though, the deviation from past albums is clear. "Pink & Blue" opens with Saint Sinner's ethereal voice as she sings, "Oh pink and blue, yeah, you know I look good on you."

Hearing vocals comes as a surprise. Tycho's past work has been almost exclusively instrumental, falling on the brighter side of the down-tempo music spectrum. Samples of people speaking, such as a broadcaster giving a report, are used on albums like "Past Is Prologue", but never before has he been accompanied by a vocalist.

On "Weather", the vocal presence only gains strength as the songs continue, giving Hansen's work an entirely new feel. When Sinner is paired with the ambient sound of Hansen's usual electronic mixings, the album releases a tone that is reminiscent of The XX. Her voice is featured on six of the eight tracks, five of which have substantial lyrics – a big shift from Hansen's Grammy-nominated 2016

album, "Epoch".

The production value is uncompromised with Sinner's haunting vocals adding another layer to Hansen's unmistakable songwriting and genius production. Hansen, who transformed Tycho in 2014 when he added band members Zac Brown and Rory O'Connor, is showing once again that he's unafraid to tamper with his formula.

It's a fresh sound, one that shows Hansen's intent to weather the storm and keep his fans guessing where his music will take them next.

Josh Ritter, "Fever Breaks" (Pythaeas Recordings/Thirty Tigers)

Josh Ritter's "Fever Breaks" is a work of stacked marvels, the result of an auspicious collaboration with Jason Isbell – who also produced – and his band, the 400 Unit.

In places raw, chilling and emphatic, while sensitive and compassionate in others, the 10 songs cover murder, love and politics while ruminating on the wonders and burdens of our existence and its expiry date.

Opener "Ground Don't Want Me" is a brisk-paced story of murder and a frustrated search for rest, if not redemption. It is followed by "Old Black Magic", where piles of guitars help illustrate the blinding, confused environment – "And I can't see the lighthouse/And the lighthouse can't scream."

An unrelenting acoustic guitar un-

derscores the intensity of "On the Water", which urges its target to make their long-distance relationship an intimate one, while the thirsting "I Still Love You (Now and Then)" recalls an old flame who is far from extinguished in his heart.

Protest songs have benefited from the age of social media – which has expanded their reach – while also having to overcome short attention spans and sensory overload. So "All Some Kind of Dream" shrewdly wraps its political message in a graceful, acoustic arrangement, calling for compassion and appealing to the best in us in "darker days than any others I've seen."

Also:

LOS ANGELES: Beatles fans got something Saturday night they hadn't in 53 years: the sight of **Paul McCartney** and **Ringo Starr** playing together on stage at Dodger Stadium. Although McCartney himself is not a stranger to the venue, having last played there just five years ago, two Beatles taking to the outfield together was something that hadn't happened since Aug. 28, 1966, which turned out to be the Fab Four's penultimate tour gig ever.

The former bandmates weren't revisiting material quite that old. The two songs Starr joined McCartney for Saturday both post-dated the Beatles' time as a touring unit: "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band (Reprise)" and "Helter Skelter". (Agencies)



Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, poses for photographers upon arrival at the 'Lion King' European premiere in central London on July 14. (AP)



Winfrey



Lopez

Variety

LOS ANGELES: Entertainment industry royalty rubbed shoulders with the real thing at "The Lion King" premiere in London on Sunday evening. **Meghan Markle**, the duchess of **Sussex**, and her husband, **Prince Harry**, walked the yellow carpet at the Leicester Square premiere, as did a starry lineup from the US and UK.

Among the many stars in attendance were **Beyonce**, who voices Nala in the film, and her husband, **Jay-Z**. They warmly greeted the British royals, with Beyonce congratulating the couple on the arrival of their first child, **Archie**. Jay-Z reportedly imparted some parenting tips, telling Harry: "The best advice I can give you: Always find some time for yourself."

Beyonce had already taken her eldest daughter, **Blue Ivy**, to the US premiere of the movie. Also at the star-studded event were **Elton John**, **Guy Ritchie**, **Vin Diesel**, and **Pharrell Williams**, who was sporting shorts on a sunny evening in London. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: Drama film, "Dad's Suit" was named the best narrative feature at the Taipei Film Awards, "Last Year When the Train Passed", directed by **Huang Pang-Chuan**, was the winner of the overall grand prize and the best short film award.

The awards were presented at Taipei's Zhongshan Hall, on Saturday. A story of deteriorating health, hope and family relations, directed by **Hung Po-hao**, "Suit" also collected awards for best cinematography, best actor and best supporting actress. It premiered last year

at the Golden Horse festival and had its commercial release in Taiwan in March this year. The awards jury acknowledged the film's "very limited budget. But said

that the picture managed to "convey exquisite and authentic emotions that linger in the mind." (RTRS)



Hong Kong actor Andy Lau (right), and director Herman Yau pose for a photo during a media event to promote their new movie 'The White Storm 2 - Drug Lords' in Taipei, Taiwan on July 13. (AP)

WAILUKU, Hawaii: Oprah Winfrey surprised the Maui Humane Society with a visit to thank the organization for evacuating animals during a wildfire, a report said.

Winfrey is a part-time Maui resident who visited the society briefly Saturday, thanking a volunteer and taking a photo outside with the organization's sign. The Maui News reported Saturday.

Winfrey is a society supporter, said Nancy Willis, the society's director of development and community outreach. "We are appreciative and grateful that she recognized the hard work of the community," Willis said. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: Jennifer Lopez took decisive action following the cancellation of her "It's My Party" concert at Madison Square Garden earlier tonight (July 13) due to a widespread power outage in **New York City**.

The second of her two-night run at the midtown Manhattan arena, the singer was 30 minutes into her concert when the venue house lights came on and an MSG staffer told the capacity crowd to exit, noting, "We regret to interrupt this event." Lopez said on social media from backstage: "I love you; I am so sorry that this happened in the middle of our moment," she said. (RTRS)