

Can't stop, won't stop: Famous conductor's show goes on

CAMBRIDGE, Mass., March 4, (AP) — Benjamin Zander's eyes are shining, and he'd very much appreciate it if yours were, too.

The internationally acclaimed conductor has spent half his life leading the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, which he founded in 1979, and its spirited youth orchestra. And as the maestro approaches his 80th birthday on March 9, he shows no signs of stopping.

Few could blame Zander if those dancing eyes went dark. His grandmother died in the Holocaust, and he has had two failed marriages.

But Zander is a serial optimist. He's a world-renowned conductor of Beethoven and Mahler; he's a best-selling author who jets around the planet giving talks on leadership to foreign governments and corporations; and he recorded a viral TED Talk that has gotten nearly 11 million views. All that powers his mission to turn everyone on to classical music and its power to brighten the eyes and lift the soul.

The Associated Press caught up with the British-born Zander in his home in Cambridge, just outside Boston.

AP: You wanted to put a copy of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony into the hands of every human being. Is that still a dream?

Zander: My first wife, a great musician, said, "Ben, you're a fool. Classical music is for an elite group of people. Don't waste your time trying to make it available to ordinary people." Many sensible people believe classical music is an elitist thing. I don't believe that. I think anybody can respond to it. They just need a little guidance, so I provide the guidance.

Zander a serial optimist

AP: Many would say that's preposterous — you'll never get everyone to appreciate classical music.

Zander: Well, there are 30 million people in China alone who play the piano and 10 million violinists. In Mexico, they've got 85 youth orchestras. Classical music is spreading like the plague. There are more people listening to it now than ever in the history of the world. When you watch television and they're selling an expensive object, what are they using? It's always classical music because it lifts the spirit. It appeals to our best angels — our highest emotional, spiritual and intellectual selves. I'm not worried about classical music. I think we ain't seen nothing yet.

AP: What is it about Beethoven that's captured your imagination?

Zander: Beethoven is in all probability the greatest composer who ever lived. Now, that's a silly thing to say because there's Bach and Mozart. But think of the string quartets, the piano sonatas, the violin sonatas, the cello sonatas, the piano concertos. We haven't even mentioned the symphonies. The range of Beethoven's music is extraordinary. It's such a beautiful idea that a man who was deaf and isolated and lonely and ill and cantankerous could actually bring the world together. He had a vision for human

connection that's been inspiring people for 200 years and will go on for another thousand.

AP: You had family who perished horribly at Auschwitz. How has that colored your work?

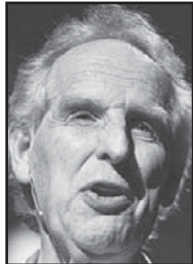
Zander: Everything depends on what you do with it. Circumstances don't matter so much. What matters is how you deal with it, what you say. My father lost everything, and I remember asking him, "Dad, aren't you angry?" But he said, "No. A person can't live a full life under the shadow of bitterness."

AP: Isn't there intrinsic value in all music regardless of the genre?

Zander: I'm probably not the right person to answer that. I don't get excited about heavy metal. I love rap, but I don't think of it as music — I think of it as language, as poetry. What I find most rewarding about classical music is the range and complexity of emotion it can express and the power that it has. That's why at great moments like weddings and funerals and festive social occasions, people turn to classical music. It elevates everybody's spirits.

AP: Looking back at all the things you've done, what would you call your finest hour?

Zander: I don't see my life like that. I see it as a kaleidoscope of experiences of equal value. I really don't draw a distinction between conducting Mahler's Ninth Symphony and having a conversation with an 8-year-old. What I'm going for is shining eyes. If your aim is shining eyes, then life unfolds from one wonderful thing to another.



Zander

Variety



This image released by Disney-Marvel Studios shows Brie Larson in a scene from 'Captain Marvel', which opens in US theatres on March 8. (AP)

Film

Streaming versus theatrical debate

Spielberg pushes against Netflix

By Lindsey Bahr

When Steven Spielberg speaks about the business of Hollywood, everyone generally listens and few dissent. But reports that he intends to support rule changes that could block Netflix from Oscars-eligibility have provoked a heated, and unwieldy, debate online this weekend. It has found the legendary filmmaker at odds with some industry heavyweights, who have pointed out that Netflix has been an important supporter of minority filmmakers and stories, especially in awards campaigns, while also reigniting the ongoing streaming versus theatrical debate.

Spielberg has weighed in before on whether streaming movies should compete for the film industry's most prestigious award (TV movies, he said last year, should compete for Emmys), but that was before Netflix nearly succeeded in getting its first best picture Oscar for Alfonso Cuarón's "Roma" at last week's Academy Awards. Netflix, of course, did not win the top award — "Green Book", which was produced partially by Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment, did.

Still, Netflix was a legitimate contender and this year, the streaming service is likely to step up its awards game even more with Martin Scorsese's "The Irishman", which The Hollywood Reporter said may also be gunning for a wide-theatrical release. A teaser ad aired during the 91st Oscars for the gangster drama said "in theaters next fall," instead of the "in select theaters" phrasing that was used for "Roma".

But Netflix also isn't playing by the same rules as other studios. The company doesn't report theatrical grosses, for one, and it's been vexing some more traditional Hollywood executives throughout this award season and there have been whispers in recent weeks that a reckoning is coming.

Now, Spielberg and others are planning to do something about it by supporting a revised film academy regulation at an upcoming meeting of the organization's board of governors that would disqualify Netflix from the Oscars, or at least how the streaming giant currently operates during awards season.

This year "Roma" got a limited theatrical qualifying

run and an expensive campaign with one of the industry's most successful awards publicists, Lisa Taback, leading the charge. But Netflix, operates somewhat outside of the industry while also infiltrating its most important institutions, like the Oscars and the Motion Picture Association of America. Some like Spielberg, are worried about what that will mean for the future of movies.

"Steven feels strongly about the difference between the streaming and theatrical situation," an Amblin spokesperson told IndieWire's Anne Thompson late last week. "He'll be happy if the others will join [his campaign] when that comes up. He will see what happens."

Eligible

An Amblin representative said Sunday there was nothing to add.

But some see Spielberg's position as wrong-minded, especially when it comes to the Academy Awards, which requires a theatrical run to be eligible for an award. Many online have pointed out the hypocrisy that the organization allows members to watch films on DVD screeners before voting.

Filmmaker Ava DuVernay tweeted at the film academy's handle in response to the news that the topic would be discussed at a board of governors meeting, which is comprised of only 54 people out of over 8,000 members.

"I hope if this is true, that you'll have filmmakers in the room or read statements from directors like me who feel differently," DuVernay wrote.

Some took a more direct approach, questioning whether Spielberg understands how important Netflix has been to minority filmmakers in recent years.

Franklin Leonard, who founded The BlackList, which surveys the best unproduced scripts in Hollywood, noted that Netflix's first four major Oscar campaigns were all by and about people of color: "Beasts of No Nation", "The 13th", "Mudbound" and "Roma".

"It's possible that Steven Spielberg doesn't know how difficult it is to get movies made in the legacy system as a woman or a person of color. In his extraor-

dinary career, he hasn't exactly produced or executive produced many films directed by them," Leonard tweeted Saturday. "By my count, Spielberg does one roughly every two decades."

It's important to note that Netflix didn't produce "Beasts of No Nation", "Mudbound" or "Roma", but rather acquired them for distribution. But if Oscar campaigns are no longer part of the equation in a Netflix-partnership, top-tier filmmakers are likely to take their talents and films elsewhere.

Others, like "First Reformed" filmmaker Paul Schrader, had a slightly different take.

"The notion of squeezing 200+ people into a dark unventilated space to see a flickering image was created by exhibition economics not any notion of the 'theatrical experience,'" Schrader wrote in a Facebook post Saturday. "Netflix allows many financially marginal films to have a platform and that's a good thing."

But his Academy Award-nominated film, he thinks, would have gotten lost on Netflix and possibly, "Rellegated to film esoterica." Netflix had the option to purchase the film out of the Toronto International Film Festival and didn't. A24 did and stuck with the provocative film through awards season.

"Distribution models are in flux," Schrader concluded. "It's not as simple as theatrical versus streaming."

One thing is certain, however: Netflix is not going away any time soon and how it integrates with the traditional structures of Hollywood, like the Oscars, is a story that's still being written.

Sean Baker, who directed "The Florida Project," suggested a compromise: That Netflix offered a "theatrical tier" to pricing plans, which would allow members to see its films in theaters for free.

"I know I'd spend an extra 2 dollars a month to see films like 'Roma' or 'Buster Scruggs' on the big screen," Baker tweeted. "Just an idea with no details ironed out. But we need to find solutions like this in which everybody bends a bit in order to keep the film community (which includes theater owners, film festivals and competitive distributors) alive and kicking." (AP)

LOS ANGELES: Universal and DreamWorks' "How to Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World" is soaring atop the international box office, thanks in part to its \$33.4 million debut in China.

The third and final installment in the animated series has now crossed \$275 million overseas, bringing its global haul to \$375 million. "How to Train Your Dragon 3" brought in another \$52 million from 61 foreign markets this weekend, including \$5 million in Russia, \$2 million in France, and \$1.6 million in Spain. Its start in China was enough to land the No. 1 spot in the Middle Kingdom, as well as both DreamWorks and Universal's second-best debut for an animated film.

Fox's "Alita: Battle Angel" fell not far behind, pocketing \$40.4 million in 81 international territories. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: Janice Freeman, a popular contestant from season 13 of "The Voice", has died in Pasadena, Calif from an extreme case of pneumonia, which caused a blood clot to travel to her heart. She was 33.

Freeman had suffered from health issues in the past, including lupus, meningitis and cervical cancer, which she had beaten. According to a post on her official Facebook page, Freeman began experiencing trouble breathing while at home Saturday with her husband Dion. He performed CPR until paramedics arrived, but she died at the hospital later that day.

While on the show, Freeman was one of judge Miley Cyrus' favorites and was on her team, making it to the top 11. (RTRS)

LONDON: Keith Flint, the British musician who sang lead vocals for The Prodigy's hits such as "Firestarter" and "Breathe", has died aged 49, his bandmates said on Monday, saying the singer had taken his own life.

Flint became one of the best known faces of the 1990s British electronic music, performing apparently random dance moves often with eccentric hair cuts,

sometimes styled as devil's horns.

"I'm a firestarter, twisted firestarter," he sang in the 1996 hit which introduced the blistering sounds of Britain's underground rave generation to the mainstream. "I'm the self-inflicted, mind detonator, yeah."

Police were called to an address in Essex, eastern England,



Freeman



Flint

shortly after 8:10 am on Monday where they found a 49-year-old who was pronounced dead at the scene. His death is not being treated as suspicious. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: Danny DeVito, Vicky Krieps, Peter Sarsgaard, Saro Emirze, Dar Zuzovskiy, and John Leguizamo have

joined Ben Foster in boxing drama "Harry Haft" with Barry Levinson directing.

Bron Studios and New Mandate Films are producing in association with Creative Wealth Media, which is financing the movie. The film began production Feb 25 in Hungary and New York.

Levinson is directing and

producing from a screenplay by Justine Juel Gillmer, based on the novel "Harry Haft: Survivor of Auschwitz, Challenger of Rocky Marciano" by Alan Scott Haft.

The film is set post-World War II and stars Foster as Harry Haft, a boxer who fought fellow prisoners in the concentration camps to survive. (RTRS)