

Film

Disney to release 'Mulan' on streaming service, for a price

By Lindsey Bahr

'Mulan' is no longer headed for a major theatrical release. The Walt Disney Co said that it will debut its live-action blockbuster on its subscription streaming service, Disney+, on Sept 4.

But this is no "Hamilton": Customers will have to pay an additional \$29.99 on top of the cost of the monthly subscription to rent "Mulan". The company plans to release it in theaters in areas where Disney+ is not available.

"In order to meet the needs of consumers during this unpredictable period, we thought it was important to find alternative ways to bring this exceptional family-friendly film to them in a timely manner," Disney CEO Bob Chapek said on the company's earnings call. "We see this as an opportunity to bring this incredible film to a broad audience currently unable to go to movie theaters."

The live-action remake of the animated film was one of the first major films to be affected by the coronavirus pandemic. Originally set for a March 27 release, "Mulan" moved to late July, then late August and was then pulled from the calendar all together as COVID-19 cases spiked through the US. Along with Warner Bros' "Tenet", "Mulan" was going to be one of the first major movies to open in theaters since the shutdown. Exhibitors, most of which have been closed for over four months, have been desperate for new films that would help draw wary audiences back to theaters.

But while Warner Bros is moving forward with a theatrical release

plan, which involves opening "Tenet" internationally first and then in direct US theaters a week later, on Sept 3, Disney decided to pivot and direct consumers to its streaming service.

It is not unprecedented for a major studio to offer a premium video on demand release during the pandemic. Universal Pictures debuted "Trolls World Tour" on streaming in April while most theaters were shuttered. Although it caused a major rift at the time, it has since led to an historic compromise between the nation's largest theater chain and Universal to shrink its theatrical window to 17 days.

Cinematic

But few expected "Mulan", a \$200 million production, to go this route, even Disney. In late June, when announcing its delay to August, Disney executives Alan Horn and Alan Bergman wrote in a joint statement that "Mulan" was, "Everything the cinematic experience should be, and that's where we believe it belongs - on the world stage and the big screen for audiences around the globe to enjoy together."

Acclaimed filmmaker Niki Caro brings the epic tale of China's legendary warrior to life in Disney's "Mulan", in which a fearless young woman risks everything out of love for her family and her country to become one of the greatest warriors China has ever known. When the Emperor of China issues a decree that one man per family must serve in the Imperial Army to defend the country from Northern invaders, Hua Mulan, the eldest daughter of an honored warrior, steps in to take

the place of her ailing father. Masquerading as a man, Hua Jun, she is tested every step of the way and must harness her inner-strength and embrace her true potential. It is an epic journey that will transform her into an honored warrior and earn her the respect of a grateful nation ... and a proud father.

"Mulan" features a celebrated international cast that includes: Yifei Liu as Mulan; Donnie Yen as Commander Tung; Tzi Ma as Zhou, Jason Scott Lee as Böri Khan; Yoson An as Honghui; Ron Yuan as Sergeant Qiang; with Gong Li as Xianniang and Jet Li as the Emperor. The film is directed by Niki Caro from a screenplay by Rick Jaffa & Amanda Silver and Lauren Hynes & Elizabeth Martin, suggested by the narrative poem "The Ballad of Mulan". The producers are Chris Bender, Jake Weiner and Jason Reed, with Bill Kong, Barrie M. Osborne, Tim Coddington and Mario Iscovich serving as executive producers.

For over 95 years, The Walt Disney Studios has been the foundation on which The Walt Disney Company was built. Today it brings quality movies, episodic storytelling, music, and stage plays to consumers throughout the world. The Walt Disney Studios encompasses a collection of respected film studios, including Disney, Walt Disney Animation Studios, Pixar Animation Studios, DisneyNature, Marvel Studios, Lucasfilm, 20th Century Studios, Searchlight Pictures, and Blue Sky Studios. It is also home to Walt Disney Records, Hollywood Records, and Disney Theatrical Productions, producer of world-class stage shows. (AP)

Variety



This image released by STXfilms shows Dixie Egerickx, Edan Hayhurst and Amir Wilson in a scene from 'The Secret Garden'. (AP)

Film

'A beautiful, redemptive fable'

Reimagining 'Garden' for new gen

By Lindsey Bahr

Frances Hodgson Burnett's children's classic "The Secret Garden" has been adapted into several films, television series and even a Broadway musical. But it had been 27 years since Mary Lennox had last been committed to film and the time seemed ripe for another visit to Misselthwaite Manor. Like "Little Women", every generation is entitled to its own version.

Producer Rosie Alison of Heyday Films (the shop behind the "Paddington" movies) had been enchanted by the 1911 novel as a child and the 1949 MGM version with Margaret O'Brien. She was certain that it held an appeal for modern children, who perhaps didn't have to reach back too far for a connection to the material - a generation who grew up with Agnieszka Holland's 1993 version are also now grown with children of their own.

"It's such a beautiful, redemptive fable," she said. "It's about damaged, slightly misfit children who are lonely and find friendship in nature. Parents think they'll be bored, but I find that a lot of kids really get into it."

They found supportive collaborators in StudioCanal, who were also partners on the "Paddington" films and are always looking for family fare. Alison said they weren't hard to persuade, but, "Everybody treaded a little nervously about the fact that it's not a huge action adventure with branded characters."

Marc Munden ("National Treasure") was enlisted to direct, they got Colin Firth and Julie Walters on board and watched around 800 tapes to find their perfect Mary.

The part would go to 12-year-old Dixie Egerickx, who displayed a "remarkable intelligence" and understanding of the character.

"She's not really your traditional heroine," Egerickx, who is now 15, said. "What I like about her is she's quite complex. She's initially very unpleasant, rude and unlikable but we learn that's because she's

lonely and she doesn't have anyone."

The filmmakers were given a relatively modest budget for a film with visual effects (\$20 million). But even with the elements of magical realism, most of the outdoor scenes were shot on location, including the garden itself.

It was decided early on that it'd be impossible to "invent" nature on a soundstage and thus the filmmakers set off on a 50-garden journey around Yorkshire, North Wales, Wiltshire, Dorset and Cornwall to find the perfect combination of settings for the enchanting, abandoned garden.

"It sticks more to Mary's imagination and her subjective view of the world, and there are slightly more fluid boundaries between her way of seeing and the world around her," Alison said. "Now, when she goes into the garden, it just seems boundless, because that's how it is to a child."

Remote

In order to make it a little less remote for modern children, the filmmakers brought the story forward a few decades from its Edwardian roots. It still had to be in the past, Alison said. Things like child services and health and safety would be involved if it were too modern.

But now, instead of 1911, it's set in 1947 in a post-World War II framework. Still, most of the notes will feel familiar. Mary still hails from India, her parents still die of cholera and Archibald Craven (Firth) is just as distant and ghostly as ever. There she's been taken in by her uncle Archibald Craven who, himself, is grieving the loss of his wife.

Mary finds herself generally locked in her room, and only gradually does she encounter Archibald or his largely bedridden son Colin (Edan Hayhurst). Her first and for a while only friend is Dixon (Amir Wilson), the gardener's son. Together, they discover, behind stone walls and ivy, the hidden, dreamlike garden that will propel and reflect their collective

healing.

Like so many films during the coronavirus pandemic, "The Secret Garden" was meant to be a big screen experience. Now, it's currently available as a video on demand release in the US. It will be getting a theatrical run in the UK in October, however. And while the situation is disappointing, Alison is trying to focus on the bigger picture.

"Hopefully there will be over the years to come, a lonely 9-year-old who has plopped in front of a TV and discovers this and it really means something to them," Alison said. "I would love for it to give hope to children."

Mark Munden's adaptation, which STX Films released on-demand last Friday, struggles to burrow into the interiors of its characters. It's sluggish at times and too withdrawn for such a vibrant tale. But it stays nevertheless in tune with the spirit of Burnett's book, and by the time it reaches its late crescendo, this "Secret Garden" blooms nevertheless.

"The Secret Garden" has been adapted many times before but only once as a major movie, in 1993. Agnieszka Holland's version, a superbly crafted family film, remains a classic in its own right. Produced by Francis Ford Coppola, shot by Roger Deakins and featuring Maggie Smith as the housekeeper, Holland's "Secret Garden" (currently streaming on HBO Max) is tough to top.

The best that can be said about Munden's "Secret Garden" is that it doesn't try to gin up the story or gloss over its themes. This is a pleasingly patient film that honestly tackles grief, death and rejuvenation without sentimentality. Given today's average wide-release children's films, that makes "The Secret Garden" a verdant oasis. (AP)

NEW YORK: Fox News Channel stars **Sean Hannity**, **Tucker Carlson** and **Howard Kurtz** were accused of sexual harassment by a frequent on-air guest in a lawsuit filed that the network called frivolous and untrue.

In the same case, a former Fox employee said she was harassed and raped by news anchor **Ed Henry**, who was fired July 1 shortly after the network became aware of the accusations.

Henry's lawyer, **Catherine Foti**, has said that her client's accuser, **Jennifer Eckhart**, initiated and encouraged a sexual relationship.

Hannity and Carlson represent two-thirds of Fox's lucrative prime-time lineup, while Kurtz hosts the weekend "Media Buzz" show. None of the men have been mentioned before in any misconduct allegations at Fox until the charges were made by **Cathy Areu**.

The lawsuit filed in New York describes Areu's discomfort with a March 2018 incident on the set of Hannity's show where the host allegedly put \$100 on a desk and challenged the men on his staff to take her out on a date.

She said she was a guest on Carlson's show in December 2018 and that after it was over, he told her he was staying in a hotel room in New York that night without his wife and children. In 2019, she said Kurtz invited her to his hotel room to discuss her hope of getting a full-time job at Fox. When she instead invited him to dinner with her and a friend, he declined, she said.

In the cases of Carlson and Kurtz, Areu believed the men were making advances, the lawsuit said. Areu said she was also propositioned by **Gianno Caldwell**, a Fox contributor.

Based on an outside law firm's investigation, Fox said it found all of Areu's claims "false, patently frivolous and utterly devoid of any merit." Fox said it would defend itself vigorously.

Areu also said she got several messages from Henry. But it was the accusations made by Eckhart, a former employee, that led to the anchor's dismissal. Her allegations weren't made public when Henry was fired.

Eckhart, who was 24 at the

time, said the 49-year-old Henry restrained her and raped her in a hotel room.

Foti said Henry had received photos and suggestive messages from Eckhart.

"The Me Too movement has helped to bring to light a number of injustices in our society, and everyone that has suffered deserves to be heard," Foti said.



Hannity



Carlson

The lawsuit said that Fox knew that Henry - who took a four-month leave of absence in 2016 following published reports of his affair with a Las Vegas waitress - had engaged in sexual misconduct as far back as 2017. (AP)

DALLAS: A rare near-mint condition copy of the first Marvel Comics comic book has sold at auction in Dallas for \$1.26 million.

Heritage Auctions says the Marvel Comics No. 1 from 1939 has been sold. Heritage says the buyer wished to remain anonymous.

Ed Jaster, senior vice-president at Heritage, calls it "a historic copy of a historic comic book." The issue features the first appearances of characters such as the

Human Torch, Ka-Zar, Angel and the Sub-Mariner.

Heritage says the comic book was first purchased at a newsstand by a **Uniontown, Pennsylvania**, mail carrier who made a practice of buying the first issue of comic books and magazines. Jaster says that since then, the issue has only changed owners a handful of times. (AP)