

Network to continue to investigate anchor's conduct 'as appropriate'

CNN fires Chris Cuomo for helping brother deal with scandal

NEW YORK, Dec 5, (AP) — CNN fired anchor Chris Cuomo on Saturday less than a week after new information emerged about how he assisted his brother, former New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, as the politician faced sexual harassment allegations earlier this year.

The network had suspended its prime-time host on Tuesday to investigate his conduct, after New York's attorney general released details showing he was more involved than previously known in helping to strategize and reach out to other journalists as his brother fought to keep his job.

CNN hired a law firm for that review, which it would not identify. The lawyers recommended Chris Cuomo's termination and CNN chief Jeff Zucker informed the anchor of the decision on Saturday.

"It goes without saying that these decisions are not easy, and there are a lot of complex factors involved," Zucker said in an email to CNN staff on Saturday.

The network said that "while in the process of that review, additional information has come to light." CNN would not discuss that information, or characterize whether it had anything to do with his brother.

Cuomo issued a statement on Twitter calling the decision disappointing.

"This is not how I want my time at CNN to end but I have already told you why and how I helped my brother. So let me now say as disappointing as this is, I could not be more proud of the team at Cuomo Prime Time and the work we did," he said.

Even with the firing, CNN said it will continue to investigate Cuomo's conduct "as appropriate."

A year ago the two sons of the late New York Gov. Mario Cuomo were flying high: Andrew as a three-term governor praised initially in many circles for his handling of the pandemic, Chris as the top-rated personality on CNN. Now they're both out of work.

As women came forward accusing former Gov. Andrew Cuomo of sexual harassment, his brother, despite being a CNN anchor, pressed sources for information on the accusers and reported back to the governor's staff on what he was learning.

Response

He was active in helping craft their response to the charges, according to emails and a transcript of his testimony to investigators working for state Attorney General Letitia James. Her office found Andrew Cuomo sexually harassed at least 11 women; the former governor resigned in August to avoid a likely impeachment trial.

Chris Cuomo and CNN have been under fire for months about their anchor's conduct. When it first came to light in May that the anchor had been talking to his brother's advisers, the network acknowledged that he had broken its rules but, as CNN said in a statement upon his suspension earlier this week, "we also appreciated the unique position he was in and understood his need to put family first and job second."

The transcripts released by James this week revealed considerably

more detail about Cuomo's involvement — conduct CNN executives admitted was a surprise even to them.

While Cuomo has said he never tried to influence CNN's own coverage of his brother, he told investigators for James about his calls to other journalists to find out what information they had about some of his accusers.

That seemed to conflict with an on-air statement Cuomo gave on CNN following his brother's resignation in August. Cuomo had said that "I never made calls to the press about my brother's situation."

Cuomo also said that he never "attacked, nor encouraged anyone to attack any woman who came forward" with accusations against his brother. According to email transcripts released this week, Cuomo wrote to aides that "I have a lead" on one of the accusers, although it was not clear what he meant.

Things moved quickly this week following the release of the transcripts. CNN took him off the air on Tuesday and suspended him indefinitely before the firing on Saturday.

It was clearly a painful decision for Zucker, who installed Cuomo as a morning show host shortly after taking over at CNN in 2013, then later moved him to prime time. Until this week, he had backed Cuomo despite criticism. "Cuomo Prime Time" had been the network's highest-rated show this year, airing at the 9 p.m. Eastern hour between shows by Anderson Cooper and Don Lemon.

Media

Variety



This image released by 20th Century Studios shows Ariana DeBose as Anita, (foreground left), and David Alvarez as Bernardo in 'West Side Story.' (AP)

Film

Remake rights some of the wrongs of original

Spielberg's rousing 'West Side Story' revival

By Jake Coyle

We're so rife with reboots and remakes today that it can take a moment to gauge just what Steven Spielberg's "West Side Story" is. It isn't a papered-over modernizing or a thinly disguised retread. It's a feat of reconstruction. Spielberg, Tony Kushner and Steven Sondheim have taken the original play and reworked it from the inside, burrowing into the DNA of "West Side Story" and its characters to recast, reconsider, deepen and clarify one of the 20th century's most iconic musicals.

It is, I think, a better movie than the 1961 original, by Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins, in almost every respect. The Sharks, the Puerto Rican gang who squares off with the white Jets in 1950s New York, have been given a new and fuller life, bringing "West Side Story" into balance and righting some of the wrongs of the original in its stereotyped depictions. Rachel Zegler's Maria, Ariana DeBose's Anita and David Alvarez's Bernardo are, to remarkable degree, what makes this "West Side Story" sing. And the story, as scripted by Kushner, is more emotional and complex than ever, fully realizing the "Romeo and Juliet" tragedy while shading the '50s gang strife with notes of today's divisions and battles of gentrification.

And, yet, as fully realized and impeccably crafted as this "West Side Story" is, I'm not sure it matches the power and force of the original. As problem-filled as that movie was 60 years ago, with Natalie Wood as the Latina Maria, its potency is impossible to shrug off. There was Robbins' electric choreography, the expressionist Panavision color and Rita Moreno — my god, Rita Moreno — a dynamo of almost overwhelming talent. The 1961 "West Side Story" was propelled by a teeming, lurching mid-century America energy — a surge of bodies in motion, syncopated with finger snaps. This "West Side Story" comes out of a different cultural moment, one of tasteful renovation — three 20th century titans of the arts, like master remodeling craftsmen, shifting and rearranging the play's lattice-work of scaffolding, brick and fire escape.

Delayed a year by the pandemic, "West Side Story" (Dec. 10 in theaters) arrives with a glow of eulogy, coming on the heels of Sondheim's death at 91. "West Side Story," originally staged in 1957, was Sondheim's first musical. Six decades later, it's Spielberg's first musical,

too, Spielberg, naturally, doesn't finally wade into song and dance with some little one-act but with possibly the most beloved musical there is. (He does, after all, know a thing or two about sharks.) When it comes to big-screen grandeur, there's still nobody who does it better.

What's immediately apparent is that Spielberg, with his regular cinematographer Janusz Kaminski, has elected for a paler, desaturated palette and a slightly grittier, more grounded sense of place. The opening shot skims over a giant pile of rubble — "slum clearance" to make way for the Upper West Side's Lincoln Center. (That bit drew chuckles at the screening I attended, at Lincoln Square's Walter Reade Theatre.) With the wrecking ball coming for San Juan Hill and a new, wealthier New York to build, the days are numbered for both the Sharks and the Jets. Their turf war is misguided from the start; they're both about to have no turf, at all. Corey Stoll's Lieutenant Schrank (superior of Brian d'Arcy James' Officer Krumpke) spells it out for them: A remake neighborhood is coming that won't have room for Puerto Ricans like the Sharks or "the last of the can't-make-it Caucasians."

Narrative

Its narrative, context and authenticity that give Spielberg's "West Side Story" its own verve. It most definitely still plays the hits, but the film feels less like a Broadway-to-screen transfer than a cinematic staging of a classic. The set pieces are often extraordinary. "In America" moves from the sound stage to the street in an on-air showstopper. "One Hand, One Heart," in which Tony (Ansel Elgort) and Maria speak their private wedding vows, has been uprooted to the Cloisters, where it shines with a holy tenderness. Some classics — "I Feel Pretty," performed inside Gimbels department store (where Maria works as a cleaner) — may be too familiar to sound new again. But songs like "Cool" are thrillingly alive, in part because Spielberg's nimble camera is in on the dance, an eager partner to Justin Peck's choreography.

But as much as these are set pieces — and as beautiful as Zegler's voice is — what makes them work so well is that they aren't isolated, but come out of the more fully formed interiors of the characters. Tony is just out of prison and staying in the drugstore basement of a new character, Valentina (Moreno, connecting movie past and present). His best friend, Jets leader

Riff (Mike Faist, terrific), is itching for a fight with the Sharks, and Faist plays him with a hint of mean, knowing despondency. Looking down on Puerto Ricans, he seems to realize, is all he has.

The Sharks, meanwhile, are led by Alvarez's Bernardo: boyfriend to Anita and older brother to Maria. There is more talking in this "West Side Story," and that includes Spanish without subtitles that intermingles with English. It's one of many details that endeavor to add authenticity to a drama with new layers of meaning. Not only are Bernardo, Anita and Maria wrestling with their standing in America, they are seizing a place in this deeply American musical. (Each actor does so, beautifully.) The blade-gleaming ethnic war at the heart of "West Side Story" is here less of a ready substitute for the Montagues and Capulets than a metaphorical battleground for today's discord, with plenty of pain and injustice to go around, and maybe some measure of hope.

That backdrop casts the romance between Maria and Tony in starker relief, and two actors — the sensational breakout Zegler and a never-better Elgort — have a warm chemistry. From the first time they see each other through the swirl of a school dance, their eyes are locked on one another. A lot of Elgort's performance, with a touch of Marlon Brando's melancholy sweetness, is in simply looking at Maria. Their rapport reaches a crescendo in the duet of "Tonight."

But that moment feels obscured by more than the fire-escape ironwork that cages it. It's possible that there are issues to the musical that can't be overcome. Is it better to let a once-one-sided view of race in America recede into the past? It remains, for instance, ridiculous how Maria shrugs off the death of her brother in the final act. It's a disservice to her character that squanders some of the magic that's accrued.

Yet this "West Side Story" succeeds most as a revival not just of Robbins' musical but of the best of classical, studio-made, big-screen cinema. It goes without saying that that's an imperiled species today — because of the pandemic, yes, but also because of other deeper currents in the movie industry. (The studio this was set up with was swallowed just before filming began.) "West Side Story" in that way feels as much like a revival as it does a swan song for a grand style of moviemaking that will hopefully persist, as Maria sings, "somehow, someday, somewhere." (AP)

GAINESVILLE, Fla: Nearly two decades after earning a place in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and more than four years after his death, rock icon **Tom Petty** has been awarded an honorary Ph.D. from the University of Florida.

The school's board of trustees unanimously voted to award **Thomas Earl Petty** a posthumous doctoral degree in music during a Friday meeting. Born and raised in Gainesville, Petty once worked as a groundskeeper at UF as he tried to make it in the music industry, but he was never enrolled.

Petty passed away from an accidental drug overdose in October 2017. Days later during a UF home football game, the song "I Won't Back Down" was played at the stadium as a memorial to Petty. The song has since become a regular feature at Gators games.

Usually backed by the Heartbreakers, Petty broke through in the 1970s and went on to sell more than 80 million records, featuring hits like "Free Fallin,'" "Refugee" and "American Girl." Petty and the Heartbreakers were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2002. (AP)

BOSTON: Massachusetts congresswoman **Ayanna Pressley** is upset that her beloved **Mariah Carey** Christmas album has gone missing, but she needn't worry — she was promised a replacement copy courtesy of the five-time Grammy winner herself.

"This is a PSA or a warning depending on how you choose to take it," the Democrat said in a tweet Friday. "Whomever 'borrowed' my #MariahCaree Christmas vinyl, return it. You can leave it at my office door, no questions asked."

She quickly followed with another tweet saying she was "so headed" she left off the "Y" in #MariahCarey.

It wasn't long before Carey tweeted back: "I'll send you a new one!!"

Pressley was surprised by the response. "Is this really THE one and only, the incomparable, iconic and legendary @MariahCarey aka Mimi?" she tweeted.

Carey actually has several Christmas albums: "Merry Christmas" was released in 1994, "Merry Christmas II You" was released in 2010, as well as Christmas soundtrack albums put out in 2017 and 2020.

It's unclear which one Pressley was referring to. (AP)

MIAMI BEACH, Fla: Legendary rocker **Lenny Kravitz** gave a private performance Friday for a star-studded crowd that included **Leonardo DiCaprio** and local Latin boy band CNCO during



Kravitz



Carey

Miami's Art Week.

The lavish party is an annual affair hosted by business mogul and art collector **Wayne Boich**. He and his wife also hosted a private dinner before the Richard Mille After Dark event at their waterfront estate. **Venus** and **Serena Williams** danced and sang along as Kravitz took the

stage for a 75-minute concert as a yacht pulled alongside to hear the rocker.

"This ain't a concert. We're just hanging out," the "Are You Gonna Go My Way," singer said, pulling Boich onstage to dance.

Kravitz, who has lived on and off in Miami for years, is a regular during the prestigious Art

Basel week and even displayed his photography during an exhibit in 2015, saying he was tired of always being the subject of photos and wanted to turn the camera around for a change.

The black-and-white collection, titled "Flash," captured soulful photographs and people in their everyday environments. (AP)

Features

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