

Duchess of Sussex's 'The Bench' celebrates fathers and sons

Books

NEW YORK, June 9, (AP)—The first children's book by Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex, is a multicultural tribute to fatherhood. "The Bench," a picture story published Tuesday by Random House Children's Books, celebrates the bond between Meghan's husband Prince Harry and son Archie and fathers and sons in general. Markle's rhyming narrative is complemented by illustrator Christian Robinson's watercolor images, showing families of different skin colors and backgrounds, from a light-skinned soldier returning home (Harry served in Afghanistan) to a dark-skinned man in dreadlocks, from a boy carrying a soccer trophy to a boy and his father wearing pink tutus. Fathers are seen as buddies, teachers, consolers and cheerleaders. Random House calls the book a portrait of "the special relationship between fathers and sons, through a mother's eyes." The image of the bench serves as a symbol of stability and comfort, starting with a drawing of Harry holding his baby son on a bench, two dogs nearby. Markle's opening stanza: "This is your bench / Where life will begin / For you and our son / Our baby, our kin" The book's jacket describes Meghan, the actor formerly known as Meghan Markle, as "a mother, wife, feminist, and activist," committed to "activating compassion in communities across the world. She cur-

rently resides in her home state of California with her family, two dogs, and a growing flock of rescue chickens." In announcing "The Bench" last month, she said it began as a Father's Day poem written a month after Archie's birth, in 2019. "That poem became this story," said Meghan, who dedicated the book to "the man and the boy who made my heart go pump-pump." Publication of "The Bench" comes four days after the birth of the couple's second child, Lilibet "Lili" Diana Mountbatten-Windsor, named in part for Harry's grandmother, Queen Elizabeth II, whose family nickname is Lilibet, and his late mother, Princess Diana. Meghan was pregnant with Lilibet while working on the book and the final illustration shows Harry and Archie, now a toddler, at the family's chicken coop. Meghan is in the garden on the opposite page, wearing a sun hat, holding an infant in a sling. Her final stanza: "Right there on your bench / The place you'll call home / With daddy and son / Where you'll never be 'lone'" Meghan and Harry announced last year they were quitting royal duties and moving to North America, their reasons including the racist attitudes of the British media. In a TV interview in March with Oprah Winfrey, they described unnervering comments about how dark Ar-

chie's skin might be before his birth and Meghan talked about isolation so intense she contemplated suicide. The British press so far has offered a mixed verdict on her book. The Telegraph labeled it "The Duchess of Sussex's semi-literate vanity project" while the Evening Standard called her writing "soothing, loving, although a little schmaltzy in places." "The biggest statement to the family the Sussexes have left behind comes from the line 'You'll tell him 'I love you'." Those words always spoken," reviewer Emily Phillips writes in the Evening Standard. "While Harry's father Prince Charles famously once said, 'whatever in love means' about his new bride Diana, we're being told that Harry will be telling their children he loves them a million times a day just like the rest of us."

Also:

NEW YORK: The husband and wife team who helped make the first COVID-19 vaccine are contributing to a book about their efforts. BioNTech founders **Ugur Sahin** and **Özlem Türeci** are collaborating with **Joe Miller** of the Financial Times on "The Vaccine," St Martin's Publishing Group announced Tuesday. Publication is scheduled for Nov 2. That's one week before a book by the head of Pfizer, which teamed up with the **Germany**-based BioNTech to develop the vaccine, is scheduled to come out.

Variety



This image released by Warner Bros Pictures shows Anthony Ramos in a scene from 'In the Heights.' (AP)

Film

Miranda's joyous ode to his beloved neighborhood

Infusion of joy in 'In the Heights'

By Jocelyn Noveck

"I am Usnavi and you prob'ly never heard my name," declares bodega owner Usnavi at the start of "In the Heights," Lin-Manuel Miranda's contagiously joyous ode to his beloved Washington Heights neighborhood. "Reports of my fame are greatly exaggerated."

Um ... maybe not for long. Projects by Miranda tend to attract a wee bit of attention.

Even in the annals of musical theater, by nature filled with Cinderella stories, "In the Heights" has an amazing backstory. It began two decades ago when a college student at Wesleyan had extra time on his hands — his girlfriend was studying abroad — so he started to write a show. A show that represented the Latino immigrant experience as he, son of Puerto Rican parents, saw it. A show that melded the things he loved: hip-hop, Latin music and dance, rap, and of course musical theater.

The kid was Miranda, and "In the Heights" eventually made it all the way to the Tony podium, winning best musical. Of course, Miranda's own story was just beginning. "Hamilton," his genre-bending phenomenon, was years away.

Comparisons between the two are inevitable, but they're different animals. "In the Heights," directed with unabashed exuberance by Jon M. Chu from a screenplay by Quiara Alegria Hudes, doesn't seek to reframe American history; it uses Miranda's rapid-fire wordplay and hybrid of traditional and contemporary styles to tell the story of one community — one intersection, even — through universal experiences, like encroaching gentrification. This updated version also touches on the Dreamers, and a golf reference to Donald Trump has been switched to Tiger Woods. But its main thrust is still the bonds of community, family and home. (If you look closely during one song, you can even spot Miranda's parents.)

"In the Heights" also benefits from an exquisite

sense of timing — cultural timing. The release was postponed a year; theaters are now open. "Lights up," begins the infectious opening number, and those words are perfect: Lights up on Washington Heights, yes, but also on a reawakened New York, where many are tentatively returning to pre-pandemic rhythms after a miserable year, eager for shared experience. "In the Heights" is a work that reads the room: a film without an ounce of cynicism, that wears its big heart proudly on its sleeve and dares you not to join in. Two lovers, suddenly dancing up the side of an apartment building? A Busby Berkeley-style dance number in a city pool? Yup. And yup.

Charm

Usnavi, we learn, aches to return to the Dominican Republic, where his late father owned a beach kiosk. Miranda played Usnavi onstage but has handed off to Anthony Ramos, a "Hamilton" alum (that's him with the "ten-dollar founding father" line) who eases into leading-man duties with warmth, humor and charm.

Though the film begins with a framing device of Usnavi recounting history to children on a beach — a choice that comes off as overly sentimental — it kicks into gear in that opening number, in which Usnavi introduces all the important characters.

There's Abuela Claudia, de facto matriarch of the community (Olga Merediz, a Broadway alum, in a deeply poignant performance). There's Usnavi's cousin Sonny (Gregory Diaz IV) — wiry, fast-talking, funny. There's Daniela (Daphne Rubin-Vega), owner of a local salon threatened by gentrification.

There's Benny (Corey Hawkins, terrific), who works at the taxi service owned by Kevin Rosario (Jimmy Smits). There's Vanessa (Melissa Barrera), for whom Usnavi secretly pines — she works at the salon but dreams of being a fashion designer. This

eight-minute number culminates in a street dance sequence (with ebullient choreography by Christopher Scott) in the center of Washington Heights. Most striking about these dancers: they're different ages, and different body shapes. They look like people.

Soon Nina (singer Leslie Grace) arrives for the summer from Stanford, harboring a secret. Always the smartest kid on the block, Nina feels marginalized as a Latina student, and has dropped out, putting her on a collision course with her proud father. Another plot addition: young Sonny is a Dreamer, and his future in the US is a risk. This side plot seems rather rushed, and a street protest scene seems an afterthought.

But the plot was always the lesser part of this equation. What shines are the inventive and joyous musical numbers — like "96,000," in that swimming pool, in which everyone imagines how they'd spend lottery winnings. Or "Carnaval del Barrio," in which Daniela urges friends to celebrate amid a blackout. The stirring "Paciencia y Fe (Patience and Faith)" gives Merediz her moment.

All characters are beautifully cast, but a standout is Hawkins, who has the soulful voice of a young Christopher Jackson (the original Benny, who has a cameo here) and charisma that burns through the screen.

Then there's Piragua Guy — he sells those shaved ice treats, drenched in flavored syrup. The small role was originally scratched, for length — until a guy named Miranda decided to play it. His sugary concoctions seem an apt metaphor for the film itself: Sweet relief at the right moment, and a treat for a hot summer filled with hope and possibility.

"In the Heights," a Warner Brothers release, has been rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America "for some language and suggestive references." Running time: 143 minutes. Three and a half stars out of four. (AP)

Features

ARABO TIMES

THURSDAY, JUNE 10, 2021

NEW YORK: Former US president **Donald Trump** reached less than a million measurable television viewers over the weekend in his return to the public stage at a North Carolina political event.

Newsmax averaged just under 700,000 viewers between 8 pm and 9:30 pm Saturday when Trump spoke, the Nielsen company said. His speech was also carried live on One America News Network and C-SPAN, but their audience is not measured by Nielsen.

Fox News Channel did not carry the speech by the former president beloved by many of its viewers. The network averaged more than 1.5 million viewers for its typical Saturday night fare of **Jesse Watters** and **Jeanine Pirro**.

Although Trump couldn't eclipse Fox's regular lineup, at least for Newsmax, showing the former president live appeared to be a good business decision for the network. So far this year, Newsmax has averaged 202,000 viewers in prime time, including the more heavily trafficked weeknights, Nielsen said.

Later on Saturday, Fox's debut hour with conservative media personality **Dan Bongino** reached 1.8 million people, making it the most-watched cable news show of the weekend.

The broadcast networks made a swift turn into summer, with NBC's "America's Got Talent" topping the ratings upon its return. CBS led for the week, averaging 3.3 million viewers in prime time. ABC had 3.17 million, NBC had 3.16 million, Fox had 1.7 million, Univision had 1.5 million, Ion Television had 970,000 and Telemundo had 880,000.

TNT led the cable news networks, averaging 2.36 million viewers in prime time last week. Fox News Channel had 1.94 million, HGTV had 1.25 million, MSNBC had 1.23 million and TBS had 938,000.

ABC's "World News Tonight" led the evening news ratings race, averaging 7.3 million viewers. NBC's "Nightly News" had 6.3 million, and the "CBS Evening News" had 4.7 million. (AP)



LOS ANGELES: NBCUniversal will present 7,000 hours of coverage of the upcoming Tokyo Olympics across eight networks and multiple digital platforms from July 20 to Aug 8. The Tokyo Games will be NBCUniversal's 11th consecutive Olympics production and ninth consecutive Summer



Watters



Trump

Games — beginning with the 1988 Seoul Games. NBC's first Olympics were in Tokyo in 1964.

NBC is scheduled to air 250 hours across 17 days, headlined by its prime-time coverage.

NBC also announced earlier this year that it would air live coverage of the opening ceremony

at 6:55 am EDT on July 23. Tokyo is 13 hours ahead of the Eastern time zone, meaning many of the marquee events will take place during prime time in the US.

USA Network, CNBC, NBCSN, Olympic Channel and Golf Channel will combine for over 1,300 hours, while Telemundo

Deportes and Universo have at least 309 hours for Spanish-language viewers.

Coverage of the Games begins July 20 at 8 pm ET on NBCSN with live softball and 4 am ET on July 21 on USA Network when the United States faces **Sweden** in women's soccer. (AP)