

# Will Smith opening up, releasing memoir 'Will' in November

LOS ANGELES, June 21, (AP): Will Smith is ready to open up about his life story.

Penguin Press announced Sunday that Smith will release his memoir called "Will" on Nov. 9. The actor-rapper shared a photo of the book's cover art to more than 54 million of his followers on Instagram.

Smith said he is "finally ready" to release the memoir after working on the book for two years. His book will be published by Penguin Press, an imprint of Penguin Random House and co-authored by Mark Manson, the author of "The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F(aster)ck."

"It's been a labor of love," Smith said in his post. Smith will also narrate the audiobook of "Will" from Penguin Random House Audio.

"Will" looks to tell a story about Smith's life and career. The book will delve into him being raised in West Philadelphia to entering superstardom as an actor and rapper. He's a two-time Academy Award nominee and won a four-time Grammy winner.

Smith starred in the "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air," "Bad Boys," "Men in Black" and "Pursuit of Happyness." He's won Grammys for "Summertime," "Men In Black," "Gettin' Jiggy Wit It" and

"Parents Just Don't Understand."

For her tour this fall to promote her memoir "Going There," **Katie Couric** is anticipating not only the interest of her fans but a return to something like a pre-pandemic world.

Book events have remained mostly virtual even as movie theaters and concert halls have begun reopening. Couric's 11-city tour, announced Monday by Little, Brown and Company and Live Nation, will very much be in person, and well beyond the scale of book stores and libraries and other typical settings for authors. She opens Oct. 28 at Boston's Orpheum Theatre, two days after "Going There" is released, and her itinerary also includes the Beacon Theatre in Manhattan, Atlanta Symphony Hall and the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee.

Special guests, to be announced, will be joining her at each stop. "Given the challenging period we've been through, I'm so excited to be out in the world, creating a sense of community and a place where we can all get together for meaningful conversations, and have some fun, too," Couric said in statement.

The tour will be produced by Live Nation, the concert promoter which previously worked on an author event scaled even higher —

**Michelle Obama's** tour for her 2018 memoir "Becoming."

"It is truly an honor to work with the iconic Katie Couric and present her to live audiences across the country," Live Nation Women President and Chief Strategy Officer **Ali Harnell** said in a statement. "She has always provided so much inspiration to people everywhere, particularly women."

While Obama appeared at the Forum in Los Angeles and other venues with seating capacities of 10,000 or more, Couric's tour is more in line with **Hillary Clinton's** events for her 2017 book "What Happened" or **David Sedaris** planned stops this fall for "A Carnival of Snackeries: Diaries: Volume Two." The Orpheum in Boston, the Beacon in New York and other stops have capacities of 2,000-3,000.

Publishers so far have hesitated to announce plans for future tours, though some in-person appearances are taking place. **Jennifer Weiner** is scheduled to read next month at Browseabout Books in Rehoboth, Delaware, and at other stores to promote her new novel "That Summer." **T.J. Newman**, author of the debut "Thriller," will be reading in July at the Changing Hands Bookstore in Phoenix, Arizona, where she used to work, and at the Mysterious Bookshop in Manhattan.

People

Variety



This image released by Warner Bros. Entertainment shows Corey Hawkins, (left), and Leslie Grace in a scene from 'In the Heights.' (AP)

Film

Chu calls his film 'a vaccine of joy'

## The moment arrives for 'In the Heights'

By Jake Coyle

As a student at Wesleyan, Lin-Manuel Miranda began writing what would become "In the Heights," the musical that would launch him as a playwright and performer and that would lead, two decades later, to Jon M. Chu's lavish big-screen adaptation. He was motivated, like any confident young artist, by ambition. But also by something else.

"It was a lot of fear, honestly," Miranda said in a recent interview. "I had a real wake-up call when I was 18, 19 and starting to study theater. The fear was: I'm going into a field that has no space for me, that has no roles for me. It was sort of that thing of: No one's going to write your dream show. The cavalry isn't coming."

When "In the Heights" opened recently, it felt very much like reinforcements are arriving. The movie, a street-level song-and-dance spectacle to rival the MGM musicals of old, is an exuberant celebration of the Latino immigrant experience, of a diverse neighborhood, of a teeming summertime New York, of life.

"In the Heights," originally slated to be released last June, arrived already engulfed with the aura of cultural event for one of the movies' most blatantly underseen communities. And as a big-screen party, "In the Heights" is poised to rekindle the euphoric, dancing-the-aisles theatrical experience that's been all but snuffed out over the past year. Just how much can "In the Heights" lift up? "It's a lot," Miranda sighs, "to put on a musical."

Yet the timing, despite Miranda's early inclination to get the movie out by streaming last year, seems preordained. "In the Heights" is one massive reminder of what we've been missing, on screen and off, the past pandemic year. Chu calls it "a vaccine of joy."

"On the first day of shooting, we all got in a circle and I was like: Let go of all the pressure. Let's just entertain the hell out of these people," recalls Chu, the director of two "Step Up" movies and "Crazy Rich Asians."

"We filmed it in the best summer of our lives in 2019," says Miranda. "It shows just how wonderful it is when we all get together and sing a song, or to see us embracing our elders without fear. It all hits different now."

"In the Heights" has already been almost universally praised by critics. With city-wide screenings, it opened the Tribeca Film Festival recently. But as much as "In the Heights" feels like a sure-thing blockbuster and a

Latino milestone, the movie debuted in theaters that have been battered by the pandemic. The film's long road to the screen — plans only picked up once Miranda's "Hamilton" became a Broadway sensation — is leading to a crucial test for moviegoing. Another wrinkle: Warner Bros. also released it simultaneously on HBO Max.

The filmmakers hope "In the Heights" can be for Latinos what "Black Panther" was for Black Americans or what Chu's own "Crazy Rich Asians" was for Asian Americans. Hispanics, the largest minority in the United States, make up an even larger slice of moviegoers despite their regular absence from Hollywood's biggest productions. For Chu, the kind of industry-changing, pop culture sensation he experienced with "Crazy Rich Asians" ultimately hinges on the audience.

Portraits

"Even 'Crazy Rich Asians' you couldn't really tell. It was only the second weekend when people started coming back and the third weekend when people who didn't go to the movies started to come," says the director. "Buying tickets to this thing — putting your money where your mouth is — was the democratic statement that no studio could make up."

Vacillating between wide-screen seas of dancers and intimate portraits of immigrant life, "In the Heights" tells a story both specific and of a community. Playing the role originated by Miranda, Anthony Ramos stars as Usnavi, a Dominican-American bodega owner with dreams of returning to the Caribbean. Ramos played Usnavi in a regional production of "In the Heights" but his breakthrough came in "Hamilton," in dual roles as John Laurens and Philip Hamilton.

The lyrics and backdrop of "In the Heights" are especially meaningful to the Bushwick native Ramos, whose star-making performance brings a streetwise New York swagger and big-smiling charisma to the film.

"The story of all these characters feels so familiar to my life and to the people that are in my life who I've seen in my own community growing up in Bushwick in New York and Brooklyn," says Ramos. "There are shots of the food that I grew up eating, the music that I grew up listening to. The piragua guy, I know that guy."

A sense of responsibility weighed on Ramos during the filming in Washington Heights. Before shooting certain scenes that felt particularly powerful, Ramos

would shout to the crew: "For the culture!" — a ritual he learned from Spike Lee while acting in his "She's Gotta Have It."

"It meant that we are all here, in this moment, doing this film and telling this story for something that is way bigger than us," says Ramos. "This ain't about us, this movie. It's about the people that came before us and the people that came after us. This is for everybody who had to sacrifice, who had to break doors open."

Both Ramos' mother and sister make cameos in the movie. In the opening number, his sister is dancing five people down from him. There are many such casting quirks. Miranda, happily a bit player in a world he created, plays the piragua guy. Much of the original Broadway cast appear in the final dance number among bursting hydrants. Some of the extras are kids from a nearby high school that put on their own "In the Heights" that the filmmakers attended and were inspired by.

"It just showed us: This is what we're here for," says Chu.

So strong is Chu's connection to the movie that he named his second child Jonathan Heights Chu. He wanted, he says, to hear that name every day of his life, and for his son to hear it, too.

Alongside Ramos stars Leslie Grace as Nina Rosario, a college student home for the summer; Corey Hawkins as Benny, a taxi driver; and Melissa Barrera as Vanessa, a salon worker trying to get her own apartment downtown. For Barrera, a 30-year-old Mexico-born actor, the character — a striver seeking opportunity away from home — is basically herself.

"To me 'It Won't Be Long Now' is literally the anthem of my life. I've been waiting for an opportunity like this forever. I feel like I've worked really hard in my career but there's always something, like, what is it that I'm missing?" says Barrera. "I was that girl. I left Mexico. I knew I wasn't going to be able to become a performer in my hometown."

When the film was early in development with The Weinstein Co., there was interest in casting pop stars in some roles. But Miranda believed strongly that "In the Heights" should help grow the Latino stars the industry has been lacking. A decision was also made to bring the show, which debuted on Broadway in 2008, up to contemporary times. That meant retailoring the book to encompass developments like the immigration policy of DACA and the challenges faced by a new generation of immigrants. (AP)

# Features

## ARABIC TIMES

TUESDAY, JUNE 22, 2021

weekend for Universal Pictures' "Fast and Furious" new installment "F9," which releases in domestic theaters June 25. The film starring **Vin Diesel**, **Michelle Rodriguez**, **Tyrese Gibson**, **Ludacris** and **Jordana Brewster** has already earned nearly \$300 million internationally.



Blunt

Stone

audiences who watched a lot of content on the small screen," he said. "Now, they will be able to see a movie that has been long delayed, but is tailor made for the big screen and that theater communal experience. Escapism will be the watch word when it comes to Furious 9."

F9 was originally scheduled for

worldwide release in April 2020, but was delayed several times, first due to the releases of Hobbs & Shaw (2019) and No Time to Die (2021), and then the COVID-19 pandemic. It was released in **Hong Kong** and **South Korea** on May 19, 2021, and is scheduled to be in the **United States** on June 25. The film received mixed reviews with praise for the

performances, visuals, stunts, and Lin's direction but criticism for its unrealistic action sequences and formulaic script. It has grossed over \$292 million worldwide, making it the fourth highest-grossing film of 2021. On July 31, 2020, a mixtape titled Road to F9 was released, and features music inspired by the film. (Agencies)

"Peter Rabbit 2: The Runaway" placed third in the box office with \$6.1 million, while "The Conjuring: The Devil Made Me Do It" claimed the fourth spot with \$5.15 million. It barely edged the **Emma Stone**-led "Cruella," which came in fifth with \$5.1 million.

"Spirit Untamed," "12 Mighty Orphans," "The House Next Door: Meet the Blacks 2" and "Wrath of Man" rounded out the top 10.

Dergarabedian expects a big