

Mirren makes regal bow as Harry Potter quiz show host

Television

LOS ANGELES, Nov 25, (AP): Helen Mirren is oddly absent from the Harry Potter film franchise that proved close to a full-employment act for Britain's acting greats. But she's found her own path into its magical world.

Dame Helen, as the Oscar, Emmy and Tony-winning actor is properly addressed, makes her debut as a quiz host with "Harry Potter: Hogwarts Tournament of Houses." The weekly, four-part series begins 8 p.m. EST Sunday on TBS and Cartoon Network.

In episode one, contestants representing the Gryffindor and Hufflepuff houses field trivia questions about J.K. Rowling's novel-turned-films in a bid to claim a championship trophy and prizes.

Mirren left the cramming to the players and is unworried about being a novice game show emcee.

"I can certainly play a strict host," she said, drolly.

Mirren's willingness to take on something different shouldn't raise eyebrows. She's celebrated for her regal roles — including "The Queen," "Elizabeth I" and "Catherine the Great" — but also counts the Fast & the Furious movie franchise among her varied credits.

Her return to a comic book-based project is upcoming: She plays a mythological goddess in "Shazam! Fury of the Gods." Mirren's baptism in the genre came with the film "Red" and its sequel.

In an interview with The Associated Press, she discussed her ad-

miration of the Potter canon, making a TV fashion statement, and female bonding on the set of the DC Comics-based film. Remarks have been edited for length and clarity.

AP: You've had an eclectic acting career, and now you're adding your first game show to the resume.

Mirren: Absolutely, which is why I signed up for it. I'm always up for a bit of an adventure. Also, of course, it's a wonderful subject and at a great moment, the 20th anniversary (of "The Sorcerer's Stone," the first Potter film). And the very fact I was never in any Harry Potter movies — much to my chagrin, I might add. It was a great way to be able to participate in the whole extraordinary phenomena that is Harry Potter.

AP: Are you a fan of the stories?

Mirren: What I remember very clearly was when the whole world of Harry Potter started rising. The most magical thing is the way the books were passed from hand to hand amongst kids, and adults sort of didn't know anything about it. It wasn't like it was published with great fanfare. A lot of the people who'll be competing (on the show), they will be in their 20s, 30s, 40s, but they will have past experience with Harry Potter as a kid.

AP: Have you watched any TV competition shows for tips or sought advice on hosting?

Mirren: I thought I'd just play it by ear and be as natural as I could. I'm personally very excited about it, so hopefully I'll communicate that. I'll be probably as nervous as the contestants themselves, and I'll try to hide that.

AP: You aren't playing a role with the costume dictated by your character, but was there a certain look you wanted as a host?

Mirren: That's an interesting question. The set, as you will see, it's so extraordinary, it's a beautiful, beautiful Harry Potter world that they've constructed. So I did want what I wore to reflect a slight costuming feel. And in a way, I'm playing a kind of a character. So, yes, I wanted it to be a sense of costume and presentation. It's got a slight sense of vintage about it, and a sense of belonging in that world.

AP: In the sequel to "Shazam!" you play Hespera, daughter of Atlas. Is she a hero or villain?

Mirren: I'm not going to tell you the answer to that. You're going to have to ascertain for yourself. I'm a member of three goddesses: Lucy Liu as Kalypto and the third goddess played by Rachel Zegler, who will be a huge star in a very short space of time. So there are three of us together, and that was really a great experience because it's so infrequent that you get to spend a whole of a movie with two other women. So often you're the only woman in the cast. Here we were a trio, and that was great. I loved it.

Variety



This image released by A24 Films shows, (from left), June Squibb, Beanie Feldstein, Steven Yeun, Richard Jenkins, Jayne Houdyshell and Amy Schumer in a scene from 'The Humans.' (AP)

Film

An intimate and devastating family drama

In 'Humans,' family's bonds sorely tested

By Jocelyn Noveck

Laughter and tears. Fun and disappointment. Affection and insults. Anxieties, hostilities, too much food, too much drinks.

In other words: Thanksgiving.

This year, Thanksgiving stories in the news are about COVID, and how families will navigate inter-generational mingling. There's none of that in Stephen Karam's "The Humans," a film entirely comprised of one Thanksgiving meal, based on a play written nearly a decade ago. But another plague hangs over the Blake family, whose table we join for 108 minutes: Economic pain. A struggling middle class. The American dream in tatters.

Karam is adapting his own Tony-winning work here, a play inspired by the 2007-2008 financial crisis. In doing so he achieves something quite rare: He makes an intimate and devastating family drama even more intimate and devastating.

Somehow, the sense of impending doom, the feeling that dinner is heading to a dark denouement, is even more tangible onscreen. As is the claustrophobia. If the stage version felt uncomfortably confined to one apartment, the effect is yet more extreme here as the camera draws ever closer, honing in not only on faces but on hidden corners, even blotches on the ceiling and walls, as if to say: There's no escape.

If it sounds like a horror film, maybe that's because Karam has said he's a big fan of the genre. And so, even though the plot ostensibly has nothing to do with horror, the elements are there: Mysterious noises, jumpy moments, scary dreams.

The place: A rundown apartment in Chinatown, where Brigid (Beanie Feldstein) and boyfriend Richard (Steven Yeun) have invited her parents, Erik (Richard Jenkins) and Deirdre (Jayne Houdyshell), grandmother Momo (June Squibb), and sister Aimee (Amy Schumer) for Thanksgiving.

The paint is peeling, the pipes exposed, the plaster bulging and the toilet seat broken. Also, there's hardly any furniture. But hey, there's a spiral staircase, and so even though the bottom floor is windowless, the place is a steal.

Not that Brigid's solidly middle-class, Catholic parents from Scranton, Pennsylvania, recognize this. Erik worries that Brigid is living near ground zero — we will learn of his own 9/11 trauma — and in a flood zone, and as for Deirdre, she can't help but comment on the lack of a view. Brigid protests: "Mom, it's an interior courtyard!" To which Mom jokes with faux hauteur: "Perhaps we can all take a stroll in the interior courtyard after dinner."

There is, surely, symbolism in this interior courtyard — not just because it's a staple of urban dwellings, but because it's closed off from the outside world, as are the Blakes, for the hours we spend with them.

Understated

A six-person cast can be hard to pull off if there's a weak link. Luckily, there is not. What's more, the banter among family members feels more than authentic — one feels these people have truly known each other forever. A lovely surprise is the understated, moving performance from Schumer as Aimee, who suffers from ulcerative colitis so severe that she's lost her chance to be partner at her law firm. Her girlfriend has also left her, as we learn in a heartbreaking phone call she makes during a break from dinner.

Brigid (a hugely appealing Feldstein) is luckier in love; Richard is a loyal, devoted boyfriend, who's even cooking the holiday meal. But like her sister, Brigid is struggling economically — she's lost out on multiple grants to launch her music career, and has a mountain of student debt. Brigid is outgoing and pleasant but when pushed, can be

hurtful — particularly about her mother's weight.

As for Mom, the terrific Houdyshell has even deepened her performance from the stage version — the only holdover from that production — for which she rightly won a Tony. Her Deirdre is outwardly upbeat and resilient but can register grief in an instant, and humiliation, too. As Erik, Jenkins masterfully balances the stubborn pride of an authoritative patriarch with the encroaching fear that everything is falling apart.

Everyone at the table is suffering from economic instability — Brigid and Aimee because of careers that never took off, Erik and Deirdre because their long-held jobs, his at a private school and hers as an office manager, are threatened for various reasons. Then there is Erik's elderly mother, Momo (an affecting Squibb), who suffers from advanced dementia and lives with her son because fulltime care is just too expensive.

We've left out Richard, the boyfriend, because in five years he stands to inherit his family money — earning him the scorn of Erik, who also sneers at the money Richard and Brigid spend on both health food and therapy: "If you're so miserable, why are you trying to live forever?"

Contentious moments like this promise a rougher evening as the hours tick by. But they're nothing compared to the stinging revelation that comes late in the game.

And yet — it's a family. Love is tested, but it is, in the end, unconditional. As the bruised family scatters into the night, there's only one thing we seem to know for sure: They'll be gathering around the table, some table, again next year. It's tempting to ask for another invitation.

"The Humans," an A24 release, has been rated R by the Motion Picture Association of American for "some sexual material and language." Running time: 108 minutes. Three stars out of four. (AP)

Features

ARABIC TIMES

FRIDAY-SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 26-27, 2021

NEW YORK: Tucker Carlson reached 5.05 million viewers for his Kyle Rittenhouse interview on Monday, the Fox News Channel opinion host's largest audience since the night of the Jan. 6 riot at the US Capitol.

Rittenhouse was acquitted on murder charges last week and Carlson was given the chance for the post-trial interview because of the support he had shown him, according to the 18-year-old's family.

Carlson has averaged 3.16 million viewers on a typical night this year, the Nielsen company said. ABC News and Diane Sawyer had strong ratings for her Friday night interview with members of a California family held captive for many years by their parents. That "20/20" episode reached more than 7.4 million viewers.

Fox broadcasting was the top-rated network in prime time last week, averaging 5.4 million viewers. NBC had 4.8 million, CBS had 4.5 million, ABC had 4.1 million, Univision had 1.5 million, Telemundo had 1 million and Ion Television had 880,000.

Fox News Channel was the most-watched cable news channel in prime time, averaging 2.89 million viewers. ESPN had 2.31 million, Hallmark had 1.58 million, MSNBC had 1.18 million and HGTV had 893,000. (AP)

MOUNT CLEMENS, Mich: A man twice convicted of breaking into homes owned by rapper Eminem is in legal trouble again after he violated his probation by failing to show up for a probation appointment and allegedly assaulting a mall security officer in the southeastern Michigan community of Taylor.

Matthew Hughes, 28, this week pleaded guilty to Macomb County Circuit Court for failing to show up for a September probation appointment but pleaded not guilty to the assault charge, the Macomb Daily reported. He was being held in Macomb County Jail, according to the jail's website. The newspaper reported no details were available concerning the alleged assault.

The parole violation occurred just days after Hughes was sentenced to probation after serving 524 days in jail for breaking into Eminem's home in Clinton Township in April 2020 and threatening to kill him. Eminem, who was home at the time,

got Hughes to go outside, where security guards detained him until the police arrived.

Ten months before that incident he entered another property in Rochester Hills in search of Eminem, whose real name is Marshall Mathers. He was sentenced to 90 days in jail after pleading guilty to a misdemeanor charge of



Carlson



Eminem

making an illegal entry. (AP)

LOS ANGELES: Joanne Shenandoah, the celebrated Native American singer-songwriter who performed before world leaders and on high-profile stages, has died. She was 63.

The Native American Music

Awards & Association posted on its website that Shenandoah, described as "Native America's musical matriarch," died Monday night in Scottsdale, Arizona, after complications of abdominal bleeding.

"Joanne's beautiful embellishing voice, strong Troquois traditions, unequivocal elegance and courteous grace made her a prominent role

model and highly respected musical matriarch among Native American communities as well as the mainstream music community at large," the organization said. "She sang with deep roots from her ancestors and flawlessly incorporated her oral traditions into contemporary Folk, Country and Americana formats." (AP)