

Abortion, Taliban in spotlight at Hollywood women's event

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif., Oct. 2, (AP) — A Hollywood event that's supposed to be about women's empowerment in the industry and the world was more about how their rights are being imperiled at home and abroad.

Restrictive abortion legislation in the US and the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan took center stage Thursday at the Variety Power of Women event, which honored actor Rita Moreno, singers Katy Perry and Lorde, poet/activist Amanda Gorman, and Channing Dungey, chairwoman of Warner Bros. Television Group.

The event celebrates the philanthropic efforts of those in the entertainment industry, with causes ranging from providing health care to the uninsured to reaching out to underserved communities through the arts.

Angelina Jolie spoke of all the girls in the world who feel like outsiders as she introduced the 23-year-old Gorman, who stole the show at President Biden's inauguration with a powerful recitation of her poem, "The Hill We Climb." (Gorman plans to run for president herself in 2036, the first year she'll be eligible.)

"How many Amandas are living in Afghanistan, hiding their journals, waiting to see if they're going to be allowed to go to school?" Jolie asked. "As if anyone has the right to decide what a woman can or cannot do with her own mind and body."

Jolie continued: "There is nothing more beautiful, more challenging, and perhaps unsettling than the free mind of a thinking woman."

Gorman then delivered a poem so powerful, the speaker that followed her — director Ava DuVernay — quipped: "Thank you to the person who decided that I would go after Amanda. Lord have mercy."

The nearly 90-year-old Moreno, who became the first Latina to win an Oscar, said that women have been deprived of power for far too long.

"We live in a time that requires us to be vigilant," she said. "As women, many issues require our attention in these dreadfully dark days, when our leaders politicize the wearing of masks and polarize our citizens over vaccines, when in the minds of many climate change is science fiction, and health care is still not codified as a basic human right in this divine America."

Actor Alyssa Milano said that "this is the most dangerous time to be a woman in America in my life."

"Texas enacted laws that are worse than we could ever have imagined. Other states are following suit," she said. "The Supreme Court seems content to let it all happen. And both parties in the Senate are failing us on this issue."

Milano then introduced a surprise guest: Paxton Smith, the Texas high school valedictorian who scrapped a speech approved by her school administrators and delivered an abortion rights call in its place.

Smith used her moment in front of Hollywood's elite to urge them to act.

"There is no more time to wait and see what happens next because the very thing we are afraid of is happening right now," she said. "Every citizen of Texas who has the reproductive capability of carrying out a pregnancy has had a fundamental freedom stripped away from them, the fundamental human right to decide what we do with our lives."

The Texas law is already facing legal challenges, including a lawsuit filed by the Biden administration.

"Royals" singer Lorde used her speech to question her own power. The singer drew some criticism after recording five songs from her latest album, "Solar Power," in the indigenous New Zealand language of te reo Maori.

The songs, she said, sparked a hard discussion.

"Is this wealthy famous white woman being supportive or tokenistic? Is she advocating or co-opting for her own social gain?" she said. "I welcome this discourse. Power like mine should be interrogated. In the past few years, we've all seen that no system of power is too big to fail, no person in charge too established to uproot."

On a night when she and other powerful women in Hollywood were being honored, Lorde said she was thinking of "the women whose birthplace or skin color or socioeconomic status was always going to make it less likely that they be handed a megaphone."

Katy Perry steered clear of politics during her speech and made it a more personal night for her, fiancé Orlando Bloom, and their daughter Daisy, who just turned 1.

"Orlando, a man that is a friend and an ally to women all around the world, thank you for handling the insanity of my life with such loving grace," she said. "And to my Daisy, a future powerful woman, I pledge to you to do my best to be an example of one, to never put limits on your dreams, to lead with love never through fear and to always be your lighthouse in any darkness."

She then asked Bloom to loosen her corset so she could sing a song called "What Makes a Woman." As he worked to undo the back of her billowing lavender dress, she advised: "Pull it all the way down, I have a girdle in here."

Event

Variety



This image released by Warner Bros. Pictures shows Corey Stoll, (left), and Vera Farmiga in 'The Many Saints of Newark.' (AP)

Film

Tony is a cameo in his own origin film

'Sopranos' prequel made for the TV fans

By Mark Kennedy

When "The Sopranos" is brought up these days, it's usually for the nebulous way it ended: That now-famous cut-to-black in a crowded diner while Journey's "Don't Stop Believin'" plays. Whether Tony Soprano lived or died is still hotly debated.

The real death in 2013 of the great James Gandolfini ended hopes of putting that debate to bed, but David Chase, the creator and showrunner of "The Sopranos," has intriguingly kept the show alive with the new prequel film "The Many Saints of Newark."

It's intriguing mainly because the film conjures the greatest character ever created for TV back to life but doesn't frame him in the middle. Tony Soprano is a cameo in his own origin film.

Instead, the guy in the center is Tony's social uncle, Dickie Moltisanti, played with real verve by Alessandro Nivola. Mafia boss Moltisanti is the guy young Tony looks up to. But he's riddled with the same flaws Tony will soon share: Possessiveness, quick to anger, methodical and yet impulsive, prone to affairs and eager to consume vast amounts of meat products.

In a stroke of genius, the older of two young Tony Sopranos in the film is played by Michael Gandolfini, the son of the late actor who share his father's wide, sad expressive eyes and bearishness. He is riveting.

All the old gang — now made young with new actors, of course — are here: Uncle June, Livvia Soprano, Paulie Walnuts, Silvio Dante, Pussy Bonpensiero, Janice Soprano, Jackie Aprile, Carmela and even Christopher Moltisanti, Dickie Moltisanti's son.

Michael Imperioli is back as the younger Moltisanti and he seems to have a bit of a chip

on his shoulder about his one-time mentor, Tony Soprano, on account of the older man choking him to death in 2007. So he narrates unseen from the grave.

That leads to one of the funniest moments in the film: When an infant Moltisanti is displayed by his mother to the family but gets too close to Tony, the baby bursts into tears. "It's like I scare him or something," Tony shrugs.

The danger here is that the new actors have a template of what their characters will look and sound like in the future. For the most part, they avoid caricature — like Vera Farmiga nailing Tony's fearsome mother and Corey Stoll brilliantly capturing the petty, irritable Junior. But John Magaro mugs a bit too much as Silvio, Stevie Van Zandt's consigliere.

One problem here is time, something the film obviously plays with. "The Many Saints of Newark" arrives 14 years after "The Sopranos" ended and that may be too long for anyone but the most ardent fan to keep up. The brain strains trying to connect new faces with old ones.

Crime

The plot really is just a few slices of years in and around Newark, New Jersey, in the late 1960s and early '70s. The DiMeo crime family — of which the Sopranos are a crew — is trying to stay afloat during civil unrest that includes deadly 1967 riots. But the film sags in many parts, never achieving the focused tautness of the series and often seems aimless. If you're not a fan already, it might come across as "Goodfellas" lite.

A terrific Leslie Odom Jr. plays Harold McBrayer, a low-level debt collector who will soon try to run his own crew. Ray Liotta wonderfully plays not one but two characters — Dickie's

dead-eyed father and also Dickie's philosophical, jailed uncle. If you're a fan of "The Sopranos," you'll know that Dickie Moltisanti doesn't appear in the HBO series. You'll learn why.

But what about Tony Soprano? How does he become the anxiety-prone mobster and dad, caught in the old ways and the new, as liable to brutally garrote an informant as break down and cry while hearing The Chi-Lite's "Oh Girl" on his car radio?

We leave him on the cusp of manhood, still teetering between criminality and innocence. Yes, he helps hijack a Mr. Softee truck, but gives away all the ice cream. Yes, he takes a pair of stolen speakers, but regrets it. "I try to be good," he tells his uncle.

There's a reveal of what will become his hair-trigger temper, but also a willingness to embrace mental health help, which will one day lead to a psychiatrist couch. He's about 20 when the film ends, too soon to see what really made him.

Credit "The Many Saints of Newark" — screenplay by Chase and Lawrence Konner, and directed by series regular Alan Taylor — for attempting to tackle generational violence, structural racism and opening up a story to add more than just Italian Americans shooting each other while forking in plates of gabagool.

But it's not enough. Tony is as mysterious at the end of "The Many Saints of Newark" as he is at the sudden end of "The Sopranos." Perhaps that's as it should be. Perhaps there's room for another prequel.

"The Many Saints of Newark," a New Line Cinema release, is rated R for strong violence, pervasive language, sexual content and some nudity. It's in theaters and HBO Max on Friday with a running time of 120 minutes. Two and a half stars out of four. (AP)

NORFOLK, Va.: Pat Robertson, who turned a tiny Virginia television station into a global religious broadcasting network, is stepping down after a half-century running the "700 Club" on daily TV, the Christian Broadcasting Network announced on Friday.

Robertson, 91, said in a statement that he hosted the network's flagship program for the last time on Friday, and that his son Gordon Robertson will take over the weekday show starting Monday.

"I will no longer be the host of the '700 Club,'" Robertson said on the show Friday, although he vowed to return from time to time, if he's had a "revelation" he needs to share. "I thank God for everyone that's been involved. And I want to thank all of you."

Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network started airing on Oct. 1, 1961 after he bought a bankrupt UHF television station in Portsmouth, Virginia. The "700 Club" began production in 1966.

Now based in Virginia Beach, CBN says its outreach extends to more than 100 countries and territories in dozens of languages through TV and video evangelism, online ministry and prayer centers. The "700 Club" talk show can be seen in the vast majority of U.S. television markets.

"Pat Robertson had an enormous impact on both American religion and American politics," said John C. Green, an emeritus political science professor at The University of Akron.

One of Robertson's innovations with the "700 Club" was to use the secular talk-show format, which was a break from more traditional broadcasts of revival meetings or church services.

"Here's a well educated person having sophisticated conversations with a wide variety of guests on a wide variety of topics," Green said. "It was with a religious inflection to be sure. But it was an approach that took up everyday concerns."

Robertson attracted a large audience and went on to have several US presidents as guests, including Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump, the network said. (AP)

LOS ANGELES: Scarlett Johansson and the Walt Disney Co. on

Thursday settled her lawsuit over the streaming release of "Black Widow," bringing a swift end to what had begun as the first major fight between a studio and star over recent changes in rollout plans for films.

Johansson filed the lawsuit in Los Angeles Superior Court two months ago, saying the stream-



Robertson



Johansson

ing release of the Marvel movie breached her contract and deprived her of potential earnings.

Terms of the deal were not disclosed, but the two sides released a joint statement in which they pledged to continue working together.

"I am happy to have resolved our differences with Disney,"

said Johansson, who has played Natasha Romanoff aka Black Widow, in nine movies going back to 2010's "Iron Man 2."

"I'm incredibly proud of the work we've done together over the years and have greatly enjoyed my creative relationship with the team. I look forward to continuing our collaboration."

Alan Bergman, chairman of Disney Studios Content, said he is "pleased that we have been able to come to a mutual agreement."

"We appreciate her contributions to the Marvel Cinematic Universe and look forward to working together on a number of upcoming projects," Bergman said. (AP)