

A portrait of Harrison Ford, an older man with grey hair, wearing a black tuxedo jacket over a white shirt. He is sitting in a wooden chair, with his hands clasped in his lap. A red peony flower is pinned to his lapel. The background is a solid dark grey.

V **ITY**

**Harrison
Ford**

Forever

At 83,
Hollywood's
ultimate
leading
man gets
his first
Emmy
nomination
— and
plots his
next move

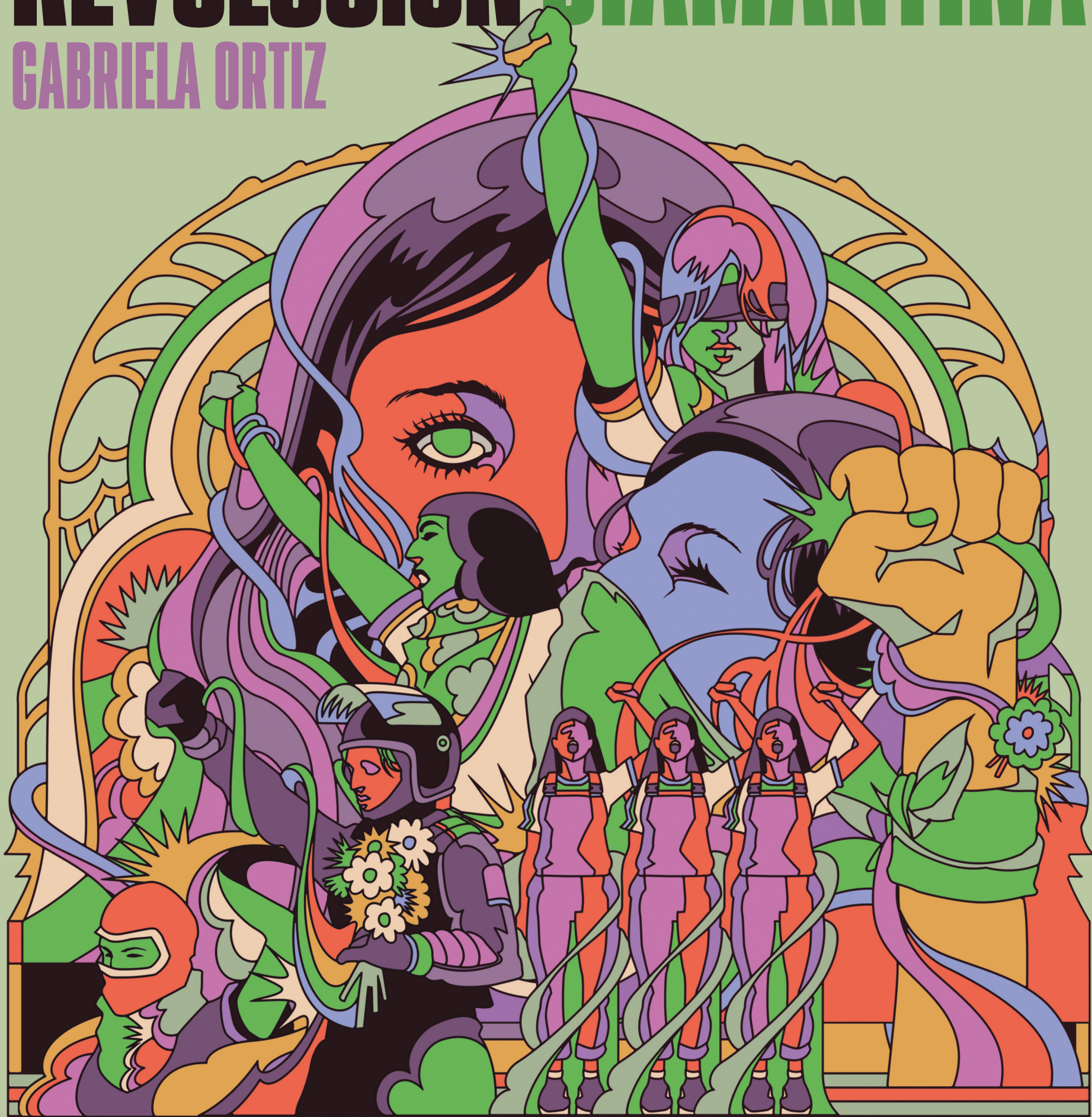
By
Angelique
Jackson

PLATOON

PARA SU CONSIDERACIÓN LATIN GRAMMY®

REVOLUCIÓN DIAMANTINA

GABRIELA ORTIZ



LOS ANGELES PHILHARMONIC / GUSTAVO DUDAMEL
MARÍA DUEÑAS / LOS ANGELES MASTER CHORALE



FEATURES

The Force Is With Him

20 One reason Harrison Ford revisited so many of his most famous roles was he wanted to see where his characters went as they aged.
By Angelique Jackson

The ‘King’ Returns

28 After a 15-year hiatus, the satirical show “King of the Hill” will grapple with a very changed world.
By Joe Otterson

Man of Steel

32 Not only has Dean Cain, a vocal Trump lover, survived Hollywood’s disdain for MAGA actors — he’s flourishing.
By Tatiana Siegel

MARQUEE**7 Merger Ahead**

Paramount and Skydance are finally set to close their \$8 billion deal. What's next?

EXPOSURE**18 Hero's Welcome**

John Cena dons a Peacemaker suit at San Diego Comic-Con. Plus: Adam Sandler and Bad Bunny premiere "Happy Gilmore 2" in NYC.

AWARDS CIRCUIT**39 Variety Show**

With a wide range of series and lots of first-time nominees, the 77th annual awards are set to make history in September.

FOCUS**43 Tune Town**

The best legal minds in the biz get their due in the Music Legal Impact report, while Busta Rhymes reflects on his Hollywood Walk of Fame honor.

REVIEWS**79 Fab Four**

Marvel gets its mojo back with Matt Shakman's satisfying, retro-styled "Fantastic Four: First Steps."

DEPARTMENTS**6 Editors' Letter**

And suddenly, because of his Emmy nomination for "Shrinking," there was Harrison Ford telling all.

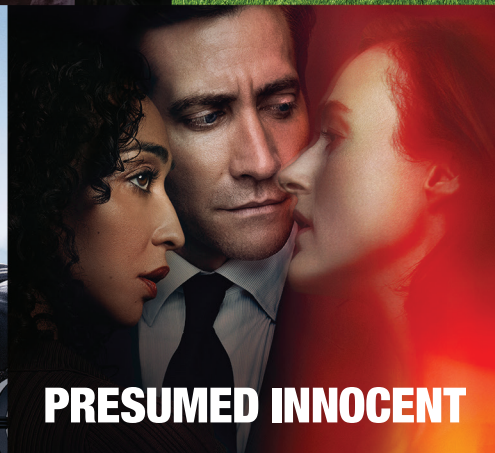
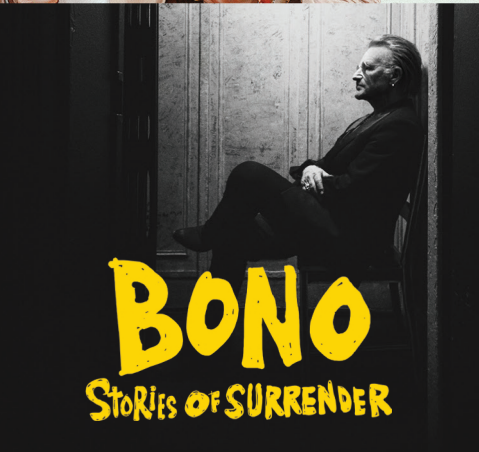
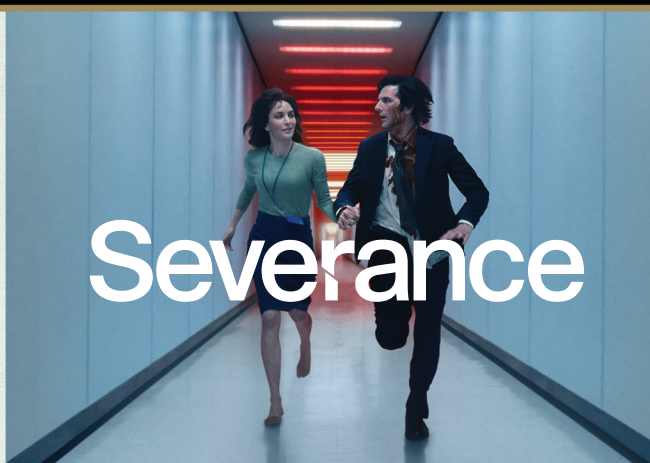
82 Back Page

Working with his hands before becoming an actor made Harrison Ford uniquely believable as someone who could wield a blaster and a whip.

Clockwise from top: Busta Rhymes; "X-Men '97"; Matilda Anna Ingrid Lutz in "Revenge"; Becky G at Univision's 37th Premio Lo Nuestro in Miami

To subscribe, please visit subscribe.variety.com.
To purchase back issues, visit variety.com/backissues.
To change your address or manage your subscription, visit variety.com/customerservice, email customerservice@variety.com or call 212-832-5147.





81 Emmy® Nominations

including the most-nominated drama and comedy of the year



Harrison Ford and Wendie Malick on Season 2 of "Shrinking"

A Silver-Screen Legend Opens Up to *Variety*

→ Some cover stories take months, if not years, to come together. Some come together very quickly. Usually those are great moment-in-time opportunities that we can't turn down.

That certainly was the case this month after Harrison Ford snagged his first Emmy nomination, for his work in the second season of Apple TV+ drama "Shrinking." We jumped at the chance to sit down with the legendary movie idol to talk about his

recent forays into episodic TV and his long résumé of indelible big-screen hits.

Our Angelique Jackson gamely took on the assignment of handling a sweeping interview with Ford. And then she graciously listened to her many colleagues who were full of "Don't forget to ask him about ..." suggestions.

Jackson ably steered the conversation through a host of eras and issues of importance to the beloved star. You'll learn things you didn't know about "American Graffiti," "Star Wars," "The Empire Strikes Back," "Blade Runner," the "Indiana Jones" franchise, "Witness" and more. He also veers into politics, the national mood and that time in 2015 when the plane he was flying crash-landed near Santa Monica Airport. There's so much to dig into.

We also pay a visit to another iconoclastic actor who is charting his own course through entertainment. While no one in Hollywood was paying attention, Dean Cain, the former "Lois & Clark" star, was quietly building up a roster of faith-centered,

MAGA-friendly movies. Our investigative reporter Tatiana Siegel delivers the goods after spending time with Cain in his home base of Las Vegas.

Finally, staying in the heartland, our own "King of the Hill" superfan Joe Otterson gives us the backstory of how the Fox animated comedy was reborn for a new generation as a Hulu series that bows Aug. 4. Read before you watch.



CO-EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Cynthia Littleton

Ramin Setoodeh

marquee



The Federal Communications Commission, led by Brendan Carr, approved the Paramount-Skydance deal a full year after the proposed merger was announced.

Paramount Sale Enters Its Last Act

The companies are days away from closing their merger after making concessions to get the Trump administration's blessing. What's next?

By Todd Spangler

→ David Ellison is finally about to show the industry what he plans to do with Paramount Global — after months of the most chaotic and politically charged M&A event in recent memory.

Last week, the Federal Communications Commission cleared the way for Ellison's Skydance Media to take over the struggling Paramount empire, a full year after they announced the proposed merger. The \$8 billion deal to create the new Paramount Skydance Corp., largely funded by Oracle billionaire Larry Ellison (David's father), is set to close Aug. 7.

It was a grueling public process that bruised the reputations of both companies. Critics accused Paramount of having "bribed" President Trump with a \$16 million payment to settle what experts



Paramount Global chairwoman Shari Redstone will receive \$1.75 billion in cash once David Ellison's Skydance takes over her struggling empire.



deemed a meritless lawsuit targeting “60 Minutes.” CBS’s cancellation of “The Late Show With Stephen Colbert,” announced a week before the FCC OK’d the Skydance transaction, appeared to many to be another concession to Trump. In a social media post, Trump said, “I absolutely love that Colbert got fired,” prompting an f-bomb riposte from the late-night host. (CBS has maintained Colbert’s axing was “purely a financial decision.”) Meanwhile, Paramount took shots from its own talent, including “The Daily Show”’s Jon Stewart and “South Park”’s Trey Parker and Matt Stone, who just inked a deal reportedly worth \$1.5 billion over five years. Stewart and “South Park” also skewered Trump, with the latter depicting the president in bed with Satan and having a comically small animated penis in its Season 27 premiere.

To meet the approval of the FCC, led by unabashedly pro-Trump chairman Brendan Carr, Skydance said it would ensure diversity, equity and inclusion programs are dead at Paramount and that DEI would not return to the newly merged company. Furthermore, it agreed to install an ombudsman at CBS to vet and act on “bias” complaints in its news and entertainment programming — a pledge that Anna Gomez, the FCC’s single Democratic commissioner, said represented the Trump administration “imposing never-before-seen controls over newsroom decisions and editorial judgment, in direct violation of the First Amendment and the law.”

Now that Skydance leadership is poised to take control, “the real work begins — rebuilding Paramount, addressing the critical strategic

questions ahead and charting a path toward a more sustainable and competitive future,” says MoffettNathanson analyst Robert Fishman.

Here are the biggest questions as Paramount-Skydance nears the finish line:

● Who’s in and who’s out?

The new company will be led by David Ellison as chairman and CEO and Jeff Shell (former CEO of NBCUniversal) as president. Shari Redstone, whose family has owned Paramount and predecessor company Viacom for decades, is set to receive \$1.75 billion in cash upon closing of the Skydance deal; she will exit the merged company’s board. The Ellison family will maintain 100% voting power over Paramount Skydance Corp., but nonvoting shares will remain publicly traded.

Leadership changes at Paramount are already underway: co-CEO Chris McCarthy, head of Showtime/MTV Entertainment Studios and Paramount Media Networks, is set to leave the company following the close of the merger, sources say. Paramount Pictures chief Brian Robbins is seen as prepped to exit as well, while CBS CEO George Cheeks is expected to stay on. (A Paramount rep declined to comment.)

● How big will the next Paramount layoffs be?

In a July 2024 presentation to investors after the Skydance deal with Paramount and Redstone’s National Amusements Inc. was announced, Shell said the Skydance team had identified at least \$2 billion in potential annualized cost savings at the combined company. Shell indicated many of those cuts will come from its linear TV business, but he didn’t explicitly cite staff reductions.

Prior to Shell’s comments, the trio of co-CEOs running Paramount — Cheeks, Robbins and McCarthy — announced a plan to slash \$500 million in annual costs. Earlier this month, they said they achieved that goal, largely through layoffs and restructuring that cut 15% of the U.S. head count, affecting about 2,000 employees. In June, the company cut another 3.5% of its domestic staff, representing several hundred pink slips. As of Dec. 31, 2024, according to Paramount’s most recent 10-K, the company had about 18,600 full- and part-time employees in 32 countries (so the head count is lower today).

Even if, for the sake of argument, the \$500 million in cost cuts claimed by Paramount’s co-CEOs is subtracted from Shell’s \$2 billion figure, that still indicates a very large set of layoffs — perhaps numbering in the hundreds — that could be coming under the new regime. Some Paramount employees expect it to run into the thousands, sources say.

● Will Skydance jettison Paramount’s cable nets?

Like its pay-TV peers, Paramount has seen steady shrinkage in its traditional television biz, which represented 64% of total revenue last year. In 2024, TV network revenue was \$18.8 billion — down 7%. The question on Wall Street has long been whether streaming (revenue was up 13%, to \$7.6 billion, last year) can grow fast enough to offset the crumbling linear TV side of the house. Ellison and Shell have said CBS remains a key asset. As for the Paramount cable networks, the new owners might opt to spin out or try to sell them, as Comcast and Warner Bros. Discovery are both doing (and after Lionsgate separated from Starz in May). That said: Maybe Ellison wants to take a breather from the M&A scene for a while.

David Ellison and Jeff Shell have said CBS remains a key asset. As for the Paramount cable networks, the new owners might opt to spin out or try to sell them.

EMMY® AWARD NOMINEE
OUTSTANDING HOSTED NONFICTION SERIES OR SPECIAL



“A VISUAL FEAST.
Stanley Tucci is the perfect guide
to take you on that journey through Italy’s
diverse, delicious landscapes.”

PASTE



TUCCI

IN ITALY





“The Fantastic Four: First Steps” collected \$218 million globally on opening weekend, but it misfired at the China box office.

Good Is the New Great

With ‘The Fantastic Four’ a qualified box office success, is the superhero genre finding its footing again?

By Tatiana Siegel

➔ Could have been worse. Could have been better. That’s the collective takeaway on Marvel Studios’ “The Fantastic Four: First Steps,” which pulled in \$218 million globally following its July 25 bow.

But as with “Superman” two weeks prior, the superhero movie’s overseas haul — \$100 million, including an anemic \$4.5 million from China — offers a stark reminder of how much things have changed since pre-COVID days and where the tripwires lie for the Disney-owned studio, which has ambitious plans for two “Avengers” movies in 2026 and 2027, respectively, followed by an “X-

Men” reboot further out on the horizon. By contrast, “Avengers: Endgame” nabbed \$614 million from the Middle Kingdom alone in 2019.

“There’s a reset of what a hit is, and I don’t see them consistently hitting \$1 billion as before — without China, with Disney+ exposure, post-COVID, without megastars,” says one top agent who represents several clients in the Marvel universe. “China used Marvel, Disney and the U.S. film industry to seed their own.”

Adds one insider of the lost China windfall: “We are never going to have those days again.”

That reality has changed the calculus at Marvel, led by Kevin Feige, when it comes to making a movie like “X-Men.” “Thunderbolts” helmer Jake Schreier is set to direct the tentpole, with the studio fine-tuning Michael Lesslie’s script. Casting will begin soon, and the field is wide open. But Marvel has indicated to reps that it is looking for younger talent, rather than A-listers, to “keep the cost down,” says another agent. Marvel is holding July 23, 2027, on the release calendar for an unnamed film, but sources say it won’t be filled by “X-Men.” Marvel declined comment for this story.

While Matt Shakman’s “Fantastic Four” features a bona fide TV star in Pedro Pascal, who has made his mark on the small screen in everything from “The Mandalorian” to “The Last of Us,” he

hasn’t yet scaled the same big-screen heights as the “Endgame” ensemble. And that helped keep the “Fantastic Four” budget manageable. Disney hasn’t given a precise figure on the film’s budget, only pegging it at somewhere north of \$200 million.

“Avengers: Doomsday” will feature at least one mega-payday in Robert Downey Jr., who is returning to the Marvel fold as villain Doctor Doom. Sources say Downey Jr. has earned between \$500 million and \$600 million over the course of seven Marvel movies and three cameos and won’t be working at a discount on “Doomsday”; neither will Chris Hemsworth, who’s returning as Thor. As for who will be the star of the film, sources say Pascal is not the centerpiece, but does have an integral role. Regardless, the tentpole is on schedule to open Dec. 18, 2026.

●

“There’s a reset of what a hit is, and I don’t see them consistently hitting \$1 billion as before — without China.”

Top agent with clients in the Marvel universe

VARIETY

ATTENTION VOTING MEMBERS

SIGN UP TO RECEIVE

Invites to *Variety's*
Exclusive Events

Unmatched Awards Coverage

Variety Magazine
For AMPAS Members only



ACTIVATE OR UPDATE YOUR REGISTRATION
VARIETY.COM/AWARDSUPDATE

Wall Street is keeping close tabs on Marvel as elements of its expanded portfolio fall into place, including the integration of 20th Century Fox assets like “Fantastic Four,” “X-Men” and last year’s runaway hit “Deadpool & Wolverine,” which earned \$1.34 billion worldwide.

“Marvel is a critical piece to Disney’s overall premium IP. And the stronger Marvel is, the better it is for the overall company,” says Wall Street analyst Robert Fishman at MoffettNathanson. “The recent studio momentum has allowed Disney to help drive subscriber growth at Disney+ and see the overall Disney flywheel start to accelerate again.”

There won’t be much to analyze for the next year. The next Marvel movie to hit theaters is “Spider-Man: Brand New Day” on July 31, followed by “Doomsday” in December and “Avengers: Secret Wars” in December 2027. Amid an industrywide pullback on superheroes, the Marvel brain trust is

feeling no sense of urgency on the long-gestating “Blade” reboot or even a new “Deadpool” outing, sources say. However, ideas are percolating on a Ryan Coogler-helmed “Black Panther 3,” creating excitement internally.

Ultimately, Marvel is thrilled that it has brought “Fantastic Four” — a tricky property that proved vexing in the past — back from the grave: Fans have embraced the effort, giving the film an A-CinemaScore. The two previous incarnations found a tepid response from audiences, with diminishing returns. Tim Story’s 2005 version earned \$334 million, while the drama-plagued 2015 version took home \$168 million amid a public bashing from director Josh Trank, who complained of studio interference from Fox. (Actor Toby Kebbell corroborated Trank’s version of events.) This time around, the only minor blip came via a behind-the-scenes battle over screenwriting credits, with the WGA stepping in to make

a determination. The union awarded final screenwriting credit to Josh Friedman, Eric Pearson, Jeff Kaplan, Ian Springer and Kat Wood.

For superhero watchers, good is the new great, as the genre finds its footing after a cold streak that included three recent Marvel misfires — “Thunderbolts,” “The Marvels” and “Eternals” — as well as a batch of duds from DC that predated the James Gunn-Peter Safran regime.

Says analyst Shawn Robbins of Box Office Theory: “I think as an industry we’ve become very obsessed with opening-weekend results, in particular with both [‘Superman’ and ‘Fantastic Four’]. Because word of mouth is so strong for both, I think the story is not fully obvious yet. Yes, ‘Fantastic Four’ is good enough in terms of it exceeded what Disney expected. So that’s a positive. And it’s tough to compare it to any other Marvel films because we simply live in a different time now for the superhero releases.”

A Killer Run

The art-house production company celebrates 30 years with a retrospective film series

By Rebecca Rubin

→ In the three decades since producers Christine Vachon and Pamela Koffler founded the production company Killer Films, the demise of art-house cinema has been greatly exaggerated — more than once.

“We’ve been doing this for so long that we’ve seen the death of independent film at least three or four times,” Vachon says. “And then we’ve seen it rise from the ashes — usually on the back of something that is really good or super original that nobody saw coming.”

Sure enough, history repeated itself as the latest from Killer, director Celine Song’s romantic comedy “Materialists,” starring Dakota Johnson, Chris Evans and Pedro Pascal, broke out with \$51 million globally. The movie’s success isn’t a complete surprise — it was distributed by indie favorite A24, features three A-listers and serves as the follow-up to Song’s Oscar-nominated debut, “Past Lives.” Yet



Christine Vachon and Pamela Koffler

the film arrived after a particularly desolate stretch for art-house cinema; “Materialists” is one of just two specialty releases this year (Neon’s thriller “The Monkey” is the other) to surpass \$50 million.

“People want to feel good, and ‘Materialists’ delivers,” Koffler says.

Killer Films has other reasons to celebrate in 2025: The production company is about to turn 30. Vachon and Koffler are marking the occasion by programming a retrospective at New York’s Metrograph, complete with features like Todd Haynes’ off-kilter Bob Dylan biopic “I’m Not There” and Julianne Moore-led “Far From Heaven” as well as horror comedy “Office Killer,” for which the production company is named.

“We made an effort to show movies that don’t get shown theatrically anymore,” Vachon says.

With the backing of those titles and others, including Kimberly Peirce’s “Boys Don’t Cry” and Lary Clark’s “Kids,” Killer has been credited as a pillar of the New Queer Cinema movement of the 1990s. Part of the company’s ethos has been championing not just queer artists, but voices from any marginalized or underserved communities.

“If you’re a gay person like me,” Vachon says, “or a person of color and you’re constantly getting the signal that your story doesn’t matter, the bigger question in the face of this administration is: How do we, as storytellers, face this moment?”

A tumultuous stretch for the movie business has led to tough questions about which films to back.

“We need to not just have the conversation about why we think this movie is great,” Vachon says, “but also about the steps that get it onto the screen.”

Vachon and Koffler believe the key to Killer’s longevity has been learning to embrace disruption.

“It’s our ability to pivot when times change — which they do constantly — rather than resent it,” Vachon says. “And people like to work with us. They feel like we protect their creative interests.”

Koffler says the pair’s long-standing creative relationship is due to “shared values.”

For Vachon, it’s their “differences of temperament.” “There’s a certain brand of financier that drives Pam crazy but doesn’t drive me crazy and vice versa,” she cracks. “It comes down to things like ‘Can you handle this negotiation? I cannot bear that agent.’”

The Fantastic 10

As Marvel's signature franchise launches its next phase, a look back at the best entries so far

By Kate Aurthur, Angelique Jackson, Haley Kluge, Jordan Moreau and Adam B. Vary

→ Since 2008, Marvel Studios has released 36 feature films, 15 streaming series and even two TV specials, all of it knitted together within the unprecedented narrative tapestry known as the Marvel Cinematic Universe. With its 37th movie, “The Fantastic Four: First Steps,” the company has gone back to its roots, bringing the inaugural creation of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby into the MCU. So it seemed fitting to look back at the entirety of this history-making creative endeavor and rank every title from best to worst. Here is our Top 10; the full list can be found at [Variety.com](https://www.variety.com).



1 Avengers: Endgame 2019

“Endgame” stands as a singular creative feat: the culmination of 11 years of big-screen storytelling, writ as large as moviemaking can get. The epic final battle, assembling (almost) every MCU character to that point, delivered a litany of exhilarating narrative payoffs that had audiences across the planet erupting in cheers. We love this 3,000.



2 Black Panther 2018

Anchored by the late Chadwick Boseman's career-defining turn, the MCU's first Black-led superhero movie was a towering cultural moment, from its \$1.3 billion box office gross to its best picture Oscar nod. The story's main theme — a newly installed leader grapples with how to be a good king and a good man — resonates more deeply every year.



3 Guardians of the Galaxy 2014

Writer-director James Gunn infused humor and emotional stakes into his celebration of how the power of friendship can defeat evil. Somehow, a genetically engineered raccoon, a sentient tree and some terrible dancing to “O-o-h Child” delivered Marvel's first tear-jerker, proving how much the MCU could achieve beyond its core superheroes.



4 WandaVision 2021

Marvel Studios' first TV series was presented as a quirky homage to classic sitcoms by way of the domestic life of Elizabeth Olsen's Wanda Maximoff and Paul Bettany's Vision. But it soon evolved into a profound exploration of the power of grief — leaving a lasting imprint of how comic-book stories can speak to our real lives.



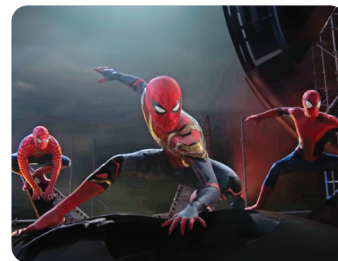
5 Captain America: The Winter Soldier 2014

“Winter Soldier” is packed with badass action set-pieces as the film rips apart S.H.I.E.L.D. to expose how our most trusted institutions can be undermined from within. But it's the deeply felt bond between Steve Rogers (Chris Evans) and Bucky Barnes (Sebastian Stan) that makes this movie sing.



6 X-Men '97 2024

“X-Men: The Animated Series,” the Saturday morning cartoon staple, gets a modern continuation that exceeds all expectations, with surprisingly mature storytelling and richly realized characters. The highpoint of the first season — the attack on the mutant nation of Genosha — is at once riveting and political in ways the MCU rarely is.



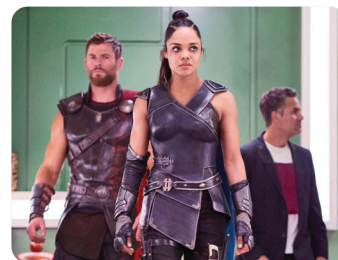
7 Spider-Man: No Way Home 2021

Tobey. Andrew. Tom. Three generations of web-slingers shared the screen in what only seemed possible in Spider-Man fans' wildest dreams. Thanks to Doctor Strange's wobbly magical mayhem, “No Way Home” fully used the multiverse and pulled many of Sony's most beloved superheroes — and super-villains — into the MCU for the first time.



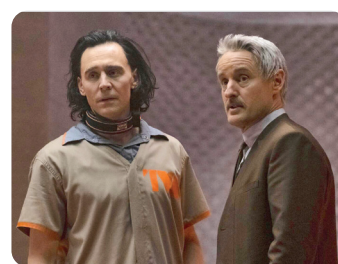
8 Iron Man 2008

Christopher Nolan has said that casting Robert Downey Jr. as Tony Stark was one of the most consequential decisions in cinema, and we couldn't agree more. By making the first Marvel Studios film a study of how a genius-billionaire-playboy turns into a hero, Downey and director Jon Favreau developed the formula for an entire cinematic universe.



9 Thor: Ragnarok 2017

Chris Hemsworth finally got a haircut, but more importantly, he got to be weird — and made “Thor” fun again, as director Taika Waititi gave the franchise the offbeat, stylish jolt it badly needed. Between a sassy Jeff Goldblum and a fierce Tessa Thompson, “Ragnarok” is Marvel at its most quotable (“He's a friend from work!”) and rewatchable.



10 Loki 2021–23

From “Thor” to “Endgame,” Loki was just about everyone's favorite Marvel villain. But over the series' two narratively trippy, visually arresting seasons, Tom Hiddleston deepened his performance by dissecting the God of Mischief's toxic narcissism. In a universe devoted to heroism, this was one of the MCU's most stirring stories ever.



Netflix plans to showcase "Jay Kelly," starring George Clooney, at multiple festivals.

Make or Break Time

Studios weigh risk or reward in the high-stakes game of Oscar campaign festival launches

By Clayton Davis

→ For Hollywood studios eyeing Oscar gold, deciding where to premiere a film is one of the season's most crucial strategic choices. The right debut at the right festival can generate months of positive buzz; the wrong one can torpedo an awards campaign before it begins.

"It's a calculated gamble every time," says a studio executive who requested anonymity in discussing internal strategy. "You're weighing the potential upside of a festival launch against the very real risk of an early critical rejection that follows you all season long."

Premieres at festivals like Venice or Toronto offer studios several key benefits. First, they provide crucial early momentum. Films that generate acclaim at top-tier events often carry that goodwill through months of campaigning, creating a sense of inevitability that can sway Academy voters.

Festivals also allow studios to test their films with critics, industry professionals and tastemakers whose endorsements shape early conversation. "When you get a standing ovation at Venice or win the People's Choice Award at Toronto, Oscar voters know they have to consider your film," says a veteran awards strategist. "You're getting validation from the exact audience you need to convince during awards season."

The Venice International Film Festival involves a particularly complex calculation. While winning the Golden Lion does not guarantee Oscar success — since 2009, only five winners of the top prize have gone on to earn best picture nominations — Venice offers international prestige and media attention at a critical juncture in the awards calendar. A strong reception there can vault a picture into front-runner status.

But festivals can also stop a movie dead in its tracks. Early critical rejection can spawn a negative narrative that proves nearly impossible to reverse. Todd Phillips' "Joker: Folie à Deux" ex-

emplifies this risk. Despite an 11-minute standing ovation at the crime musical's Venice premiere last year, persistent critical backlash overtook any initial goodwill. The \$200 million Warner Bros. sequel opened domestically to just \$40 million, and awards prospects for stars Joaquin Phoenix and Lady Gaga vanished almost as soon as the reviews hit.

Paul Thomas Anderson's "One Battle After Another," a WB tentpole that stars Leonardo DiCaprio, is bypassing Venice and isn't expected to appear at Telluride. Given the film's reported \$175 million budget, the studio has chosen to avoid fests rather than risk the critical scrutiny that might dampen its commercial prospects. The box-office-first approach is evident in Warner's highly surreal partnership announcement: a collaboration between Anderson's latest opus and online game "Fortnite."

Because of the cost and complications of flying talent around the world in a compressed time frame, very few films hit the full fall festival circuit — New York, Venice, Telluride and Toronto. Last year, Apple TV+ tried the tactic with Alfonso Cuarón's miniseries "Disclaimer," which earned just two Emmy nominations. This year, it appears no film will mimic that approach.

Other studios avoid festivals altogether. Universal Pictures rarely participates in the circuit; its upcoming "Wicked: For Good" is not expected to premiere at any major festival. This conservative approach eliminates the risk of early negative reviews but also forgoes the potential lift that a prestigious debut can provide.

Netflix, by contrast, continues to invest heavily in festival strategy. After "The Power of the Dog" earned 12 Oscar nominations following its festival run, the streamer plans to showcase Noah Baumbach's "Jay Kelly," with George Clooney and Adam Sandler, at multiple festivals.

Focus Features, overflowing with awards prospects, will juggle Yorgos Lanthimos' "Bugonia" and Chloé Zhao's "Hamnet" at Venice and Telluride, while debuting Daniel Day-Lewis' acting comeback drama "Anemone" later in the year. Craig Brewer's "Song Sung Blue," also from Focus, is being released on Christmas, but will likely bypass the festival circuit.

Ultimately, a festival premiere strategy reflects a studio's confidence in its film and its willingness to take risks. In an industry where perception often becomes reality, the decision to debut at Venice instead of Toronto — or to skip festivals entirely — may determine not only a film's awards trajectory but also its place in the Oscar echelons. "It comes down to trusting the audience you choose to reveal it to will get it," says another strategist. "And that is the biggest gamble of all."

A Quieter Comic-Con Still Makes Noise

Ryan Gosling, 'South Park' and Wile E. Coyote were among the highlights of the annual fan fest

→ With no big Marvel Studios panel, no first looks at DC's next movies and Netflix focused on Tudum, the 2025 edition of San Diego Comic-Con was a quieter affair. But it nonetheless made news: Arguably the biggest panel came on the final day, usually the sleepest of the convention, when George Lucas made his first-ever appearance to discuss the 2026 opening of his Lucas Museum of Narrative Art in Los Angeles. "This is a temple to the people's art," he said. "Art is about an emotional connection, not how much it cost or what celebrity made it. If you have an emotional connection, then it's art."

That's also an apt description for Comic-Con, where studios use star power, giveaways and exclusive footage to cultivate the 130,000 oft-costumed attendees' passion for their upcoming film and TV projects. Here are some of the major highlights from this year's fest.

• 'South Park' Reveals Its Trump Penile Dysfunction

Grand political statements were largely absent from this year's event. But all eyes were on the Comedy Central panel featuring "South Park" creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone, a day after the show's Trump-baiting Season 27 premiere. The duo largely let the episode speak for itself, although they said Comedy Central wanted to blur the episode's depiction of a tiny Donald Trump penis. So they resolved it by putting googly eyes on the member and noting it was a character.

• Looney Tunes Proclaims, 'T-T-T-That's Not All, Folks!'

With 6,500 people packed into Hall H, some panels turned to theatrics to make an impact. The titular alien hunter in 20th Century Studios' "Predator: Badlands" took to the stage to open the film's panel, while Disney's "Tron: Ares" started with pulsing lasers and armor-clad guards. But the panel for Ketchup

Entertainment's "Coyote vs. Acme" — the Looney Tunes live-action comedy infamously shelved by Warner Bros. Discovery in 2023 — stole the show, with officials from the Acme Corporation repeatedly interrupting the proceedings in a tongue-in-cheek attempt to block star Will Forte and director Dave Green from playing any clips from the film. "They've been trying to bury this at every step," Forte said of Acme. "They'll stop at nothing!"

• A Comic-Con-fluence of First Looks

Exclusive footage ultimately was the coin of the realm at Comic-Con. Several scenes from Amazon MGM's "Project Hail Mary," including the opening five minutes, played to eager fans of Andy Weir's bestselling sci-fi novel of the same name. "I connected to his reluctance," star Ryan Gosling said of his character, a high school science teacher who's sent to space to save humanity. "He's somebody who gave up on himself on Earth, and he's given an opportunity to believe in himself again."

"Tron" debuted two eye-popping extended clips and a Nine Inch Nails music video, while "Predator" fans were treated to the battle-loaded first 15 minutes of "Badlands." The Stephen King adaptation "The Long Walk" got a screening of the film's intense first 22 minutes. A gripping early look at Season 2 of Hulu's "Paradise" in-

troduced Shailene Woodley's character, a tour guide at Graceland. Prime Video's "Gen V" panel sneaked in a hilariously bloody teaser for the final season of "The Boys." "King of the Hill" fans got an exclusive screening of an episode from the revival. And Paramount+'s "Star Trek" panel presented the entire July 31 murder-mystery episode of "Strange New Worlds," while FX debuted the first episode of the epic series "Alien: Earth," which premieres on Aug. 12.

• 'Resident Alien' Takes It to the Grave

"Resident Alien" got a surprisingly emotional panel; news broke the night before that USA Network had canceled the series, which has three episodes remaining in its fourth and now final season. The series' stars and showrunner reflected on its legacy and took a final bow in front of their devoted fans.

"The industry is in disarray," cast member Alice Wetterlund said. "Thanks, tech. In a world where TV was normal, we could have way more. The only reason that's not true is not because anybody behind the show doesn't want it. It's because of the way the industry works now. You guys deserve more of this."

Contributors: Angelique Jackson, Leia Mendoza, Jordan Moreau, Michael Schneider and Adam B. Vary



Phil Lord, Ryan Gosling and Andy Weir debut footage from "Project Hail Mary."

Awards Circuit

By Michael Schneider



Living Through This

With the media and the arts under direct attack, here's what the Emmys can do



➔ Remember your old history textbooks, when you'd read a chapter about a dark or difficult period in the past and wonder, "How did people handle living through that?" In the 20th century, that meant the Great Depression and two world wars, as well as violence against people of color and all sorts of oppression. Reading those books, we were kinda smug: "Man, people were really terrible back then! Good thing we've evolved as more accepting, inclusive human beings!"

I'm not sure the kids reading history textbooks today (do they still have textbooks? Have they been banned yet?) are feeling as smug. But it's very likely that students learning about 2025 in 50 or 100 years are going to be asking the same question. So, how are we living through this?

Not well. The past few weeks have been extremely difficult for the free media, and it's too soon to tell what the devastating consequences might be. In the course of a few weeks, Paramount has bent the knee and paid \$16 million to Donald Trump to resolve a frivolous lawsuit, giving him a huge victory over CBS News. In a tremendous

CBS' cancellation of "The Late Show With Stephen Colbert" silences another voice.

blow to public media, crucial funding for PBS and NPR stations — particularly in rural areas — has been eliminated. In his continued attempts to silence journalists, Trump filed a \$20 billion lawsuit against The Wall Street Journal over an exclusive report that alleged that he had sent Jeffrey Epstein a "lewd" birthday note.

And regardless of where the reasons lie, the fact that CBS has canceled "The Late Show With Stephen Colbert" silences another voice — and gives Trump another reason to gloat, proclaim victory and warn other broadcasters that they should do the same.

The sheer enormity of all this bad news, day after day, is disheartening. Just last week, to push the Paramount deal over the finish line, Skydance agreed to eliminate any remaining diversity, equity and inclusion programs: Because it's pretty clear this administration would like to set the clocks back to an era when only white folk were in front of and behind the camera. And now, after zeroing

out public media funds and aiming at eliminating the National Endowment of the Arts (which has already rescinded millions of dollars in grants), the Republicans are looking to name the Kennedy Center's opera house after Melania Trump?

That's just the direct attack on the media, the arts and journalism. The ongoing action of masked, armed, unregulated thugs kidnapping both undocumented and, in some cases, legal citizens — tearing families apart and shoving them in filthy holding pens without due process — is having a profoundly awful effect on Los Angeles.

It's all madness. As we enter Phase 2 of the Emmy race, it may seem like there's too much going on in the world to pay attention. But there are ways to help — including keeping some of these issues front and center. I'm hoping the Emmy telecast will take a moment to pay tribute to PBS and remind viewers what public broadcasting is all about. Maybe also add a fundraising aspect to fill in some of the money that local stations — especially the ones tasked with public safety alerts — need to stay on the air. Locally, at upcoming FYC events, think of the independent L.A. businesses that have been hit the hardest during this siege on our city

— including street-food vendors.

My colleague Clayton Davis recently noted that the Colbert news could help his chances at landing his first "Late Show" Emmy, and if that happens, I know that acceptance speech will be amazing. But honestly, if Jimmy Kimmel or "The Daily Show" wins, any of those thank yous will come with the opportunity to say something appropriate and stirring for the era. In times like these we all need to rise to the occasion. What will we do, and how will those future history books judge us?

I'm hoping the Emmy telecast will pay tribute to PBS and remind viewers what public broadcasting is all about.

Telev^{er}se 25

Acting Class with
HENRY WINKLER

**ANNE RICE'S TALAMASCA:
THE SECRET ORDER**

Premiere Screening and Q&A

The Art of Foley with
SANAA KELLEY

BONES

20th Anniversary Retrospective with Creator & Cast

Breaking Story with
BEAU WILLIMON

Game On: Inside the Booth with
THE LOS ANGELES DODGERS

QUEER AS FOLK

25th Anniversary Reunion

THE RAINMAKER

Premiere Screening and Q&A

Scene by Scene with
TOMMY SCHLAMME

What's Next: The Future of
MUSIC SUPERVISION

AND MORE!

**AUGUST 14-16
JW MARRIOTT
L.A. LIVE**

**BUY TICKETS
NOW**



TELEVERSE.COM

exposure

Edited by Marc Malkin

John Cena at the “Peacemaker” panel



Matt Stone and Trey Parker at the “Comedy Central Adult Animation” panel

Comic-Con

Various locations, San Diego **JULY 24-27**

George Lucas made his first appearance at the annual geek fest to offer a sneak peek at the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art ahead of its 2026 opening. “I’ve worked with hundreds of illustrators in my life, and they’re all brilliant, but they don’t get recognized for anything,” the filmmaker said. “This museum is a temple to the people.” “South Park” creators **Trey Parker** and **Matt Stone** took part in a Comedy Central panel the day after their Season 27 takedown of President **Donald Trump**. The collaborators said the network wanted them to blur the president’s animated tiny manhood. Stone noted that they added eyes to the appendage, prompting Parker to tell the network, “If we put eyes on the penis, we won’t blur it. And then that was a whole conversation for about four fucking days. It’s a character.”



Quinta Brunson at the Variety Comic-Con Studio presented by Google TV



Aryan Simhadri and Walker Scobell at the “Percy Jackson and the Olympians” panel



Sterling K. Brown at the “Paradise” press line



Ashley Eckstein, Marissa Bode and Michael James Scott at the Her Universe Fashion Show



Jodie Turner-Smith, Evan Peters and Gillian Anderson at the “Tron: Ares” panel



Queen Latifah and George Lucas at the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art panel



'Happy Gilmore 2' Premiere

Jazz at Lincoln Center, New York **JULY 21**

Bad Bunny signed on for the comedy sequel after his impressive work hosting "Saturday Night Live." "I saw him and I couldn't believe how funny he was," **Adam Sandler**, who co-wrote and stars in the film, told *Variety*. The singer's team had already been reaching out to the funnyman to consider him for roles. "He's doing fine with or without me, but I'm happy he's in this, man," Sandler said. **Julie Bowen** reprises her role as Happy Gilmore's love interest in the second movie. "When he asks, you say yes," Bowen said about getting the call from Sandler. "No one says no — you'd be high to say no."



Bad Bunny and Adam Sandler



Haley Joel Osment, John Oliver, Jimmy Fallon and Steve Buscemi



Julie Bowen



Sam Rockwell

'The Bad Guys 2' Premiere

TCL Chinese Theatre, Hollywood **JULY 23**

Star **Sam Rockwell** made quite the red-carpet entrance, arriving at the theater in a black vehicle reminiscent of his character's getaway car in the animated film. The playful stunt ended with the actor being cuffed by a couple of police officers. "I got to be in the booth with Sam, which never really happens," co-star **Danielle Brooks** told *Variety*. "That was a lot of fun. He reminded me to loosen up with the script. We did a lot of improv together." Director **Pierre Perifel** said they started working on the sequel just as the first film dropped in 2022. "These characters are such great friends to play with," he said. "The universe that we created was such a fantastic sandbox to jump in and tell everyone another adventure."



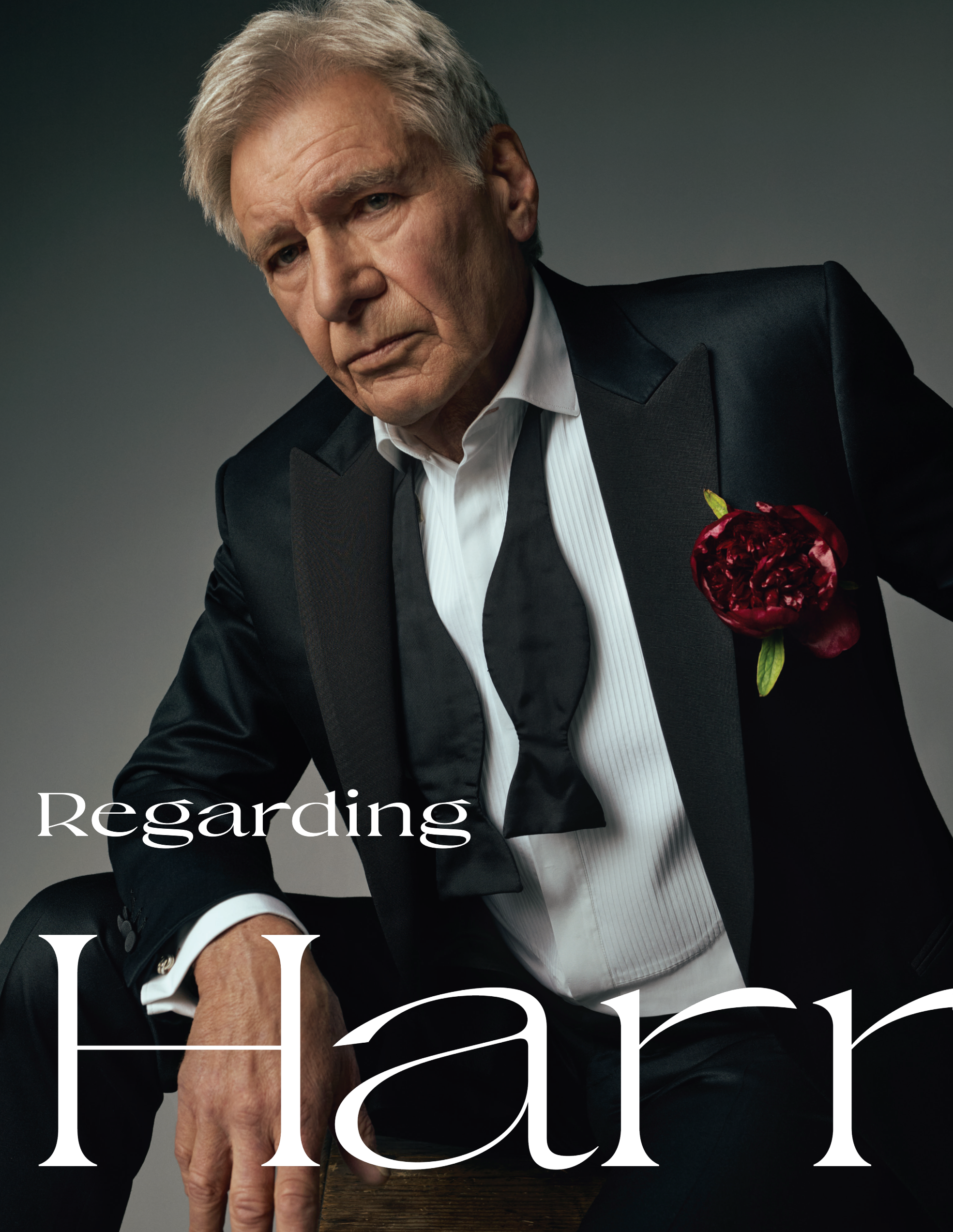
Danielle Brooks and Natasha Lyonne



Pierre Perifel and Marc Maron

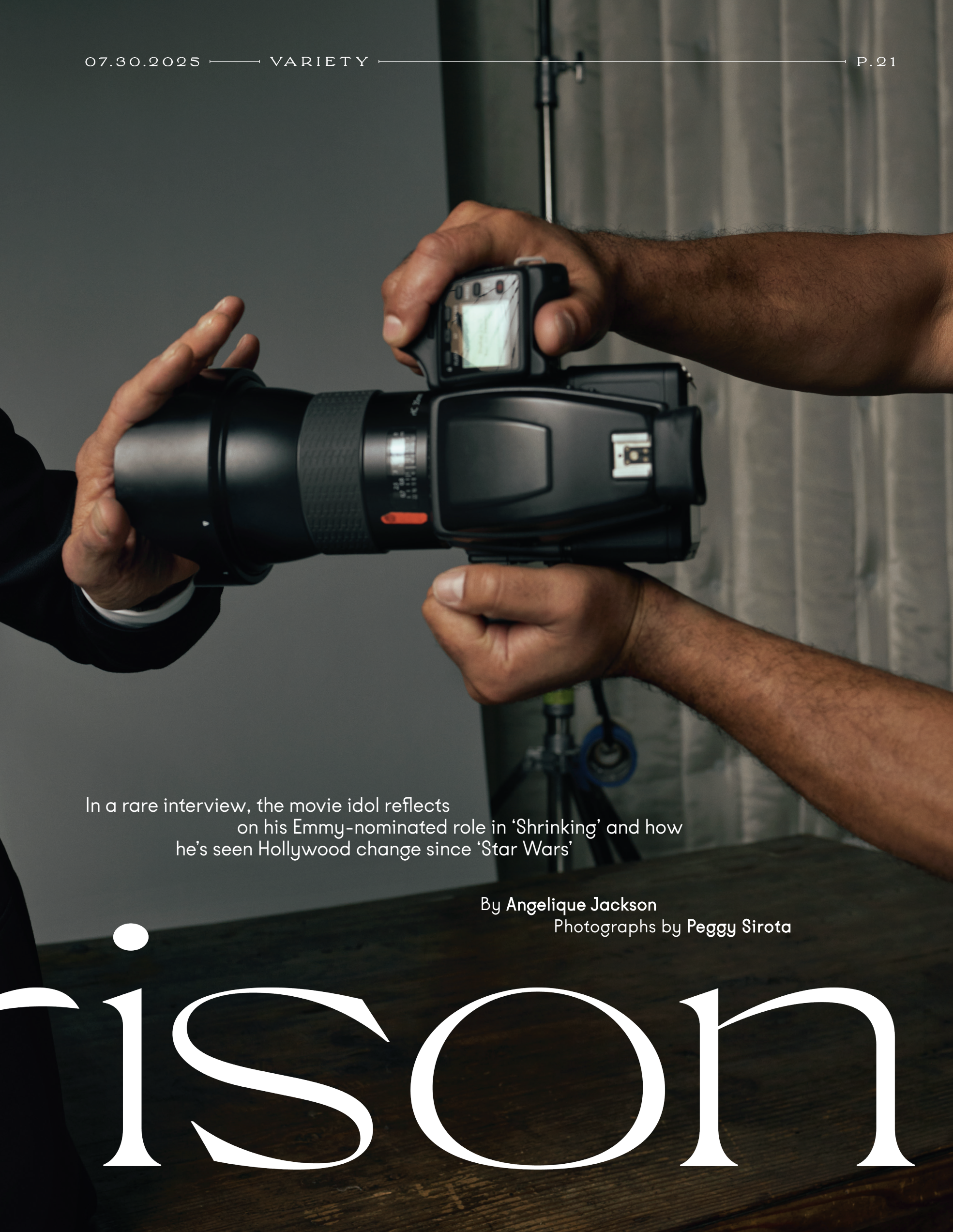


Awkwafina and Craig Robinson



Regarding

Hann



In a rare interview, the movie idol reflects
on his Emmy-nominated role in 'Shrinking' and how
he's seen Hollywood change since 'Star Wars'

By Angelique Jackson
Photographs by Peggy Sirota

ris on

“Is it just me or does he look like the president of the United States?”

That’s what Jessica Williams whispered to the producers of “Shrinking” while she was watching from behind the camera as her co-star Harrison Ford acted in a scene that took place at a formal event. “And they were like, ‘No, that’s just what Harrison Ford looks like in a tuxedo, and it’s insane.’”

On this Monday morning, I’m witnessing the same phenomenon as Ford sits in a photo studio, his black bow tie hanging loose as he holds a paper cup of black coffee as if it were a tumbler of whiskey. His face, still impossibly handsome at 83, conjures up dozens of movie heroes, from Jack Ryan to Indiana Jones, Han Solo to Rick Deckard, to, yes, multiple presidents of the United States.

Now, after amassing a box office haul of more than \$12 billion as one of the highest-grossing movie stars in history, Ford is earning a reputation as a small-screen standout thanks to his performances in Taylor Sheridan’s *Yellowstone* prequel “1923” and “Shrinking,” where he plays Dr. Paul Rhoades, the

eccentric senior member of a psychotherapy practice in Pasadena, who has been diagnosed with Parkinson’s.

In typical fashion, Ford, who just received his first Emmy nomination and some of the best reviews of his career for “Shrinking,” downplays the difficulty of the performance.

“I say the words, do the work, rinse and repeat,” he says with his trademark dry humor.

It’s grueling work, but Ford has enjoyed one luxury that being part of a streaming series provides. “We get more time to develop a character over a season than one normally does in a film,” he says.

Of course, Ford has revisited several of his most famous parts throughout his career, returning to play Han Solo nearly 40 years after the first “Star Wars” movie, as well as Deckard in two “Blade Runner” movies 35 years apart, and suiting up as Indiana Jones five times across four decades. He didn’t come back to those roles for the payday; Ford wanted to examine the consequences of his characters’ actions as they aged.

So perhaps it shouldn’t be a surprise that, at a moment when many of his peers are busy collecting lifetime achievement awards, Ford continues to challenge himself artistically. In “Shrinking,” he seems looser and more vulnerable than he’s ever been.

“He could do an absolutely amazing job caring way less,” his co-star Jason Segel says. “This guy knows his moves, but he’s not content to do his moves. He’s creating a character from scratch.”

Segel points to the Season 1 episode where Ford delivers an all-out slapstick performance when Paul shows up to a party high on weed gummies; it’s evidence of Ford’s willingness to go places he’s never been. “I don’t think anybody knew that Harrison could do *that*,” Segel says. “There was a moment during that episode when he got a giant laugh from the crew, and he walked by me and he whispered in my ear, ‘I knew I was fucking funny.’”

The way Ford creates characters is unique, says J.J. Abrams, who worked with him on two “Star Wars” movies, as well as “Morning Glory” and “Regarding Henry.” “Harrison meets them between who he is and who the character is,” Abrams says. “It’s like he bends the will of the character to be the thing that he brings to it in a way that I don’t see other actors do quite so much.”

As he sits across from me, Ford glances at his phone and smiles. He just got a text with the gag reel from “Shrinking,” which wrapped filming Season 3 two weeks ago. When he presses play by accident, the audio from the clip kicks in, and the room fills with the sound of his castmates cracking each other up.



Ford comes around the table to show me: There's a clip of him on the "Shrinking" set bursting through the door to the "Indiana Jones" theme. I don't have to look over my shoulder to know that he's smiling, delighted by the memory of being part of this particular ensemble.

How does it feel to get your first Emmy nomination for "Shrinking"? I don't think there's anything competitive about creativity, and I don't understand the need to compare and contrast one person's work to another's. If you like it, you like it; if you don't like it, look at something else.

I'm grateful, but I would have done what I did — and I'll do what I'm doing — regardless of whether it's deemed worthy of mention or not. Because it's what I do. It's what I love doing. I love telling stories. I love pretending to be somebody else.

In the Season 2 finale, Paul delivers a speech about how grateful he is for the family that he and his colleagues have created. Has life imitated art in terms of how you feel about working with this ensemble? I don't know whether life is imitating art or art is imitating life, and I don't care. *[He laughs.]* But it is true that in this case, these people do have warm feelings for each other. You're really living with these people, as well as working with them, and that familiarity either breeds contempt or not — and these people have been wisely chosen to be not contemptible.

How did you approach playing Paul?

It's an additive process. One brick goes on another brick; pretty soon you have a house. But if you don't have a firm foundation, then the whole thing is askew. You're trying to find that place where you can use your honest experience to represent the ideas and the relationships and the elements of the personality of the character. That's like being an item in a recipe. You've got to know what your job is here — am I the onion or am I the tomato?

You've said every character you've played has comedic elements to it. I think there's humor in everything. Sometimes it's just God's joke. A character that has a sense of humor is a lot more attractive

"A character that has a sense of humor is a lot more attractive than a character that doesn't. If somebody doesn't have a sense of humor, I don't want to hang out with them."

than a character that doesn't. If somebody doesn't have a sense of humor, I don't want to hang out with them. So I try and bring some form of a sense of humor to whatever character I play.

What are you adding to Paul for Season 3?

What continues to be added is fuel to the fire, and the fire in his case, right now, is in the Parkinson's department. He knows he's in decline. He knows that he's facing even more difficult physical circumstances than he finds himself in at the moment. He's entering a phase of his life which is a mystery, but he has a partner in the character that Wendie Malick plays.

She's going on the journey with him, and so are all of his other colleagues.

Michael J. Fox joins the cast in Season 3. Was he helpful to talk to as Paul continues to deal with his illness?

It's been essential. Michael's courage, his fortitude and his grace, more than anything else, is on full display. He's a very smart, very brave, noble, generous, passionate guy, and an example to all of us, whether we're facing Parkinson's or not. You cannot help but recognize how amazing it is to have such grace.

So he gives me both a physical representation of the disease to inform myself



Jason Segel and Harrison Ford on "Shrinking"

with, but more than that, he allows me to believe that Paul could believe that he could be adequate to the challenge. The truth is that we can't be fucking around with this just to make a joke or anything. Parkinson's is not funny. And I want to get it right. It's necessary to be correct with what we do in respect of the challenge that Parkinson's represents, and that we don't use it for its entertainment value.

Do you find parts of yourself sneaking into Paul?

I do it on purpose, looking for what matches me and the character. When you're doing a series like this, the writers do begin to write for you, and sometimes they write for you too much. You want to say, "Stop, guys, I did this already. We've done this. Let's go back to where the story starts, and instead of something that's become a kind of easy way of getting a laugh or an easy way of getting a point across, let's look for another way to do it."

You can only say, "Do you want me to pull my pants down and make my ass clap," so many times.

One time.

What's the last time you were flipping channels and came across something you starred in and thought, "Might as well revisit this"? Yeah, it was actually "Witness." I was flicking through, and I saw me and watched for a minute or two.

How'd you look?

Young.

You were nominated for an Academy Award for that performance. What was it like to make "Witness"?

The role was fantastic. I got to work with Peter Weir. What I loved about the movie was that we had a very, very short period of preproduction. Peter knew nothing of the Amish, so he went away to learn about the Amish, and I went away to research the police. And we came back together two weeks after that and discussed what we learned. And that was included in the rewrite. I love that kind of tension that we were under — we didn't really have the script entirely figured out, so we left a couple of big holes in it when we started. I felt really good about the film we were making, and the film was quite a success.

To the nomination, Peter and I were working on "The Mosquito Coast" at the time, so neither of us were able to be part of the ceremony. So it's kind of like it never happened. We watched it on TV on the boat I was living on in Belize. It didn't matter to me whether I won, but I was pleased that the performance was recognized.

Your first on-screen role was playing a bell-boy in "Dead Heat on a Merry-Go-Round." What do you remember about your debut?



From top: Ford with Kelly McGillis in "Witness"; with director Peter Weir in "Mosquito Coast"

I was under contract to Columbia Pictures at the time for \$150 a week and all the respect that that implies. I was called into the office of the head of the new talent program, and he told me that I had no future in the business. Which was OK. And then he asked me to get my hair cut like Elvis Presley. That I didn't go along with.

And he asked you not only to get your hair cut, but also to change your name.

He thought that "Harrison Ford" was too pretentious a name for a young man.

He might want to reevaluate that.

I met him later, across a crowded dining room. He sent me a card on which he'd written, "I missed my guess." I looked around, couldn't remember which one he was, but then he nodded at me and smiled, and I thought, "Oh yeah, I know you."

What made you want to be an actor?

I'd been to college, and I hadn't made a success of my academic career. At the beginning of my junior year, I looked for something in the course catalog that would help me get my grade point average up, and I came across drama. The first line of the paragraph that described the course said, "You read and discuss plays," and I thought, "I can do that." I didn't read all the description — typical of me in those days — because the last few lines described that the course also required you to be part of the school plays for that academic year. I hadn't ever done anything like that before, so I was shocked by that part of it.

But I quickly recognized that I loved telling stories. I liked dressing up and



pretending to be somebody else. And the people that I met had a similar bent, people that I might have overlooked. They're people that probably hadn't been really seen before, for who they are, for what they were — and they were storytellers.

Did it make you feel seen?

No, it made me feel truly unseen. Because I was able to hide behind the character, and that was the first freedom I really felt.

Let's talk about "American Graffiti." It's a small role, but a breakout performance.

A lot of actors came out of that show, and I thought it was remarkable the way George [Lucas] used music in that film; it was a rare use of contemporary music. That movie was fun to make. It was made very, very cheaply. I do remember I was almost fired for taking two doughnuts instead of my deserved one.

That film was the beginning of a long friendship with George Lucas. What stood out when you first met him?

I didn't think he could speak. He never spoke. I remember there was an interview for the part that I was eventually given, and he was the only guy in the room that didn't talk. I later realized he didn't like to talk very much, but he did when necessary.

You improvised Han Solo's famous response, "I know," after Leia tells him she loves him in "The Empire Strikes Back." What's the story behind the line?

I was supposed to say, "I love you too," and I thought that was a little un-Han Solo-ish. I thought it was a little banal. So I said no, and [director] Irvin Kershner agreed with me. George, when he saw it, was not so sure, and made me sit next to him at the screening of the film the first time we ran it for an audience. They laughed, but it was a good laugh, so we kept it in. Thank you, George.

When did you know that Han Solo would be a character that would become something special? Was it once you got to the second film or the third film?

I didn't really know whether there was going to be another film when we started, and because I didn't know whether there would be another film — and because I only had the script from the first one to consider — I didn't sign the sequel deal, which turned out to be to all of our advantage.

You, Carrie Fisher and Mark Hamill had a singular experience because of those films. What comes to mind when you think of them?

I had a special relationship with both of them. Carrie had a very inspired wit and very special manner. She's also very smart, very funny. Both of them were dear friends — are dear friends.

Another early role was working with Francis Ford Coppola on "Apocalypse Now." What was that experience like?

I played a character that I named myself. He wore his name proudly on his uniform. The name was L-U-C-A-S, Lucas. I played a small part, an American soldier who gives Captain Willard [Martin Sheen] the assignment to kill Colonel Kurtz [Marlon Brando]. I play a very nervous guy with a funny haircut. I went down to the Philippines and shot my part of it right after one of the "Star Wars" movies, and when George Lucas first saw the movie, he didn't know the character was me, even though he was named Lucas. An Easter egg, I now understand it to be.

You're one of the few actors who has worked with Spielberg, Lucas and Coppola. What was it like to be making movies in Hollywood at that time?

You're talking about a very exciting time

in the movie business. In the late '70s and through the '80s, there was this group of young filmmakers, all of them wildly independent, both in spirit and in mind, who wanted to make their own films their own way, and they all burst upon the scene at much the same time. I was very lucky to lump in with those guys because I was of a youthful age. But I never expected to be anything more than a character actor. I never wanted to be anything more than somebody that made a living as an actor.

You shared the screen with Sean Connery in "Last Crusade." What was his style?

I had the best time with him. He's not the Billy Goat Gruff that everybody thinks he is — and neither am I. He asked me to play tennis with him, and I hadn't played tennis much before. In fact, not at all. I was able to serve the ball, but I hit him in the back two times with a serve — much to his amusement.

But when we got into the motorcycle with the sidecar, he really began to give me trouble; he thought he was more qualified to drive than I was. I think I proved him wrong.

You've played Indiana Jones five times now. What has getting the chance to complete his journey with "Dial of Destiny" meant to you?

Well, I wanted to see him as an older man facing the consequences of the life that he had lived. But I couldn't imagine that we were going to end up doing five of them. I didn't expect success. In the movie business, you always go in wanting to be successful, but you don't always expect to be.

I did expect the first film would be wildly successful. I read it very quickly, one time. I'd been asked by George Lucas to go and meet Steven Spielberg, who I didn't know, and he sent me a script to read. I thought it was great. And then I went to meet Steven, we spent about an hour together and suddenly I had a job.

Another character you revisited over the years was Rick Deckard in "Blade Runner." That was an extraordinary experience. We shot for 50 nights in rain — most times, we were outside. It was sort of miserable to make, but it holds its own.

Do you have a favorite cut of "Blade Runner"? I like any cut without the voice-over. When we first saw the film in script form, it had a narration. I felt strongly that the narration was not right for the film — I played a detective, and I really *talked* about the detective part of my job, but I didn't appear to be *doing* it. So Ridley, the screenwriter, a producer and I spent three weeks at my dining room table taking the information that was in the voice-overs and making it part of the scene experience.

And then at the end of the film, Warner Bros. said, "What the hell is going on here?"



From top: Ryan Gosling and Ford in "Blade Runner 2049"; with Jerry Ziesmer in "Apocalypse Now"



I don't understand this at all. Explain it." And the voice-over came back. I did the voice-over about six times, and nobody was ever happy with it. So I was glad that the film was finally released without it, which I think encourages the audience to be present in the story.

How did you feel about coming back to work with Ryan Gosling and Denis Villeneuve on "Blade Runner 2049"?

I enjoyed the experience of making the second "Blade Runner" — to be fair, even more than I did the first one, because it wasn't raining and it wasn't night all the time.

What about when you accidentally punched Ryan Gosling?

[We were rehearsing a fight] and we got too close and I hit him. I apologized right away. What more could I do? Can't take back a punch. Just take it. He's a very handsome man. He's still very handsome.

It's been 10 years since your plane accident. Helen Mirren said that she felt as if you approach things differently since then. Did it have an impact?

I suppose it did. I've been through a couple of big accidents that took a while to heal from. This is not something dismissed lightly, but shit happens; it was a mechanical issue that was judged to be beyond my control. If I'd been at fault, I would have taken another direction. But I don't think it informs my life on a day-to-day basis now that I've recovered sufficiently from the physical effects.

Did it change you as an actor?

No.

There were moments in your career where you took on very different roles, such as the Russian submarine captain in "K-19: The Widowmaker." Was it frustrating when the audience didn't respond?

No. I knew they weren't going to like that one. [He cracks up.] I always used to think, "I'll do one for me and one for them."

You shot an endorsement video for Kamala



From top: Ford on the set of "The Empire Strikes Back" with Mark Hamill, George Lucas and Carrie Fisher; with Sean Connery in 2006

Harris. You don't usually speak about politics directly. How do you feel about having made that video?

Fine.

Now that we're six months into the Trump presidency, what do you think about where the country is?

The pendulum doth swing in both directions, and it's on a healthy swing to the right at the moment. And, as nature dictates, it will swing back.

But currently the issue is not who we are, but that we're not who we used to be because we've been purposefully disaggregated into serviceable political units. And that has caused the middle to become frayed and tenuous, and the middle is



where we belong. Not because it's banal and safe, but because it's fair. Compromise is fair and honest.

In politics and in life, you don't always get what you want, but you get what you get and you don't get upset. They teach us that in kindergarten, but they also teach you to fight for what you think is right.

Now, because we've been disaggregated in this way, we're having a hard time finding commonality. But if you look at the economy, you'll figure out where the commonality is — it's where it always was: Rich get richer, and poor get poorer. And that ain't exactly right.

Where do we go from here?

You're asking an unqualified person. So I don't have that answer.

You've said you're open to the idea of working with your wife, Calista Flockhart. Do you guys have any ideas?

If we get to work together, we'd want it to be someone else's idea. That kind of casting might not be the best way to bring people into an imagined situation, because [audiences] may say, "Oh, I know they're married; now I'm not even thinking about the movie anymore."

You appeared in "Captain America: Brave New World." Has Kevin Feige convinced you to come back to Marvel again?

Nope.

Will you ever retire?

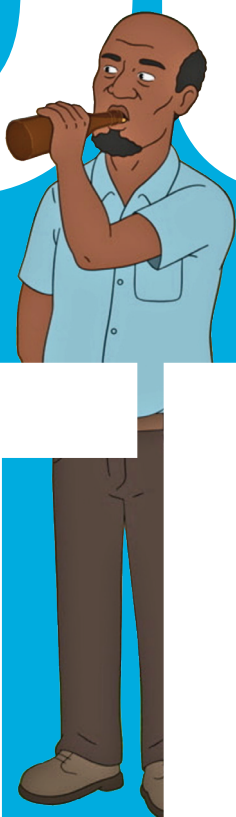
No. That's one of the things I thought was attractive about the job of an actor, was that they need old people, too, to play old people's parts. ●

"[Ryan Gosling and I] got too close and I hit him. I apologized right away. What more could I do? Can't take back a punch. Just take it. He's a very handsome man. He's still very handsome."

No Ki



but



This

ngs



**'King of the Hill' is
back after 20 years,
and so is its sharp
satirical take on
heartland America**

By Joe Otterson



one

Perhaps the most unhinged character

P.

3

0

on “King of the Hill” during that show’s original run from 1997 to 2009 was pest exterminator and out-there conspiracy theorist Dale Gribble. As originally voiced by the late Johnny Hardwick, Dale’s fringe viewpoints — which frequently centered on government cover-ups and doomsday prepping — were seen as a bit of harmless fun.

Cut to 2025, and “King of the Hill” is back on television for a long-awaited Season 14 on Hulu. A lot has changed, and perhaps most notably, Dale’s views are now more mainstream than many would care to admit.

“Nationally, we’ve made a turn towards Dale,” says Toby Huss, who took over as the voice of the character in Episode 7 of the new season, following Hardwick’s death. “I hope we’re all OK with that.”

Of course, in its early-21st-century run on Fox, “King of the Hill” was never an overtly political show. There was that episode in 2000 where Hank Hill wavered in voting for George W. Bush due to the former Texas governor’s weak handshake, but that was about it.

The “King of the Hill” revival — don’t call it a reboot, but rather an update of what Hank and his family and friends are up to more than a decade and a half later — doesn’t deal in politics either; the animated series has always been about a mild-mannered man a bit confused by the changing world around him.

And in 2025 Arlen, Texas, as in the rest of the U.S., things sure are different. That allows for plenty of



social commentary, and the show’s cast and creators all agree that now more than in its original run, there’s value to viewing American culture through the unique lens of “King of the Hill.”

“Hank always represented such a common-sense, practical approach to cultural things and societal things,” says the revival’s showrunner, Saladin K. Patterson. “Whether it leaned left of middle or right of middle, it always was something that was respectful and made sense.”

According to co-creator (and voice of Hank) Mike Judge, he and co-creator Greg Daniels started kicking around ideas for bringing the show back after they saw the fan response to a live reading of an episode featuring the original cast at the SF Sketchfest in 2017. But it wasn’t until they got the notion to age up Hank, wife Peggy, son Bobby and the rest of the characters by bringing them into the present that the ideas really started flowing.

Joining them in imagining the modern-day Hills was Patterson, who is new to “King of the Hill” — but it turns out he has a long history with the show. During a late-’90s stint in a Disney writing program, Patterson tried to convince those in charge to let him write a spec for the just-launched “King of the Hill.”

“The execs at the time were like, ‘Oh, that’s just a cartoon.’ I said, ‘No, it’s not just a cartoon, guys! You don’t get it!’” Patterson says.

As fate would have it, Patterson was offered an opportunity to write for “King of the Hill” during

its original run. He turned down the job, however, in favor of a gig on “Frasier.” Patterson doesn’t regret the choice, but says that Daniels is fond of reminding him of it.

“He likes bringing it up anytime I start to feel too good about myself,” Patterson says, laughing.

Patterson and Daniels ultimately worked together on the ill-fated animated series “The Cops.” That show hailed from Louis C.K. and was set to air on TBS, but the network pulled the plug after sexual misconduct allegations against C.K. became public. Daniels kept looking for other ways to work with Patterson and recommended him to Judge when talk of a “King of the Hill” revival started picking up steam. Judge and Patterson hit it off, partly because they happen to share a background in engineering: Patterson studied the subject at MIT, while Judge worked in mechanical engineering after getting his B.S. in physics from UC San Diego.

While joining a well-established returning series like “King of the Hill” might seem daunting, all agree that Patterson was up to the challenge.

“He’s very focused. He knows what he wants. He doesn’t waste our time,” says Kathy Najimy, who voices Peggy. “He will laugh so you can hear him laugh, which is really important. I think he got handed something that could have been really overwhelming, and he handled it just beautifully.”

In the new batch of 10 episodes — set to premiere all at once on Aug. 4 — Hank and Peggy return to Arlen after a decade in Saudi Arabia, where Hank was working for the Aramco oil company as the “assistant manager in charge of Arabian propane and Arabian propane accessories.”

“We looked up these Aramco bases in Saudi Arabia, and they’re built to look like the idyllic, perfect American city,” Judge says. “And we just really liked that. [Hank] was sort of stuck in time in this artificial little American city.”

As for the rest of the Rainey Street gang, Bobby (voiced by Pamela Adlon) now runs a Japanese-German fusion restaurant in Dallas and is living with his best friend, Joseph; Dale was briefly the mayor of Arlen; Bill (Stephen Root) has been living as a shut-in since COVID; Boomhauer (also voiced by Judge) is helping to raise his girlfriend’s teenage son; and Connie (Lauren Tom) is studying engineering at UT Dallas.

While most of the characters are back, the show has lost a number of original cast members over the years. Brittany Murphy, who voiced Luanne, died in 2009, not long after the original show ended. Dennis Burkley, who voiced Carl Moss, the principal at Tom Landry Middle School, died in 2013. Rock legend Tom Petty, who voiced Luanne’s eventual husband Lucky, died in 2017.

Then there are the most recent ones: Hardwick was found dead in his home in Austin in 2023

07.30.2025

VARIETY

(having already taped the revival's first six episodes). And right after he crashed a "King" panel at the ATX TV Festival in Austin in June, John Redcorn voice actor Jonathan Joss was killed in an altercation with a neighbor in San Antonio.

Like Hardwick, Joss finished work on multiple episodes before his death, although Huss took over voicing Dale for four of the 10 episodes. "Johnny was the expert on Dale," says Huss, who had voiced Cotton Hill and Kahn Souphanousinphone in the original series. "So all I can do is try to learn from what Johnny did and not be the expert on Dale ... but do my version of where Johnny was going with him."

Adlon sheds tears as she discusses Hardwick's death but says that cast and crew from the show were able to gather and pay tribute at the home of Ashley Gardner, who voices Dale's wife, Nancy. "We had a memorial for him at Ashley's house, and it was beautiful," Adlon says. "We just needed some place to put our feelings and our grief. And Ashley's husband made a Dale's Dead-Bug van and parked it in the driveway for the memorial. It was fucking amazing."

Regarding how the revival would handle Luanne's absence, Patterson says, "I think it's honest to say that there is no quote-unquote one right way to handle it. I think there were a few ways that would have been equally respectful and loving, and people would have understood. ... So what we ended up doing, fans will see the character referenced in a very loving, respectful way in an episode that gives a nod to how special she was,

"Ashley's husband made a Dale's Dead-Bug van and parked it in the driveway for the memorial. It was fucking amazing." Pamela Adlon

VARIETY

both to our characters in the show's world but also in real life."

The loss of key cast members deeply affected the "King of the Hill" family, and they *are* a family. Those interviewed glowingly say that they have maintained the relationships they forged on the show. Says Root: "We started in '96, so after 13 seasons of this show, we have seen births and deaths and marriages and divorces and real life through all the people that have done this show."

Judge says that one of his great joys was seeing how working on the show improved the lives of the cast and crew.

"After a year or two, you're seeing them driving to work with much nicer cars and buying houses and getting married," he says. "It was really, really great to see a lot of people who really deserved it becoming successful."

Cast members say they still regularly meet for dinner or catch up at Hollywood events, where they will find themselves slipping into the voices of their characters. "It's kind of a sickness," Adlon says. "If I see a picture of Bobby, I feel like I'm looking at a picture of myself, because it's such a part of me and us."

The "King of the Hill" revival is not the first time some core cast and crew have revisited iconic characters in the past few years. Judge famously revived "Beavis and Butt-Head" (which also featured Huss) on MTV in 2011, and then again with Paramount in 2022; a new season is scheduled to hit Comedy Central in 2025. Najimy, meanwhile, revisited her role from the 1993 Halloween movie

"Hocus Pocus" in a long-awaited sequel that came out in 2022. And of course, Daniels is about to revisit "The Office" universe with his new Peacock series "The Paper."

For Tom, who voices Minh Souphanousinphone in addition to Connie, this is now her second animated character from a Fox show to return on Hulu. She also voices Amy Wong on "Futurama," which was revived on the streamer in 2023.

"I just thank my lucky stars," Tom says. "I feel so blessed, especially because I've got about three more years to pay these insanely high tuitions for my kids, but also just to be able to see all my family and friends again and be able to kind of revisit these characters."

While the reboot/revival wave has largely crashed, the early rabid reaction (via news, teaser clips and that ATX panel) from fans indicates that they're eager to see more "King of the Hill." The cast and creators credit that response to the show's authenticity. While many animated series push the bounds of reality, "King of the Hill" tells grounded stories — slices of life that people from all over the world can relate to in some way.

"I just am so grateful that it's coming out right now, because America needs to be able to feel safe, laugh and not judge themselves," Adlon says. "And there is no judgment with this show, and there is no agenda at all."

And maybe with the help of Dale Gribble, we can all unite to make wackadoodle conspiracy theories fringe again. ●

07.30.2025



VARIETY

07.30.2025

DEAN CAIN Is STILL FLYING HIGH

The Trump-loving 'Lois & Clark' star, who is the first and only Superman of color, has quietly created a mini empire of faith-based movies

BY TATIANA SIEGEL





Dean Cain is about to pull off a lightning-fast costume change that would impress even Superman. Standing in front of an infinity pool overlooking a golf course and the Las Vegas Strip in the distance, the actor is wearing a faded gray T-shirt, gym shorts and no shoes. A Greek Orthodox cross and a military dog tag hang from a chain around his neck. The man who played the Man of Steel and his alter ego, Clark Kent, on the trailblazing series “Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman” needs to morph into something camera ready.

“I’m gonna have to go put on a jacket and a shirt and leave my shorts behind,” he says as he pops a tangerine-flavored nicotine lozenge in his mouth and heads upstairs for a Zoom appearance on “Piers Morgan Uncensored” to discuss the latest “Superman,” two days before it unspools in theaters.

With Superman in the zeitgeist this summer, Cain, 58, is an obvious go-to voice, given his headline-grabbing conservative takes on the film and the amount of time he spent in the latex suit. Only eight actors have appeared as Kal-El in live-action films and TV series, from the most iconic (Christopher Reeve) to the most recent (David Corenswet in this month’s Warner Bros. tentpole). With the exception of “Smallville”’s Tom Welling, no one has clocked more time on-screen as Superman than Cain, who appeared in 87 episodes of the hit ABC series, which ran from 1993 to 1997. Though George Reeves starred in 104 episodes of the 1950s version of “Superman,” each installment was 30 minutes to “Lois & Clark”’s 46 minutes. Cain also remains the first and only Superman of color and certainly the most sexually active on-screen “Teri Hatcher and I were making out all the time in beds, half clothes on, half off,” he says of the show’s risqué vibe. The professional football player turned ’90s heartthrob was among the highest paid of his super peers thanks to sheer volume over the four-season run “Lois & Clark,” which averaged 18 million viewers at its height. “It was more money than I had ever seen in my life,” he says. “My entire contract for the Buffalo Bills was equal to a couple episodes of ‘Lois & Clark.’”

In addition to his Superman cred, Cain is something of a cultural Zelig. He deflowered fellow Princetonian Brooke Shields, whom he dated for four and a half years at a time when she was arguably the most recognizable woman in the world and the press obsessed over her virginity, all of which she detailed in her 2014 memoir. At Princeton, he also overlapped with everyone from Michelle Obama to Lyle Menendez. His love life was tabloid catnip and included a six-month relationship with fellow ’90s sex symbol Pamela Anderson at the beginning of her “Baywatch” run. “That candle burned hot and short,” he says. “She wanted to be with the rock-star kind of guy, and that’s not me.” As a real-life journalist — and not merely playing a Daily Planet reporter — he interviewed people like Mark Wahlberg and Ron Howard when he co-hosted “The Today Show” with Hoda Kotb. In more recent years, Fox News has rolled out the welcome mat, while Trump enlisted him to host the inaugural parade. (It was canceled due to extreme cold.)

As is the case with Superman, Cain seems to toggle back and forth between two disparate identities. There’s the industry kid who grew up alongside the Penns, the Lowes and the Sheens — all of whom he considers family — as the adopted son of “Young Guns” director Christopher Cain. There’s also the NRA board member who publicly endorsed Trump three times, a move that has relegated most like-minded actors to the sidelines.

“I love President Trump. I’ve been friends with him forever,” he says of the mogul turned politician most loathed by Hollywood. (They first met when Cain judged a Miss Universe pageant in 2009 alongside the late Vogue editor at large André Leon Talley.) “Trump is actually one of the most empathetic, wonderful, generous people you’ll ever meet.”

Some MAGA-adjacent Hollywood folks come in for mockery: Think Scott Baio or Roseanne Barr. But Cain can’t be quite as easily dismissed. He’s a Princeton graduate who majored in history and appears to have a genuine curiosity for the world. He is quick to pull out his iPhone and show pictures from the 56 countries he’s visited and the 30 world leaders with whom he has held court, including Jordan’s King Abdullah II and Israel’s Benjamin Netanyahu. Close friends include Jordanian Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad — a relationship forged during their Princeton days.

“I can’t wait to show you the whole house,” Cain tells me after his TV hit. “It’s incredible. Feel free to wander around.”

It’s 10 a.m., and the temperature is inching toward 106 degrees, so I head inside and do just that. The 6,500-square-foot three-story contemporary is minimalist in decor but teeming with superfluties, including an elevator, a first-floor gym, a screening room, an infrared sauna and a master-bedroom walk-in closet bigger (and tidier) than my SoHo apartment.

Indeed, the whole place is lavish, and represents a sort of alternative choice for a star who’s chosen a different track from the L.A. life he once seemed set to inhabit. In 2023, Cain sold his house in Malibu — the oceanside city he called home since the age of 5 — and uprooted to the land of no state income tax and open carry laws. All the while, he quietly built a cottage industry of faith-based movies, with 16 to his credit so far, like this year’s “Little Angels,” which he wrote, directed and toplines. (Later this summer, he is directing, writing, producing and starring opposite Kevin Sorbo in “Holy One,” a Vegas-set redemption movie that revolves around the world of golf.) And if there’s a Hollywood blacklist for Trumpers, Cain seems to have dodged it. In fact, the biggest reason Cain doesn’t work much in mainstream Hollywood any longer stems from a choice he made in 2000, to prioritize being a single parent to his only child, a now 25-year-old son.

“He’s always had a real soft spot in my heart in terms of just how open he was,” says Greg Berlanti, who first cast Cain as a gay lothario in the 2000 rom-com “The Broken Hearts Club.” “He embraced the part completely. He embraced the rehearsal process where I had the guys all going to gay bars and hanging out together. He embraced the straight members of the cast and the gay members of the cast. And always with a smile on his face.” (Berlanti brought Cain back for an arc in the CW series “Supergirl” from 2015 to 2017.)



Dean Cain with President Donald Trump in February 2020

For his appearance on the Morgan panel, Cain turned up the MAGA volume on the new “Superman” and its subtle jabs at red-state America (Ma and Pa Kent appear as though they were plucked from a Wonder Bread factory) and *possibly* Israel (progressive influencers seem to think the fictitious Boravia, a U.S.-backed, heavily militarized human rights abuser is an intentional metaphor for the Jewish state). “Look, don’t try and make it all woke and crazy!” Cain told Morgan, acknowledging that he hadn’t yet seen the film. For me, he’s a little less interested in the political dimension — and more appreciative of Superman’s pooch. “Seeing Krypto in the trailer gave me goose bumps,” he says, nodding in the direction of a dog bed that looks well used. “He saves a squirrel. He saves a little girl. I respect that.”

Still, everything is political these days, even superheroes. And Cain, who has been conservative most of his life — save for casting a vote twice for Bill Clinton — has zero qualms about critiquing Hollywood’s leftward bent.

“My dad told me not to voice my political opinions,” he says. “I guess I didn’t listen to my dad.”

With that, Cain and I jump into his Tesla Model S Plaid for a tour of the neighborhood and lunch at his favorite organic haunt. “If you want to see speed, lean your head against the backrest so you don’t get shocked by this. Ready? OK?” he says. We hit 85 mph in what feels like a split second. “Oh my God!” I scream. He then reverts to regular speed to show me the house he bought for his parents and to take me on a trip down memory lane.

Born in Michigan, Dean George Tanaka was the younger of two boys. He never knew his biological father, who was a Japanese American serviceman. His mother, Sharon Thomas, moved the boys to Los Angeles when Cain was 3 so that she could escape the relent-

less snow and pursue acting. Not long after arriving, she married Christopher Cain, who adopted the toddlers and settled the family in Malibu. The couple later had a daughter, who is Dean’s half-sister.

One of Cain’s early memories is making a Super 8 with Charlie Sheen and Chris Penn, both a year ahead of him in elementary school. Mimicking their industry parents, Sheen (son of “Apocalypse Now” star Martin Sheen) and Penn wanted to make a Vietnam movie.

“They needed a Vietnamese person. Of course it was me. They’re like, ‘You be the gook,’” he says. “I’m like, ‘What’s a gook?’ I didn’t know what it meant.”

About two decades later, when the press began covering his casting as Superman, Cain got a similar taste of being the one who is different from the rest of the group.

“It was 1993 and I remember a fan going, ‘We wanted Superman, not Sushi Man,’” he says.

Cain took no offense at being othered by either his friends or his fans. He thinks identity politics are stupid, particularly in Hollywood, with its endless list of “firsts.” Henry Cavill was the first British Superman. Corenswet is the first Jewish Man of Steel.

“For the love of God, he’s a Kryptonian. He could be green. Does it matter?” asks Cain, who would personally like to see Michael B. Jordan don the cape because he “has all the qualities of Superman — that humility, that kindness, that openness, that earnestness.”

But Cain also bristles at the idea that he is not embracing his own Japanese identity.

“Tanaka is my given name, and it’s funny that people are like, ‘Well, you tried to hide that.’ It’s tattooed on my ankle,” he says, pointing to the kanji characters that spell his name in ink. “My family was interred in the Minidoka internment camp in Idaho. That was a horrible injustice, but I don’t think that I deserve any sort of reparations.”

After Princeton, Cain signed with the Bills, but his fledgling career as a professional athlete ended at training camp due to a knee injury. Plan B was acting. Though his mother was an actress, mostly in movies directed by his father, Cain was discouraged from pursuing a Hollywood career. “When I finally said I was going to be an actor, my dad gave me a three-word piece of advice: ‘Don’t. Do. It.’” Again, Cain didn’t listen.

After landing small parts in “A Different World” and “Beverly Hills, 90210,” Cain auditioned for the role that would change his career trajectory. “It came down to myself and Kevin Sorbo for Superman,” he recalls. “I had to come back to audition with 10 different Lois Lanes. I remember faces. I was in fight-or-flight mode. I was trying to survive.”

**“TRUMP IS ACTUALLY ONE
OF THE MOST
EMPATHETIC, WONDERFUL,
GENEROUS
PEOPLE YOU’LL
EVER MEET.”**

Dean Cain

Among the whiz of would-be Lois Lanes he remembers was Melora Hardin, who famously played Jan on “The Office,” and Paula Marshall, who plays Marsha Jacobs (wife of Eric Dane’s Cal Jacobs) on “Euphoria.” Both lost out to Hatcher, who became a breakout TV star as the plucky reporter before her “Desperate Housewives” days.

While he waited for the final word from the network, Cain took a friend on a ski trip to Utah and made a promise: If he got the role, new skis were on him. Then he got the call. “My buddy turns to me and goes, ‘Man, for the rest of your life, people are going to call you Superman,’” he remembers. “I couldn’t fathom that being the case at the time, but it changed my life insanely.”

Soon, Stage 14 on the Warner Bros. lot would be home, sandwiched between two series also in their rookie runs. “Little shows called ‘ER’ and ‘Friends,’” he jokes. “I loved playing basketball with George Clooney and talking and joking. Teri was the best Lois Lane of all time, in my opinion. She just drove the show.”

As a star athlete, Cain was accustomed to the adulation. “But this was on a much more gigantic scale. Your life is gone. I had been around movies and watched my dad do it and watched my friends Rob Lowe and Charlie Sheen do well. And make mistakes. Like, ‘Don’t do a sex tape at the Democratic National Convention.’ Sorry, Rob. ‘Don’t do cocaine with hookers,’” he says with a playful smirk. “I was certainly not going to make the same mistakes.”

The pace was grueling: five-day work weeks that began at 6 a.m. on Monday and finished at 7 a.m. on Saturday. “We called it Fraturday!” Cain says. “There was no time to work out, because they couldn’t give me a workout clause, because then they’d have to for

**“I COULD HAVE
HAD THE BIGGEST
SEXUAL HARASSMENT
LAWSUIT IN
HOLLYWOOD
HISTORY.”**

Dean Cain

every other star and then it sets precedent for Warner Bros. That’s why I haven’t done a series since. It feels like suffocating. You feel claustrophobic.”

Like most TV stars, he also got financially screwed. “I didn’t know enough back then about residuals. Warner Bros. buries the bodies deep and makes it look like it’s lost money. There’s no possible way,” he says. “But I should have sued. George Clooney did it. He sued on ‘ER’ and got a big payout for his participation. I was advised not to because ‘You don’t want to bite the hand that feeds you.’”

The work itself was far from glamorous. The costume was uncomfortable.

“When they first brought it to me, it was this royal blue spandex bodysuit. We ended up putting in stirrups so that it stayed in place. And the boots were a whole lace-up thing at first. We worked on it as time went on,” he says. “I remember it being 110 in Burbank. In the Superman suit, you can’t sweat. If you sweat, it balls up. So I didn’t. I’m a Japanese dude. I don’t sweat that much. I’m not hairy at all. They didn’t have to shave my chest or anything. But still...”

The flying was excruciating because the wires cut off circulation. “There’s no blood flow going to your legs. After hanging for hours, I would have to get a massage just to keep the blood moving from quadrant to quadrant. Teri would cry. She’d be in tears every single time we had to fly because it *hurt*.”

But the combination of a skintight suit in constant flight helped turn the 26-year-old Cain into a primetime sex symbol. Typically, the actress is objectified, but with “Lois & Clark,” Cain was the one who executives and crew talked about in the third person when he was in the room. He never took it personally.

“Any guy who tells you he feels bad being objectified, I mean, really? Come on,” he insists. “It’s a wonderful compliment.”

No one was ever inappropriate. *Except ...*

As the day wears on, Cain reveals something that he has never before told a reporter. “I could have had the biggest sexual harassment lawsuit in Hollywood history,” he says.

When pressed for details, he declines to name the person who harassed him or provide any further comment on the matter.

There were always murmurs. “Lois & Clark” ended abruptly. The Season 4 cliffhanger was never resolved. Cain, who wrote two episodes for Seasons 2 and 3, had already written scripts for Season 5. His plans to direct several episodes evaporated. The harassment took its toll on his relationship at the time with volleyball star Gabrielle Reece.

Now in his early 30s, Cain’s life was about to change dramatically once again. His new girlfriend, Playboy Playmate Samantha Torres, got pregnant.

“She figured we’re gonna get married because that’s what you do when you get pregnant out of wedlock. And I was like, ‘That’s not gonna work,’” says Cain, who has never married. “My parents were angry.”

Cain with Rob Lowe and Charlie Sheen in 2004





Emma Stone, Nathan Fielder and Cain in "The Curse"

So, too, was Torres, who made visitations with their son difficult. He sued for joint custody. After spending \$1.5 million on lawyers, he was awarded 50-50 custody of Christopher Dean Cain. Parenting became his *raison d'être*, while his acting career took a backseat.

"I turned down 'Band of Brothers.' I also turned down a huge series. I would have been maybe the highest-paid actor in all of television," he says.

But that long-running series, which Cain declines to name out of respect for the actor who wound up getting the role after he passed, shot in Vancouver, and Torres didn't want to live there. "I'm adopted. I know how important it is to have a father," he says. So Cain bought a house in Torres' hometown of Ibiza, Spain, so that co-parenting could be more seamless. When his son was 9, he was awarded full legal and physical custody. Tensions between Torres and Cain eventually died down, and she asked him to be the godfather of her twins, who are now 14. He still owns the Ibiza house, one of several savvy real estate investments he made with his "Lois & Clark" money.

"With Dean, what you see is what you get. He's not afraid to speak his mind or take a stand, no matter how popular or unpopular that position might be. And I admire that," says his friend Kia Jam, an Iranian producer whose credits include "Lucky Number Slevin" and "City of Lies." "But what most people don't see are the things he does quietly, without any need for recognition: the trips to war zones to visit and support U.S. troops, the work he does with wounded warriors."

Instead of diving back into the TV grind, he said yes to small movies like "Broken Hearts Club."

"People don't realize that in 1999 when we were making it, straight actors did not want to play gay, and they were all advised not to, especially if they were a heartthrob," Berlanti notes. "It was daring."

For his part, Cain never understood the fuss. "I played gay in two films, and I loved it. And when I did Greg's film, people were like, 'We're concerned because people might think you're gay in real life.' And I said, 'Well, then I've done my job.'"

All that might seem at odds with his current perch as one of the higher-profile members of Trump world, one who makes Christian movies, loves guns and is a sworn deputy sheriff and reserve police officer. As Cain eats his chicken quesadilla and fries, a man idles outside the glass window that separates our table from him. Cain tells me the man, who seems erratic, has caused issues in the restaurant previously. He assures me he can take care of any situation.

"Are you carrying right now?" I ask.

"I'm always carrying," he answers.

Cain is a fount of strong opinions. Asked about his former classmates — one famous, one infamous — he lets loose. About the former Michelle Robinson and future first lady, he says, "Isn't she the one who said, 'Harvey, you're the guy my daughter should work for,' right?" (Malia Obama interned at the Weinstein Co. after the first accusation against Weinstein surfaced publicly but before a stream of claims exploded into view.) As for Menendez, who along with his

brother, Erik, killed their parents in 1989 and is now seeking to be released, with Kim Kardashian championing the cause, the law-and-order-loving Cain isn't sold. "He reloaded," he offers plainly.

Even if his positions deviate from the Hollywood norm, he doesn't feel like an outcast. "Brooke and I are still great friends. Politics never comes up in any of our conversations, ever, that's for sure. And she would defend me to the grave, I promise you," he says. "She called me before she published the book and asked if she could include stuff from us, and I said, 'I trust you implicitly. Say whatever you want.' And she told the truth."

Nowadays, Cain occasionally will work inside the studio system, albeit in edgier fare. He appeared in six episodes of Maria Bamford's semi-autobiographical dark comedy "Lady Dynamite" for Netflix and two episodes of the Emma Stone psychological thriller "The Curse" for Showtime. Otherwise, he is content making his slate of Christian-themed films. The budgets are small (less than \$10 million). But he believes the impact is big. The late Andrew Breitbart, the conservative firebrand who founded Breitbart News and co-founded HuffPost, once told Cain that all politics is downstream from culture. "So if you're making shows like 'The Chosen,' or you're making a lot of these faith-based movies that I make, you're putting out content that affects people in what I would consider a very positive way, with good, strong morals and values," he says.

Family is clearly important to Cain. His father made the kind of sacrifice you don't hear often when it comes to industry parents. When Cain was recruited by colleges to play football, most offered full scholarships. Ivy League schools do not. Turning down Princeton was not an option.

"He sold his car to keep me at Princeton," Cain says. "He took the bus to his meetings in prep for 'Young Guns,' and he'd get off two blocks away and walk the rest of the way so nobody would see that he was taking the bus. He did that for *me*. So my dad is my hero."

As happy hour approaches, Mom and Dad will soon be arriving at the house. Cain packs up his leftovers in a to-go box in case his son is hungry. Back at the house, a helium balloon floats above the kitchen table. It's a remnant from a birthday party Cain threw for his sister the previous week and is starting to lose its buoyancy.

"My dad has his own chair, and if Dad's here, nobody else can be in that chair. Except the dog," he says as he pauses to reflect. "This is where my family congregates. It's my happy place." ●

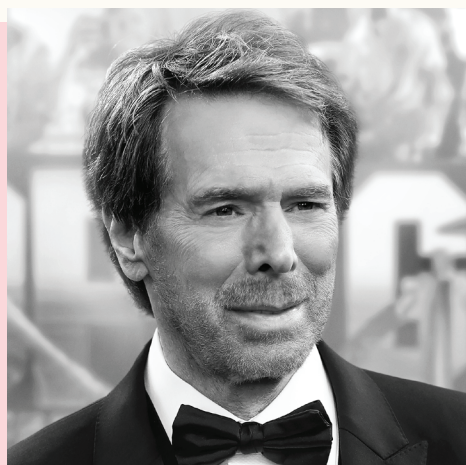
VARIETY

Entertainment & Technology Summit

September 25
Los Angeles

In-Person Tickets Available

Featured Speakers



Jerry Bruckheimer
Producer
"F1: The Movie"



Nicole Byer
Host
"Why Won't You Date Me?"



Brett Paul
President
Warner Bros. Television Group



Amy Reinhard
President of Advertising
Netflix



Matt & Ross Duffer
Creators & Executive Producers
"Stranger Things"



Jody Gerson
Chairman and CEO
Universal Music Publishing Group



Register Now Variety.com/EntTech

PREMIER PARTNER



SUPPORTING PARTNERS



awards circuit

Spread the Love With so many new series in the race this year, the Emmys could be a time for breaking records

By Emily Longeretta

→ With a big variety of series, dozens of first-time nominees and a few shows breaking back into the race, the 77th annual Emmy Awards are set to make history — possibly in more ways than one. Below, *Variety* breaks down the contenders in some of the main categories.

● **Drama series**
Arguably, the most stacked race of all this year is the drama category. Although “Sev-



Clockwise from left: Kaitlyn Dever in “The Last of Us”; Adam Scott in “Severance”; Noah Wyle, right, and Shawn Hatoss in “The Pitt”



Of the eight outstanding comedy series nominees, only two have taken home the trophy in the past — non-comedy comedy ‘The Bear’ and ‘Hacks.’

erance,” “The Last of Us,” “Slow Horses” and “Andor” have landed nominations in the category before, none of this year’s noms have taken home the trophy in the past. (Although, the first season of “The White Lotus” did win outstanding limited series, before moving to drama.) “Severance” is an early front-runner but it’s not without its huge competitors in the debuts this year. “Paradise” on Hulu racked up four nominations for its freshman year on Hulu, and “The Diplomat” caused quite a splash with its second season on Netflix, but HBO Max’s “The Pitt” (with 13 noms) remains the biggest competitor against the Apple TV+ leader.

● Guest actor/actress, drama

The guest category is set to be quite the competition for both male and female drama performers. In the actor race, “The

Cynthia Erivo is nominated for her guest starring role in “Poker Face.”

Last of Us” racked up two nominations in Jeffrey Wright and Joe Pantoliano — and the last time the show was eligible, it took home the guest actor trophy. Giancarlo Esposito earned his fourth Emmy nod for his guest role on “The Boys,” the only acting nod for the show. Meanwhile, drama series nominees “The White Lotus,” “Andor” and “The Pitt” earned love in the guest category with nominations for Scott Glenn, Forest Whitaker and Shawn Hatosy, respectively — any of whom could take the trophy. In the guest drama actress category, “Severance” landed three nods with Merritt Wever, Jane Alexander and Gwendoline Christie, while “The Handmaid’s Tale’s” only nomination went to Cherry Jones. The front-runners in the category, though, are Kaitlyn Dever and Catherine O’Hara, both from “The Last of Us” — one of whom was responsible for the death of Pedro Pascal’s Joel, with the other as his therapist.

● Comedy series

Of the eight outstanding comedy series nominees, only two have taken home the trophy in the past — non-comedy comedy “The Bear” for its first season and “Hacks” for its third season. The four other returning nominees, “Only Murders in the Building,” “Shrinking,” “What We Do in the Shadows” and “Abbott Elementary,” have all been nominated before as well. And the newcomers aren’t anything to sleep on: “Nobody Wants This” and “The Studio” made huge splashes at Netflix and Apple TV+, respectively, with the latter’s 23 nominations breaking the previous record held by “The Bear” for a freshman series. And with down-the-line voting, it’s likely that so many nominations for the Seth Rogen-led series could bode well in this category.

● Guest actor/actress, comedy

Let’s start this entry with guest actor in a comedy, since there are only two shows that fill the six slots. Jon Bernthal, who previously won in this category for this role, is back in “The Bear.” The remaining five slots go to “The Studio.” While Bryan Cranston is nominated for his role of Griffin Mill in the Apple TV+ Hollywood-set-show, Dave Franco, Ron Howard, Anthony Mackie and Martin Scorsese are up for ... playing themselves! As for the comedy guest actresses, “The Studio” also got a nom in Zoë Kravitz, recognized for playing herself as well. But there are other shows in the mix, too: Julianne Nicholson and Robby Hoffman for “Hacks,” Cynthia Erivo for “Poker Face” and Olivia Colman and Jamie Lee Curtis for “The Bear.” Curtis took home the trophy for that part last year thanks to that impressive Christmas episode.

● Limited series

In the limited/anthology series category at every other award show, “The Penguin” has swept. Not only has Colin Farrell won for his portrayal of the titular role, but the recognition has also been for supporting actress Cristin Milioti. So, it seems that the show would be the front-runner. That is, until March rolled around and Netflix dropped a four-episode dark drama, “Adolescence,” each episode filmed in one sweeping shot. The series seems to be the new “Baby Reindeer,” with 13 nominations this season. That said, this category is filled with other shows that landed a slew of nods — “Dying for Sex” earned nine, “Monsters: The Lyle & Erik Menendez Story” landed 11 and “Black Mirror” earned 10. The latter

took home the best TV movie award in 2017, 2018 and 2020 before the 2021 rule change forced it to change categories; it couldn't break back in — until now.

● Television movie

Usually, the television movie category is impossible to predict. Disney+'s "Chip 'n Dale: Rescue Rangers" and Roku's "Weird: The Al Yankovic Story" have both won in past years. Once again, this year includes only streaming movies: Apple TV+'s "The Gorge," the only one in the category to earn two nominations (the other being for sound editing); HBO's "Mountainhead," released on the final date of eligibility as Jesse Armstrong's "Succession" follow-up; Netflix's "Rebel Ridge" and "Nonnas"; and Peacock's "Bridget Jones: Mad About the Boy," a film that entered theaters all around the world but exclusively streamed in the U.S., making it a strange entry into the category. This is likely the biggest competitor up against Armstrong's "Mountainhead," which may be the leader here simply for the fact that the TV Academy recognized his name after so many wins for his last drama.

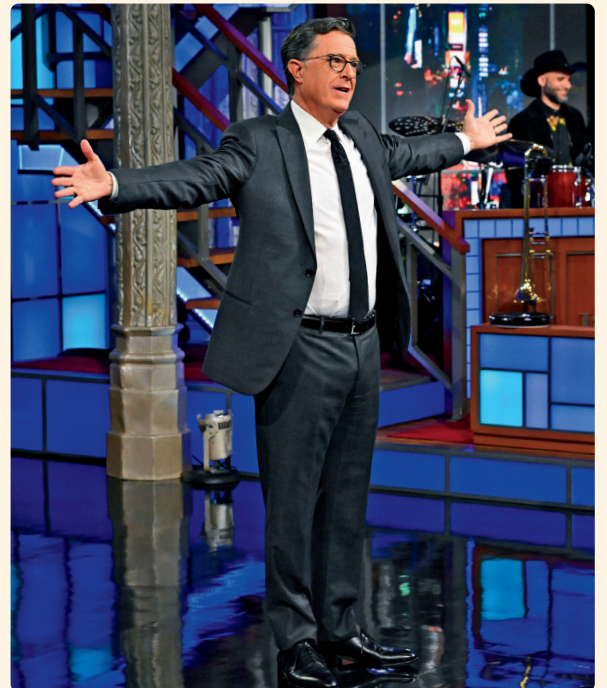
● Talk

After the news that "The Late Show With Stephen Colbert" was coming to a shocking end, the talk series race just got a bit more interesting. The CBS series has been nominated in the category nine times and received two this year for a total of 32 through the years. It's never taken home an Emmy — but if there's any time that voters are going to switch things up, it'll be this year. While predecessor "The Colbert Report" was a favorite with the TV Academy, since his run at CBS, he's yet to land the trophy. Colbert is up against Comedy Central's Emmy darling, "The Daily Show," which landed eight noms this year, bringing its total to 84 over the years. It's won in the category 12 times, including last year. The third slot goes to ABC's "Jimmy Kimmel Live," which got three noms total this year. It's been nominated every year since 2012 but has yet to take the best talk series trophy.

● Reality

One of the toughest categories to break into (or back into) is the reality competition category. CBS' "The Amazing Race" landed its 22nd nom in the category, but it hasn't won since 2014. MTV's "RuPaul's Drag Race," a five-time winner, was dethroned last year by Peacock's "The Traitors," one of the few shows to break into the category with its second season.

Netflix dropped a dark drama, 'Adolescence,' each episode filmed in one sweeping shot. The series seems to be the new 'Baby Reindeer' with 13 nominations this season.



Now, it's back for its third (arguably, better) season and is the one to watch. Bravo's "Top Chef" landed its 19th nod in the category. But the biggest surprise was the absence of NBC's "The Voice." The three-time winner was left out of the category for the first time since 2012 — it's been nominated every year since its second season —

Clockwise from top: "Adolescence," "The Late Show With Stephen Colbert" and "The White Lotus"

making room for CBS' "Survivor" to return to the category after missing out last year. "Survivor" has only won in the category once, in 2010, but it seems the buzz around Season 50 (which just wrapped and stars "White Lotus" creator Mike White) was loud enough to help push its way back into the category.

Talent. Experience. Commitment.

Congratulations to all the *Variety* Music Legal Elite honorees, including Latham & Watkins partners



Sy Damle
Washington D.C.



Gabe Fleet
New York



Andy Gass
San Francisco



Alli Stillman
New York



Joe Wetzel
San Francisco

focus

Wheeling the Deals How music attorneys help artists navigate confusing label pacts

By Todd Longwell



→ When singer Dale Bozzio fell 40 feet from a room at a Holiday Inn in Downtown L.A. in 1976, breaking a kneecap and her floating ribs and splitting open her head, she was not signed to a record contract. She had yet to form Missing Persons with fellow members of Frank Zappa's band or compose what would become their signature songs ("Words," "Destination Unknown," "Walking in L.A."). But because she was an employee of Zappa (who passed away in 1993) at the time, she had health insurance, which paid for her medical care over the next year, much of which she spent in a coma.

If Bozzio had been signed to a label as an artist, it would've been her responsibility as an independent contractor to obtain health insurance on her own or through membership in a union like SAG-AFTRA or the American Federation of Musicians Local 47 in Los Angeles. That only would have been possible if she met the income thresholds (currently, one must earn \$27,540 over the course of 12 months to qualify for SAG-AFTRA coverage).

This fundamental fact seemed to be lost on Chappell Roan, who internet commentators have placed at two degrees of stylistic separation from Bozzio (i.e., Roan's look is reminiscent of Lady Gaga's who's sported a look reminiscent of Bozzio in her '80s prime). Roan sparked an industry-wide conversation about the issue with a well-intentioned speech at the Grammys in February in which she called on record labels "to treat their artists as valuable employees with a livable wage and health insurance."

"Maybe if there was more transparency [in record contracts] a great, successful, articulate artist like Chappell Roan would have a better sense of those economics and how that relationship works, that they're not your employer. You're an independent contractor, and they don't provide health care to anybody other than their staff, their employees," says Daniel Shulman, a partner at Eisner.

Bozzio knew the rules of the game and its pitfalls because she had a mentor like Zappa, who referred Missing Persons to his attorney, Owen J. Sloane, to negotiate their contract with Capitol Records.

"Frank saved my life from the beginning of time till now because everything he did

for me,” says Bozzio, who’s developing a movie based on her life story, which she recounted in her 2021 autobiography “Life Is Strange.” “He taught us everything we know.”

Unfortunately, most artists don’t have a Zappa. But they have attorneys and other reps who should be guiding them through the finer points of the label agreements that will be affecting their lives for years, if not decades, to come. But it’s not always so easy.

“You explain what you consider to be the salient points of the deal, and they go, ‘Yeah, yeah, yeah,’” says attorney Jess Rosen of Greenberg Traurig of tyro label signees. “They just don’t care. They want to be creative. They want to get in the game.”

According to Paul Schindler, another attorney at Greenberg Traurig, there are

only four or five points in a record contract that truly matter.

Number one is the term of the contract, which should be as short as possible. Next is what you’re getting paid and how you’re getting paid, whether it’s on a royalty basis or net income, and if you’re getting substantial ownership stake in the master. After that, the things to consider are the guarantees for advances, monies being committed for marketing and promotion, and whether they’re giving you the maximum rate on your publishing.

“If the artist is successful, you can renegotiate,” says Schindler. “If the artist is not successful, it doesn’t matter what the contract says, they’re not going to get any money.”

In his 2024 memoir “Brothers,” Van Halen drummer, Alex Van Halen, recounts how

the band returned home from a successful seven-month tour in support of their 1978 debut album, which had already sold more than a million copies, only to find that they were a million dollars in debt to the label.

Situations like this aren’t uncommon for artists who came up in the ’70s and ’80s. Many talk of how they were unaware that all those things the record company ostensibly paid for — from recording costs, tour support and marketing (advertising, videos, etc.) to the drinks and dinner bought for them by the glad-handing local label rep — were actually recoupable expenses that would be deducted from their future earnings, which may never exceed their expenses.

Then there are the deductions that can remain in contracts long after technical progress has rendered them obsolete. According to band members, Van Halen’s original contract with Warner Bros. took 10% off the top for “breakage” before calculating their royalty share — a holdover from the ’20s, ’30s and ’40s, when the medium of choice was 78 rpm records made of easy-to-shatter shellac.



“If the artist is not successful, it doesn’t matter what the contract says, they’re not going to get any money.”

Paul Schindler



Dale Bozzio of Missing Persons was fortunate to have health insurance when she fell 40 feet from a room at the Holiday Inn in Downtown L.A.

Courtesy of Bozzio

A man with short dark hair and glasses is smiling while talking on a black smartphone. He is wearing a dark button-down shirt. The background is a blurred office setting. A large blue diagonal stripe runs from the top left towards the bottom right, separating the image from the text on the right.

\$3+ Billion in Total Royalties Distributed 60,000+ Members

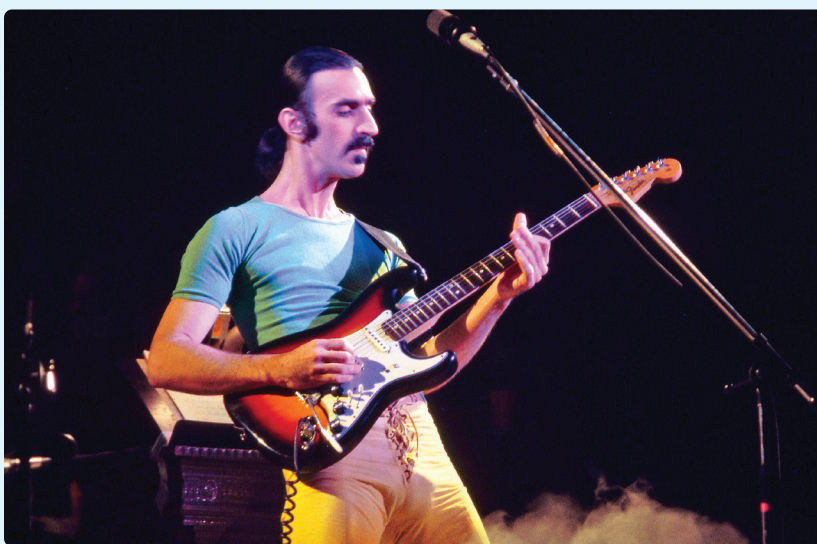
Have Your
Clients Connected
with The MLC?

At The MLC, we're dedicated to ensuring
that songwriters and music publishers
receive their **mechanical streaming royalties**
accurately and on time.

With a suite of tools designed to help
maximize royalties—and a public database
that allows anyone to search ownership data
for more than **45 million songs**, we're on a
mission to get your clients paid.

Don't let your clients miss out on U.S.
streaming royalties. **Introduce them to
The MLC today!**

CONGRATULATIONS
TO RICK MARSHALL,
GENERAL COUNSEL AT THE MLC,
AND TO ALL OF *VARIETY'S*
2025 MUSIC LEGAL ELITE!



More recently, packaging fees were still being applied to digital downloads.

With the rise of music piracy in the 2000s, record labels began insisting on “360” or “all rights” deals, which promised increased promotional and tour support, while taking a cut of a wide array of artist revenue streams, including downloads, merchandise and live performances.

In the years since, technological advances have put power back in the hands of artists. The ability to record radio-ready music at home has largely negated the need for big recording advances, and artists are able to self-promote on social media and self-distribute on digital platforms, leading to the rise of distribution-only deals and a proliferation of buyers, encompassing indie labels, media companies and passive distributors.

“It’s no longer like you go to the three major labels,” says Audrey Benoualid, a partner at Myman Greenspan Fox Rosenberg Mobasser Younger & Light. “You have 20 or 30 different options, at least, of where you can go see what services they

are offering, and the deal is dependent on each specific artist and their needs.”

But while today’s distribution deals offer the artists increased control, a bigger cut of the profits and ownership of the masters, as well as shorter contractual commitments, there’s less motivation for labels to invest in career development because they don’t have as much skin in the game.

“The majors are being far more selective about which artists they choose to sign and to develop,” says Aaron Rosenberg, also a partner at Myman Greenspan. “So you’re actually seeing fewer new artist deals.”

“The majors are being far more selective about which artists they choose to sign and develop.”

Aaron Rosenberg

Chappell Roan, left, sparked a dialogue about record companies providing healthcare for artists; Van Halen (Alex Van Halen, left, Michael Anthony, David Lee Roth and Eddie Van Halen), upper right, complained about their original Warner Bros. deal; Frank Zappa, lower right, looked out for Dale Bozzio.

Attorney Loren Wells of Wells & Kappel believes that part of the reason why major labels are shifting to the distribution deal model is because they’re publicly traded companies.

“It’s not because of some grand economic genius, but simply because they care about quarterly returns,” he says.

There’s also a potential downside to the biggest upside: ownership of the masters. No matter how little money a recording makes, all its profit participants (songwriters, producers, etc.) must be paid their share, which can become burdensome, both fiscally and logistically, when ownership is returned to the artist after the label’s license expires.

“On traditional deals, there was always the record label who was going to handle getting everybody paid,” says Shulman. “Now, we’re entering this new world where the artists are operating a sophisticated business that requires lots of different interlocking parts. And I don’t think a lot of people thought a ton about it when they were structuring the deals at the outset.”



EMPIRE

CONGRATULATIONS 2025 MUSIC LEGAL ELITE



MIKE GALLEGUS

EVP, BUSINESS & LEGAL AFFAIRS

VARIETY



Barnes & Thornburg represented the NFL on its deals for the Super Bowl halftime show, featuring Kendrick Lamar.

Sound Counsel From AI to arena tours, *Variety's* Music Legal Elite keep clients in tune with the times

By Paula Hendrickson, Nick Krewen, Todd Longwell, Stuart Miller

→ For the top attorneys on this year's Music Legal Elite list, it is a time of plenty. After being decimated by illegal downloading in the 2000s, the music business is riding high on legal streaming, which hit \$20.5 billion in global revenues in 2024, marking a 4.8% year-over-year increase, according to the IFPI Global Music Report 2025. This has, in turn, bolstered the brisk market for lawyers who broker music catalog deals, such as Big Loud's sale of a minority interest in Morgan Wallen's catalog to Chord Music Partners for \$200 million in April. Touring and brand deals have also been increasingly lucrative. But looming over it all is AI, which has opened up a new and largely unsettled legal frontier, rich with opportunities for both litigation and dealmaking.



Lisa Alter, Katie Baron
Partners
Alter, Kendrick & Baron

"Music is one of the last things to be impacted by inflation or depression," says Alter, who along with Baron, racked up an impressive \$880 million in transactions over the past 12 months, closing catalog deals for Iconic Music Group (RZA, Rod Stewart) and Influence Media Partners (DJ Khaled, Enrique Iglesias, Blake Shelton, Future, Jesse Frasure, Logic) and Primary Wave (the Notorious B.I.G., Ramones).

Challenges hidden in the catalog: "Sometimes there are complications, because it requires doing diligence into chain of title that involves the estate," says Alter. "Sometimes there is no will and you have to deal with what happened with letters of administration. It can definitely add multilayers of complexity."



Clara Kim
Exec VP, chief legal & business affairs officer
ASCAP

As the only U.S. performing rights organization with over 20,000 copy-

rights that isn't owned by private equity, ASCAP distributed almost \$1.7 billion in royalties to its writer and publisher members in 2024. "We're not-for-profit, with 90 cents of every dollar going out to our members," notes Kim.

Pay up, pirates: "We engage in quarterly campaigns to go after bars, restaurants, conventions — basically, music users who refuse to license and pay for the music that they use," says Kim. "Our licensing representatives have tried to get some music users to acquire a lawful license for over a year. It's not random."



Jason Karlov
Chair, entertainment, media and sports practice group

Brian Schall, Amanda Taber
Partners
Barnes & Thornburg

The Barnes & Thornburg trio handles a diverse array of matters for iconic artists such as Bob Dylan, T Bone Burnett, John Fogerty and "Weird" Al Yankovic and their heirs (including those of Donna Summer), as well as a large stable of electronic music deejay/producers, catalog deals for Legacy Music and copyright termination work for acts including Edwin McCain and Drivin N Cryin. They also rep the NFL on music work, including the Super Bowl halftime show, NFL Films and NFL productions music licensing.

A marketplace with no mechanism: Karlov believes there's big money being left on the table when it comes to commercial licensing of music on social media. The current system used by record companies only supports \$5,000 and \$10,000 licenses for big hits, he says, "but imagine if you could get \$5,000 every 24 hours for every hit in the last 10 years, ad nauseum."

Eric Sacks Branch Furtado

congratulations on being recognized as

Variety's 2025
Music Legal Elite

This is a wonderful and well-deserved honor.
We are all so very proud!

**GRUBMAN
SHIRE
MEISELAS &
SACKS**

ENTERTAINMENT AND MEDIA LAWYERS



Peter Anderson
Partner
Davis Wright Tremaine

Anderson has scored victories for defendants in numerous high-profile music copyright infringement cases, most notably Led Zeppelin, who were alleged to have borrowed elements of their song “Stairway to Heaven” from Spirit’s 1967 instrumental “Taurus.” More recently, he successfully defended Mariah Carey in a copyright infringement lawsuit regarding “All I Want for Christmas Is You” and won a summary judgment for Cher on her claim that a copyright termination initiated by Sonny Bono’s widow didn’t eliminate her 50% share of royalties on hits like “I Got You Babe.”

Just because they pay, it doesn’t mean it’s stolen: “It’s sometimes cheaper to just pay on the claim rather than hire lawyers and litigate,” he says.



David Dorman
General counsel
Claire Jacobs
Senior VP, legal affairs & regulatory compliance



Kristy May
Senior VP, business affairs
Bea Koramblyum
Global head of business affairs; VP, business development
Downtown Music

The team brokered Downtown’s pending acquisition by Virgin Music Group, while Dorman led negotiations for an expanded credit facility with Bank of America, providing over \$120 million, which, he says, “powered us to aggressively issue advances

and be a strong force in the market.” Downtown has also been working closely with the National Music Publishers Assn., strategizing on how to best protect the copyrights and the content of its clients. “It’s important to make sure their work is not taken advantage of, whether that’s about licensing in general or as it relates to AI, which requires constant learning to stay on top of,” Dorman points out. **Shattering silos:** “We’ve had separate business affairs teams across the different parts of the company, but my goal is to bring the overall team together to work in one direction on one mission,” Dorman says. “I’m making sure we’re not reinventing the wheels at each of our constituent companies but working cohesively.”



Daniel Shulman
Managing partner, New York office
Eisner

Shulman is deep into the Jon Batiste business, repping the Tony-short-of-an-EGOT singer-songwriter on everything from his composer and acting agreements for the film “Saturday Night” and numerous endorsement deals (Infiniti, Amazon, Tommy Hilfiger) to negotiations for the first-ever Jon Batiste’s Jazz Club at Baha Mar Resort in the Bahamas. Other clients include actor-singer Leon Thomas III, producers Boi-Ida and Vinylz and the estate of Aaliyah.

If you endorse, you better believe: “I think it’s obvious for the most part when an artist is not genuinely excited about whatever business it is that they’re helping to promote,” he says.



Mike Gallegus
Exec VP, legal & business affairs
Empire

After finishing film school in San Francisco, Gallegus fell into the music

world, sharing an apartment in the Tenderloin neighborhood with creatives like Left Brain of Odd Future and Duckwrth, producing live events and managing artists. After a handful of years being what he calls a “failed manager,” he went to law school, passed the bar and got a job with San Francisco-based independent label Empire, where he’s closed deals for acts including breakout country star Shaboozey, rapper 310babii and Afrobeats artist Fireboy DML.

Scoring hits while giving back: “We want to invest in people who historically weren’t invested in and give people platforms,” he says



Ken Abdo, Cynthia Katz, Tim Mandelbaum, Heidy Vaquerano
Partners
Fox Rothschild

This quartet oversaw more than \$2 billion worth of deals in 2024, including HarbourView Equity’s catalog securitization for \$500 million in debt financing, as well as the purchase of 25 catalogs, including those of rapper T-Pain and legendary jazz-pop guitarist George Benson. The firm also brokered \$uicideboy\$’s deal to sell their master and publishing catalogs for almost \$500 million, assisted Litmus Music in acquiring the full Equal Vision Records catalog and renegotiated “Flowers” co-writer Gregory “Aldae” Hein’s agreement with the Pulse Music Group to include a joint venture that allowed him to sign other writers.

Earned income: “In many deals, we have ‘earn-outs,’” states Mandelbaum. “For example, if earnings over three years exceed a certain amount, whether it’s an annual average or something else, the seller gets some additional payment.”



Empire’s Mike Gallegus closed the deal to bring Shaboozey to the label.

Left to right: Courtesy of Anderson; Courtesy of Dorman; Courtesy of Jacobs; Courtesy of May; Ebru Yildiz; Gittings Photography; Courtesy of Abdo; Courtesy of Katz; Courtesy of Vaquerano; Getty Images; Courtesy of Gallegus

Congratulations to

Jess Rosen, Bobby Rosenbloum, and Paul Schindler
on being named to **Variety's 2025 Music Legal Elite!**

We are proud to celebrate their achievements and
recognize their significant contributions to our clients
and the music industry.

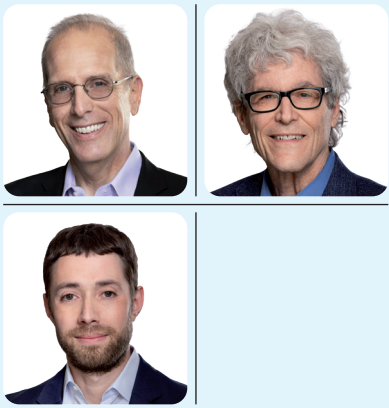


Jess Rosen

Bobby Rosenbloum

Paul Schindler

GREENBERG TRAUIG, LLP | ATTORNEYS AT LAW | 2850 ATTORNEYS | 49 LOCATIONS WORLDWIDE* | GTLAW.COM



J. Eugene (Gene) Salomon Jr.
Managing partner

Donald S. Passman,
Ethan Schiffres
Partners
Gang, Tyre, Ramer, Brown & Passman

The trio boasts an envy-inducing client list packed with household names and legends including Taylor Swift, Adele, Pink, Elton John, Paul Simon, Stevie Wonder, Neil Diamond and



The Gang Tyre team negotiated composer Ludwig Göransson's pact to score "Sinners."

Cher. In the past year, they've been involved in various catalog sales, touring, merchandising, endorsements, record and publishing agreements collectively worth more than \$1 billion, including deals for world tours by Billie Eilish and Green

Day, composer Ludwig Göransson's pact to score "Sinners" and Randy Newman's sale of his publishing and recorded music assets to Litmus Music. They also handle music crossovers for actors such as Anthony Ramos, Aron Piper and Olly Sholotan.

Can exits on brand deals with equity interest outpace an artist's music revenue?: Perhaps, but "it's hard to equal the kind of money you can make on a major tour now, because the dollars are just so big," says Salomon.

Congrats to our
Elite friends and colleagues,
**Larry Iser &
Jonathan Steinsapir.**

KHIKS
KINSELLA HOLLEY ISER KUMP STEINSAPIR
ATTORNEYS

khiks.com





**Damien Granderson,
Guy Blake, Colin Morrissey,
Lynn Gonzalez**

Partners
Granderson Des Rochers

The Granderson Des Rochers team's recent big deals — including joint ventures for the Paper Route, Native Lands and Black Label and a fashion campaign for A\$AP Rocky, Kelsey Lu and J Balvin — speak to broader



“It’s hard to equal the money you can make on a major tour now, because the dollars are so big.”

Gene Salomon

trends in the industry. With the rise of streaming and direct access to fans, the traditional model of “we’ll pay and produce these records and own them forever” is fading, according to Blake, who handled catalog deals for Ne-Yo, Timbaland and the estate of the Notorious B.I.G. Other clients include Raye, SoundCloud and independent labels such as Issa Rae’s Raedio, Rancho

Humilde and Quality Control Music. **Jurassic era of catalog sales has passed:** “You’re seeing younger and younger talent whose approach has been, ‘I just spent the last five years

building up this catalog and now I’m gonna sell it and invest that money and then spend the next five years creating a new catalog and do it again and again,” says Blake.



Granderson Des Rochers cut a fashion campaign deal for J Balvin.

We congratulate
Lisa Alter & Katie Baron
on their selection to *Variety's* 2025
“Music Legal Elite Report.”



156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 600 | New York, New York 10010
212.707.8377 | akbllp.com





Jess Rosen
Shareholder & co-chair, Atlanta entertainment & media practice

Paul Schindler
Senior chair, New York entertainment & media practice
Greenberg Traurig

Rosen handles big deals for artists such as Kenny Chesney (acquisition of his Blue Chair Bay Rum by Next Century Spirits; Sphere residency), Kane Brown (publishing catalog sale to HarbourView Equity; AEG tour agreement) and Miranda Lambert (pact for branded Nashville restaurant; Las Vegas residency; joint venture with record label Big Loud Texas), while Schindler specializes in endorsements, merchandising and joint ventures, including the sale of leading Latin concert promoter CMN to AEG Presents and various new third-party agreements with James Prince’s Rap-A-Lot Records and N-the-Water Publishing worth more than \$50 million.

What music catalogs won’t they buy?: “Some of the funds shied away from certain rap deals because they felt they would buy, or could be buying things that were too offensive for their shareholders,” says Schindler.



Bobby Rosenbloum
Chairman, global entertainment & media practice
Greenberg Traurig

Rosenbloum has brokered more than \$4 billion worth of music deals in the last year alone. Based in Atlanta, he travels far and wide for in-person meetings with his clients, which include the Recording Academy, the Coca-Cola Company, X, iHeartMedia, Eldridge Industries, Major League Baseball, Mattel, Dick Clark Prods., the Grand Ole Opry and numerous AI companies, including OpenAI, Songbird AI, Oyi and Klay Vision.

AI is a supplement, not a replacement: “It could end up bringing down production costs, creating new styles and new ways of producing in the way that technology often has in terms of allowing people to record from their homes and reduce the expense of doing so,” he says.



Eric Sacks
Partner, head of corporate department

Branch Furtado
Partner
Grubman Shire Meiselas & Sacks

Sacks and Furtado represent companies and handle high-profile acquisitions, investments, strategic partnerships and joint ventures. Furtado led the team overseeing Warner Bros. Discovery’s joint venture with CuttingEdge Group, worth a reported \$1 billion, making it one of the largest music rights transactions to date. In the past year, they’ve also represented Live Nation, Sony Music, Hybe America and iHeart, plus several high-profile media and sports executives.

Not panicking over AI: “It’s going to have a major impact on everything, not just media ... but that’s what we welcome,” says Sacks. “We want these challenges. Whether it’s AI or any change in market or disruptive

●

“[AI] could end up bringing down production costs, creating new styles and new ways of producing.”
Bobby Rosenbloum

technology, it really comes down to problem solving. And problem solving is where this job is the most fun.”



Palisa Kelley
Managing director, business & legal affairs
HarbourView Equity Partners

Over the past 12 months, Kelley has been the in-house legal mastermind guiding HarbourView Equity Partners through its purchases of the music catalogs of rapper T-Pain and legendary jazz guitarist George Benson and an asset-backed securitization that raised approximately \$500 million. Kelley maintains that their catalog buys aren’t takeovers as much

as partnerships, because they help their signees to exploit all relevant and potential income streams. “We have an in-house licensing expert and an in-house marketing team, used to increase and build those revenue streams,” she says.

“Genre-trifcation”: “Billions all over the world listen to traditional genres of music,” says Kelley. “We’re not afraid to tap beyond those genres.”



Howard King
Managing partner
King, Holmes, Paterno & Soriano

King is a litigator whose firm represents a diverse list of clients, including Dr. Dre, Van Morrison, Alanis Morissette, Sia, Frank Ocean, Carole King and the estate of Tupac Shakur. He’s handled many successful lawsuits against managers, talent agents and publishing companies, but you might not have read about them, because, as he likes to say, the best resolutions are the ones nobody knows about because they don’t go to trial.

The elders’ edge: “The benefit of being older is that you have a reputation, and we tend to have a lot of credibility when we’re threatening litigation,” he says.



Jess Rosen reps Miranda Lambert, left; Palisa Kelley guided HarbourView’s acquisition of T-Pain’s catalog.

Relentlessly invested in our clients' success — **in music, media, and beyond.**

Congratulations to Barnes & Thornburg's Jason Karlov, Brian Schall and Amanda Taber on being named to *Variety's 2025 Music Legal Elite*, recognizing top attorneys guiding today's most influential artists and companies.



Jason Karlov
Entertainment, Media and
Sports Practice Group Chair



Brian Schall
Partner



Amanda Taber
Partner

**Barnes &
Thornburg**

btlaw.com



Larry Iser
Managing partner
Jonathan Steinsapir
Partner
Kinsella Holley Iser Kump Steinsapir

Although Iser focuses primarily on musical artists and Steinsapir on publishing companies and the Michael Jackson estate, they frequently confer on challenging issues. Iser, whose roster includes Jackson Browne and David Byrne, spent much of 2024 dealing with unauthorized use of clients’ songs in political ads, including ones for President Trump and Sen. Rand Paul. He also reps Sofi Tukker and Third Side Music in infringement



Jonathan Steinsapir litigates on behalf of the Michael Jackson estate.



“We do want to protect songwriters ... we also don’t want to stop technology from developing.”

Jonathan Steinsapir

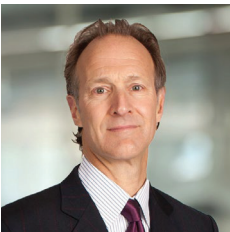
claims over unauthorized uses of the duo’s hit song “Best Friend.” The Michael Jackson estate kept Steinsapir busy arbitrating against HBO over the airing and promotion of “Leaving Neverland,” and winning an appellate battle with Jackson’s mother over a \$600 million catalog deal.

Striking a proper balance with AI: “We do want to protect songwriters, but we also don’t want to stop technology from developing,” says Steinsapir.

Congratulations to our 2025 *Variety* Music Legal Elite honorees



Kenneth J. Abdo



Tim Mandelbaum



Cynthia L. Katz



Heidy Vaquerano



Seth Traxler, Shellie Freedman, Rory Wellever, Peter Martelli
Partners
Kirkland & Ellis

The group recently advised Blackstone on its \$1.6 billion acquisition of Recognition Music Group (45,000-plus songs by artists such as Red Hot Chili Peppers and Journey), Universal Music Group on its investment in Chord Music Partners (62,000-plus

song catalog, valued at \$1.85 billion, with songs by Taylor Swift and Fleetwood Mac) and UMG division Virgin Music Group on its proposed \$775 million acquisition of Downtown Music Holdings. “Those deals demonstrate the range of our representations,” says Traxler. “Universal being focused entirely on music and Blackstone being a premier asset manager.”
Diversify to survive: “Firms need multiple deep specialties across different areas, including special finance counsel because of how the demands for expertise has changed,” says Traxler.



Gabe Fleet
Partner
Latham & Watkins

Fleet helped lead the team that in May earned a closely watched win for the National Assn. of Broadcasters in the Webcasting VI proceeding before the Copyright Royalty

Board. Shortly before trial, Fleet secured a deal setting royalty rates for commercial radio broadcasters well below that sought by the major record labels and SoundExchange, along with a better deal on late fees.
Getting the win: “There have not been a lot of successful settlements in these proceedings,” Fleet says. “Both sides have diverse constituencies. You’ve got to understand everybody’s goals and find solutions that address as many people’s goals as you can.”



“Both sides have diverse constituencies. You’ve got to understand everybody’s goals and find solutions that address as many people’s goals as you can.”

Gabe Fleet

Congratulations to our partners **John Frankenheimer, Kennth Kraus, Monika Tashman** and **Debbie White** on being named to *Variety*’s inaugural 2025 Music Legal Elite report.

We celebrate your outstanding achievements, cultural impact and innovative contributions to the music industry and beyond.



LOS ANGELES
NEW YORK
CHICAGO
NASHVILLE
WASHINGTON, DC
SAN FRANCISCO
BEIJING
HONG KONG

loeb.com



**Sy Damle, Andy Gass,
Alli Stillman, Joe Wetzel**
Partners
Latham & Watkins

The group defended Spotify against a federal lawsuit from the Mechanical Licensing Collective over royalty payouts for bundled music service offerings, getting the case dismissed with prejudice. Stillman says it was “the capstone of a larger issue in a longer dispute,” noting it will have an industrywide impact for streaming services, as well as indirectly tie into the firm’s work for trade associations they represent before the copyright office. The firm is also defending AI companies such as Suno, Udio and Anthropic in lawsuits with potential for wide-ranging long-term effects on the industry.

Score one for the robots: “We’ve had a lot of early successes in demonstrating that cases bringing copyright infringement claims against the act of training a generative AI are not the

“At some point there will just be too many [AI] works for services to handle and rights owners to parse.” Rick Marshall

right way to approach this industry,” says Wetzel. But, he adds, “we do not believe that users should use AI to create outputs that would infringe existing copyrighted works.”



John Frankenheimer
Chairman emeritus; chair, music industry practice group
Debbie White
Vice chair, music industry practice group
**Kenneth Kraus,
Monika Tashman**
Partners
Loeb & Loeb

Collectively, this Loeb & Loeb quartet has more than 150 years of experience, and it’s supported by a venerable

Los Angeles-based firm with more than 450 attorneys worldwide, enabling them to call on a wide variety of other experts in areas ranging from tax litigation to estate practices. The senior members of the team, Frankenheimer and Kraus, respectively rep legends such as Diana Ross and Bob Seger, and were key players in the sale of a minority stake of Morgan Wallen’s master recording catalog to Chord Music Partners, reportedly worth \$200 million. White’s clients include the Who, Duran Duran, Christina Aguilera and K-pop giants HYBE, while Tashman’s clients range from Latin music artists Aventura and Romeo Santos to Blondie, Debbie Gibson and Papa Roach.

Same old story on the tech frontier: “There is this constant process we go through of being uncomfortable, being fearful, reluctantly getting involved and getting excited about what the opportunity is, and then probably overstepping and making mistakes,” says Frankenheimer.



Derek Crowover
Co-office administrative partner, Nashville; vice chair, music industry; sports industry member
Tiffany Dunn
Co-office administrative partner, Nashville
Loeb & Loeb

Crowover has represented Big Loud Records since its 2015 founding and was part of the firm’s team that brokered the label’s \$200 million-plus sale of a minority stake in Morgan Wallen’s masters to Chord Music Partners in April. The balance of his client list ranges from songwriter-producer Ashley Gorley (responsible for 85-plus No. 1 hits) to the estate of Otis Redding. Working alongside him in the Nashville office, copyright, trademark and

intellectual property law specialist Dunn handled numerous matters for clients like Luke Combs and the John R. Cash Revocable Trust.

Nashville influx of non-country creators: “They wound up making a living in country, which now means that country music has their influence, which is not really what we know as traditional country,” says Crowover.



Lee Phillips
Senior partner
Robert Jacobs
Partner; leader of entertainment litigation
Binta Niambi Brown
Partner
Manatt, Phelps & Phillips

The Manatt trio has a mix of skills and experience that is both deep and wide. A six-decade veteran, Phillips has handled a long list of legends during his career, including Michael Jackson, Barbra Streisand, Prince, Brian Wilson and the Eagles. In recent months, he’s repped former “American Idol” judge Randy Jackson in various endorsement deals and advised a top music act on a major catalog deal. Litigator Jacobs handles complex, high-profile music rights cases, including a \$25 million copyright infringement suit over Bad Bunny’s allegedly unauthorized use of the song “Empty My Pocket” in his song “Enseñame a Bailar.” Brown negotiates cutting-edge artist deals, such as Blackpink member Rosé’s recent pact with Atlantic Records and Warner Chappell, and advises on catalog sales and acquisitions.

Law coming to the AI Wild West: “I suspect that there will end up being some sort of licensing regime put in place so the tech companies, creators and the music majors can start to monetize this in a more, shall we say, efficient way,” says Jacobs.



Binta Niambi Brown reps Rosé, left, of Blackpink.

CONGRATULATIONS TO
VARIETY'S
MUSIC LEGAL ELITE
HONOREES
INCLUDING OUR COLLEAGUES

DON PASSMAN
GENE SALOMON
ETHAN SCHIFFRES

GANG · TYRE · RAMER
BROWN & PASSMAN



Rick Marshall
General counsel
Mechanical Licensing Collective

As the head of the Music Licensing Collective legal team handling the rollout and ongoing operation of the blanket mechanical license created by the Music Modernization Act, Marshall ensures the accurate, transparent and efficient distribution of royalties collected from digital services. And those micro-pennies add up: His efforts have helped facilitate more than \$3 billion in payments to music publishers, administrators and self-administered songwriters.

The coming flood of AI generated music: “The massive influx is something that the whole industry is going to have to reckon with or else at some point there will just be too many works for services to handle and rights owners to parse,” he says.



Michael Poster
Partner-in-charge, New York, transactional department chair and music acquisitions & financing chair
Michelman & Robinson

Poster’s biggest recent deal was overseeing the investigation, diligence and rights analysis for the \$1 billion-plus joint venture between his client Cutting Edge Media Music



Michael Poster handled a catalog sale for Snow Patrol member Johnny McDaid.

and Warner Bros. Discovery, involving the music for a century of TV and film programming. He also assisted in the sales of Snow Patrol’s Johnny McDaid’s music catalog to Concord and Neil Sedaka’s to Primary Wave. **Reruns encouraged:** According to

Poster, “there are many mid-size acquirers in the secondary music catalog market who have \$75 million or \$80 million in assets and the ability to buy a catalog that has already been acquired” and, therefore, previously vetted for rights issues.

Primary Wave^{PW} Music

We honor our elite attorneys, Amy Ortner, Samantha Rhulen, and Lexi Todd, for protecting and amplifying our artists’ legacies.

The Home of Legends

primarywave.com

Left to right: Courtesy of Marshall; Courtesy of Poster; Getty Images



Christine Lepera, David Steinberg, Bradley Mullins, Gabriella Ismaj

Partners
Mitchell Silberberg & Knupp

The MSK quartet is a go-to for litigating high-profile music industry disputes. Lepera won two copyright lawsuits for Dua Lipa regarding her hit song “Levitating,” obtaining a summary judgment in one

case, a dismissal with prejudice in the other. Steinberg successfully defended copyright infringement claims involving Nickelback’s “Rockstar” and GloRilla’s “Tomorrow” and “Tomorrow 2.” Recently, Mullins defended Warner Music Group subsidiary Uproxx in a class action suit alleging violations of the Video Privacy Protection Act, and Ismaj scored wins for the estate of Juice WRLD and Universal Music Group in copyright and breach of contract claims. Other recent clients include Timbaland, Fat Joe and Drake. **It’s not all about AI, folks:** From copyright infringement and trademark disputes to litigation over management and band break ups, “there’s a whole panoply of things that are kind of going on and will always be going on that is maybe not as sexy and not as the topic this year,” says Lepera.



Christine Lepera won two copyright lawsuits for Dua Lipa.

manatt

We Salute You!

We applaud **L. Lee Phillips, Robert Jacobs and Binta Brown** for being recognized in *Variety’s* Music Legal Elite Report.

Manatt Entertainment is dedicated to empowering music creators. Our **Music Streaming Royalty Calculator** is a



free tool that draws on direct-source data to provide music creators with payment information from streaming services. Scan the QR code to try the calculator.



Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP manatt.com



The NBCUniversal team negotiated music rights deals for the blockbuster “Wicked.”

extending a partnership with the estate of the Cars’ Ric Ocasek to the entire band, landing the late rapper the Notorious B.I.G.’s catalog and new associations with legendary classical violinist Itzhak Perlman, Extreme co-founder Nuno Bettencourt, Americana singer-songwriter Jerry Jeff Walker and “Feels So Good” flugelhornist Chuck Mangione, who recently died. They also helped Primary Wave step out of the music publishing box with its deal to co-produce the immersive, multi-sensory Bob Marley Hope Road experience that recently opened at Las Vegas’ Mandalay Bay. **Trumpeting potential ancillary income:** “You can tell any artist’s story whether in books, film, documentaries, biopics, live stage and jukebox musicals,” says Ortner. “It’s an infinite array of possibilities.”



Audrey Benoualid, Aaron Rosenberg

Partners
Myman Greenspan Fox Rosenberg Mobasser Younger & Light

Benoualid has successfully negotiated deals worth more than \$80 million for clients over the past year, including major touring agreements for acts such as Red Hot Chili Peppers and Erykah Badu. Rosenberg boasts a roster that includes Ariana Grande, Jennifer Lopez, John Legend, Meghan Trainor and Jason Derulo, as well executives including Warner Records CEO and co-chairman Aaron Bay-Schuck and Republic Records co-president, CCO and head of A&R Wendy Goldstein. Together, the duo has worked on numerous matters for breakout star Tate McRae, including brand partnerships with Adidas and Neutrogena. **Dirty little secret:** “People don’t really think of lawyering as a fun endeavor, because it is a serious [thing], where we’re kind of like the intellectual property bodyguards of our clients,” Rosenberg says, but he feels the democratization of music and the freedom it has engendered has increased the dealmaking fun factor.



Tanya Perara

Exec VP and chief counsel, music

Terra Hatch

Senior VP, music business & legal affairs

Cira Limoli Nisco

Senior VP, music business & legal affairs

Luiz Buff de Souza e Silva

VP, music business & legal affairs
NBCUniversal

Well-organized teamwork keeps Perara, Hatch, Limoli Nisco and Buff in sync while negotiating expansive deals securing rights to composer Stephen Schwartz’s songs from Broadway’s “Wicked” (plus new songs) for Universal’s 2024 film adaptation and its upcoming sequel, plus licensing the film’s music to brand partners to cross-promote the films. They also spent two years securing rights from countless musicians for “SNL 50” and its related specials. **Scoring in sports with needle drops:** “The emotion with which people experience sports provides an



opportunity for us to create those really big moments in the Olympics,” says Perara. “We’ve had big names like Carrie Underwood and Fall Out Boy and other significant artists help us create iconic themes. Then, obviously, we have a theme like ‘Roundball Rock’ with John Tesh that people identify immediately with basketball on NBC.”



Amy Ortner

Chief business affairs officer & general counsel

Samantha Rhulen

Senior VP, business & legal affairs

Lexi Todd

VP, business & legal affairs
Primary Wave Music

“It was a pretty monumental year,” says Ortner, noting that the \$700 million in acquisitions the Primary Wave team closed in 2024 included artists from a wide range of genres (rock, new wave, hip-hop, classical, country and jazz). Key deals include



Sandra Crawshaw-Sparks

Senior partner, litigation department; chair, entertainment, copyright and media practice group
Proskauer Rose

Crawshaw-Sparks splits her time between defending and prosecuting copyright infringement cases, recovering tens of millions of dollars for her clients in the process. She also successfully defended Madonna, Live Nation and various venues in connection with three class action suits regarding the artist’s Celebration Tour and her alleged tardiness. **AI, friend or foe?** “Can you take copyrighted material and use it to train your AI mechanism without paying a license fee?” she asks. “The answer will be one of those seismic shifts that music has seen over the last 30 years.”

“People don’t really think of lawyering as a fun endeavor.”

Aaron Rosenberg



I love the
smell of helium
in the morning.

VARIETY 120
YEARS



**Ilene S. Farkas, Frank P. Scibilia,
Benjamin K. Semel,
Don Zakarin**

Partners
Pryor Cashman

Fresh from successfully defending Ed Sheeran, Warner Music and Sony Music Publishing from an infringement claim on Sheeran's "Thinking Out Loud" levelled by the Marvin Gaye estate, Pryor Cashman is rep-

With AI, "you might get a lot more personal music on lower-budget projects than you've ever seen before." **Michael Peters**

resenting more than 100 defendants in the "Dem Bow" copyright infringement case that the plaintiffs claim encroaches a drum pattern they claim to own. Over 1,800 songs and recordings are involved, as are superstars Justin Bieber, Pitbull, Becky G and Anitta.

Bound and DSP determined: "The songwriters and publishers are bound by a compulsory license. They don't have the ability to say, 'no,'" notes Scibilia. "So if Spotify were to tell Sony Publishing, 'We want to license your catalog,' all Spotify has to do is get a compulsory license, pay royalties to

the Mechanical Licensing Collective and pay the statutory rate."



Elsa Ramo
Founder; managing partner

Michael Peters
Senior associate
Ramo

Ramo yearned to be involved in the

music end of the business, but by the time she launched her firm in 2005, Napster had effectively obliterated that dream. But, six years ago, she decided to add attorney and multi-instrumentalist Peters to help to serve the multimedia music needs of her client roster. Together, they have applied their expertise to live concert specials ("The Weeknd Live at SoFi"), interactive music experiences (Netflix's "The Queen's Ball: A Bridgerton Experience"), music festivals (Elements Music Festival) and film scores ("Bride Hard").

AI music tools for film and TV auteurs: "A lot of filmmakers have very precise and inspired musical ideas, but they just don't have the background, the technical ability or the training to execute them," says Peters. "You might get a lot more personal music on lower-budget projects than you've ever seen before."



Congratulations to our colleagues, and their fellow honorees, for being recognized among

Variety's 2025 "Music Legal Elite"



Christine Lepera
Partner, New York



David Steinberg
Partner, Los Angeles



Bradley Mullins
Partner, Los Angeles



Gabriella Ismaj
Partner, Los Angeles



Joshua Love, Stephen Sessa, Edward Shapiro
Partners, entertainment & media group
Reed Smith

In the past year, Love, Sessa and Shapiro have closed Concord Music Group’s \$468.8 million acquisition of Round Hill Music Royalty Fund and another half a billion dollars’ worth of deals for Lyric Capital Management, including the purchase of Jason



The Reed Smith team reps Justin Bieber.

Aldean’s catalog. They also repped songwriter-led music publishing and record company Seeker Music in its partnership with Joan Jett and Kenny Laguna’s Blackheart Music. Other clients include Rihanna, Nicki Minaj, Justin Bieber, Bon Jovi, the Smashing Pumpkins, Korn and Kesha.

Corporate cacophony: “In 2025, I think it’s safe to say that music is firmly established as an asset class,” says Love. “You see the biggest players from Blackstone, Aries, Apollo, Goldman-Sachs [and] Partners Group, all making a push into the space. It’s taken five years, but there’s a maturity in the market that wasn’t previously present.”



“In 2025, I think it’s safe to say that music is firmly established as an asset class.” Joshua Love

Left to right: Courtesy of Love; Courtesy of Sessa; Courtesy of Shapiro; Getty Images

DAMIEN GRANDERSON

GUY BLAKE

GRANDERSON
DES ROCHERS

BEVERLY HILLS NEW YORK CITY

CONGRATULATIONS
DAMIEN GRANDERSON,
GUY BLAKE,
COLIN MORRISSEY,
& LYNN GONZALEZ

FOR BEING NAMED TO VARIETY'S
2025 "MUSIC LEGAL ELITE REPORT."

GDRFIRM.COM / @GDRFIRM

COLIN MORRISSEY

LYNN GONZALEZ

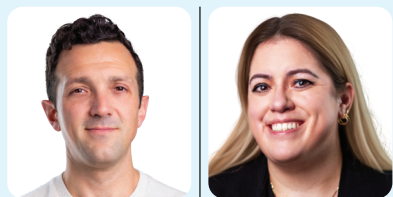


Josh Binder, Jeremy Mohr, Paul Rothenberg

Founding partners
Rothenberg, Mohr & Binder

The trio reps a cutting-edge collection of au courant hitmakers. Binder's clients include independent hip-hop label Top Dawg Entertainment (the launching pad for Sza, Doechii and Kendrick Lamar), DJ Marshmello, Latin music star Ivan Cornejo and Lisa of K-pop sensations Blackpink. Rothenberg has a roster top-lined by pop singer-songwriter-producer Charlie Puth, R&B star Jazmine Sullivan and hip-hop artist Logic, while Mohr handles Gunna (with Binder), Kehlani, Chloe x Halle, producer and executive Hitmaka and artist and producer Caroline Polachek.

Younger artists selling catalogs: According to Mohr, it's often done to finance a big life event, like buying a first house, having children or putting children in college or private school. "They're still hopefully in their prime and have a long runway to build it up and either flip it again or amass a bigger catalog that they hang on to," he says.



Kevin Eskowitz, Lisa Lester

Partners
Rothenberg Mohr & Binder

The son of a top Live Nation exec, Eskowitz spent his college years at George Washington University playing guitar in a band. Lester was a Division I tennis player at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas. Today, he has a client list that includes EDM

artist Gryffin, singer-songwriter Conan Grey, producer Grant Boutin (Tate McRae) and J-pop band One or Eight, while Lester handles Grammy-winning mixer Rob Kinelski (Karol G, J Balvin), producers Noah Goldstein (Rosalía, Travis Scott, Frank Ocean) and Buddy Ross (Lorde, Haim) and artists including Domi & JD Beck and Bunt.

Can't escape the TikTok of it all: "What is a hit in the modern age if it's not the soundtrack to a million makeup tutorials?" muses Eskowitz.



Stanton (Larry) Stein, Ashley R. Yeargan, Irene Lee, Bennett Bigman

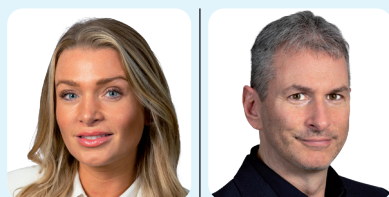
Partners
Russ August & Kabat

The quartet has scored some big litigation wins in recent months, overturning a \$2.5 million Florida jury verdict for negligent security for Drake (Stein and Yeargan) and resolving the estate of Donna Summer's suit alleging Kanye West and Ty Dolla \$ign infringed on the copyright of her song "I Feel Love" (Stein and Bigman). In the meantime, Lee won a judgment in favor of Tyga in a legal action seeking to recover \$3 million, while managing 5,000 brands and intellectual property portfolios for artists (Mariah Carey, Mary J. Blige, Joan Jett, Cardi B, deadmau5, Mick Fleetwood), labels (TenThousand Projects, Imaginary Studios) and Web 3.0 companies (PixelynX).

Actionable AI: When feeding existing copyrighted content to train your language model, "I think it's hard to argue against fair use," says Lee. "But when you are wholesale downloading seven million books from known pirate sites, yeah, I think you now have a claim there."



Rothenberg, Mohr & Binder handles Top Dawg Entertainment, home to Doechii.



Alexis Robinson

Partner and leader, entertainment, technology and advertising practice group; co-leader, music practice

Daniel E. Schnapp

Partner and co-leader, music, artificial intelligence, interactive media and technology transactions teams

Genevieve Perez

Special counsel

Han Kim

Associate
Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton

The Sheppard Mullin quartet has closed a succession of big deals for artists, rights holders and tech platforms. It advised Domain Capital Group on the acquisition of the catalogs of Iggy Azalea, composer Andrew Bissell and prolific country songwriter Ashley Gorley and advised Soundraw on legal issues arising from the use of AI to create custom music. For ASCAP, they negotiated multi-year public performance licenses with major platforms such as Amazon, Paramount Global, Spotify, Pandora, Warner Bros. Discovery and Netflix. Other clients include Uproxx Studios, Shanghai-based Team Wang

Records, K-pop singer Jessi, record company the Black Label, Steinway Musical Instruments and music video production company Freenjoy.

Evaluating catalog value: "The hard part for us on the legal side is making sure our client is getting what they think they're getting," says Robinson. "They're making certain assumptions, and we have to make sure that we're aligned."



Julie Swidler

Exec VP, business affairs and general counsel
Sony Music

Public policy initiatives and global government affairs are taking up more time for Swidler, whose long list of day-to-day responsibilities also includes strategic partnership negotiations, artist contracts, litigation, transactions and joint-venture operations. Increasingly, that means pushing for legislative action to protect musicians from AI vocal clones and soundalikes.

Not-so-beautiful: "One recent industry win was getting the moratorium on AI legislation out of the 'Big Beautiful Bill,'" says the 17-year Sony Music vet. "There was a very big concern that the states would not be able to regulate tech, and we wouldn't have the Elvis Act, which would be a problem."



Joshua Rosenberg
Partner
Venable

Rosenberg is defending artist Jason Derulo and Sony Music Entertainment in a potentially game-changing joint authorship lawsuit initiated by Matthew Spatola concerning Derulo’s chart-topping “Savage Love,” in which the plaintiff seeks co-writer and co-producing credits. He also reps Ariana Grande in a wide variety of matters, ranging from the protection of her brand and content to the management of her personal safety, including defending the singer in a breach of

contract lawsuit filed by a litigant who often targets celebrities. **Hackers leveling up:** “People go on platforms like Discord, hack in, obtain unauthorized artist content and try to sell it online to the highest bidder,” says Rosenberg.



Mark Robinson
Exec VP, global business & legal affairs



Michael Cantor
Senior VP, business affairs & development
Virgin Music Group

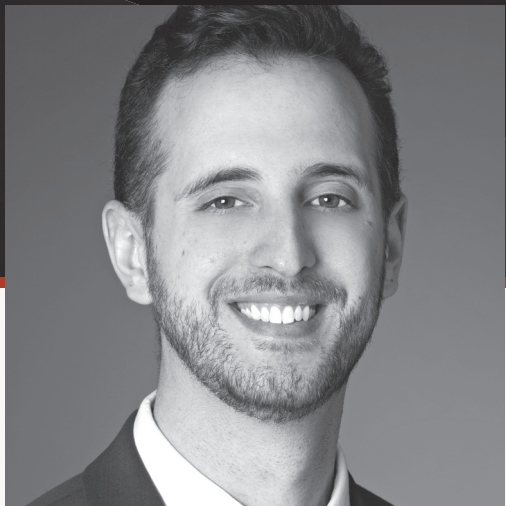
The duo negotiated deals for both artists (Carin León, Kip Moore) and companies (Primary Wave) and advised Virgin on its acquisition of



Virgin Music Group’s legal team closed a deal for Carin León.

Outdustry, an artist and label services and rights management business focused on markets like China and India. They’re now working closely as a partner with artists who are looking to take more control of their catalogs or personal record labels. “Catering to the independent community, we have to be more

flexible and creative,” Robinson says. **Working in an uncertain economy:** “With tariffs and other issues, we need to be innovative, so our artists are still able to reach the fans all over the world,” says Cantor. “It’s still a big place when you’re trying to move physical products, so we focus on coming up with solutions.”



CONGRATULATIONS

Elsa Ramo & Michael Peters

ON BEING NAMED IN

Variety’s 2025 Music Legal Elite

You are legal leaders who play a pivotal role in shaping careers, safeguarding creativity, and driving innovation.

We also extend our congratulations to all the honorees who keep the music business thriving—one deal at a time.



Where creativity meets counsel.



Peter Rosenthal
Exec VP, global head of business & legal affairs
Warner Chappell Music

Rosenthal's team of lawyers brings music rights into the company through songwriter agreements, administration agreements and catalog acquisitions, then maximize

the rights they've acquired, whether it's in a wide-ranging pact with Meta or a deal for an individual song to be in a show or ad. In recent months, he's closed deals involving such artists as Diplo, Morgan Wallen, Patrice Rushen and the estate of Tom Petty.

The advantage of a short-term administration-only deal: "It's a way to reach some writers that we otherwise might not, who aren't interested in a life of copyright deal or a traditional multi-year or multi-album type deal," he says.



Paul Robinson
Exec VP and general counsel
Warner Music Group

In February, Robinson and his M&A team closed a deal for WMG to buy 50.1% of Tempo Music, with the option to buy the remainder. In July, WMG announced a joint venture with Bain Capital to invest up to \$1.2 billion in music catalogs.

Moving up to varsity level: "Tempo is a company that we bought an interest in after they've made all of their acquisitions," he says. "And Bain is like the JV. It has zero right now, and we're going to be filling it up with all kinds of fantastic music assets."



Warner Chappell's Peter Rosenthal closed a deal for Diplo.

"People have predicted the end of the music business due to technology many times."

Loren Wells



We congratulate
our partner
Beau Stapleton
and all those included
in *Variety's* 2025 Music
Legal Elite

WILLKIE

1,200 LAWYERS | 16 OFFICES | 6 COUNTRIES

Attorney Advertisement



Todd Larson
Partner
Weil, Gotshal & Manges

Larson is co-lead counsel representing Sirius XM and Pandora to determine royalty rates for 2026 through 2030. “We’re battling over the implications of the major labels’ market power and what adjustments need to be made to the benchmark rates to make them applicable to what you’d find in an effectively competitive market rather than where you have monopoly suppliers,” he explains.

Musical bona fides: “I’ve played guitar since I was a kid and before law school played in bands in the Philadelphia area,” he says. “We recorded a couple of CDs and played SXSW. Now, I’m the bass player in a Grateful Dead band.”



Loren Wells, Tim Kappel
Partners
Wells Kappel

If Wells and Kappel’s four-year-old New Orleans-based firm wasn’t already on the industry map, that all changed early this year when they won a summary judgment in a lawsuit they filed on behalf of co-author Cyril Vetter regarding the copyright reversion rights to “Double Shot (Of My Baby’s Love),” which was a hit for the Swinging Medallions in 1966. If upheld, it will enable authors to recapture world-wide rights with termination of a U.S. copyright, which will have a widespread effect on the industry and the bottom lines of creators.

Quit squawking, Chicken Littles: “People have predicted the end of the music business due to technology many times. And it certainly causes changes and shifts, but it’s never quite as monumental and industry-ending as people seem to think it might be,” says Wells.



Ziffren Brittenham negotiated pacts for Beyoncé, left, and Olivia Rodrigo, right.



Sarah Martin
Global head of music business affairs
WME

London-based Martin is an expert at putting out fires for WME music clients, metaphorically speaking. If they’re stuck in Dubai because of passport problems or their show in Prague is cancelled due to an act of God, her team can help out. She says that these acts of kindness also showcase the strengths of the business team, attracting more artists to the agency on a long-term basis.

Increasingly unpredictable weather: “It’s making it much more difficult [for] promoters to make money and offer [big] fees to artists,” she says. “In turn, the insurance market is becoming more reluctant to insure that risk.”



Beau Stapleton
Partner, corporate & financial services
Willkie Farr & Gallagher

Stapleton represents talent and record labels, but a surge in private equity-backed transactions has him spending more time at the intersection of finance and music.

He recently brokered Pophouse Entertainment’s \$300 million-plus acquisition of the Kiss catalog, name, image and likeness and merchandising rights, and represented George Benson in selling his music assets to HarbourView Equity.

Monitoring the macroeconomic trends: “We’re looking at government policy. We’re looking at the Federal Reserve rate cuts, because that’s going to have fairly immediate and real-world implications for the deals we do,” he says.



Stephen Barnes
Senior partner
Yorn Levine Barnes Krintzman Rubenstein
Kohner Endlich Goodell & Gellman

Barnes continued to cut big deals for Snoop Dogg, including his pact to be a special correspondent for NBC during the 2024 Summer Olympics and partnerships with fellow rap pioneer Dr. Dre on a new album (“Missionary”) and a line of alcoholic beverages (including the ready-to-drink Gin & Juice). Ancillary revenue streams “are not really ancillary anymore,” Barnes says. “Many artists have branched out to reflect the fullness of their talents. Brand building is the cornerstone of that.”

It’s about more than money, but ...: “Maximizing the deal is important because it helps establish where you are in the business,” says Barnes.



John Branca, David Lande, David Byrnes
Partners
Ziffren Brittenham

Branca rose to prominence in the 1980s cutting deals for major artists such as Michael Jackson, and today he’s co-executor of Jackson estate, which has generated more than \$3 billion under his leadership. He’s also handled big transactions for clients including Interscope, Rhino and Barry Gibb. Lande has played a pivotal role in the careers of a newer generation, including SZA, Olivia Rodrigo, Justin Timberlake and a revived Linkin Park, while Byrnes handles artists such as Travis Scott and Jennie Ruby Jane. Lande and Byrnes also teamed to negotiate Beyoncé’s “Cowboy Carter” album and tour.

Rocking the Enormodome: “This summer, we have seen more stadium tours than we ever have in the industry,” says Lande. “And you’ve seen artists who you normally wouldn’t consider to be stadium artists selling out stadiums.”



Scream Stream Shudder celebrates 10 years of chills as audiences grow and programming expands

By William Earl

→ Ten years after its launch, horror streamer Shudder has grown and retained a loyal audience. The secret? Backburning trends and analytics in favor of the personal taste of a dedicated team of fanatics.

“For a lot of people, horror is personal. It certainly is for me,” says Shudder senior VP of programming and acquisitions, Samuel Zimmerman, who has an encyclopedic knowledge of horror movies. “When Shudder first started, I was given a lot of support. ‘You’re the curator of this, because Shudder is meant to feel hand-picked, programmed for people who love the genre.’ As we’ve grown, sticking to that ambition has been really important, because it shines a light on who we are as a team.”

Shudder released “When Evil Lurks” theatrically.

Shudder started as a niche streaming service launched by AMC Networks midway through the run of the flagship channel’s massive success with “The Walking Dead.” Originally, the platform was focused on catalog titles curated into different genres by Zimmerman, but exclusives and acquisitions quickly became a focus.

Cut to 2025, with the streamer coming off of a 2024 that set new viewership records, doubled the total hours watched over the last five years and saw average hours watched per user balloon to an all-time high, according to internal data provided by the company. This year, the surge in popularity continues, with Shudder kicking off its best-ever start in sub-

scriber engagement, based on average hours per user.

Emily Gotto, Shudder’s senior VP of acquisitions and production, joined the company in 2017 and was involved in the purchase of three festival titles that set the tone for the type of filmmakers the team wanted to work with: Flying Lotus’ surreal “Kuso,” Coralie Fargeat’s neon-drenched thriller “Revenge” and Issa López’s Spanish-language horror fantasy “Tigers Are Not Afraid.” Gotto cites the adventurous filmmaking and bold ideas of this trio as core values for the films that thrive on Shudder.

“If you’re going to have a platform that specializes and celebrates the world of horror, you need to be able to represent the length and breadth of what that genre encapsulates,” she says. “There are the more bombastic, straightforward, entertaining, fun movies. And then you’ve got the more challenging titles that are really brave; a lot of our international slate is recognized in terms of its provocation. We really want people to come to the service and find something for them.”

López, who went on to direct and co-write “True Detective: Night Coun-

SHUDDER 10

A DECADE
OF SCARY
GOOD

START YOUR
FREE TRIAL!

VISIT [SHUDDER.COM](https://shudder.com)

WARNING

MAY CAUSE NIGHTMARES.
YOU SHOULD PROBABLY NOT BE WATCHING THIS.

try,” says she doubts “Tigers” would have had the cultural impact and success it received without Shudder’s support.

“When they acquired the movie, they waited,” she says. “We sat together and they said, ‘We finalized acquiring the movie earlier this year, but we’re not going to drop it until late summer, because that’s the window where we can get more attention for this.’ That gave them the time to build massive word of mouth, so by the time that the movie opened, first in theaters before going to the platform, it was incredible the amount of press and attention ... for a really small movie.”

Beyond pushing boundaries with film, Shudder has also launched unique genre TV shows, including small screen continuations of famous film franchises (“Creepshow,” “The Creep Tapes”), a reality competition series (“The Boulet Brothers’ Dragula”), docuseries (“Cursed Films”) and more. Nicholas Lazo, Shudder’s VP of development and production, describes how finding the right type of series to put on the platform is challenging.

“You want to do something that’s going to have the potential to carry for many seasons moving forward,” he says. “To keep a TV show scary is a challenge we’ve looked at from every different direction. Timing is really powerful. It enables you to set up a story, tell something really spooky, get people unsettled and send them on their way. The question I’ve always asked myself and our creative partners: ‘How do you make something scary? In an environment or in a plot line where your main characters have a tendency to die, how are you going to have that return when everybody’s dead? What happens?’”

Greg Nicotero, an executive producer and director of “The Walking Dead,” developed the “Creepshow” series at Shudder and is set to launch its first reality competition series this year. He says that Shudder let him have unprecedented latitude to make “Creepshow.”

“They gave me the freedom to explore and let me shift the tone,” Nicotero says. “They were super supportive in terms of any of the creature designs. They really never gave me a direction. They’re like, ‘Look, why would we give you notes? You know exactly how to do this.’”

Throughout the years, Shudder has also increased its theatrical distribution footprint. While it started early with a Neon partnership to get “Revenge” in theaters, there have been more and more buzzy engagements along the way, with films like 2022’s “Skinamarink” and 2023’s “When



“The best thing about Shudder is that it doesn’t isolate content on an SVOD platform.”

Emily Gotto

Evil Lurks” drawing in adventurous theatergoers. While some streamers shy away from theatrical distribution, the experience is an essential part of the horror community, and the team at Shudder fosters that aspect of the fandom.

“The model we’ve built released films like ‘Late Night With the Devil,’ like ‘Oddity,’ and we will continue to do so,” Gotto says. “The best thing about Shudder is that it doesn’t isolate content onto an SVOD platform. We are SVOD-led as a brand, but we believe in films getting seen by as wide an audience as possible, be it theatrically or on the small screen.”

Looking forward, Shudder is planning to celebrate its 10th anniversary with plenty of new content as it approaches the busy Halloween season. Box office successes like this summer’s “Clown in a Cornfield” and “Dangerous Animals” are set to debut on the streamer, alongside new chapters in the “V/H/S” and “Hell House LLC” franchises.

Team Shudder is also leaning in to live events, including a traditional second line parade and party in New Orleans that kicked off a birthday celebration during April’s Overlook Film Festival, a presence at

both San Diego and New York Comic Cons, and presentations of some of the company’s key titles in Shudder Anniversary Selects Series set up at arthouse theaters across the country.

Lazo believes that although the company is growing, sticking to core beliefs set into place in the beginning will continue their success.

“I think between myself, Sam, Emily and all the other people who work on the brand, we have a wide range of tastes with a killer Venn diagram of overlaps,” he says. “I’m trying to make things for me because I believe that other people are going to want to watch them too.”

Zimmerman agrees, noting that one of the best parts of the industry is being curious and surprised, because horror always delivers something different.

“Going into Shudder, I was so burned out on zombie films I never wanted to see another in my life,” he says. “I think for a time we weren’t going to do them. And then you see things that blow your mind: ‘One Cut of the Dead,’ or ‘The Sadness.’ There’s always going to be interesting and really good new stuff in whatever subgenre.”



Rob Savage’s “Host” was a hit for Shudder.

Artists
on the
**autism
spectrum**
providing
high-quality
animation
and
VFX
services
for
studios
for over
a decade.



exceptional-minds.org

ANIMATION SERVICES

Storyboarding	2D Animation
Character Design	Clean and Color
Prop Design	Compositing
Background Design	Illustration
Layout	

VFX SERVICES

Compositing	Stabilization
Paint Work	Retimes
Digital Makeup & Costume Fixes	Keying
De-Aging	Rotoscoping
Tracking	End Titles

Block Busta Rapper and actor Rhymes reflects on music career, family and what keeps him going

By Todd Gilchrist

→ Before a year or two ago, rapper and actor Busta Rhymes never imagined that a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame was an honor for which he'd even be eligible.

Yet it quickly became "a necessary bucket list item that needed to be checked off" after the future recipient began to recognize its singularity among the many kudos he's received over his 35-year career. "This is a

once-in-a-lifetime moment," says the man known offstage as Trevor Smith.

"It's different from the Grammys. It's different from MTV, different from BET Awards. You could win multiple ones of those. You only get one of these."

He says more music is coming soon, following the release of an EP earlier this year. "The name of the new album is 'Vengeance,' and the goal is to put it out sometime early

in September." Busta also contributed to the soundtracks of two upcoming films, "The Naked Gun" and "The Bad Guys 2," both of which open in theaters on the same day. His star on the Walk of Fame ceremony on Aug. 1 further commemorates this fruitful moment in his life and career — one that's been a long time coming, but one accompanied by the perspective to be able to fully appreciate it. "Receiving this accolade in a time where I'm not only at my best and the happiest I've ever been in life overall, I just feel like I am amongst an incredible group of people from all walks of the entertainment industry. It's a very prestigious acknowledgement, and I'm super grateful.

"At 25, 30 years in our career, we are just now starting to become the Mr. Miyagis of this shit," Busta says. "We ain't Daniel-sans no more. We're starting to master this shit — because we're doing it, and doing it with grace, and we're having a ball."

Other than his 1997 track of the same name featuring Erykah Badu, "one" is not a number that Busta encounters terribly often; his 11 studio albums, eight mix tapes and 109 singles (including 57 as a featured artist) have sold a reported 10 million records and earned him a Billboard R&B/Hip-Hop Award, 12 Grammy nominations and 16 MTV Video Music Award nominations. His accomplishments first began under the tutelage of Public Enemy's production team the Bomb Squad and especially its frontman Chuck D, who gave him his enduring stage moniker, the name of his first group, Leaders of the New School, and the philosophy that still guides him today.

"He gave us the concept of having a good 'Clamp' on your career," he remembers. "Clamp was the acronym for Concept, Lyrics, Attitude/Appearance, Music and Performance. Chuck always said that if you could master these five areas, you should be in a good space for a very long time — and I never deviated from that."

Though they were frequently associated with Native Tongues artists A Tribe



"I'm the happiest I've ever been in life. I feel like I am amongst an incredible group of people from all walks of the entertainment industry." Busta Rhymes

**CONGRATULATIONS
BUSTA RHYMES**
ON YOUR STAR ON THE HOLLYWOOD WALK OF FAME



Kobalt

Paramount+ PRESENTS

VARIETY | RollingStone

TRUTH SEEKERS SUMMIT

EXPLORING THE ART OF DOCUMENTARY
AND INVESTIGATIVE STORYTELLING

FEATURED SPEAKERS



YAMICHE ALCINDOR
WASHINGTON
CORRESPONDENT, NBC NEWS



ZEKE MILLER
DEPUTY WASHINGTON BUREAU CHIEF,
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



ALEX THOMPSON
NATIONAL POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT,
AXIOS AND CO-AUTHOR OF #1 NYT
BESTSELLER "ORIGINAL SIN"



BEN MCKENZIE
ACTOR & DIRECTOR, "EVERYONE
IS LYING TO YOU FOR MONEY"



LISA CORTÉS
DIRECTOR & EP, "MURDER
HAS TWO FACES"



CARA CUSUMANO
FESTIVAL DIRECTOR & SVP
PROGRAMMING, TRIBECA

THURSDAY, AUGUST 14 | 9:30 AM - 5 PM ET

REGISTER NOW FOR VIRTUAL ACCESS
VARIETY.COM/TRUTHSEEKERS





Called Quest and De La Soul, he stresses that L.O.N.S. was never a part of the hip-hop collective. Nevertheless, his group's music, focusing with insight and humor on the experiences of young people of color, bridged a gap between its Afrocentric members and the politically charged music of their Public Enemy mentors.

"At that time, it was cool to be fucking smart, and it was cool to be self-empowering and it was cool to empower your community and your people and your peers and your loved ones. That was the environment," Rhymes says. "It wasn't just Chuck D giving it to us, it was Tribe. It was De La. It was Queen Latifah. It was a lot of them giving that social empowerment perspective in their music, and that frequency is what we aligned with."

That affinity with Tribe in particular led to "Scenario," one of the greatest posse cuts in rap music history, featuring an explosive verse from Rhymes. "That moment solidified a lot of the shit that happened for me after that, because I became the guy that pretty much pioneered the feature," he reflects. "Collabs was happening, don't get me wrong, but it wasn't happening in the way that it was with me." He admits he seized on the opportunity more as a matter of personal necessity than professional strategy.

"I turned 'Scenario' into a moment of capitalizing — by default, because I was kicked out of Leaders of the New School a year later," Rhymes says. "In '93, I was the first, and the youngest in the group to have a child. So I needed to find a means to provide for my son, and I wasn't able to get no money with Leaders of the New School no more. Jumping on everybody's record while I was hot and everybody wanted that 'dungeon dragon' shit from 'Scenario,' that

Busta Rhymes With Tyra Banks in "Halloween: Resurrection," left, and performing during the 2025 Apollo Theater Spring Benefit at the Apollo Theater in New York City, right.

"The one thing I know that motherfuckers need all the time is to laugh." Busta Rhymes

shit led to me becoming the go-to guy for features before any other MC in that way."

A rapid succession of guest verses (including another all-timer, on Craig Mack's star-studded remix of "Flava in Ya Ear") soon earned him a solo contract from Elektra Records. Even while capitalizing on the cartoonish, mischievous persona that he introduced to the world on "Scenario," Rhymes held tightly onto the socially conscious influence of early collaborators like Chuck D when conceiving his first albums. "The impression that they made was everlasting on me," he says. "'The Coming' and 'When Disaster Strikes...'" are direct spinoffs of Public Enemy conceptually.

"When I made 'Extinction Level Event' and we had that album artwork in 1998 and then to see New York City look like that when the Twin Towers fell, I just felt like I'm onto something ... each album was a different chapter, like in the Bible or the Quran." Even so, he always leavened that gravitas with whimsicality. "The one thing I know that motherfuckers need all the time is to laugh," he says. "So making sure motherfuckers could experience the joy of some good humor, but still understand that the credibility and the skill set that's going to be displayed is never going to be compromised in the slightest way, that's a balance I've found great comfort giving to the people."

His run of hits between 1996's "The Coming" and 2006's "The Big Bang" — including 50 singles in that 10-year period alone — was frequently complemented by unfor-

gettable music videos, many directed by Hype Williams. "Film and television have always been a significant part of what I've done because it's me still displaying my performance skill set," he says. "I like to do visuals that are spinoffs of movies that I either wish that I was in or that I was a super fan of. 'Put Your Hands Where My Eyes Could See,' it's 'Coming to America.' The Janet [Jackson] video ['What's It Gonna Be?!'], that's 'Terminator 2.' 'Dangerous' with Bill Duke and myself, 'Lethal Weapon' and 'The Last Dragon' as well."

To echo a refrain Rhymes frequently makes on social media, the blessings haven't stopped since then. Not only has he released four more albums (the most recent, "Blockbusta," in 2023) and eight mix tapes, but he's acted in dozens of TV and film roles while raising — and now, working with — his three sons and three daughters. "I'm actually, probably, enjoying and living my best life throughout my whole career within the last three to four years," he says. "To be able to raise six beautiful children and now to get money doing what we love and be in business with my kids doing what we love, there's nothing fucking better than that feeling to me."

Tipsheet

WHAT Busta Rhymes receives star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame

WHEN 11:30 a.m., Aug. 1

WHERE 6201 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood

WEB walkoffame.com



YOUR **DESTINATION** FOR **AWARDS** SEASON

→ **AWARDS CIRCUIT SECTION
ON VARIETY.COM**

The latest awards news throughout
the year

→ **AWARDS CIRCUIT COLUMN**

Michael Schneider dissects TV
trends and contenders

→ **AWARDS CIRCUIT PODCAST**

Interviews with top contending talent
and hot takes from the Roundtable

→ **AWARDS CIRCUIT VIDEO**

Variety's award pundits analyze the
top categories and all the contenders

→ **AWARDS HQ NEWSLETTER**

A weekly first look at everything
happening on the circuit, from
big events to breaking news

→ **PREDICTIONS NEWSLETTER**

Clayton Davis forecasts the
winners of the awards race

→ **ARTISANS**

Jazz Tangcay highlights the people
behind the crafts that make an award-
winning production possible

→ **ARTISANS NEWSLETTER**

Weekly highlights of the crafts stories
from the Artisans section of Variety.com



EMILY LONGERETTA
SENIOR FEATURES EDITOR, TV

MICHAEL SCHNEIDER
TV EDITOR

CLAYTON DAVIS
SENIOR AWARDS EDITOR

JAZZ TANGCAY
SENIOR ARTISANS EDITOR

VARIETY.COM/AWARDSCIRCUIT



reviews



Reed Richards (Pedro Pascal) and Sue Storm (Vanessa Kirby) are one-half of the Fantastic Four.

FILM REVIEW / PETER DEBRUGE

Squash and Stretch

Marvel offers a retro-styled 'Fantastic Four' reboot that looks and feels different from the studio's other superhero movies

The Fantastic Four: First Steps

Director Matt Shakman

Screenwriters Josh Friedman, Eric Pearson, Jeff Kaplan & Ian Springer

Cast Pedro Pascal, Vanessa Kirby, Ebon Moss-Bachrach, Joseph Quinn

Distributor Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures

➔ Fourth time's the charm. First there was the low-budget version of "The Fantastic Four," produced by Roger Corman, which Marvel managed to bury before it hit theaters (though bootlegs abound). The comic-book company was far more enthusiastic about a pair of early-2000s adaptations at Fox, which boasted a fun cast — including Jessica Alba, Chris Evans and Michael Chiklis — but couldn't get the tone right, skewing corny in both the dialogue and effects departments. Then came the 2015 reboot, which was a bomb, turning the characters into sullen, moody versions of themselves (and Doctor Doom into an emo megalomaniac).

As live-action adaptations of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's pulp quartet go, Marvel's back-to-the-drawing-board "The Fantastic Four: First Steps" succeeds where earlier attempts have faltered.

And good thing, too, since the studio has a lot more riding on this franchise now. At their peak, Marvel movies earned upwards of \$1 billion at the box office, but they've lost steam of late, as the studio unfairly asks fans to consume every film and TV show in its extended "cinematic universe" just to keep up with the increasingly convoluted mythology (one complicated by alternate realities, time travel and so on).

The new movie, which Matt Shakman directs with a stylish retro-futurist flair, skips over the whole origin-story shtick we typically get whenever new superheroes are introduced. Personally, I find that to be the most relatable aspect of the genre: the part where we can see how ordinary people adapt to the gift/curse of being granted extraordinary powers. It's the stuff that comes next, when those same characters must inevitably face off against some force hell-bent on destroying Earth, that bores me.

What a pleasant surprise, then, that the opposite proves true in "First Steps," which centers almost entirely on a threat from Marvel's biggest villain

to date, the planet-sized Galactus. The Fantastic Four are already famous when the film opens, appearing on an "Ed Sullivan"-style variety show to celebrate four years of protecting the world from all manner of human-scale villains (including relatively manageable pests like Mole Man, who resurfaces here in the form of Paul Walter Hauser).

Set in the early 1960s, the movie starts out almost like a sitcom from that era, presenting a brief but impressive shot of the Baxter Building, an elegant space-age skyscraper that's home to our heroes, before cutting to a domestic scene between Reed Richards (Pedro Pascal) and his wife, Sue Storm (Vanessa Kirby). Sue, who can generate force fields and make objects (and herself) disappear, has just learned that she is pregnant — something these two struggled for years to achieve.

In this couple's case, however, the discovery adds an understandable anxiety other parents needn't worry about: What effect will that fateful exposure to cosmic rays, which gave the Fantastic Four their powers, have on their unborn child?

It's common knowledge that "The Incredibles" writer-director Brad Bird had the Fantastic Four in mind when he conceived his beloved Pixar cartoon, which resonated with audiences because it focused on the everyday concerns of an exceptional family. Now "First Steps" returns the favor, adopting what worked so well in that animated homage. Here, the central foursome are more or less related: Reed and Sue are married, and they live with her hotheaded younger brother, Johnny Storm, aka the Human Torch (Joseph Quinn), and Reed's strong but sensitive best friend Ben Grimm ("The Bear" star Ebon Moss-Bachrach).

Ben came back from their fateful space flight permanently transformed into a hulking rock monster. Visual effects technology has come a long way since filmmakers obliged Chiklis to don a bulky foam latex suit as the Thing, and Marvel is now capable of conjuring the expressive orange character entirely from CGI. As visual effects go, it's hard to top the handsome Pascal, who gives the elastic Mister Fantastic a gravitas missing in previous ensembles.

Shakman, who counts all nine episodes of the "WandaVision" limited series among his extensive TV credits, gives the Fantastic Four sufficient time to establish their personalities before introducing Julia Garner as Galactus' herald, Shalla-Bal. Looking like a cross between a hood ornament and a chrome-plated surfing trophy, she travels all the way to Times Square to announce that Earth will soon be devoured by her all-consuming master.

Gender-swapping the Silver Surfer is the biggest — and likely most controversial — change to Marvel arcana, although it does yield an intriguingly flirtatious dynamic with Johnny. Marvel has made clear that the studio is preparing the Fantastic Four's most iconic nemesis, Doctor Doom, for a forthcoming film, but the planet-obliterating combo of Galactus and Silver Surfer hardly feel like second best.

At times, the movie resembles a live-action take on "The Jetsons," between the flying Fantasticar and production designer Krasa Farahani's brightly colored modern sets. Superhero experts can tell you where this is all headed, along with the significance of certain inside jokes. And yet, there's relief to be had from a Marvel movie in which you needn't have carefully studied multiple other movies to make sense of what's happening.

Kid-friendly and funny enough without veering into self-parody, "First Steps" represents the launch of Phase Six for the studio, building toward another two-part "Avengers" tentpole from the Russo brothers. True to its subtitle, the film feels like a fresh start. And like this summer's blockbuster "Superman" reboot over at DC, that could be just what it takes to win back audiences suffering from superhero exhaustion.

There's relief to be had from a Marvel movie in which you needn't have carefully studied multiple other movies to make sense of what's happening.



Ben Grimm (Ebon Moss-Bachrach) and Johnny Storm (Joseph Quinn) will soon face a planet-sized villain.

TV REVIEW / ALISON HERMAN

High Anxiety

As his podcast comes to a close, Marc Maron confronts catastrophe in his latest HBO special

Panicked

Platform HBO **Premiere date** Aug. 1
Director Steven Feinartz

→ Partway through “Panicked,” his latest HBO special, the comedian Marc Maron casually makes a reference to “the show.” He doesn’t explain what he means, nor does he have to: For more than 15 years, Maron and his producing partner Brendan McDonald have presided over the podcast “WTF With Marc Maron,” an interview show that vaulted the once obscure stand-up into name recognition, a sit-down with President Obama and a solid career as a screen actor. But “WTF” will come to an end this fall, a fact that looms over “Panicked” even though it was recorded in May, before Maron made the announcement. So much of “Panicked” dwells on familiar topics for Maron — his cats, anxiety and frustration with “anti-woke” podcasting peers — that it’s largely distinguished in his catalog by the events framing the release.

For a more holistic look at how Maron is handling this pivotal juncture, fans will have to wait for “Are We Good?,” a documentary about his life that’s still awaiting distribution after premiering at South by Southwest earlier this year. (The title comes from Maron’s signature question to podcast guests with whom he’s had prior beef, which in the show’s early days was most of them.) That film’s director, Steven Feinartz, also helms “Panicked,” which was recorded at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

The venue suits Maron’s NPR-adjacent audience of engaged lefties, a demographic he lovingly ribs as “empathy whores” who’d only attend an arena show if they were shuttled from a Whole Foods parking lot. That doesn’t stop him from feeding them red meat like an opening bit about how much he hates Trump supporters, especially those who happen to be fellow podcasters. “All they really wanted was to say his R-word with impunity,” Maron says. (In the moment, “they” go unnamed, though a later joke takes a swipe



Marc Maron dissects current events and quotidian affairs in “Panicked.”

at bro-casting staple Theo Von.) The inevitable punchline lands to thunderous applause: “Was it worth it, you fuckin’ retard?”

“Panicked” improves when it focuses on the minutiae of Maron’s everyday existence rather than the broader sweep of current events, even if the old Air America commentator — the gig where he and McDonald first crossed paths — dies hard. There’s a long and delightfully told story about Maron evacuating his home during the Los Angeles fires this January with pets in tow. (“I got three cats and one carrier. That’s not a porno movie; that’s my life.”) The material about his aging father, now living with dementia, is refreshingly candid, especially a riff on the surprising silver lining of a parent who no longer has a filter. And while there’s far less discussion of the sudden death of his former partner, the director Lynn Shelton, than in his previous special, “From Bleak to Dark,” the closing anecdote combines trenchant observations on the

long-term trajectory of grief with Maron’s typically cranky take on Taylor Swift.

Though averse to medication, Maron admits to suffering from “intrusive catastrophic thinking,” a state of mind increasingly well suited to the world in which we live. Per the title, “Panicked” continues the comedian’s project of finding new ways to articulate his reflexively pessimistic, relentlessly anxious, very Jewish worldview. “I don’t know if I could tell the difference between happiness and ‘Fuck, that’s good coffee,’” he admits. Soon enough, Maron’s audience will no longer be privy to a steady drip of his internal monologue. Instead, they’ll get only the most polished, distilled version, delivered onstage between gigs like Apple TV+’s golf comedy series “Stick,” on which Maron is quite good. “Panicked” may fall short as a political treatise, but it affirms Maron as an unparalleled narrator of his own agita, and many others’ too. From here on out, it’ll have to be enough.

Raise High the Roof Beam

→ “Paging Mr. Ellis.” It certainly doesn’t rank among the greatest lines in film history, but those three words introduced Harrison Ford to moviegoers. Long before he played Indiana Jones, Ford was an aspiring actor who got his first break playing a bellhop in 1966’s “Dead Heat on a Merry-Go-Round,” a forgettable crime film featuring James Coburn.

In those first few moments on film, Ford evinces none of the charisma that would make him a star. His uniform is too snug; he seems ill at ease delivering his lines. It’s a shock to think about how confidently he later would command the screen.

It took more than a decade before Ford would get attention in 1977’s “Star Wars.” In between, Ford scored supporting roles. However, he earned a living not as an actor but as a carpenter, building cabinets for the likes of Joan Didion and Valerie Harper.

Stardom came late — Ford was 35 when Han Solo made him famous. But those years in the wilderness helped mold him into an icon. Part of Ford’s enduring appeal is that you believe he’s gotten his calloused hands dirty; he could believably wield a blaster or a whip, injecting a note of realism into the most fantastical of stories.

Maybe that’s why captaining a spaceship or raiding an ancient tomb seems so much more natural for Ford than delivering a message in a hotel lobby. — *Brent Lang*



Harrison Ford and Camilla Sparv on the set of 1966's "Dead Heat on a Merry-Go-Round"

FRIDAY, AUGUST 1 AT 11:30AM PDT



**The Hollywood Chamber of Commerce
is Pleased to Recognize Busta Rhymes**

The Hollywood Chamber of Commerce invites you to watch our
Walk of Fame ceremonies live from anywhere in the world exclusively
on walkoffame.com. Your front row seat awaits you!



WALKOFFAME.COM



www.hollywoodchamber.net

17 EMMY® NOMINATIONS

INCLUDING

OUTSTANDING DRAMA SERIES

“THRILLING & ADDICTING”

THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

OUTSTANDING DRAMA SERIES

OUTSTANDING LEAD ACTOR

IN A DRAMA SERIES
PEDRO PASCAL

OUTSTANDING LEAD ACTRESS

IN A DRAMA SERIES
BELLA RAMSEY

OUTSTANDING GUEST ACTOR

IN A DRAMA SERIES
JOE PANTOLIANO

OUTSTANDING GUEST ACTOR

IN A DRAMA SERIES
JEFFREY WRIGHT

OUTSTANDING GUEST ACTRESS

IN A DRAMA SERIES
KAITLYN DEVER

OUTSTANDING GUEST ACTRESS

IN A DRAMA SERIES
CATHERINE O'HARA

OUTSTANDING PRODUCTION DESIGN

FOR A NARRATIVE CONTEMPORARY PROGRAM
(ONE HOUR OR MORE)

“DAY ONE”

OUTSTANDING CASTING

FOR A DRAMA SERIES

OUTSTANDING PICTURE EDITING

FOR A DRAMA SERIES

“THROUGH THE VALLEY”

OUTSTANDING CONTEMPORARY

MAKEUP (NON-PROSTHETIC)

“DAY ONE”

OUTSTANDING PROSTHETIC MAKEUP

“FEEL HER LOVE”

OUTSTANDING MUSIC SUPERVISION

“THE PRICE”

OUTSTANDING SOUND EDITING

FOR A COMEDY OR DRAMA SERIES (ONE HOUR)

“THROUGH THE VALLEY”

OUTSTANDING SOUND MIXING

FOR A COMEDY OR DRAMA SERIES (ONE HOUR)

“THROUGH THE VALLEY”

OUTSTANDING SPECIAL VISUAL

EFFECTS IN A SEASON OR A MOVIE

OUTSTANDING SHORT FORM

NONFICTION OR REALITY SERIES

MAKING OF THE LAST OF US



HBO ORIGINAL
THE LAST OF US

HBO
max