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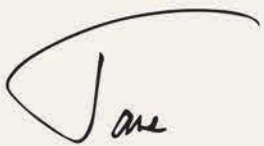
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**NEW
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By Angelique Jackson

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‘It Felt More Like an Expedition Than a Film’

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By Brent Lang

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Christopher Nolan has risen closer to the sun with his smash hit “The Odyssey.” That’s even better news for Universal.

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By 2016, after Travis Scott’s first album, “Rodeo,” was released, his performances became the stuff of lore.

Charles Melton in “Beef”;
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Christopher Nolan and Travis Scott on the set of "The Odyssey"

'The Odyssey' Sets Sail With Travis Scott

→ The summer's first big winners were the New York Knicks. The next was Christopher Nolan. "The Odyssey" isn't just the kind of hit we've come to expect from the director — it's leading to a tidal wave of ticket sales. Nolan's historic epic, starring an A-list ensemble that includes Matt Damon, Anne Hathaway, Robert Pattinson, Tom Holland and Zendaya, grossed \$263 million globally in its first weekend of release. That's the best-

ever opening for Nolan, and cause for a celebration at Universal Pictures.

"Odyssey" fever is so high, it seems only fitting that much of this week's issue is devoted to the blockbuster of the year. We open our magazine with Matt Donnelly looking back at a fateful moment in modern studio history: how exactly Universal's Donna Langley was able to poach Nolan from his longtime home at Warner Bros., after then-Warner-Media CEO Jason Kilar alienated the director with his clumsy handling of the COVID-era film "Tenet."

Next, Angelique Jackson profiles "Odyssey" supporting player Travis Scott. In a wide-ranging interview, the rapper and mogul talks about his ambitions to leap into the movies — aided by his new first-look deal at Paramount — and how he and Nolan both ended up on the "Odyssey" soundtrack.

Then, Brent Langsits down with Nolan and many of the actors in "The Odyssey" — from Damon to a scene-stealing Samantha Morton — to talk about the unbelievable production hurdles of making this

film. It's a safe bet to say we'll be hearing about the cinematic accomplishments of "The Odyssey" for the rest of the year, through the Academy Awards. Coming off seven Oscar wins for "Oppenheimer," Nolan has done it again, helping boost movie theaters at the moment we needed him the most. For this industry, Nolan looks a bit like Batman from his own "Dark Knight" trilogy — a crusading hero.



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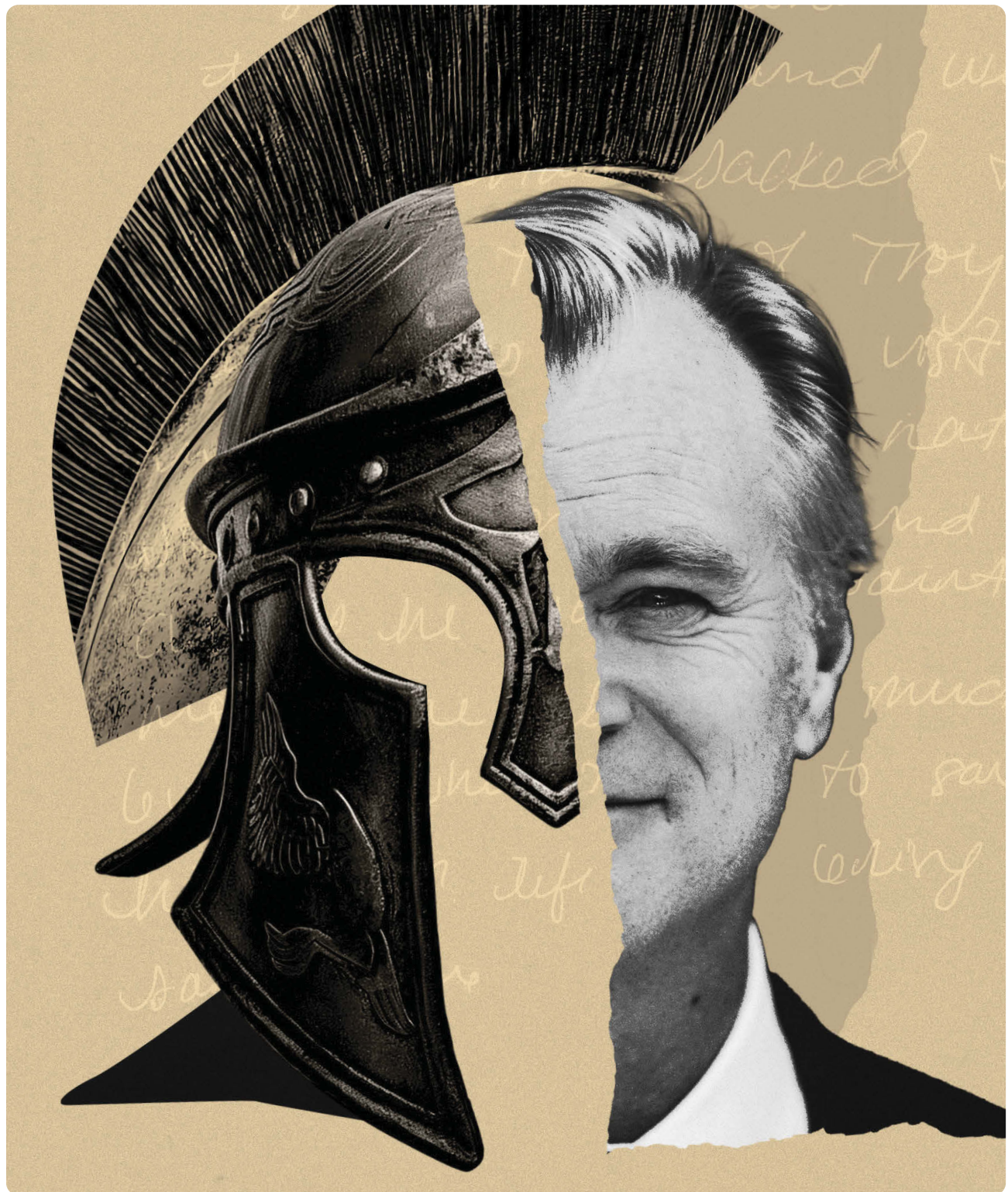
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SENIOR ARTISANS EDITOR



marquee



The Nolan Ascension

After a smash opening for 'The Odyssey,' Christopher Nolan cements his legacy — and Universal becomes the envy of the industry

By **Matt Donnelly**

→ Greek mythology is riddled with humans who become immortal, many as punishment for tangling with the gods. But not Christopher Nolan, the toast of the mortal world's Mount Olympus — Hollywood.

The opening-weekend success of his Imax epic "The Odyssey" cements Nolan as his own kind of myth: a bankable auteur who can command the attention of worldwide moviegoers simply by picking up his camera.

Nolan has spent most of his career in the upper stratosphere of show business; he's thought to be one of a few name directors who are events unto themselves (Quentin Tarantino, James Cameron, Ryan Coogler, Greta Gerwig). But after a nearly \$264 million global first frame for "The Odyssey," the best



start of Nolan's career, he's moved even closer to the sun. Analysts predict the film has the runway to gross \$1 billion around the world. The title has also crashed down on this year's Oscar race like a thunderbolt from Zeus, disrupting a low-hum narrative that Amazon MGM's "Project Hail Mary" is the reigning, populist choice for best picture.

"The Odyssey" has "reinvited people back to a theatrical experience which had been hobbled since the pandemic," says Jason E. Squire, professor emeritus at USC School of Cinematic Arts. "This is an extraordinary creative and commercial victory for Nolan and Universal Pictures."

Indeed, the other victor here is Donna Langley, NBCUniversal's entertainment and studios chairman. As the days tick by and box office records for "The Odyssey" keep rolling in, it's abundantly clear how important it was that Langley wooed Nolan to Universal Pictures five years ago following his messy breakup with Warner Bros.

In 2021, Langley fended off Sony Pictures, Paramount and the deep-pocketed Apple Studios to win the director's unexpected blockbuster "Oppenheimer." While Nolan never has signed any kind of exclusive studio deal — and almost surely never will — Langley's team has proven an able partner for the once-in-a-generation talent. In essence, they have replaced Warner Bros., where Nolan made nine of his 13 movies, as his default home.

"You may think it's an easy approval process to move forward with any Nolan movie, but it's an enormous financial commitment. A \$250 million budget, another \$100 million at least for marketing? There is no guarantee of profitability, and that's the intriguing and seductive gamble for movie executives," added Squire, who taught Coogler at USC and hosts "The Movie Business Podcast."

That gamble has paid off and observably came down to an issue of trust. Nolan was incensed in 2021 when Warner Bros., his studio partner of nearly 20 years, went rogue amid the COVID-19 pandemic and decided to release a full slate of films concurrently on its streaming service HBO Max and in cineplexes. This directly impacted Nolan's time-traveling action film "Tenet," led by John David Washington and Robert Pattinson. Nolan's brand exclusively celebrates movies made for theaters. Jason Kilar, the corporate

Christopher Nolan and Emma Thomas did not take "The Odyssey" out to any bidders besides Universal.

"You may think it's an easy approval process to move forward with any Nolan movie, but it's an enormous financial commitment."

Jason E. Squires, "The Movie Business Podcast"

overlord of Warners at the time, exploded the company's goodwill with talent and agents in every corner of the business by forcing the studio's titles to stream day and date.

Langley, known for an English sort of grace under pressure and her bedside manner with filmmakers, swooped in with a complex and unusual deal for "Oppenheimer." It guaranteed a lengthy exclusive theatrical window for the opus about the atomic bomb, committed in writing to a marketing spend equal to the film's \$100 million budget *and* awarded Nolan a generous portion of the film's first-dollar box office grosses. Nolan earned a reported \$100 million in fees and back end for the best picture Oscar winner. Langley and Nolan's bond has been strengthened because the two share same-aged kids, insiders say.

While his "Odyssey" deal is thought to be a more standard agreement than the "Oppenheimer" pact, insiders say Nolan will again receive first-dollar gross. That means he stands to reap millions for his work on top of his salary early in "The Odyssey"'s theatrical run, instead of having to wait until the film is profitable. Reps for Universal Pictures and Nolan declined to comment.

Not that WB, Universal's neighbor in Burbank, didn't put up a fight. In 2022, following Discovery's purchase of Warner Bros., the film studio's incoming leaders, Mike De Luca and Pamela Abdy, announced plainly in a *Variety* cover story that they were "hoping" to get Nolan back. Subsequently, we reported that De Luca and Abdy cut a seven-figure check to the director in 2022 — a payment in arrears for fees he waived in hopes of getting "Tenet" to be the first film shown in theaters reopening after coronavirus closures.

That "little kiss," as one source put it, didn't work. Especially given the windfall that came to Nolan after Warner Bros. staked its own blockbuster "Barbie" on the same July 2023 release date that Universal had given "Oppenheimer." While the competition ignited the box office in a world-class example of counterprogramming, the move was largely seen as baiting the director, who felt antagonized.

And so Universal won the day again with "The Odyssey." After the success of "Oppenheimer," Nolan and partner Emma Thomas did not take "The Odyssey" out to other bidders. Langley traveled to Nolan and Thomas' Hollywood Hills home and read the script with the pair, insiders say. Afterward, the group rolled directly into planning for the Matt Damon epic.

Nolan can run the table with any studio partner he wants, but "The Odyssey" feels like his own homecoming at Universal. Shareholders, the creative community and global audiences are all pleased. Why test the movie gods?

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ON BEING NAMED

**VARIETY'S
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World Cup Overflows for Fox

After big ratings and bold experiments, Fox Sports CEO Eric Shanks must decide what worked

By Brian Steinberg

➔ The World Cup wrapped over the weekend, but the TV industry may be kicking it around for quite some time.

Fox Sports lured massive crowds to the event even though “home teams” from the U.S. and Mexico were eliminated well before the tournament reached its late stages. A game between Argentina and England averaged 15.063 million viewers on Fox, making it the most-watched FIFA Men’s World Cup semifinals match in English-language history, while a match between Spain and France averaged 11.462 million viewers.

“There has to be something other than the competition itself that has reached people to make them interested,” says Eric Shanks, CEO and executive producer of Fox Sports, which telecast English-language games from 19 venues over 39 days of play.

And while much of the focus has been on the pitch, Fox has been experimenting while Spain, Egypt and others aim for goals. After most days of play, Fox Sports put on a bespoke late-night program for soccer fans led by James Corden. During the matches, Fox Sports relied on “hydration breaks” that let players take a few minutes to quench their thirst and even think about the state of their game. And throughout the tournament, Fox Sports allowed its play-by-play team to be freer than one might expect during a TV event that generates millions in audiences and advertising.

Perhaps Fox has a natural buffer: sheer numbers. The event is “up over 100 billion minutes of consumption,” says Michael Mulvihill, president of insights and analytics for Fox Sports. “It’s almost a hard figure to even contextualize, but it’s similar to what you’d see at an Olympics or an NFL package” for an entire season.

Shanks makes no apologies for pushing the envelope. Some fans have expressed outrage over the on-air hydration breaks, which come with com-



Hydration breaks during the World Cup final and other matches created opportunities for commercials.

mercials, but the executive believes the pauses improve overall play. “I think it has made the games more close,” with fewer “blowouts” in scoring, he says. “It makes a difference for players to be able to collect their thoughts” and for coaches to have time to discuss strategy. “It has probably been a positive for the game,” he adds.

Fox is also pleased with Corden’s after-game work. “It’s what late-night should be. People are

talking about what they like,” Shanks says. “I would love to try this with James on other events.”

The sports broadcaster hasn’t looked to placate viewers. Fans have in some instances railed against commentator Alexei Lalas, a veteran analyst, player and soccer executive, who has been accused of being too bombastic and even partisan on air. Strong reaction is good, says Shanks. “That is what everybody hopes for when you produce television. The worst thing in the world is showing something and finding out that people didn’t care.” A month ago, Shanks adds, Lalas was known largely to soccer die-hards, and now a wider crowd is “obsessed with him. That’s incredible.”

Fox’s next trick is to cajole World Cup fans to stick around for other sporting events. The company has seen spikes during the tournament for IndyCar and Major League Baseball, but whether there is carryover in the longer term remains to be seen. That holds true for the overall popularity of soccer in the U.S., says Shanks. The World Cup provides “a spark that you can use, but you have to do something with it. It’s not just a magic wand you wave and it’s going to have a lasting effect. You have to capitalize on it.”

Keeping Score

WORLD CUP ON FOX BY THE NUMBERS

160M+

Number of people who watched some part of the tournament via Fox

100B+

Minutes of consumption generated by World Cup telecasts

\$120K

Median annual income of Fox’s World Cup audience

1,000

Number of people at Fox Sports Touch production of World Cup

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

ÁLVARO DÍAZ

"Díaz is serving up his most ambitious album yet with 'OMAKASE', in which he continues to reshape reggaeton while expanding his sonic palette with genres like cumbia and amapiano."

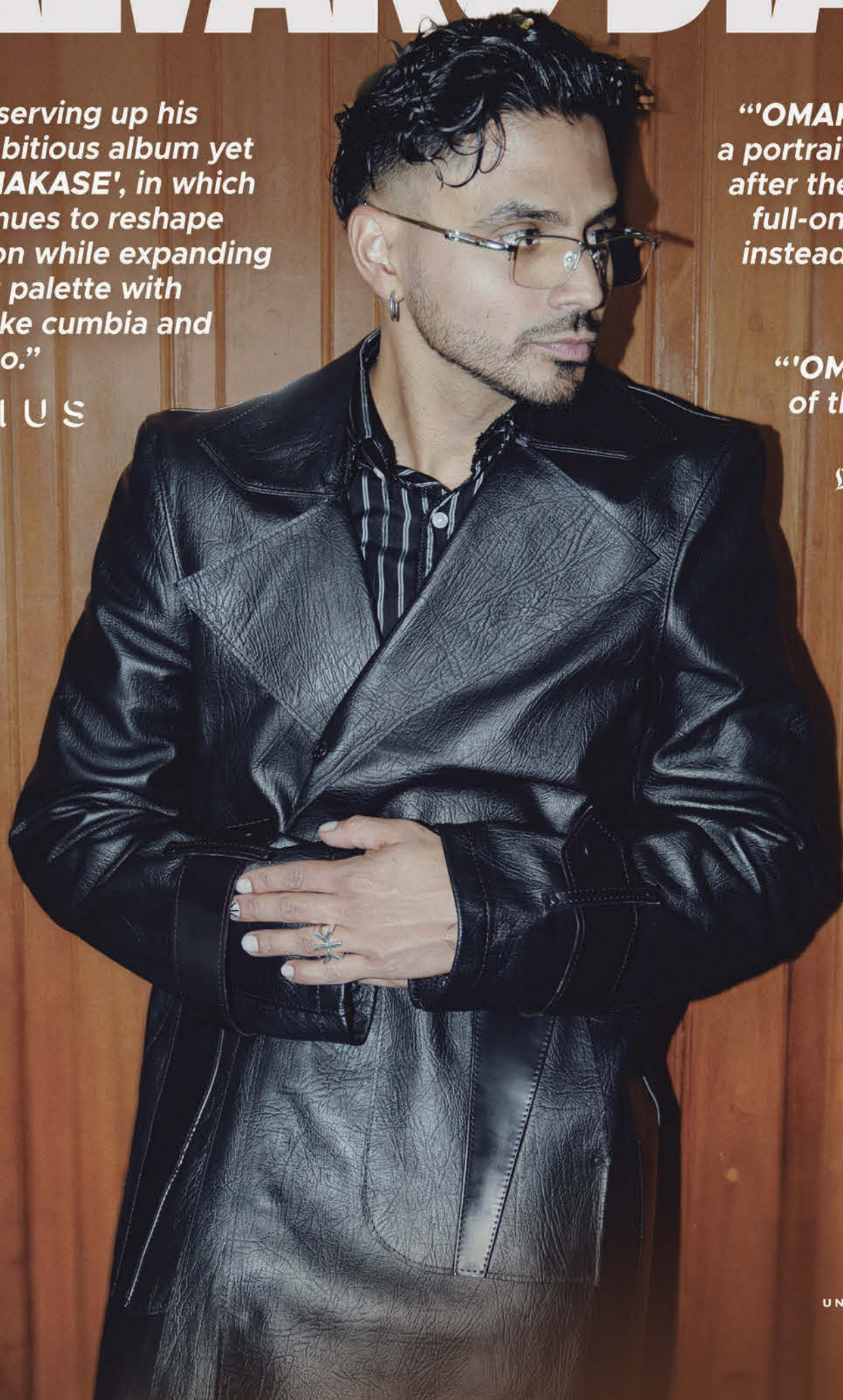
GENIUS

"'OMAKASE' feels like a portrait of Latin music after the crossover era: full-on world building instead of translation"

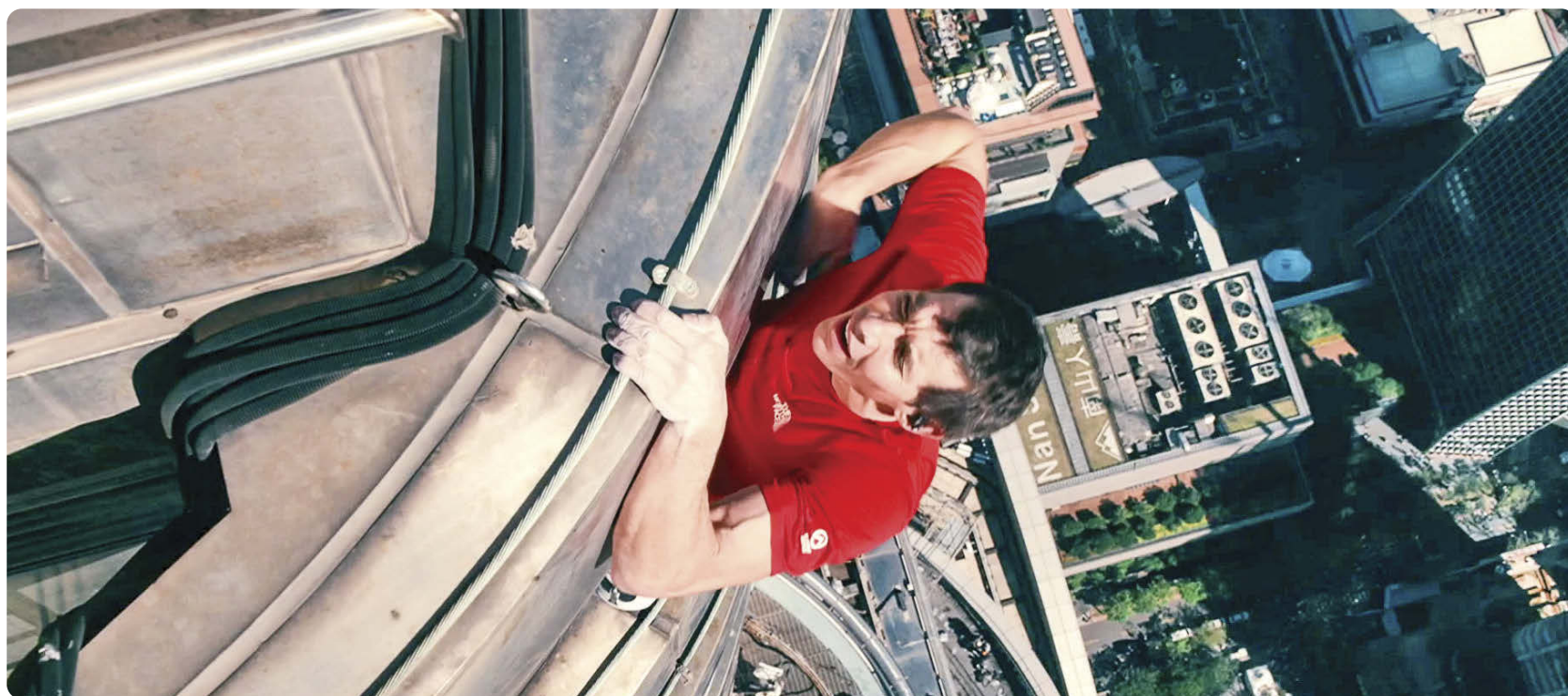
RollingStone en español

"'OMAKASE' is one of the best albums of 2026"

Los Angeles Times



UNIVERSAL MUSIC LATINO



Netflix says events like “Skyscraper Live” punch above their weight relative to viewing time.

Revising the Big-Data Script

Netflix says raw viewing metrics don’t tell the whole story about its billion-dollar live events slate

By Todd Spangler

→ Three years ago, Netflix made a big hoopla over the first public release of a huge trove of global viewing data — breaking down the billions of hours streamed by its customers on a bi-annual basis. Co-CEO Ted Sarandos boasted that the company was opening its databases with a deeper level of transparency into its operations than anyone in the biz.

“This is probably more information than you need,” Sarandos said in December 2023 about the initial report, which covered the first six months of that year. “But I think it creates a better environment for the guilds, for us, for the producers, for creators and for the press.”

Now the story has changed. Netflix last week said that, starting in 2027, it will release its mas-

sive viewing-metrics reports yearly instead of every six months. Certainly some investors were left wondering: What is Netflix trying to hide?

Netflix says it’s moving to a once-per-year data dump to “keep the focus on our primary financial metrics — revenue and operating profit.” In releasing second-quarter earnings, the company suggested fears of slowing viewer engagement are overblown. Netflix said that viewing hours were up 2% in the first half of 2026, an improvement over the 1.5% growth in the comparable year-earlier period. However, according to analysts, Netflix’s engagement is declining on a per-household basis, indicating headwinds for subscription and ad revenue growth. But there’s no way to put a definitive number on that, because the streamer stopped releasing subscriber numbers at the start of 2025.

There’s another reason Netflix wants to downplay the big data dump: Live programming punches above its weight for the streamer relative to viewing time, according to Netflix co-CEO Greg Peters. “There is not a linear relationship between view hours and revenue and profit because all hours are not created equal,” he said on the company’s Q2 earnings interview.

Netflix said that in 2026, live programming is expected to account for just over 5% of its content spend — roughly \$1 billion of its \$20 billion projected total — but only about 1% of view hours. That said, live event programming accounted for six of the top 10 new member sign-up days

over the past five years (and, Netflix noted, it only began streaming live events in 2023). The company didn’t disclose which events those were but one of those surely was its biggest livestream to date: the Jake Paul v. Mike Tyson fight, which generated 48.9 million views in November 2024.

Live programming also plays a big part in Netflix’s burgeoning ad business. The company said in its 2026 U.S. upfront negotiations that there has been strong interest in its live lineup, including the 2027 FIFA Women’s World Cup, an expanded NFL slate (with five games this upcoming season, up from two), and WWE and MLB events.

Two of Netflix’s biggest live events in the first six months of 2026 were “The Roast of Kevin Hart” and “BTS: The Comeback Live” special, each of which drew about 21 million views. The nail-biting “Skyscraper Live” featuring free-solo climber Alex Honnold scaling Taipei’s tallest building pulled in 12.6 million. The data shows that those weren’t anywhere the biggest audience draws for Netflix year to date. The top TV title was limited series “His & Hers” (104 million views), and the No. 1 movie was sci-fi actioner “War Machine” (147 million).

But again, that’s not the full picture — and you should expect Netflix to double down on live events in 2027 and beyond. Live events “drive disproportionate sign-ups,” Sarandos said on the Q2 call. “So we’re thrilled and we’re continuing lean into live events because they have a big, outsized positive on the business.”



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← **Music, Fashion, Film 2026**
Charli's seventh album is pop at the intersection of indie rock, which calls for ultra-cool, demure attire.

→ **How I'm Feeling Now 2020**
Charli's bedroom-pop album spoke to a time when the only thing to do was lounge around in your underwear.

Club Classics

On the eve of Charli xcX's new album 'Music, Fashion, Film,' a flip through her lookbook across the years

By Steven J. Horowitz

→ Charli xcX is nothing if not a creature of re-invention. Since the early 2010s, the British pop star has progressed from a scrappy internet darling to a transformative force, embracing experimental sounds and textures while evolving her style. Charli has channeled everything from classic British schoolgirl looks to trashy outfits that make you question whether the importance of good taste is in bad faith. With "Music, Fashion, Film" arriving on July 24, *Variety* looks back at how she's become one of pop's most enduring chameleons.



↑ **Crash 2022**
Charli satirized the notion of being a pop star, and she had an exaggerated look to back up the album's shiny sounds.



← **True Romance 2013**
Tumblr chic with a splash of Brit-pop, Charli was all about high-waisted pants or a skirt with a modest top.

→ **Charli 2019**
The performer embraced futurism, rocking a bob and sleek, form-fitting ensembles.



← **Sucker 2014**
"Clueless" '90s fashion mixed with mod, mapped to the more rock-oriented pop of Charli's sophomore album.



→ **Brat 2024**
"Brat" summer demanded wraparound shades, Y2K-style outfits and, of course, Charli's era-defining slime green.





Citizen Rosie

The star of 'Common Knowledge' may call Ireland home, but she'll never give up her right to be an American

By Marlow Stern

➔ Rosie O'Donnell is back in America — with plenty to say.

The comedy icon is bringing her one-woman show, "Rosie O'Donnell: Common Knowledge," to New York's Daryl Roth Theatre for 12 performances beginning July 22. Directed by Gabriel Barre, "Common Knowledge" sees the 64-year-old star chronicle everything from her past year and a half living in Ireland (and the myriad cultural differences she's encountered) to raising a nonbinary child with autism. The Long Island native previously performed the show in Ireland, Scotland and Australia before bringing it to her old stomping grounds.

O'Donnell rather famously decamped to her ancestral homeland just prior to her longtime

nemesis Donald Trump's second inauguration. The former "View" host read the GOP's Project 2025 transition plan and thought, "Oh, my God! They're saying this part out loud? Imagine how bad it will be when he gets in!" O'Donnell was concerned about her own well-being and that of her fifth and youngest child.

"I didn't do so well when [Trump] was in the first time," she says. "And I knew with a nonbinary autistic child that I would need to be present and not overwhelmed by the constant barrage of Trumpness that comes in America. During the horrors of World War II, they came first for the disabled. ... I feel I was warranted in doing what I needed to do in order to protect myself and my family."

"Common Knowledge" is, more than anything, a love letter to autistic children and those who parent them. The show stands in sharp contrast, O'Donnell says, to health czar Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s portrayal of autistic people as "valueless."

"I wanted to talk about the joy of my child and how brilliant this child is, as well as some of the challenges," O'Donnell explains. "I didn't want it to be the story of the 'tragedy of autism,' because if you're ready to be a parent, you're ready to accept whatever your child comes with. And if you're not ready to accept whatever your child comes with, don't be a parent."

As for RFK Jr., who's said autism is "a tragedy" that "destroys families" and floated countless conspiracy theories regarding its causes, O'Donnell doesn't mince words: "Listen: That man is a lunatic; his own family says so. He tried to get on Kamala Harris' campaign first, and when she said, 'No, thank you,' he went over to Trump. What kind of self-respect or dignity does he have to do that? ... I think he's a very dangerous, very selfish, very uneducated man who's gotten away with so much privilege that he doesn't even know what to do with himself."

This month also marks the 30th anniversary of one of O'Donnell's most beloved films, "Harriet the Spy," in which O'Donnell is nanny and confidant to the titular snoop, played by the late Michelle Trachtenberg, who died in February of last year at age 39. O'Donnell remembers Trachtenberg as "a genius child who was able to memorize anything" and says she attempted to lend a helping hand to Trachtenberg prior to her passing.

"She got into drugs and alcohol, I believe, and then I lost touch with her," O'Donnell recalls. "In the last few years, when she was in pretty bad shape, she would call me and we would talk. We were supposed to see each other three or four times, and she just never showed up. ... I would call her and go, 'Honey, are you heading over?' and she'd go, 'Was that today?' She was not in good shape. But I didn't think that she would die."

O'Donnell adds that addiction has impacted her family too. "I have a daughter [Chelsea] who's addicted. She's been sober a year and a half, and she's currently in prison, sadly, but she was born addicted to drugs and never really had a fair shake. It's very serious, and there are millions of families in America going through the same thing."

While she misses America deeply (bagels, in particular), O'Donnell has enjoyed the kindness of strangers in Ireland and that they aren't a "celebrity-obsessed culture." And despite getting dual citizenship, and Trump's public threats to revoke her birthright citizenship, she isn't planning to relinquish that anytime soon. "I will never give up my American citizenship, and that's the only way it can be taken from you if you're an American citizen, no matter what the current president says."

"I feel I was warranted in doing what I needed to do in order to protect myself and my family."

Rosie O'Donnell



Tee Party

Hollywood's caught the golfing bug — here's how to get in on the action

By Anna Tingley and Marc Malkin

➔ Hollywood is taking a big swing at golf. Netflix just dropped “Hawk,” Will Ferrell’s comedy series about a former champion who is delusionally desperate for a comeback. The streamer also has greenlit “Jupiter Island,” a drama series about elite golfers from “Love Story” creator Connor Hines. And Owen Wilson is returning for Season 2 of Apple TV’s golf comedy “Stick.”

Fashion brands are also hitting the links: Kim Kardashian convinced Ferrell to strip down, in character, to his undies for a cheeky Skims campaign, and Tom Holland fronted Vuori’s latest golf collection after the “Odyssey” star joined the brand as a global partner.

Here, *Variety* highlights some of today’s best looks and accessories to up your putting green fashion game.



Tombolo Mulligan Golf Cabana

The terrycloth mimics the fairway, and there are sleeve loops for a tee and pencil. tomboloccompany.com, \$158



Louis Vuitton Golf Bag

The Monogram canvas bag is ultra lightweight. us.louisvuitton.com, \$8,400



Tory Burch Printed Golf Dress

Front pockets and a hidden zip pocket keep small course essentials close at hand. Toryburch.com, \$330



Malbon Palmetto Glove

The mint green Cabretta leather glove fits like a second skin. malbon.com, \$48



Head Club Cover

Whimsical hand-crocheted cotton covers come shaped like bears, rabbits, squirrels and mallards. headgolf.com, \$80



Todd Snyder x FootJoy Golf Shoe

A classic wingtip is reworked with brogue detailing and patent accents. toddsnyder.com, \$285

Awards Circuit

By Michael Schneider



What Were They Thinking?

The Emmys move five categories out of the telecast



→ Richard Gadd, change your flight plans. The creator and star of HBO Max's "Half Man" wound up with the series' only Emmy nomination this year — via his supporting actor in a limited/anthology series or movie nod. But as of last week, that category will no longer be presented during NBC's Emmy telecast on Sept. 14.

Last Thursday, the TV Academy Board of Governors voted to move five categories to the earlier Emmy ceremonies (no longer dubbed the "Creative Arts Emmys," now they're just "Emmys"): writing for a variety series, supporting actor and actress in a limited series or movie, directing for a limited series or movie and writing for a limited series or movie.

That means a lot of nominees who thought they were only attending the Sept. 14 Emmys might now be going to the Sept. 5 and Sept. 6 shows — or perhaps they'll be attending multiple ceremonies, as many of the limited supporting actor and actress nominees (Jason Bateman, Dakota Fanning, David Harbour, Linda Cardellini and Nick Offerman among them) now have categories in both shows.

Richard Gadd received a nod in a category that has been moved off the Emmy telecast.

Of course, that's a high-class problem to have — to be nominated for so many Emmys that you're spending multiple nights at the Peacock Theatre. I'm sure those nominees can find sharp looks for a few Emmy outings. (Think about how many FYC events they attended just to get here!)

The DGA, the WGA and SAG-AFTRA swiftly condemned the move, arguing, "The decision to eliminate these categories from the prime-time broadcast devalues the contributions of the talented people the Academy is meant to honor." But wait — what about all the hardworking crew who have always been awarded during those earlier ceremonies, including many of your own members? The Creative Arts Emmys honor talented people from various fields — including TV movies, animation and documentaries — as well as guest performers and voice actors, costumers, hairstylists, editors, cinematographers, art directors, musicians and more. Are you suggesting this batch of five is too elevated to be a part of this group?

I do feel for the TV Academy. Granted, it is the very definition of a massive bureaucracy that often struggles to keep pace with the industry. But that's partly because of the catch-22 it forever faces: Make drastic changes to evolve with the times, and you piss people off. Don't make changes, and you're accused of being a dusty, immovable relic that fights to maintain relevancy. Look how hard it's been to even figure out a solution to the variety series category: No matter the option, someone is unhappy.

You know that old definition of insanity — "doing the same thing and expecting different results"? Put on the same Emmys, and what do you expect you'll get? More ratings slides and bad reviews. At least the Academy, NBC and Jesse Collins Entertainment are trying something different. The Emmys attracted just 7.4 million viewers in 2025. Will paring the number of awards and filling that time with more entertainment (music performances, comedy routines, more heartfelt acceptance speeches) ultimately make a difference? Even chairman Cris Abrego says it's a gamble. But this is just one year. If it doesn't work, switch it back. But at least they're trying something! And

I do trust in ceremony producers Jesse Collins Entertainment to give it their best shot.

Having covered this industry for as long as I have, this is all déjà vu. History repeats itself, and the TV Academy tried to do exactly this in 2005, when it announced plans to move seven categories to the Creative Arts show. The industry, including the WGA and the DGA, balked, and the TV Academy had to backtrack. Even 20 years ago, the Emmys were trying to find a way to evolve — let's see if this time it sticks.

The TV Academy is the definition of a massive bureaucracy that struggles to keep pace with the industry.

exposure

Edited by Marc Malkin



Benjamin Beatty and Annette Bening



Drew Starkey

'Lucky' Premiere

DGA, West Hollywood
JULY 13

The Apple TV adaptation of **Marissa Stapley's** novel filmed at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. "We shot from 11 p.m. to 11 a.m. for 11 days," **Anya Taylor-Joy**, who stars as a con artist on the run from the law and a mob boss (**Annette Bening**), told *Variety*. "I now feel like I've gone through something." **Drew Starkey**, who plays Lucky's boyfriend, enjoyed some blackjack. "The first night I got lucky, and then I got confident and went back the second night and lost it all and felt very dejected," he said, politely declining to reveal how much he lost.

Anya Taylor-Joy and Reese Witherspoon



Lupita Nyong'o



Tom Holland

'The Odyssey' Premiere

AMC Lincoln Square,
New York JULY 14

Zendaya spread her wings at the final stop of the film's worldwide tour. The actress, who plays Athena in **Christopher Nolan's** fantasy epic, wore a white gown from Matières Fécales that featured large angel wings. Her stylist, **Law Roach**, revealed that he asked that the dress be put on hold for Zendaya when he saw it on the runway two years ago.

Zendaya



Matt Damon and Anne Hathaway

Kevin Hart

Ana Amelia Battle Cabral
and Marcello Hernandez

ESPY Awards

David H. Koch Theater,
Lincoln Center, New York **JULY 15**

New York Knicks point guard **Jalen Brunson** took home the award for best athlete: men's sports. "It's been a helluva run, to say the least," he said onstage. Best breakthrough athlete went to American Olympian figure skater **Alysa Liu**. She recalled leaving the sport for two years to focus on her mental health: "This really feels like I broke through in my own way for myself and for my sport. I love being an athlete."

Eileen Gu

THE
ESPYS

THE
ESPYS

Jalen
Brunson

Alysa Liu

Simone Biles



HIGHEST IN THE ROOM

**'THE ODYSSEY'
IS JUST THE FIRST
STOP ON**

**Travis
Scott's**

HOLLYWOOD JOURNEY

By Angelique Jackson / Photography by Greg Swales



“I WAS NERVOUS AS FUCK,”

Travis Scott says.

That’s shocking coming from someone who just wrapped up the highest-grossing solo rap tour of all time, with raging crowds in the tens of thousands. But when Scott climbed atop a wooden table in an ancient castle on a remote Italian island to deliver some of the first lines in Christopher Nolan’s “The Odyssey,” he was freaked out. After all, it was the first shot of the day, and his audience included Anne Hathaway, Tom Holland and Robert Pattinson.

“All those actors were there, and I’m standing on the table,” he says. “And it wasn’t like Travis rager shit, or we’re kicking it at a function. No, this was some serious shit. There’s a camera right here in my face. Nolan’s right there. And they’re all actors — so everyone’s in their zone, locked in.”

On that day, on that table, Scott took a deep breath, raised his stave and went sicko mode: “A war. A man. A trick. A trick to break the walls of Troy and burn it screaming to the ground,” he bellowed, launching into the song of the hero, Odysseus, and his victory in the Trojan War.

In truth, it was also a bit of a test. “I threw him into the deep end, with a cast of hundreds of extras, movie stars right there,” Nolan tells me later, laughing, saying it was a conscious choice to put Scott’s close-up at the top of that day’s shoot. “I said, ‘OK, Travis, jump up on the table and start reciting the Song of Odysseus and hold the attention of the room.’”

Scott and Nolan’s relationship began when the rapper, then 29, contributed the end-credits track for Nolan’s 2020 film “Tenet.” And he ultimately co-wrote the end-credits song, “When I’m Home,” for “The Odyssey.” But that’s not what Nolan called on him to do here. “He’s a performer, but it is a very different thing to come as an actor,” the director explains. “I was very clear with Travis that I wasn’t hiring him as a musician.”

When adapting Homer’s nearly 2,700-year-old poem for the Imax screen, Nolan realized he needed to make the story accessible for today’s

audiences and struck on the notion that rappers carry on the tradition of oral storytelling that poets did in ancient Greece. “I wanted somebody on-screen who would be reciting words and holding attention in the room in a very credible way, that we can relate to in today’s world, so that we would understand the drama and the emotion that comes from storytelling through poetry,” Nolan explains. “If you view it in rarefied terms, if you elevate it and have some very formal version of what a bard in the palace of Ithaca might be, I would find that alienating.”

Before reading Nolan’s script, Scott was already familiar with Homer’s poem. He first read “The Odyssey” when he was a kid named Jacques Bermon Webster II growing up on the outskirts of Houston. His paternal grandmother, Bernice Webster, who was an English professor, assigned it to him as part of his summer reading curriculum. “That summer, she made me do an essay on the book, and I did some CliffsNotes bullshit,” he says, laughing. “I got a whoopin’ because I lied about reading it.”

Today, Scott’s grandma feels pretty pleased with herself. “She’s like, ‘See? That’s why I made you read that book; now you’re in this movie,’” Scott says, beaming. “It’s actually crazy.”

Last week, Scott posted a text from his momma, Wanda Webster, making plans to take Grandma Bernice and Grandma Sealie Wood, his maternal grandmother, to see the film. “I might shut down a movie theater and invite my whole family and have them come,” Scott says. (His kids, Stormi, 8, and Aire, 4, with ex Kylie Jenner are probably too young for the R-rated adventure, no matter how classic.)

“A sit-down”

isn’t exactly the best descriptor for the experience of interviewing Travis Scott; as we talk after a photo shoot in midtown Manhattan, he never stops moving. His legs are far too long for the low-slung coach, so he keeps adjusting his posture and fiddling with the zipper on the accent pillow. It’s a Sunday afternoon, and he’ll soon be heading uptown to see Jay-Z perform at Yankee Stadium, so one can forgive him for being a little antsy. Throughout the chat, the “Highest in the Room” hitmaker puffs on a blunt, putting it down only when he gets animated about a given subject and needs both hands to illustrate his point.

Thirty minutes earlier, he was staring down the barrel of the photographer’s lens while rocking a sleek Hermès suit on a boiling-hot rooftop in NoMad. It’s hard not to get goose bumps when he hits a supermodel pose while his psychedelic

rap-trap track “Goosebumps” plays on a portable speaker. When he turns in profile, it’s clear why Nolan wanted to capture his visage on Imax film: He looks every bit a movie star.

Now we’re tucked away in his dressing room: He’s taken off his Rick Owen shades and thrown on baggy sweatpants and a faded Oasis T-shirt that offsets his chunky gold and diamond chains, and he’s geeking out over the 1979 film “The Warriors,” one of his favorites, about a street gang who must escape from the Bronx back to their home turf after being framed for the murder of a respected gang leader. “They’re like war heroes for peace,” he says.

Scott’s role in “The Odyssey” represents the next mountain the 10-time Grammy nominee will climb as part of a larger journey to becoming a big-screen power player. As we speak, the ink is drying on Scott’s first-look deal at Paramount Pictures, the latest move for his über-successful company, Cactus Jack.

“Creativity emanates from every pore of his body,” Paramount Pictures co-chair Josh Greenstein says, “from the way he dresses to the cars to the music to his taste in film.”

Over the past decade, nearly everything Scott has touched has turned to gold. What began in 2017 as a record label and music publishing company that represents some of the hottest names in rap, like Sheck Wes and Don Toliver, has evolved into a veritable ecosystem around Scott’s artistic and commercial endeavors. Cactus Jack’s consumer-products arm has collaborated with Nike and Jordan; “Fortnite”; luxury brands Saint Laurent, Dior and Audemars Piguet; and Hot Wheels, Reese’s Puffs and McDonald’s. Cactus Jack has also partnered with Paramount on consumer products — their limited-edition “SpongeBob SquarePants” and “Scream” apparel drops sold out almost instantly.

The new deal expands that partnership, giving Scott the freedom to develop projects ranging from film and TV productions to theater and other experiential endeavors, all tapping into Cactus Jack’s global cultural influence. “I want to bring back amazing films, pictures and just creative good ideas. And [Paramount’s] not scared to make good ideas,” Scott says.

Scott realized long ago that music and film occupy the same space, but this endeavor formalizes that idea. “I was spending so much on music videos that they were like independent film budgets, and I wanted to figure out how we could make better use of that,” he says. “How can we take long-lasting ideas and structure to make them better than those three to four minutes?”

At the same time, the studio was shaping its next chapter, a key element of which is attracting younger audiences to movie theaters. At present, no artist connects with their fandom like Scott does. His “Circus Maximus Tour” lasted two and a half years, and the 2.2 million tickets sold brought in \$265 million.





**“YO, LET’S GET
OUT. LET’S
BREATHE AIR.
LET’S TOUCH
GRASS.”**

Travis Scott

“His taste level moves culture. How many people can you say that about?” Greenstein says. “Everything he touches becomes culture, and that’s a superpower.”

Scott doesn’t have a slate of projects in development at the studio yet, but he describes a genre he’d like to explore: “The illest shit right now is it’s almost like scary movies aren’t scary anymore; they’re exciting dramas. These dark thrillers where nothing scary happens till the end. It’s all suspense and buildup, good writing and maybe a cast you don’t even know, but you’re just so dialed in.”

He’s talking about movies like the Japanese chiller “Exit 8,” but the last film he caught in the cinema was “Michael.” Would he make a biopic about himself?

Definitely, he says. “I would do ‘Entourage’ again.”

He’s particularly passionate about the theatrical experience, which makes Paramount a good home for his future work. “It’s cool to have the streaming and all, but keep movie theaters alive. There’s nothing more enjoyable than being like, ‘Hey, y’all want to go to the movies?’ ‘Everything’s becoming so lazy and couch potato, like, ‘Y’all want to go to the house and chill?’ That’s cool too, but it’s like, ‘Yo, let’s get out. Let’s breathe air. Let’s touch grass,’” Scott says, putting down his blunt as he grows exasperated.

“And then the thing is, these people spend so much time sound designing, and y’all’s cribs don’t even have home theater systems. So why are we fucking disrespecting the sound designers and all this crazy shit that you’re really supposed to intake in the movie?” He picks up the blunt to relight it. “I’m sorry,” he says, sheepishly, about his rant.

Where other

artists, like Prince, were futurists whose genius was hampered by the era in which they lived, Scott has been incredibly successful at getting his big ideas across the finish line. For his first full-length album, 2015’s “Rodeo,” Scott planned to release an action figure with the physical copy of the record. And though that idea fell through, it became an important part of his lore — and he eventually got his own toys, thanks to McDonald’s and “Fortnite.” (The “Rodeo” toy was a low in Scott’s trajectory, but not nearly as low as the night in 2021 when 10 concertgoers died in a crowd crush while he was performing at his Astroworld Festival in Houston. The tragedy was personally devastating, but his professional partnerships ultimately held.)

This fall, the University of Southern California will launch a course about the creative ecosystem around Scott and Cactus Jack, unpacking

how an individual can turn their talent into a full-scale creative platform. Much like your average Travis Scott-related drop, the 140 slots for the class were taken in about 20 minutes.

"I think he understands that what drives contemporary culture is experience and immersion," says Dr. Josh Kun, a professor in the Communication and American Studies department at USC. "Fans and consumers and everyday folks want experiences, and they want to be immersed. They want to be hit at multiple levels. He really, really understands that, where lifestyle becomes an entire way of moving through the world."

Nolan agrees, pointing to Scott's "Circus Maximus" film as a prime example of what he's capable of. The visual companion to his 2023 "Utopia" album, it features segments directed by Nicolas Winding Refn, Harmony Korine, Gaspar Noé, Valdimar Jóhannsson, Kahlil Joseph and Scott himself. "Travis is super smart and super creative," Nolan says. "There's an understanding of cinematic virtues — the way in which you can involve an audience using their ears, but also their eyes — that I think is very natural to Travis. I think that's why he's excited to move into film."

What does Scott see as his secret sauce?

"It's experiences that I wanted as a fan that I didn't get," he says simply. "So I've always told myself, 'If I'm ever in this position, I just want to deliver the best experiences.'"

When it comes to making films, Scott learned a great deal during his sojourn on the "Odyssey" set. He showed up each day at 5 a.m. and hung out until 3 p.m. because he relished the opportunity to shadow Nolan and cinematographer Hoyte van Hoytema, asking questions about their process and peering into the director's monitor as they framed up a shot on the Imax cameras. "I'm looking in the camera. I'm all under the hood," Scott says, laughing. "Ain't no kicking it."

What did he learn from observing Nolan? "Always see the vision through. Never go short on the vision." It's similar to wisdom that his mentor, Ye, imparted early in his career.

Just to be clear, "The Odyssey" isn't Scott's acting debut. His filmography includes the 2021 indie drama "Gully" and Korine's hyper-stylized crime thriller "Aggro Drift," along with a cameo on HBO's "Ballers." He'll appear as himself in the Owen Wilson-led comedy "Rolling Loud," filmed during the hip-hop festival in 2024. (In the film, Wilson plays a dad who sneaks his underage son into the event because he's a big Travis Scott fan. High jinks ensue, and Wilson winds up onstage with the rapper as he performs his megahit "Fe!n.")

"I would love to act more," Scott says. "I respect the true talents of the people that wake up every day and really grind."

But acting, by nature, requires one to be in service of someone else's vision, whereas Scott is more suited to be the visionary. As such, his focus is on producing, directing, composing

“**THERE’S NOTHING [BETTER] THAN BEING LIKE, ‘HEY, Y’ALL WANT TO GO TO THE MOVIES?’ IT’S ALL BECOMING SO LAZY AND COUCH POTATO.**”

Travis Scott

and sound-scaping. "I feel like that's where I can shine the most," he says. "I love acting, but that's way cooler."

Reflecting on his overall goals, Scott adds, "I'm here to conquer who I am as an artist. In these side quests — these cool things I like to do — I never lose sight of the main goal. I'm still trying to do every stadium in the United States and the world. I'm working on an album right now, and that's fucking amazing. And I'm constantly pushing myself to push the sonics to try to make something that I haven't made before."

Scott's been hard at work on the follow-up to the double-platinum "Utopia," his first No. 1 record. He carries the tracks for this mysterious sixth studio album around on an iPod, which fans and hip-hop heads spotted attached to his waistband while he took in a recent World Cup match in Houston with Stormi and Aire.

He's been taking inspiration from his time on the road, making music for the person at the very back of the stadium. "I'm like, OK, I need to double down on trying to make something that

can reach the person that's all the way back in the bowl, so how do I reach them like the person that's right next to me," he says. "So that's what I'm on — trying to elevate the show to a more theater aspect."

He teases: "Stay tuned on how that's going to happen. 'Utopia' was supposed to be a play. I want to try to bring back true experiences before they try to take them all down and make everything digital."

With "The Odyssey" a major Oscar contender, the credits track could put Scott in the best original song race. "I still need a Grammy, but I would love to take home an Oscar. That'd be cool," he says.

Scott has been nominated by the Recording Academy 10 times, but he's never won. Does the thought of winning a Grammy motivate him?

He ponders the question, letting out a long wisp of smoke before answering. "It's not why I do what I do," he says of the elusive award. "I like to set goals, and I just want to achieve them. I noticed the people that get them always have that like, 'It doesn't matter' [attitude]. To me, the award represents something, and to achieve that would be amazing."

In March,

Scott joined Nolan and composer Ludwig Göransson at the Directors Guild of America theater in West Hollywood to screen a cut of "The Odyssey." Göransson had been noodling with an idea for the end-credits song featuring English singer-songwriter James Blake, and he wanted Scott to be involved. (One of Nolan's favorite songs from "Utopia" is "Til Further Notice," which features Blake.)

But Scott needed to see the movie first. "Travis was sitting right next to me, and during the Cyclops scene, he put his hoodie up over his head because I think he was kind of scared," Göransson says with a laugh. "It was a great time watching the movie with him. He was very excited."

According to Scott, Göransson had booked a session in the studio they could get to work right after the screening. There, he played what he'd been tinkering with for Scott and Nolan, with the bard's lines from the film as placeholders in the mix. Then Scott began freestyling between the lines, delivering the ode to Odysseus promised by the nearly three-hour film.

In the middle of this story about the recording session, Scott hops up to grab a piece of candy — a red Airhead stocked by the catering team. In that moment, I mention that there's a crazy piece of trivia about the song: It's Nolan's first songwriting credit.

"Welcome to my world, OG," Scott says. ●



CHRISTOPHER NOLAN'S HARDEST VOYAGE YET

The Oscar-winning director put everything on the line — with help from Matt Damon and Anne Hathaway — to make ‘The Odyssey’ come alive

By BRENT LANG

Illustration By JAMES TAYLOR GRAY

Over five countries and 91 days, Christopher Nolan and the cast and crew of “The Odyssey” were driven to their breaking point as they labored to bring Homer’s epic to the screen. They shot on the ocean, in craggy mountain passes, across dense forests and sandy beaches, battling wind, rain and scorching sun in an act of cinematic brinkmanship nearly as punishing as Odysseus’ long journey home.

“I don’t think I’ve ever felt as exhausted as I did at the end of this shoot,” a heavy-lidded Nolan says the day after the film’s premiere in New York City. “It was the hardest thing I’ve done. It was an endurance test for all of us.”

Some locations were so remote, so unforgiving, that no one dared to film there before. Many days would start with members of the production hiking up rocky terrain just to get to where they’d be shooting.

“It felt more like an expedition than a film,” says Matt Damon, who plays Odysseus. “The running joke as we shot was ‘Boy, Greece was hard; I’m sure Italy will be easier,’ and then we’d get to Italy, and it would be just as intense. So then you’d think Iceland’s going to be a breeze, and then we got to Iceland, and it was raining sideways and we’re shooting through the night.”

It helped that Nolan braved the elements along with everyone else. “He was always right next to the camera,” Damon says. “When we were cold and wet, he was cold and wet. If you were hiking up a mountain, he was hiking up a mountain.”

Filming was supposed to go on even longer. “We could have shot another nine days,” Nolan says. “But the reality is we were *done*. We couldn’t have been out on those boats any longer than we were — we couldn’t take it. So, yes, we finished early, but we also sort of stumbled across the finish line.”

It’s 24 hours before “The Odyssey” opens on July 17, and I’m sitting with Nolan in his publicist’s SoHo office. The \$250 million, R-rated epic is expected to be one of the year’s biggest hits, and the reviews for the film have just landed — they are raves. Nolan is calm, albeit weary, outfitted in a blue blazer and nursing a “cuppa” despite the 95-degree heat. A lot is riding on him. The film features A-listers like Damon, Anne Hathaway and Tom Holland, but Nolan — who became a household name with the “Dark Knight” franchise, and later a draw in his own right with “Inception,” “Dunkirk” and “Oppenheimer” — is the star attraction. In those films, Nolan retained his auteurist fire while creating big, bold populist extravaganzas.

“They broke the mold with him,” says Samantha Morton, who plays the witch Circe. “He somehow manages to communicate with the everyman who just wants to be entertained *and* with cinema aficionados. I don’t know anybody else that has ever done it like him.”



“The Odyssey” may be set in an ancient world, but Nolan saw it as an opportunity to test the limits of modern technology by shooting the film entirely with Imax cameras. It’s the first picture to do so, and the result is a film that is truly monumental in scope: Not only do the sacking of Troy and the battle with the Cyclops fill Imax’s vast screens, but the palace intrigue that awaits Odysseus when he finally returns to Ithaca also plays out on a massive scale. But pulling it off was an ordeal. Imax cameras are lumbering tools that weigh 300 pounds each and roar like Cuisinart blenders. Cast members initially struggled to figure out how to act in front of something they likened to an SUV.

“It was a blind trust exercise in Chris,” admits Hathaway, who plays Odysseus’ wife, Penelope. “Chris has a loyal group around him, and many of them had used Imax cameras to shoot action sequences. But they’d never done intimate scenes like the ones I was in. Everybody was a beginner in some respects.”

Moreover, the cameras only contain less than three minutes’ worth of film, so they need to be constantly reloaded, often in the middle of a scene. After some trial and error, Nolan opted not to yell “Cut!” when a camera ran out. Instead, he would gently ask the cast to pause, quietly get more film and have them pick up where they left off.

“When I say, ‘Cut,’ this bell goes and everybody grabs a cigarette or scratches their ass,” Nolan says. “It’s a word you don’t want to use if you want to maintain some tension. There’s a sacred space between ‘Action’ and ‘Cut’ on a film. You want everyone instinctively coming together, freeing up their conscious minds and doing great work at the same time instead of peaking at different points. The harmony you need is like a stage performance.”

“The Odyssey” is being positioned as a grand, old-fashioned sword-and sandals adventure — the kind of blockbuster that gave blockbusters their name. But most of those movies were escapist adventures, and while “The Odyssey” is thrilling and awash in spectacular set-pieces, it carries far weightier themes. In some respects, it’s a spiritual sequel to “Oppenheimer,” Nolan’s most recent film, which explores J. Robert Oppenheimer’s guilt over unleashing the atomic age. When Damon, who appears in both films, read the script for “The Odyssey,” he saw parallels between Oppenheimer’s role in constructing the bomb and Odysseus’ part in developing the Trojan Horse, an ingenious ploy that allows his army to raze the city of Troy. Both innovations lead to carnage on an enormous scale.

“You see echoes of Odysseus’ ingenuity in Oppenheimer’s, and the tragic consequences of their discoveries,” says Damon. “Both men are tortured by what they’ve done.”

Part of what Nolan hoped to tease out in his latest film was the Greek concept of *xenia*, or the law of Zeus, in which hospitality must be extended to strangers, essentially because you never know if someone is really a deity in disguise. In “The Odyssey,” this civic duty is frequently ignored with disastrous consequences. “It’s supposed to keep people on the straight and narrow,” Nolan says. “I was interested in the idea that the interdependence of people is the foundation and possibly the definition of civilization. And both ‘Oppenheimer’ and ‘The Odyssey’ show us how often that is ignored and thus how fragile civilization is and how it can be easily unraveled.”

Like Homer’s poem, the film adaptation of “The Odyssey” unfolds in a mystical world, one in which men battle monsters, walk among gods and witness miracles. But Nolan wanted to root the film in reality. That meant using practical effects as much as possible in place of CGI, so that the mythical elements of the story never seemed too fantastic.

“The word that Chris kept using was ‘grounded,’” Damon says. “He wanted things that were real and tactile. He wanted layers of dirt on the wardrobe. He wanted the sets to feel like real places where people lived and worked, so that it would seem relatable and not some distant world.”

The particulars of “The Odyssey” remain the same. After defeating Troy and setting sail for home, Odysseus, the ruler of a small kingdom, and his men are blown off course. At the far reaches of civilization, they struggle to stay alive, beset by giant cannibals, sirens whose songs cause sailors to go mad and a sorceress who transforms men into pigs. But it’s also a human story about the costs of war and the innocent people who are swept up in the wreckage. Morton, who portrays a sorcerer who gains the upper hand on Odysseus’ crew when they come to her

Christopher Nolan with Matt Damon and Zendaya on the set of “The Odyssey”



“**THERE’S A SACRED SPACE BETWEEN ‘ACTION’ AND ‘CUT’ ON A FILM. THE HARMONY YOU NEED IS LIKE A STAGE PERFORMANCE.**”

Christopher Nolan



island home looking for food, plays her part as a battle-hardened woman just trying to stay safe, instead of the temptress of legend.

"My family is a military family," Morton says. "War is complicated. Men are complicated. Our relationships with men as wives, sisters, daughters, is complicated. I drew on that. And there are people in my family that have been sexually assaulted and raped, and I thought of that as well."

Perhaps the most subversive thing about "The Odyssey" is the way that it repositions its female characters and brings them to the fore. Penelope, for instance, is depicted in the poem as ever patient and virtuous while waiting for her husband to return. In Nolan and Hathaway's interpretation, Penelope is a more calculating power player, keeping at bay the wolfish suitors who show up hoping to take Odysseus' place and working the angles to preserve her son's chance of assuming the throne.

"I always accepted the narrative about Penelope that focused on her likability, her goodness, her morality," Hathaway says. "Chris

created a character that's not a denial of those things, but who is dealing with a constraining and challenging set of circumstances. This paragon of patience is staring at an uncertain future and wearing thin. The costs of playing the game are becoming clear."

Hathaway says one of her friends went to see "The Odyssey" despite reservations about Homer's work and came away transformed. "She always felt like it was a war tale that blamed women for everything bad in the world," Hathaway says. "And she came out sobbing. She told me it was the first time she felt welcomed by the story. This version of 'The Odyssey' reached out its hand to her."

Most people emerge from "The Odyssey" talking about its battle scenes — from the fall of Troy to Odysseus' battle with hulking, man-eating soldiers outfitted in shimmering armor. And they are thrilling. But there's real darkness too. In Troy, for instance, we get swept up with the soldiers as they sneak out of the Trojan Horse and take the city by surprise. But our

excitement fades as Nolan's camera captures the men raping women, looting houses and reveling in the violence.

When I spoke to Nolan on the press tour for "Oppenheimer," I was struck by how rattled he seemed by the state of the world. Russia had invaded Ukraine, and he worried openly about nuclear Armageddon. Since that film, things have only grown more dire, with wars also raging in Gaza and Iran. That must have seeped into how he chose to interpret "The Odyssey."

"That's my job," Nolan says. "And if I've done it right, there will always be a correspondence between what's going on in the world and what's happening on-screen. I don't like to be too self-conscious or didactic about that. I really want to entertain people. That's still what's most precious about films." ●

"Cape Fear"
creator
Nick Antosca



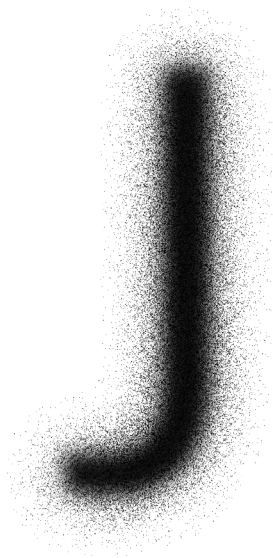
FEAR

Nick Antosca's reimagined 'Cape Fear'
is a gnarly vision of rage and resentment —
and a perfect TV show
for our time

BY DANIEL
D'ADDARIO

AND

FURY



avie Bardem has played plenty of villainous roles — the suave Raoul Silva in “Skyfall,” the devilish Anton Chigurh in “No Country for Old Men.” But Max Cady opened up something new for the Oscar winner, since the ex-convict has had years to consider how best to extract pain. “It’s fun portraying someone that has all the time in the world to achieve what he wants,” Bardem says. “That gives him a superpower: patience.”

Apple TV’s “Cape Fear” provides a new take on a familiar character. First portrayed by Robert Mitchum in the 1962 film of the same title in an adaptation of the novel “The Executioners” by John D. MacDonald, Max is best remembered as the tattooed psychopath Robert De Niro played in Martin Scorsese’s 1991 adaptation. There, Max used brute force to pulverize

the family of an attorney (Nick Nolte) he believed had wronged him; Bardem plays the role more insinuatingly, drawing ever nearer to his targets while always stopping short of revealing his malignancy to the wider world. “It’s a slow curse, rather than an imposition of violence,” Bardem says. “Everything is in order to break that family.” By the July 17 installment, eight episodes into a 10-episode season, he’s largely succeeded: Three of the four members of the family he’s haunting are imprisoned or institutionalized, and the fourth is losing it. It’s the latest twist in what’s become summer’s most addictive serial — a deviously dark tale with roots in midcentury storytelling but a 2026 sensibility.

There are soapy, grotesque elements of “Cape Fear” that might have worked in any era — after all, the project seems to keep coming back every 30 years or so. But this version seems doubly suited for our times. A lengthy limited series digging deep into the backstory and motivations of a character who’s long operated as a simple, easily understood shorthand for “villain” might sound like a joke about streaming-era bloat, were Bardem’s explorations of the character not so satisfyingly gnarly. (The actor describes one flashback scene — of a prison fight while Max was incarcerated — as “very visceral, very animal.”)

And the ways in which Max’s crusade intersects with concerns about the legal system feels vividly contemporary. Max was sent to prison after his defense attorney (Amy Adams) convinced him to take a plea deal offered by the prosecutor (Patrick Wilson); the two lawyers, Anna and Tom Bowden, are now married, while Max, sprung from prison after new evidence emerges, is convinced that the pair were working in concert to tip the scales. His toying with the family occurs while the public

celebrates Max as a beneficiary of deferred justice. This is an especially bitter pill for the Bowdens — even before their son, Zack (Joe Anders), turns up missing a toe and Max follows, implying he was responsible.

The last time Adams was on TV as a series regular was in 2018’s “Sharp Objects,” another Southern Gothic tale about buried secrets coming to light. Here, the emergence of all Max represents to Anna, who has built for herself a reputation in Savannah as a put-together lawyer with a charming family and a beautiful home life, is a trigger before the blood starts flowing; when she represented him, Anna was a mess, and that remains only an inch beneath the surface. Adams saw in the storyline a parallel for our manicured, Instagram-ready lives. “There’s so much at stake for Anna because she’s built a life based on ambiguity,” she says, “and tried to atone for what her past mistakes might have been. I am really drawn, in a day and age where people have such curated lives, to the way our past can be revealed — and how damaging it can be when it doesn’t align.”

Max can relate: He doesn’t see himself the way the world saw him when he was in prison. “Max would have you believe, ‘Whatever I am, you made me,’” Nick Antosca, the series’ creator, says. The ambiguity around whether or not Max committed the crime for which he was convicted, a new element in this telling, adds spark to the story and to its antagonist. “You were definitely the victim of an injustice, but were you a bad guy before that?” Antosca goes on. “We try not to definitively answer that question, but we leave interpretations possible. Max is definitely a villain — but I want the audience, in some ways, to be enamored of him.”

Antosca (left) on the set of “Cape Fear”

This kind of tonal play has become a hallmark of late for Apple: “Pluribus” tasks a proud misanthrope with saving the world, and “Widow’s Bay” mixes gross-out horror with droll comedy. But “Cape Fear” may be flashier than both. It feels like the kind of talent-rich, lushly photographed big bet that’s beginning to fall away as the streaming landscape contracts. It’s a brash statement from the streamer whose six Emmy nominations in the comedy and drama series categories this year announced it as a rising power in the streaming wars.

But to get there — to get viewers enamored of Max Cady — required the blessing of the rights holders in order to get off the ground. And this necessity took some doing. Antosca, a prolific creator of crime and horror TV, including Peacock’s “A Friend of the Family” and Netflix’s “Brand New Cherry Flavor,” has worked throughout his career with Universal, which he believed owned the “Cape Fear” rights; the idea of remaking the film struck him after





working with Juliette Lewis on Hulu's "The Act." (Lewis portrays the daughter of Nolte's character in the 1991 version; in Antosca's version, she plays an unrelated role.)

Antosca recalls that Universal said, "You know, cool, but it's never going to work, because the rights are bifurcated. Somebody has the international rights, and you have to go convince Spielberg and Scorsese." (Steven Spielberg had been slated to direct "Cape Fear," but left the project and picked up the planned Scorsese film "Schindler's List.") In the background while making various shows in the following years, Antosca's producing partner Alex Hedlund worked to untangle the rights, eventually obtaining the directors' blessing. Antosca absorbed their insights: The Bernard Herrmann music from the original film had to stay, they told him. (Composer Jeff Russo rerecorded Herrmann's compositions and added material of his own.) When editing the prison-fight sequence, Antosca

**Javier Bardem
in "Cape Fear"**

says, "one of the more fun experiences I've had in the editing room was with Martin Scorsese on FaceTime saying, 'Roll the cut a couple frames, right *before* the head starts to explode' — just calibrating, to the exact frame, how we were going to smash that skinhead's head."

The violence gets one's attention: This is a show in which a teenage boy is manipulated into *biting off his own toe*. But it's the dynamics between the Bowdens, as their lives crumble into chaos, and Max, looking on with a smile, that keep one watching. As in the 1991 version, the lawyers' offspring develop a fixation on Max; using go-betweens and contemporary technology, Zack and Natalie Bowden (the latter played by Lily Collias) find themselves drawn into Max's schemes too. For Adams, this was still another connection to the present moment. "Being a mother and understanding that there is a whole world that my daughter participates in, that as much as I can be aware and alert, I don't know what's going on," Adams says. "The most attended child can run amok online, and it's hard to really understand what's going on. Snapchat — what even is happening there?"

The introduction of technology gets at ways in which this show differs from past iterations, but the tightrope it walks is its attempt to retain the lurid tone of the "Cape Fear" films while existing as functional television. Bardem recalls being horrified at being offered the role, given that it had been inhabited on-screen twice before;

he was relieved when Antosca told him, "We're going to bring a new take for a new generation — but the *essence* of the story is going to be close to the movie that we all love." Among the innovations: a backstory, developed by Bardem and Antosca, that explained that *this* Max Cady was raised by an American father and a Basque mother, and that he discovered Santeria in prison, which he twisted into a self-justifying philosophy.

"You're not asking me to replay it," Bardem continues, "which is something that I would never dare to do. De Niro's performance and Mitchum's are going to be way, way above anything I do, and it's OK. I can live with that — it's not a competition."

Viewers can be the judge — but even attempting to come close to those performances required calibration: De Niro and Mitchum threw everything they had at films viewers experienced as stand-alone, immersive experiences. Week after week, that intensity might become unbearable. The reality of the Bowdens' world — their work in an Innocence Project-style nonprofit, their kids' tech addictions, the social pressure they feel not to speak up about Max — isn't just situating the story in a recognizable 2026 landscape. It's making good TV. "One thing I admire so much about the '91 movie," Antosca says, "is that it is so nightmarishly operatic and intense. I wanted to capture that energy and keep adding more nightmares — but you must feel, even if it's this heightened world, like the stakes are real." ●

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JAVIER BARDEM



Variety co-Editor in Chief explores the day's
biggest entertainment news with Variety
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Necessary Shake Up Traditional voting methods could cause more split votes than ever at this year's Emmys

By Emily Langeretta



Clockwise from top left: Michael J. Fox, Tal Anderson, Taylor Dearden and Coleman Domingo earned noms.

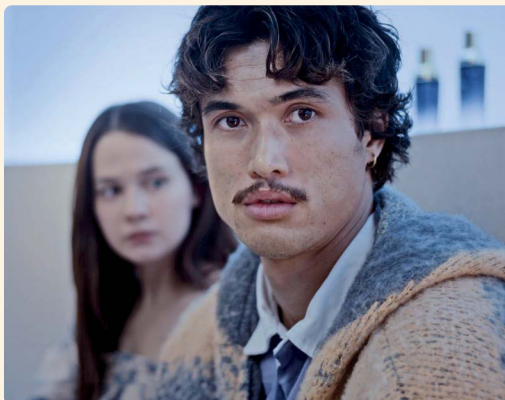
→ While down-the-line voting has often scored huge, the 2026 Emmys may shake up the usual tradition. Some of the biggest shows of the year are only recognized in the acting categories but miss in series nods. Below, *Variety* breaks down the contenders in a few major categories.

• Drama

In the drama category, last year's winner, "The Pitt," which also took home lead actor, supporting actress and guest actress trophies, is back with its second season. It leads the pack in overall nominations with 25 — 13 of which are for actors. This time, "The Pitt" faces two other HBO Max series in the category: "The Gilded Age" and "A Knight of the Seven Kingdoms." Netflix's "The Diplomat" and Hulu's "Paradise" landed series nods, one of the seven total noms for each show. Apple TV also scored three noms in the category; "Slow Horses" earned its third nomination in the category while new series "Pluribus" and "Your Friends & Neighbors" both broke into the race. While "Pluribus" garnered a whopping 18 nominations for its first season (and Rhea Seehorn is the front-runner for lead actress), the recognition in this category is the sole nom for "Your Friends & Neighbors." Meanwhile, Brad Ingelsby's "Task" didn't earn a series nod, but did get recognition for writing, directing, cinematography and editing, as well as acting noms for Mark Ruffalo (lead actor) and Tom Pelphrey (supporting).

• Guest actor/actress, drama

Last year, "The Pitt" racked up 13 nominations; this year, that's the number of actors from the show that received their kudos, with five in the guest actor and guest actress categories. Ernest Harden Jr., Jeff Kober, Brittany Allen, Tal Anderson and Tina Ivlev all landed recognition for the medical drama, despite some not even being submitted by HBO; instead, they self-submitted. But will they cancel each other out? It's always a possibility with multiple nods in one show. The guest actor category includes other heavy hitters too: Colman Domingo for the final season of "Euphoria," Jeff Hiller for "Pluribus," Bradley Whitford for "The Diplomat" and Jonathan Pryce for "Slow Horses." On the guest actress side is early front-runner Shailene Woodley for



"Paradise," Miriam Shor for "Pluribus" and Merritt Wever for "The Gilded Age."

● Comedy series

With "Hacks" breaking the record for most-nominated comedy series (24), and it being the final season of the beloved HBO Max comedy, it seems like an easy front-runner. That being said, it's not an easy category, with mostly returning shows filling the category — FX's "The Bear," ABC's "Abbott Elementary," Netflix's "Nobody Wants This," Hulu's "Only Murders in the Building" and Apple TV's "Shrinking." But the two new series in the batch are serious contenders: Apple TV's "Margo's Got Money Troubles," which racked up eight nods, and, even more so, the spoiler of the race, Apple TV's "Widow's Bay." The horror-comedy scored 19 nominations, including six acting noms — Matthew Rhys earned lead actor noms for both this and limited series "The Beast in Me" — and nods for writing, directing and casting.

● Guest actor/actress, comedy

Some of the biggest stars landed in the guest actor and actress in a comedy cate-

Ariana Madix, above left, scored a surprise nom for "Love Island USA;" Charles Melton, top right, earned a nom for "Beef" while Nick Offerman landed two noms.

gories this year. Two-time Emmy winner Rob Reiner earned a posthumous nomination for his role in "The Bear," one that will be hard to beat. But if anyone could do it, it'd likely be the beloved Michael J. Fox, who landed a nomination for "Shrinking." Elsewhere in the stacked category is Christopher McDonald for "Hacks," Hamish Linclater for "Widow's Bay," Brett Goldstein for "Shrinking" and "Heated Rivalry" star Connor Storrie for his hosting role on "Saturday Night Live." For guest actress, Jamie Lee Curtis ("The Bear") and Betty Gilpin ("Widow's Bay") are the only two not from "Hacks," as Cherry Jones, Laurie Metcalf, Leslie Bibb, Lauren Weedman and Kaitlin Olson account for the remainder of the group. Once again, canceling out could happen, but the odds are good that "Hacks" could do very well on Emmy night.

● Limited or anthology series

For its first season, Netflix's "Beef" won the trophy for best limited/anthology series. This time around, the show hasn't generated quite as much buzz, but it still earned 16 nominations, including for lead actor and actress and supporting actor and actress.

Elsewhere in the category is Netflix's "The Beast in Me," FX's "Love Story: John F. Kennedy Jr. & Carolyn Bessette," Peacock's "All Her Fault" and HBO Max's "DTF St. Louis." The latter also landed a slew of acting noms with Linda Cardellini, Joy Sunday, Jason Bateman, David Harbour and Richard Jenkins filling up the supporting categories. Although "All Her Fault" was an early drop, released in November, star Sarah Snook took home a Critics' Choice trophy and the show snagged two Golden Globe nominations and an Actor nod. Although "Monster: The Ed Gein Story" came up short in the series nomination, star Charlie Hunnam still snagged a lead actor nom, and Laurie Metcalf earned her second nom of the year for her supporting role in the Netflix horror drama. Netflix's "Death by Lightning" and Prime Video's "Bait" failed to land series noms, but the actors were recognized; Nick Offerman landed a supporting nod (his second of the year alongside a supporting comedy actor nod for "Margo's Got Money Troubles") and Riz Ahmed earned a limited lead actor nomination.

● Reality

As we seem to write over and over again, one of the most difficult categories to break into has always been reality competition, with years of the same winners. At one point, "The Amazing Race" won in seven consecutive years, then "RuPaul's Drag Race" won four years in a row. For the last two years, "The Traitors" has taken the trophy. This year, "The Amazing Race" is out of the running and ABC's "Dancing With the Stars" is back for the first time in 10 years, which shouldn't come as much of a surprise after its massive 34th season. "Top Chef" and "Survivor," which also had a huge season with its 50th, round out the category with four of the five nominees also recognized in host: RuPaul, Jeff Probst, Kristen Kish and Alan Cumming. Ariana Madix was the surprise fifth spot for her hosting of Peacock's "Love Island USA." Who becomes a front-runner may come down to who campaigns best during phase two.

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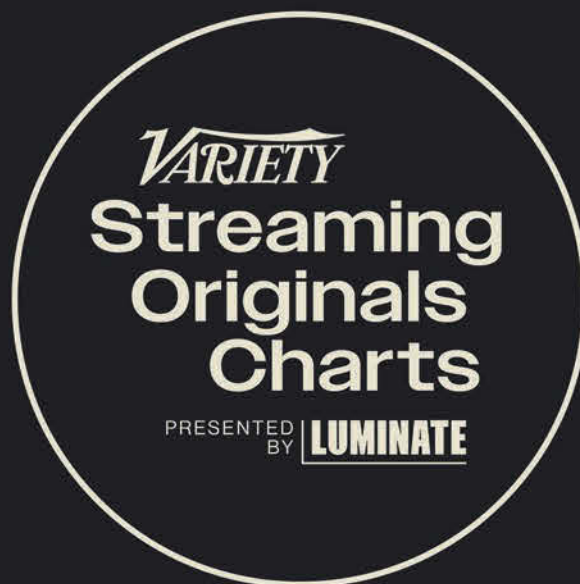
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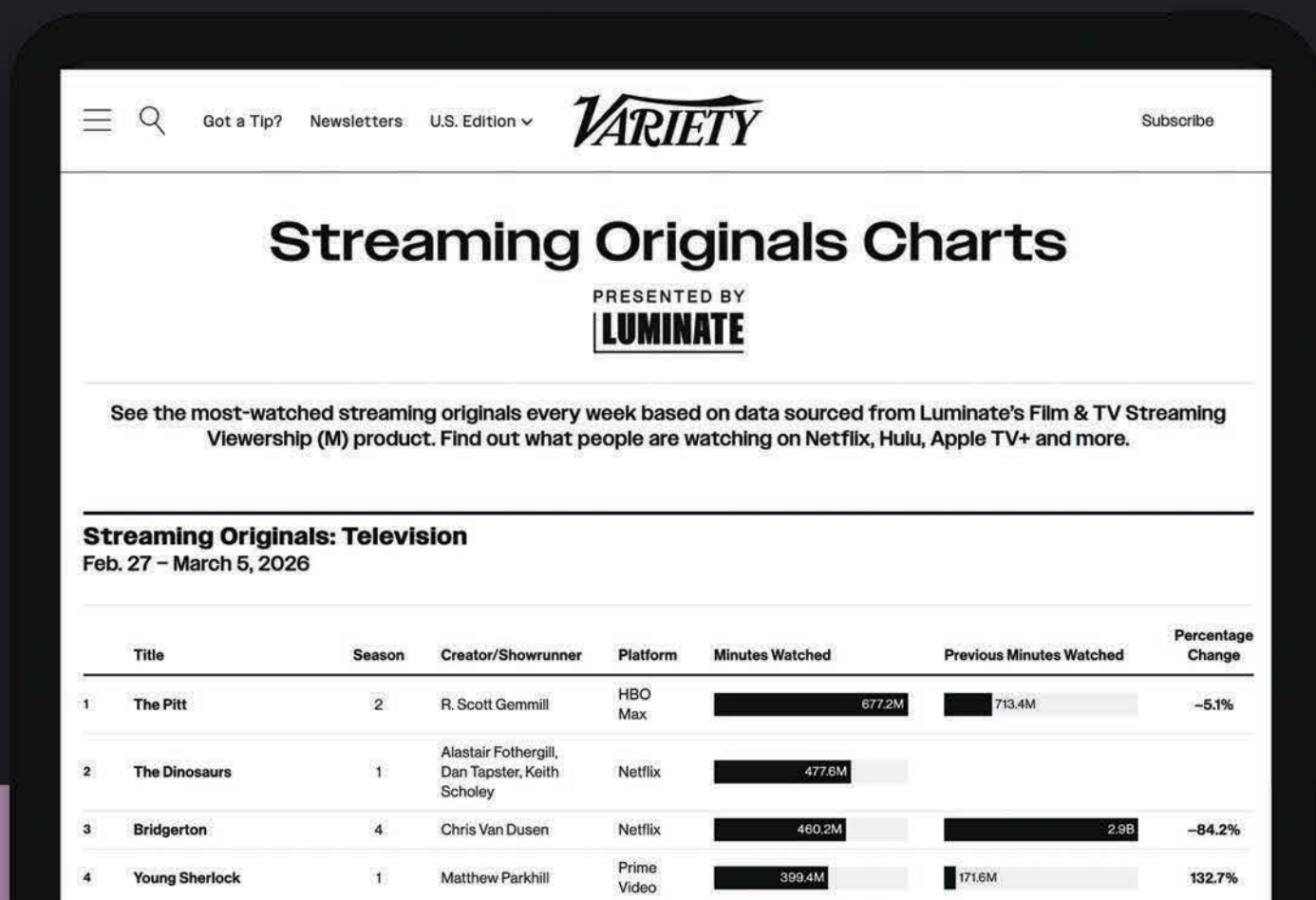
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The Power of Song
Music biz pioneer
Jody Gerson breaks
barriers and puts her
focus on the artists

By Jem Aswad





➔ As the highest-ranking female executive in the music industry, the first female chairman of a global music company and the first woman to be named CEO of a major music publisher, Universal Music Publishing Group's Jody Gerson enjoys an unimpeachable pedigree. A music publisher for the entirety of her professional career, she presides over one of the world's top publishing companies and has signed or works with a dazzling array of artists, including Adele, Bad Bunny, Justin Bieber, Lana Del Rey, Ariana Grande, Coldplay, Drake, Billie Eilish, Elton John, Alicia Keys, Kendrick Lamar, Post Malone, the Prince estate, Rosalia, Harry Styles, Taylor Swift, SZA, the Weeknd and many more.

On her watch, Taylor Swift joined UMPG (after Gerson lured her longtime publisher, Troy Tomlinson, into the fold) and Bob Dylan sold his publishing catalog to the company — in a deal reported to be between \$300-\$400 million — as did Neil Diamond and Sting.

Gerson leads a global company with 48 offices in 41 countries, with more than 850

Jody Gerson, flanked by Universal Music Group topper Lucian Grainge, left, and Recording Academy head Harvey Mason Jr., right, at the 2025 pre-Grammy Gala Salute to Industry Icons honoring Gerson

employees; it owns and administers more than five million copyrights. She has tripled its revenue since she took the helm in 2015 — after increasingly successful roles at Warner Chappell, EMI and Sony Music Publishing — and her tenure has coincided with a sea change in the profile of the publishing industry, as more people and investors have realized the value of music and intellectual property.

She also oversees Polygram Entertainment, Universal Music Group's film and television development and production division, and has served as executive producer of documentaries and projects on the Beach Boys, Stax Records, Tupac Shakur, Billy Preston, the Bee Gees, the 2002 drama "Drumline" and more. She even coined UMPG's succinct new core purpose statement: "Before it's music, it's a song."

Perhaps most significantly to her, she has also mentored countless creatives and executives who speak glowingly of her contributions to their careers. The interview that follows is edited from a nearly two-hour conversation with Variety in early July.

Did anything in your background prepare you to run a global publishing company?

My dad and my grandfather had their own business — a nightclub called the Latin Casino in Cherry Hill, New Jersey — until it went bust. My mom was a stay-at-home mom until she had to get a job. I knew things were a little out of control in my house and I knew somebody had to be the grown-up, and it was going to be me. I was a very observant child: I observed how artists behaved backstage, how my father and my grandfather were with talent, I observed the maitre d' at the dinner theater, where [your seat depended on] how much money you were greasing his palm. He didn't even look down, but he knew if you gave him a hundred or if you gave him two dollars, and you were seated accordingly.

Who were some of the artists and how did they act? Frank Sinatra, the Supremes, Aretha Franklin, Gladys Knight, the O'Jays, Richard Pryor. When Frank Sinatra performed there, he would have dinner with a lot of people who came in from New York and New Jersey and Philadel-

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phia, and I would watch them. I remember once a boyfriend had broken up with me and I was so upset, and my dad was like, “Frank, Jody’s boyfriend broke up with her.” Frank goes, “Listen, if anybody ever lays a hand on you, you call me. Don’t call your old man — you call me.” I remember Gladys Knight watching “Roots” when it came out before she went onstage and being mesmerized by it.

And they were different before the curtain went up — some people threw up, some people had [practice] routines — but they became bigger than life once the curtain went up. I saw the greatest entertainers of that time as a little girl. It gave me a love and respect for artists, and a comfort level.

So it’s not like anybody taught me how to do anything — I observed. When I graduated from Northwestern, I wanted to work at MTV but there wasn’t a job for me, so I went around to the record companies. In those days, women got publicity jobs or promotion jobs — “I’m not doing that” — and randomly, I got an interview at Chappell Music. I had never heard of music publishing, but I took the very entry-level job to move to New York, and I took advantage of every opportunity. If a songwriter needed a lyric sheet, instead of sending a messenger, I went myself with the hope that the songwriter would open the door and I could say, “Hi, I’m Jody Gerson.” I had respect for the guys who were in royalties and copyright, and I asked them what they did. I worked in the tape room, putting together all the songs that came in for the week so that the A&R people could listen to them, and then I would stay after hours and figure out how to match the song with the artist. I was really good at identifying songs and artists that would be popular; that’s why A&R was the first thing that I went after.

“When I took this job, I decided I was going to be me — as a mother of three, as someone who wanted to support the ambition of our employees.” Jody Gerson



Gerson, above, at work.

Gerson, left, with Alicia Keys, center, and Clive Davis

What was your first breakthrough? Eventually, Chappell became Warner Chappell. I got out of the tape room and I was pitching songs. My first hit was “Straight to the Heart,” a song I pitched to Crystal Gayle that was written by Graham Lyle and Terry Britten, who also wrote Tina Turner’s smash “What’s Love Got to Do With It” and were inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame this year. But then when I went to EMI, and the first artist I signed was a band called Nelson [the sons of 1950s star Ricky Nelson, who had a multiplatinum debut album in 1990], but the one that really put me on the map was Arrested Development [an Atlanta-based alternative-hip-hop act who released a Grammy-winning multi-



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Gerson and Billie Eilish at the ASCAP 2019 Pop Music Awards.

platinum debut album in 1992]. That led me to Jermaine Dupri, Dallas Austin, TLC, the whole Atlanta thing. And the beauty of what I got to do was — and is — that I wasn't genre specific. I really learned how to be good at this with Dallas.

How so? We just had an amazing connection. He wanted to work outside of Atlanta, so I took him to Europe for the first time, and he worked with Madonna, Bjork and Pink. He didn't want to be pigeonholed, and I needed a vehicle to support my ambition. How do I get into rooms? I got into rooms because I had Dallas. And while he was in the studio, I was out there trying to figure out how to get him what he wanted. He said he wanted to produce a movie, and one day he told me a story about being in a high school marching band — and we actually produced a movie together: "Drumline" [the 2002 film that launched the careers of Zoe Saldana and Nick Cannon]. And then we did "ATL" together, which helped launch T.I.

My career is in music publishing, but really it's about how to support all the

places a talented person wants to go with their career. And I knew that songs and songwriters would take me where I wanted to go, and I still say that today.

You represent two groups of people that are effectively minorities in music: women and songwriters. Women first: How have you handled the sexism that you've inevitably encountered throughout your career? I powered through. I don't want to be a guy. I'd only had male bosses; I never had a female boss and I didn't have a female mentor. And when I started, women didn't necessarily help each other.

But when I took this job, I decided I was going to be me — as a mother of three, as someone who wanted to support the ambition of our employees. So I surround

myself with incredible executive talent and I run a meritocracy. My head of Latam is a woman: Alexandra Lioutikoff. Talk about an area that's hard! I just hired a head of Asia, Sunita Kaur. I am conscious of women being successful and I am conscious of the fact that men have been at this longer than we have. That's why I committed to [nonprofit org dedicated to increasing the number of women working in music] She Is the Music: We have to want each other to be successful. It's very, very important that women support other women. I came up saying "I got this — I can raise three children, run a house, run a company, take my kids to school, get dinner on the table," all of that. But it's insanely crazy-making and not the right way to do it. The right way is to have connectivity with other women.

When I took this job, I said, "Yay, I'm the first." But if when I'm done, I'm still the only one, I will not have been successful.

And yet, the number of C-suite female music executives keeps falling. So let's change that. I don't want to be negative. It's very important to me to be hopeful — not in a Pollyanna kind of way, but we have to take responsibility for each other and move each other forward, give each other opportunities and be honest with one another. It's us who's going to get us there.

I've known since I was a little girl that I had power, but how did I deal with a male-dominated business? I did it by making myself small. I made my boss big, I made my artists big, but I was small. And it took me a really long time to stand in my power. I don't think this generation of women is making themselves small.

When [Grammy chief] Harvey Mason called me about being honored [with the prestigious Industry Icon Award at the Clive Davis Pre-Grammy Gala in 2025], I was like, wait, what, me? Can I call you back? Can I think about it? I don't even know why I had that reaction. But I had to write a speech, and it was the greatest therapy I've ever had. Because the first drafts said "Thank you to every single person who I've met in my career, every single executive I work with. Thank you, thank all of you." And by draft four or five, my

"My career is in music publishing, but really it's about how to support all the places a talented person wants to go."

Jody Gerson

JODY GERSON

There is no one like you and not enough words to describe your remarkable achievements. Mogul is one, but you are also a boss, a trailblazer, an innovator, a leader, and most of all, a friend, to your songwriters, your colleagues and your music industry peers.

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partner Gavin said, “Would you consider making one speech where you’re not thanking everyone? Everybody knows you appreciate them — you do it in every speech. Can you consider yourself in this one?”

It was a fundamental change for me to look at my own career. Because I do think one of the qualities of being a woman and surviving was making myself small. And I didn’t shrink for that speech.

Songwriters are literally at the bottom of the streaming economy — streaming royalties are approximately 75% to recorded music and 25% to publishing. Why is that?

What can we do about it? OK, let me give you a positive first. In the days when we were buying records, there were 10 songs on an album, and we paid \$9.99. We could listen to that album over and over and over, and it was only ever going to be worth \$9.99. Now, every time a song is streamed, there is revenue, and no matter what form that song is in — whether it’s somebody performing it on “American Idol” or a cover or UGC [user-generated content] or any version of a song — there is an opportunity to get paid. So it’s not all horror, and I think we’re getting there. I do.

But it’s hard. I think so much of music publishing ... you know, the fact that we have to spend a fortune on the CRB [Copyright Royalty Board, the government organization that determines royalty rates],

and wouldn’t it be nice if the platforms respected songwriters? [National Music Publishers Assn. president-CEO] David Israelite fights a good fight on behalf of all of music publishers, I think.

But what I didn’t know when I took this job was how much of my day would be spent fighting for the value of a song. Can you believe that so much of my job is about getting people to pay for the music that they use?

I also have this other challenge now, which is how do people consume music? They’re consuming it on TikTok, social media, music-branded content, ba, ba, ba. I have to make it easier for music to be licensed. YouTube loves to promote their creator economy, and I love to promote our songwriter economy, but in order to do that, I have to find an industry solution to make licensing easier.

You’ve done or observed the job of almost every single person in a publishing company. How do you stay out of the weeds and just let your staff do their thing, even if it’s not exactly the way you would do it?

I’m a really good delegator, although I think I’m harder on my A&R team. I get pangs — like when [head of U.S. A&R] Jenn Knoepfle brings in an artist that I wish I had brought in, I get a pang, like, Oh, I used to just do that. I don’t get a pang when my CFO is working on P&L [laughter]. But

“Can you believe that so much of my job is about getting people to pay for the music that they use?” Jody Gerson

when you want your team to be successful, you have to let them succeed.

Also, I run a global business. Do you think that I can micromanage my guy in France or Germany? [Chief operating officer] Mark Cimino has certain responsibilities, so do JW [Beekman, CFO for UMPG], [head of global A&R] David Gray, [chief counsel] David Kokakis and Jenn [Knoepfle], and they’re so good. Publishing is so complicated and so big that I couldn’t do it myself. It wouldn’t be fair to songwriters.

You didn’t get Kendrick Lamar the first time you went after him, but you got him later. Do you have a philosophy to leave the door open?

I very, very rarely close the door. And the thing with Kendrick was not getting the deal the first time — I remember calling [Lamar’s then-manager] Top [Dawg] and saying, “OK, I’m going to do it,” and he said, “Jody, we just closed [with another publisher].” But I was determined that as soon as that deal was available again, I was going to get it. And that was the beginning of my relationship with Top Dawg. I stayed on him, and that’s why he brought me SZA and Doechii and Kendrick when Kendrick became available. Because first and foremost, we’re in a relationship business. I played a very long game, obviously.

You’ve tripled revenue in the last 11 years. What did you change about the culture in order to make that happen?

I bet on talent. Universal Music Publishing was a successful company. They hit their numbers, but they weren’t a thriving creative force. They were risk-averse, so they didn’t bet on new talent. And I encouraged people all over the world to sign the best talent and take risks with them. At the same time, we already had a world-class global admin system, so the combination of great global admin, becoming the definitive admin company for the film and TV companies and investing in great talent — that’s how we did it. And again, reminding every single person who works here that they have an important job, and that job is to change a songwriter’s life.

Doechii, left, and Gerson at the 2025 Billboard Women in Music event



AMAZON MUSIC CONGRATULATES

JODY GERSON

on her well-deserved recognition as
Variety's 2026 Music Mogul of the
Year and for championing the artists
and songwriters who inspire fans
around the world.

amazon music



RED LIGHT
MANAGEMENT

congratulates
JODY GERSON

on the well-deserved recognition as
Variety's 2026 Music Mogul of the Year.

**CONGRATULATIONS TO VARIETY'S 2026
MUSIC MOGUL OF THE YEAR**

JODY GERSON

**Visionary.
Creator Champion.
Global Leader.**

Thank you for your leadership, your commitment to songwriters, and nearly 20 years of trust in Sacem.

As we celebrate 175 years of serving creators, we are proud to stand alongside Universal Music Publishing Group in protecting and promoting the value of music rights around the world.

 **sacem**

VARIETY

2026 MUSIC
MOGUL OF THE
YEAR

CONGRATULATIONS
NMPA BOARD MEMBER

JODY GERSON

Chairman and CEO,
Universal Music
Publishing Group



CONGRATULATIONS TO
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JODY GERSON

AND ALL OF THE
MUSIC LEGAL ELITE

HONOREES
INCLUDING OUR COLLEAGUES

DON PASSMAN

GENE SALOMON

ETHAN SCHIFFRES

GANG · TYRE · RAMER

BROWN & PASSMAN



Lisa Alter and Katie Baron closed a partnership RZA of Wu-Tang Clan centered on the group's catalog.



Lisa Alter
Partner
Katie Baron
Partner
Alter, Kendrick & Baron

Alter and Baron negotiated and closed more than \$1 billion in music transactions, including Iconic Artists Group's acquisition of Rod Stewart's publishing and music catalog and a partnership with RZA centered on the Wu-Tang Clan catalog. They also advised Reservoir Media and Influence Media Partners on catalog acquisitions, financing and other transactions involving Miles Davis, Mannie Fresh, Louis Prima, DJ Khaled, Future, Enrique Iglesias and Blake Shelton, as well as a separate music-backed securitization. The pair counseled KKR on debt financing provided to HarbourView Equity Partners and served as intellectual property counsel on Sony Music Entertainment's acquisition of Ultra Records.



Jason Boyarski
Founding partners
David Fritz
Founding partners
Boyarski Fritz

Boyarski represented Blackpink star Jisoo in her solo deal with Warner Records and negotiated Fetty Wap's new Atlantic/300 deal following the rapper's streaming resurgence. Fritz recently renegotiated Lil Tecca's publishing and record deals with Universal and Republic Records, respectively, handled the music clearances for Amazon's "Melania" — including negotiations with the Rolling Stones and the estates of Aretha Franklin and Michael Jackson — and negotiated a catalog sale for Marc Anthony to GoDigital. "We must always make sure the deal never gets in the way or overshadows the creation of art," Boyarski says.

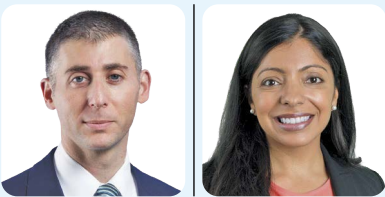
Music's Power Players Meet the legal eagles who help multiplatinum stars shine

By Jem Aswad, Steven J. Horowitz and Mike Wass

→ They may not make the music or mastermind the marketing campaigns, but — *duh!* — the music business wouldn't and couldn't exist without lawyers. The best of them oversee the mega-million deals and catalog sales of superstars, protect the creative work of human beings against AI and other entities that would steal it, prevent young artists from signing

something they'll regret and more. Lots more. Or so one hopes. But there's a reason why some lawyers are so praised by artists and executives. A good lawyer is like a good doctor or contractor or financial planner; finding someone who gives seasoned, honest, direct counsel and looks after your best interests, often over their own, is invaluable, especially in an era where

grift, dirty deals and dishonesty are coming from the very top. We must emphasize that this list is based on attorneys' and firms' accomplishments over the past year — legacy and an impressive client base matter, of course, but there are already plenty of "power lists" that are basically directories. We want this one to be a bit more meaningful, and we hope it is.



Jonathan Sperling
Partner and chair of music industry group

Neema Sahni
Partner, co-chair of music industry group

Adrian J. Perry
Co-chair of music industry group

Phillip Hill
Of counsel
Covington & Burling

One of the more tight-lipped firms covered in this year's list, Covington has been involved in several major catalog deals in the past year that it has shared with *Variety* on the condition of confidentiality. Its music industry group represents a wide range of clients, including catalog acquisition work for Shamrock Capital, Duetti and Influence Media Partners, as well as Sony Music, BMI, SESAC, Downtown, Runner Music, the Black Music Action Coalition,

Spotify, Tidal, Amazon Music, Peloton and Avid Technology (makers of Pro Tools). It represented Sony Music Entertainment in a lawsuit against Napster seeking unpaid royalties and damages for copyright infringement, resulting in a judgment in Sony Music's favor for more than \$20 million.



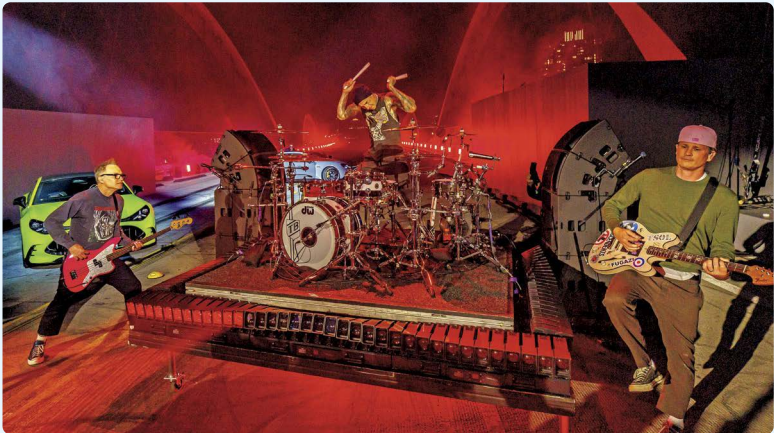
David Dormon
General counsel

Claire Jacobs
Senior VP, legal affairs & regulatory compliance

Bea Koramblyum
Global head of business affairs & VP of business development

James Ball
VP, legal & business affairs
Downtown Music

Virgin Music Group's \$775 million acquisition of Downtown Music



Blink-182 relies on the legal minds at Fox Rothschild.

placed Dormon, Jacobs, Koramblyum and Ball at the center of one of the year's biggest music-business transactions. The team guided the multi-jurisdictional deal while continuing to oversee legal and business affairs across Downtown's publishing, distribution and artist-services operations. At the time of the acquisition, Downtown served more than 4 million creators and 5,000 business clients across 145 countries. The team also negotiated a range of publishing, distribution and partner agreements, including deals with Budde Music, Notable Music and Josa Records in support of breakout Música Mexicana star Netón Vega.



Cynthia Katz
Partner

Heidi Vaquerano
Partner

Ken Abdo
Partner

Tim Mandelbaum
Partner
Fox Rothschild

Fox Rothschild has provided legal counsel for an array of musicians, including Wu-Tang Clan, Blink-182, Motley Crue, Jodeci, \$uicideboy\$, Jason Derulo and many more. But the firm's work with global investment firm HarbourView Equity Partners has become an increasing priority over the past year as they've helped close hundreds of transactions worth billions of dollars. Among the deals were the acquisitions of catalogs and music publishing companies from Max Martin and Shellback, the Quincy Jones estate and Rodney "Darkchild" Jerkins. Additionally, the firm secured more than \$500 million in debt financing from over 75 catalogs from artists including James Fauntleroy, Christine McVie, Nelly, Kane Brown and Wiz Khalifa. It also advised Concord in its acquisition of Mothership Music Publishing's assets.



Gang, Tyre reps the interests of superstar Kendrick Lamar.



Greenberg Traurig congratulates
Jeff Biederman, Steve Plinio, Jess Rosen, and Bobby Rosenbloum
on being named to *Variety's 2026 Music Legal Elite*.

We are honored to celebrate their remarkable contributions to our clients and the music industry.

*We also congratulate **Jody Gerson**, Chairman and CEO of Universal Music Publishing Group and *Variety's 2026 Music Mogul of the Year*, on this well-deserved recognition.*



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44679

WORLDWIDE LOCATIONS
United States, Europe
and the Middle East
Asia, Latin America



Donald S. Passman
Partner
Ethan Schiffres
Partner
J. Eugene (Gene) Salomon Jr.
Managing partner
Gang, Tyre, Ramer, Brown & Passman

The music team at Gang Tyre represents a formidable roster of superstars, including Taylor Swift, Kendrick Lamar, Adele, Billie Eilish, Elton John, Paul Simon, Stevie Won-

der, Randy Newman, Neil Diamond, Cher, Anthony Ramos, Hailee Steinfeld and “Sinners” star Miles Caton. The firms also handled the deal for Quincy Jones’ catalog sale, Zac Brown’s Sphere residency, Green Day’s pre-game Super Bowl performance and an exceptionally busy year for Oscar- and Grammy-winning composer Ludwig Göransson (“Sinners,” “The Odyssey” and “Star Wars” films). Passman, of course, occupies a unique emeritus position as author of the definitive guide “All You Need to Know About the Music Business,” and is working on its 12th edition.



Elizabeth Moody
Partner
Colin Morrissey
Partner
Granderson Des Rochers



Damien Granderson
Partner
Guy Blake
Partner



The Granderson Des Rochers team balances a roster of clients — A\$AP Rocky, Raye, J Balvin, Wizkid and Rod Wave, among others — with companies and labels including Quality Control, SoundCloud and Issa Rae’s Raedio. The past year has seen Morrissey negotiating tour deals with Live Nation for Ne-Yo and Bryson Tiller. Granderson handled Rocky’s appointment as a Chanel ambassador in November and his headlining “Don’t Be Dumb” world tour, as well as Raye’s tour earlier this year. Notably, the firm has established a presence in the AI space as Moody brokered historic deals between Udio and Universal Music Group, Warner Music Group and Merlin, plus Roblox’s partnership with UMG.

● **“We must always make sure the deal never gets in the way or overshadows the creation of art.”** Jason Boyarski

For the love of music.



Congratulations, Jody Gerson

Variety’s 2026 Music Mogul of the Year

Thank you for being one of music’s greatest champions.
From your friends and partners at **MOONBUG** Entertainment.





CONGRATULATIONS

DANIELLE AGUIRRE

NMPA Chief Operating
Officer & Chief Legal
Officer

VARIETY

2026 MUSIC LEGAL ELITE





Bobby Rosenblum
Chairman, global entertainment & media practice

Jeff Biederman
Shareholder, entertainment & media practice, Los Angeles

Steve Plinio
Shareholder, entertainment & media practice, Los Angeles

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

Rosenblum led negotiations on the Recording Academy’s \$500 million-plus agreement with Disney and ABC, bringing the Grammys to Disney after more than five decades at CBS. He also advised clients including Spotify, Apple TV+, Meta, Snap, Twitch, OpenAI, Stability AI, AEG Presents and the Country Music Assn. Biederman oversaw the sale of a majority interest in the Miles Davis estate’s publishing and recorded-music rights, along with deals involving songwriter Josh Kear and N.W.A.’s DJ Yella. Plinio represented clients including Gamma, Wendy Melvoin, Josh Klinghoffer and Jeezy in more than \$25 million worth of entertainment and music industry transactions. Rosen negotiated Kenny Chesney’s Sphere residency, Miranda Lambert’s catalog sale and publishing agreements, Kacey Musgraves’ new recording and publishing deals and Orville Peck’s agreement to star in “Cabaret” on Broadway.



Jess Rosen negotiated Orville Peck’s deal to star in “Cabaret.”

manatt

We Salute You!

Congratulations to Manatt’s **Jordan Bromley, Gary Gilbert, Sarah Moses and John Meller** for being named to *Variety*’s 2026 Music Legal Elite list—championing artists’ rights, resolving high-stakes litigation and structuring transformative transactions that drive the industry forward.



Explore our U.S. Streaming Royalties Calculator for insight on the money behind the music. Scan the QR code or go to www.manatt.com/calculator.





Lawrence Shire
Managing partner
Eric Sacks
Partner
Kenneth Meiselas
Partner

Grubman Shire Meiselas & Sacks

Over the past year, the firm has over-
seen and negotiated deals for clients
spanning the Weeknd and Usher
to Hilary Duff and Playboi Carti. In
December, Meiselas, who heads the

firm’s music department, negotiated
the Weeknd’s unique catalog part-
nership with Lyric Capital, said to
be in the \$1 billion range, that allows
the artist and his team to maintain
creative control over the catalog
and remaining shareholders and
owners in the company. Elsewhere,
the firm negotiated Usher and Chris
Brown’s R&B stadium tour as well as
Lady Gaga’s sold-out “Mayhem Ball”
tour. Additional clients on the ros-
ter include Bruce Springsteen (Shire
negotiated his deal for the “Deliver
Me From Nowhere” biopic), Britney
Spears, Madonna, U2, David Byrne,

Billie Eilish, LeBron James, Andrew
Lloyd Webber, Sombr, Audrey Nuna,
Live Nation and Sony Music.



David Jacobs
Founding partner
Jacobs Law Group

The Grubman veteran hung out his
own shingle in November of 2024 and

quickly established himself by closing
a blockbuster, reportedly nine-figure
label deal for country superstar Zach
Bryan. The firm has grown quickly,
now with 10 staffers and a roster that
also includes Geese and its singer
Cameron Winter, Pusha T and Clipse,
Young Thug, Lil Nas X, Kali Uchis,
Blood Orange and rising stars Ethel
Cain, Adela and Jim Legxacy. “Music
attorneys sit at the intersection of art
and commerce, but our job isn’t sim-
ply to get transactions done — it’s to
help artists build meaningful, sustain-
able careers and protect the things
that make them one of a kind,” he says.



**“Our job isn’t simply to get transactions done —
it’s to help artists build meaningful, sustainable careers
and protect the things that make them one of a kind.”**

David Jacobs

DAMIEN GRANDERSON

GUY BLAKE

GRANDERSON
DES ROCHERS
BEVERLY HILLS NEW YORK CITY

CONGRATULATIONS
DAMIEN GRANDERSON,
GUY BLAKE,
LIZ MOODY,
& COLIN MORRISSEY
FOR BEING NAMED TO VARIETY'S
2026 "MUSIC LEGAL ELITE REPORT."

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LIZ MOODY

COLIN MORRISSEY



Grubman, Shire, Meiselas & Sacks negotiated Lady Gaga’s blockbuster “Mayhem Ball” tour.



- Jordan Bromley**
Partner
- Gary Gilbert**
Partner
- Sarah Moses**
Partner
- John Meller**
Partner
Manatt, Phelps & Phillips

Bromley helped lead the pro bono legal effort behind FireAid, negotiating nearly 100 agreements in less than two weeks to help bring the benefit concert to life, while remaining an active voice on creator rights and AI policy. Gilbert and Meller represented George Benson in an eight-figure catalog sale, advising HarbourView Equity Partners on acquisitions worth hundreds of millions of dollars and guiding Chord Music Partners through its \$240 million sale process following KKR’s exit. Meller also negotiated nearly \$500 million in catalog acquisitions. Moses remained active on the litigation front, representing rapper Lucki in a seven-figure contract dispute with Empire and serving on the team defending BMG in copyright litigation involving Eminem and Rihanna’s hit “The Monster.”



Dan Wall
Exec VP, corporate and regulatory affairs
Live Nation Entertainment

To put it mildly, Live Nation and its Ticketmaster subsidiary are hot-button subjects in the music world, and the company’s top legal officer could not have a more fitting surname. While Live Nation works extensively with lawmakers and regulators to address speculative ticketing and multiple other deceptive resale practices, including some of the most powerful bots technology has created, it also managed to get the Department of Justice to suddenly settle its antitrust case against the company, reportedly after a conversation with President Trump (although multiple states included in the suit continued it — and won). This past January, Wall fielded aggressive questioning before Congress and held the company line. Not coincidentally, he was previously a trial lawyer in the DOJ’s Antitrust Division and was a member of the team in the landmark AT&T monopoly case.



John Frankenheimer
Chairman emeritus; chair, music industry practice



Derek Crowlover
Vice chair, music industry practice



Debbie White
Vice chair, music industry



Monika Tashman
Partner
Loeb & Loeb

Loeb & Loeb remained at the center of the music-rights boom, advising on Sony Music Publishing’s multi-billion-dollar acquisition of Hipgnosis-related assets from Recognition Music and Blackstone, the sale of a minority stake in Morgan Wallen’s master catalog to Chord Music Partners and a nine-figure transaction tied to Zach Bryan’s publishing catalog. In addition to catalog deals, White continued her longstanding

representation of Hybe and BTS, while Crownover advised Big Loud Records and Dolly Parton on major business and branding initiatives. Tashman provided counsel for Debbie Harry, Blondie and Modern English, including the sale of “I Melt With You” to Round Hill. The practice also oversaw deals involving the Johnny Cash, June Carter Cash and Otis Redding estates. “The greatest threat to the industry would be apathy and inaction regarding AI,” Frankenheimer says, “but this is a different era, and I’m very encouraged by the proactive approach our leadership is adapting.”



Loeb & Loeb advised on a huge transaction tied to Zach Bryan’s catalog.



Doug Mark
Founding partner



Harry Roberts
Partner
Mark Music & Media Law

The firm's namesake is a co-founder of the 5,000-title Mothership Music Publishing company and negotiated its sale to Concord in April; oversaw podcast, book and label deals for Benny Blanco; and handled Pulitzer Prize and Grammy-winner Rihannon Giddens' first Broadway deal. Roberts worked closely with two of the biggest rising stars in the industry, representing Laufey in connection with her massive international tour and Amy Allen in a stellar year

in which she won the songwriter of the year Grammy for the second consecutive year. He also negotiated the Chainsmokers' residency extension in Las Vegas.



Christine Lepera
Chair, music litigation practice
Mitchell Silberberg & Knupp

Lepera has long been a major attorney in copyright and IP, but her successful defense of Katy Perry in the heated "Dark Horse" litigation — which the singer won on appeal in 2022 — was one of the most consequential music copyright cases of the past decade. She and the firm have built on that success: In the past year, she secured



Christine Lepera successfully defended Katy Perry in a landmark case.

victories in two separate copyright lawsuits targeting Dua Lipa's "Levitating," while also filing suit against Samsung over the alleged unauthorized use of the singer's image, name and likeness. Lepera also represented FKA

Twigs in a trademark dispute, J. Cole in a copyright ownership case and Eminem, Aftermath, Interscope and Universal Music Group in litigation surrounding Eminem and Rihanna's hit "The Monster."

We proudly congratulate
Lisa Alter & Katie Baron
on their selection to *Variety's* 2026
"Music Legal Elite Report."



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Eric Greenspan
Partner
Joshua Karp
Partner
Myman Greenspan Fox Rosenberg
Mobasser Younger & Light

Industry veteran Greenspan is the longtime attorney for Red Hot Chili Peppers, who, according to reports, sold their recorded-music catalog to Warner Music Group for a whopping \$300 million-plus (which the firm did not confirm). He also has long represented Goldenvoice founder Paul Tollett, whose Coachella festival had its biggest year to date in 2026 (an unconfirmed \$200 million-plus across both weekends). Karp worked alongside Greenspan on the Chili Peppers deal and also handled a variety of matters for John Legend, Meghan Trainor, Ariana Grande, Big Sean and Common. Also, longtime clients Dead & Co. capped a 48-show residency at the Las Vegas Sphere as well as an IMAX simulcast of their 2025 Golden Gate Park performance celebrating the Grateful Dead’s 60th anniversary.



Samantha Rhulen worked on an upcoming Def Leppard documentary.



Danielle Aguirre
Exec VP & general counsel
National Music Publishers’ Assn.

The NMPA’s small (and predominantly female) staff has a long

history of legal victories over companies infringing on compensation and credit for songwriters and music publishers, and with AI’s rapid rise, that work has increased exponentially. The NMPA’s mission includes defending creators’ rights in court, highlighting business and licensing opportunities and working to change policies at the U.S. Copyright Office and in Congress. Over the past year, Aguirre and her team have announced model licenses for indie publishers with AI music generators Udio and Klay and with Spotify for audio-visual rights, and a deal with Twitch for all music publishers. “While litigation plays an important role in ensuring that creators’ rights are respected,” she says, “NMPA believes there is both a place and a necessity for building constructive relationships with responsible AI companies.”



Amy Ortner
Chief business affairs officer & general counsel
Samantha Rhulen
Senior VP, business & legal affairs
Primary Wave Music

Primary Wave’s proposed \$7 billion acquisition of Kobalt was among



“NMPA believes there is both a place and a necessity for building constructive relationships with responsible AI companies.”

Danielle Aguirre

the year’s most closely watched music-business deals, with Ortner helping guide the transaction. Her purview extended to Primary Wave’s strategic alliance with Pops Music in Southeast Asia and the acquisition of Gilberto Gil’s publishing and music catalogs. Rhulen closed some of the largest deals in Primary Wave’s history, including partnerships with Pete Townshend and INXS, while helping lead the company’s first acquisitions in regional Mexican music. She also worked on a forthcoming Def Leppard documentary and the restoration of James Brown’s South Carolina home as a visitor attraction. They have also helped to develop projects tied to Whitney Houston, Bob Marley and the Doors while advancing the forthcoming “Purple Rain” musical, based on Prince’s catalog.



Joshua Karp worked on various legal matters for Ariana Grande.



Oswaldo Rossi forged a partnership pact between Karol G and Reebok.



- Steve Sessa**
Partner & co-chair, entertainment & media group
- Ed Shapiro**
Partner, entertainment & media group
- Josh Love**
Partner, entertainment & media group
- Eric Marder**
Partner, entertainment & media group
- Reed Smith**

Nearly \$20 billion in music transactions flowed through Reed Smith over the past year. Sessa, Shapiro, Love and Marder worked on Concord’s combination with BMG, Sony Music Publishing’s acquisition of Hipgnosis-related assets, Concord’s acquisitions of Stem and Broadway Licensing Global and the Weeknd’s

reported \$1 billion partnership with Lyric Capital. The team also handled significant catalog deals involving Jason Aldean and Joan Jett. Reed Smith also represented Concord, Chord Music Partners, Lyric Capital, Sony, Kobalt, Recognition Music Group, Shamrock Capital, Litmus, Pophouse and Ares on acquisitions, investments and strategic transactions across the sector. Beyond deal-making, the team advised artists and entertainment companies including Jay-Z, Christina Aguilera, Bon Jovi, John Summit, Anitta and Lil Uzi Vert, along with Roc Nation, Avex Music Group and the NFL’s Super Bowl half-time show.



Oswaldo Rossi
Founder, managing partner
Rossi Baldivia Klein Fine & Spector

One of the very top attorneys working in Latin music, Rossi has secured

substantial brand deals and partnerships for his clients over the past year. In January, he forged a partnership for client Karol G with Reebok to become its global brand ambassador and negotiated with Goldenvoice to confirm her as the first Latina to headline the 2026 Coachella festival. In addition to representing top artists including Rauw Alejandro, Peso Pluma and Rawayana, Rossi facilitated Rimas Entertainment’s acquisition of a significant stake in Dale Play Records, which counts Bizarrap, Nicki

Nicole and Duki as part of its roster. Beyond that, Rossi represented Rodney “Darkchild” Jerkins, Rich Music and Chris Jedi/Gaby Music in their respective catalog sales deals.



Paul Rothenberg
Founding partner
Jeremy Mohr
Founding partner
Josh Binder
Founding partner
Rothenberg, Mohr & Binder

Lisa’s solo career expanded beyond music, with Rothenberg, Mohr & Binder advising the Blackpink star on projects ranging from a behind-the-scenes documentary to partnerships with Kith, NikeSKIMS and Shiseido. The firm also represented Doechi during a breakout year that included a major Samsung deal, oversaw Marshmello’s catalog sale and guided Gunna as he entered free agency. The firm also represented A\$AP Ferg in a new Adidas partnership and No Doubt’s founding members in connection with their appearance at the Sphere. Behind the scenes, the partners provided counsel for Top Dawg Entertainment and its roster while helping to launch Crush Music’s publishing division.



The Weeknd’s team at Reed Smith worked on his Lyric Capital partnership.



Julie Swidler
Exec VP, business affairs & general counsel (global)

Stephanie Yu
Exec VP, U.S. lead of business & legal affairs

James Mullan
Exec VP, International business & legal affairs, international general counsel

Jeff Walker
Exec VP, head of business & legal affairs, global digital business
Sony Music Entertainment

This year's Legal Elite recognition is part of a victory lap for Swidler, who stepped down from her role at the end of June. Her successor had not been announced at press time, but the legal team at the world's second-largest music company has a formidable purview. Included in that are Sony's Artists Forward initiative, intended to empower creators with data and insights as well as supporting their well-being; supporting U.S. legislation including the No Fakes Act; the Train Act, which would help enable copyright owners to determine if their works were used to train AI models; and the Generative AI Copyright Disclosure Act.



Nicola Levy
Exec VP, digital business affairs

Alasdair McMullan
Exec VP, business & legal affairs, head of litigation
Universal Music Group

Jeff Harleston
General counsel & executive VP, business & legal affairs

Martha Braithwaite
Exec VP, business & legal affairs

Running the legal affairs of the world's largest music company is no joke, especially when UMG takes the lead on such business-critical issues as AI and the leveling off of streaming as a revenue source. Harleston, a nearly 35-year UMG veteran, oversees all business transactions, contracts and litigation for the company and leads the team, was a key player in the No Fakes bill and oversees deals and renewals with all streaming and AI platforms, including major agreements with Spotify, Udio and Nvidia in the past year. "Our team has continued to approach AI from the perspective of opportunity, while ensuring we have the correct guardrails and frameworks in place," he says.

● **"Our team has continued to approach AI from the perspective of opportunity ... with guardrails in place."** Jeff Harleston



Congratulations to

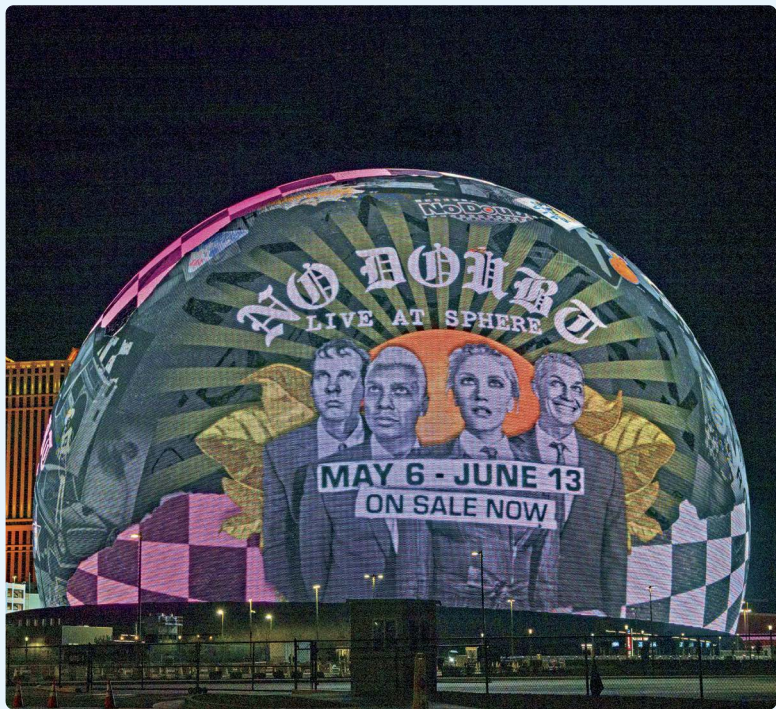
CHRISTINE LEPERA

and her fellow honorees, for being named to

Variety's

2026 MUSIC LEGAL ELITE





Rothenberg, Mohr & Binder repped No Doubt in their Sphere residency.



- Paul Robinson**
Exec VP & general counsel
- Trent Tappe**
Senior VP, deputy general counsel & chief compliance officer
- Brad Cohen**
Senior VP, associate general counsel & head of litigation
Warner Music Group
- Peter Rosenthal**
Exec VP, global head of business & legal affairs
Warner Chappell Music

Warner Music has been on the front lines as generative AI continues to reshape the music business, and Robinson and the team have been responsible for negotiating landmark (if controversial) agreements with Suno and Udio, which resolved litigation while establishing new frameworks for licensing, compensation and the use of copyrighted music in AI-generated products. Beyond AI, the team oversaw efforts to protect Warner’s catalog through copyright infringement litigation against brands including Crumbl Cookies, DSW and PacSun, targeting the unauthorized commercial use of music in social-media marketing and influencer campaigns. In February, Robinson received the Recording Academy’s Entertainment Law Initiative Service Award, recognizing three decades at Warner and his contributions to music industry policy, copyright law and creator advocacy.

Congratulations to our partners **John Frankenheimer, Derek Crowover, Debbie White** and **Monika Tashman** on being named to *Variety*’s 2026 Music Legal Elite report.

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



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John Branca

Partner

David Lande

Partner

David Byrnes

Partner

Ziffren Brittenham

As co-executor of the Michael Jackson estate, Branca mined legacy gold with a producer credit on the biopic of the late superstar, "Michael," which has earned more



John Branca earned a producer credit on blockbuster biopic "Michael."

than \$1 billion worldwide and surpassed the Queen hit "Bohemian Rhapsody" as the highest-grossing music biopic of all time. Lande had a hand in setting up client Justin Bieber with a headlining performance at Coachella 2026, which netted the singer a reported \$10 million, and negotiated Olivia Rodrigo's partnership with American Express around the release of her chart-topping third album, "You Seem Pretty Sad for a Girl So in Love." Additional negotiations included agreements for SZA's co-headlining 2025 tour with Kendrick Lamar and Shakira's high-grossing "Las Mujeres Ya No Lloran" world tour. "It's especially gratifying to see younger audiences discovering Michael Jackson for the first time, as if he were a brand-new artist, driving streaming to unprecedented levels and returning him to the top of the charts around the world," Branca says.

Primary Wave^{PW}
Music

PrimaryWave.com

**Congratulations
to Amy Ortner &
Samantha Rhulen**
on being named to
Variety's Music Legal Elite!



The Home of Legends

NOTICE OF PUBLIC DISPOSITION OF COLLATERAL UNDER SECTION 9-611 **OF THE UNIFORM COMMERCIAL CODE**

From: Raven Asset-Based Credit (Onshore) Fund II LP
75 Spring Street, 6th Floor
New York, NY 10012

Names of Debtor: Jonathan Goldwater (the "Debtor").

Raven Asset-Based Credit (Onshore) Fund II LP is the administrative agent and collateral agent for the lenders (in such capacities, the "Secured Party") under that certain Credit Agreement, dated as of July 12, 2022 (as amended, restated, supplemented or otherwise modified from time to time, the "Credit Agreement"). Pursuant to the Non-Recourse Pledge Agreement (as defined in the Credit Agreement) the Debtor granted the Secured Party a security interest in the Collateral (as defined in the Non-Recourse Pledge Agreement). The Borrowers (as defined in the Credit Agreement) are in default of their obligations under the Credit Agreement.

This notice is being published pursuant to Sections 9-610 and 9-611 of the Uniform Commercial Code, as enacted and applicable with the State of New York (the "UCC").

The Secured Party intends sell (the "Sale") some or all of the Collateral described on Exhibit A hereto (the "Sale Collateral") in public as follows:

Day and Date: July 27, 2026 (the "Sale Date")
Time: 10 a.m. (Pacific Time)

Place: Paul Hastings LLP
1999 Avenue of the Stars, 26th Floor
Century City, CA 90067

The Public Auction will also be available by teleconference. Remote access details can be requested from Dov Goodman at Paul Hastings LLP at 310-620-5736 or dovgoodman@paulhastings.com.

Persons interested in participating in the Public Auction should contact Mr. Goodman no later than five (5) days prior to the Sale Date.

The purchase price for the Sale Collateral shall be payable by wire transfer in same-day funds or by certified or bank check drawn upon a US bank as follows: (i) a two million dollar (\$2,000,000) deposit (a "Good Faith Deposit") is required to be delivered at least one (1) business day prior to the Sale Date, which deposit shall be delivered pursuant to wire instructions available upon request by a prospective bidder to Mr. Goodman, (ii) on the Sale Date, the winning bidder shall, if necessary, deposit additional cash with the Secured Party in order to, when aggregated with the Good Faith Deposit, ensure that the Secured Party has received cash in an amount not less than 10% of the winning purchase price amount and (iii) the balance of the purchase price shall be payable within one (1) business day following the Sale Date.

All Good Faith Deposits shall be non-refundable once submitted; provided, that, if a bidder who has delivered a Good Faith Deposit is not selected as the winning bidder, they shall be entitled to the return of their Good Faith Deposit within five (5) business days after the Sale Date.

If a winning bidder fails to timely consummate the purchase of the Sale Collateral due to a breach or failure to perform on the part of such winning bidder, such defaulting winning bidder's Good Faith Deposit shall be forfeited to the Secured Party and the Secured Party specifically reserves the right to seek all available damages from such defaulting winning bidder.

The bids made at the auction must be accompanied by evidence satisfactory to the Secured Party, in its sole and absolute discretion, of the bidder's ability to make payment in cash in full of the purchase price as and when required by the terms of the Sale.

The Sale shall be subject to the further conditions set forth in the terms of sale which are available upon request from Mr. Goodman and such revisions thereto as may be announced prior to or at the start of

the auction. Copies of documentation available to the Secured Party concerning the Sale Collateral will be made available to qualified bidders who have entered into a confidentiality agreement acceptable to the Secured Party.

The Secured Party reserves the right to bid, to become purchaser at the Sale and, without deposit, to credit against the purchase price all sums related to the Obligations under the Credit Agreement and to adjourn, delay or terminate the Sale at any time. The Sale Collateral will be sold "as is" and "where is" and without any implied or express representation, warranty or covenant, including without limitation any warranty relating to title, possession, quiet enjoyment, or the like, in the disposition of any or all of the Sale Collateral.

The Sale Collateral may be sold as a block, although the Secured Party reserves the right to consider proposals to only acquire certain assets. Among other requirements, the purchaser at the Sale will be required to represent that any Sale Collateral consisting of securities is being acquired for the purchaser's own account and not with a view to the sale or distribution thereof and that such Sale Collateral will not be resold unless pursuant to an effective registration statement under the Securities Act of 1933 (the "Act") and any applicable state securities laws or under a valid exemption from the registration requirements of the Act and such laws. The purchaser will also be required to provide the Secured Party with an investment letter.

EXHIBIT A **(Description of Sale Collateral)**

Any or all of the Debtor's right, title and interest in the following, in each case whether now owned or existing or hereafter acquired or arising and wherever located:

(i) all of the Company Interests (and any certificates representing the Company Interests from time to time);

(ii) all direct and indirect rights (including, without limitation, general intangibles) and benefits of the Debtor as an equityholder of JGFI, including, but not limited to, all rights of the Debtor under any limited liability company agreement, equityholder agreement or similar agreement related to the Company Interests (the "Equityholder Rights");

(iii) all rights to receive profits, capital distributions, surplus, income, commissions, fees, dividends, distributions or other income and all splits, options, warrants, issues, collections or distributions, whether in the form of cash or other assets of any kind whatsoever (including, without limitation, equity securities, property, interests, options or rights in substitution of, or in exchange for, any Company Interests or Equityholder Rights), in respect of the Company Interests or the Equityholder Rights, by means of distribution, payment, exchange or other method of any kind whatsoever (including, without limitation, upon the liquidation, dissolution or distribution of capital of the issuer thereof, the recapitalization or reclassification of the capital of the issuer or the reorganization of the issuer) (clauses (i), (ii) and (iii), collectively, the "Pledged Interests"); and

(iv) any and all proceeds of any of the Pledged Interests.

"Company Interests" means all of the equity interests issued by J. Goldwater Family Investments, LLC, a Delaware limited liability company ("JGFI"), and held by the Debtor from time to time.

Note that it is the Secured Party's understanding that JGFI's primary asset consists of equity interests representing 25% of the outstanding shares of Archie Comic Publications, Inc., a New York corporation.



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Matt Damon plays the endlessly thwarted conqueror of Troy.

FILM REVIEW / GUY LODGE

Of Gods and Monsters and Men

There's nary a dull moment in Christopher Nolan's muscular, complex epic, but it's more sensually than emotionally felt

The Odyssey

Director
Christopher Nolan

Screenplay Christopher Nolan, based on Homer's "Odyssey"

Distributor
Universal Pictures

Cast Matt Damon, Anne Hathaway, Tom Holland, Robert Pattinson

➔ More than 70 years have passed since Hollywood last attempted a straight-up adaptation of Homer's "Odyssey," which is an unfathomable eternity considering both its standing as a foundational epic narrative — the hero's journey to end, and begin, all hero's journeys — and the industry's tendency to recycle any halfway proven story material until it positively disintegrates. Is it the well-worn familiarity of the text that has protected it from complete cinematic exhaustion or the great, daunting heft of it? Either way, making a full-tilt film of "The Odyssey" in the year 2026 is at once a job for the heedlessly adventurous and the staunchly traditionalist.

Enter Christopher Nolan, the man who has built a bazillion-dollar career on both those virtues. He's a blockbuster merchant who makes 'em like they used to, but also not quite like anyone

else has made 'em before. It's to be expected that Nolan's take on Homer is thorough, robust and attentive both to scholarly detail and old-school moviemaking craft; it's likewise no surprise that it's been reshaped to fit the director's predilection for trickily nonlinear storytelling, its disordered timeline a feat of intricate weaving and unweaving to rival Penelope's shroud, further complicating even the in medias res ploy of the text.

It is understating things to say the result is no small achievement. A genuinely grand, gutsy vision, "The Odyssey" thrills generously for the bulk of its near three-hour running time: Every few minutes, it seems, it throws at its audience another mighty set-piece that, in almost any other summer studio spectacle, would be a climactic standout. If the language of Homer's epic has been simplified and modernized in Nolan's screenplay, the stakes and scale of its storytelling have suffered little corner-cutting: It's so very *big*, in terms of

mythological scope and human consequence, not to mention the sheer volume of incident stuffed into it, as to remind us why other, less intrepid filmmakers have stayed away.

But if this "Odyssey" is consistently involving and frequently dazzling, it's never exactly moving. It keeps the eyes and ears so lavishly occupied, while engaging the mind with its structural games of cat's cradle, you almost don't notice, or mind, that your heart isn't quite in it.

Where it holds our sympathies, that's in large part thanks to the inspired casting of Matt Damon, the unassuming but sturdily capable everyman of contemporary American cinema, as the endlessly thwarted Odysseus, king of Ithaca and conqueror of Troy. There's a crushed, grizzled sadness to his countenance, and even to his otherwise strapping physique, which cuts an altogether more poignant figure than Kirk Douglas' lean, hungry warrior in 1954's rather more condensed "Ulysses." Time has

collapsed, and so has he, in the increasingly unmarked years following his long Trojan War stint. Some viewers may feel that chronological stretch blunted by Nolan and editor Jennifer Lame's repeated structural switching and circling, which leaves the film, especially in its more frenzied first half, almost without a present tense. But it proves an effective way of channeling our hero's own bleary disorientation, his sense of being ceaselessly buffeted by the elements, the tides and the whims of the gods.

Yet if we care in the moment for his survival, it's harder to summon as much feeling for his return, to a kingdom where his wife, Penelope (Anne Hathaway, stoic but tremulous), and son, Telemachus (an over-callow Tom Holland), are barely holding down the fort, fending off the aggressive advances of scheming suitor Antinous, lasciviously played by Robert Pattinson as an outright pantomime villain. Nolan's writing is sharper and more surprising on matters of honor and betrayal among men than it is on more vaguely outlined family relations: It says much for a superb John Leguizamo's frail, quavering but staunchly upstanding performance as Odysseus' blind servant Eumaeus that his patient pining for his master is the film's most palpably felt emotion.

For better or worse, however, "The Odyssey" impresses most at its most nakedly, viscerally spectacular — those scenes in its episodic shuffle that showcase the lurid showman in Nolan above all. The near capture of Odysseus' army by the giant Cyclops Polyphemus (somehow played, with brain-melting digital assistance, by Bill Irwin) is realized with riotous, shrieking monster-movie gusto, only slightly tempered by an aftertaste of compassion for the beast. Another extended sequence of surreal peril, as the men fall under the literal spell of predatory enchantress Circe, is as strange and darkly, hilariously sensual as anything Nolan has ever directed, galvanized by a raw, wily, volatile Samantha Morton in the film's most indelible performance. And the Trojan Horse sequence, delivered after a teasing setup involving Elliot Page's tersely vulnerable sacrificial soldier Sinon, is as rousing and as funny as you'd hope.

"The Odyssey" is a veritable banquet, then, of loud, grandiose, *movie-movie* pleasures, so confidently lavish that it can afford to throw away a significant portion of its all-star cast on lily-gilding cameos. Viewed in Imax, in particular, Hoyte van Hoytema's burnt, bleached, sprawling vistas of sand, scrub and sea invite actual awe; ditto the deep electro-orchestral throb of Ludwig Göransson's score. There's so much to feel here at a sensory level that the film gets away with its slightly aloof, soul-skirting chill; we leave it feeling that we've been to hell and back, and exhilaratingly so.

If the language of Homer's epic has been simplified and modernized, the stakes and scale of its storytelling have suffered little corner-cutting.



Penelope (Anne Hathaway) and Telemachus (Tom Holland) hold down the fort while Odysseus is away.

TV REVIEW / ALISON HERMAN

Comic Book Guy

The latest 'Big Bang Theory' spinoff is a creative, genre-swerving romp through the multiverse

Stuart Fails to Save the Universe

Platform HBO Max Premiere date July 23

Episodes 10 Creators Chuck Lorre, Bill Prady, Zak Penn Cast Kevin Sussman, Brian Posehn, John Ross Bowie, Lauren Lapkus

→ In a sea of perfunctory prequels and sequels, you have to hand it to a spinoff that actually comes up with a creative angle. Such is the case with “Stuart Fails to Save the Universe,” the *third* offshoot of “The Big Bang Theory,” which forms a useful contrast with its predecessors. The straightforwardly titled “Young Sheldon,” a single-camera sitcom that ran for seven seasons on CBS before ending in 2024, wound back the clock to trace the childhood of Jim Parsons’ breakout character as a prodigy in Texas; “Georgie & Mandy’s First Marriage,” airing its third season this fall, follows Sheldon’s older brother in his time as a broke newlywed.

Compared with such setups, which color within the lines of characters’ existing biographies, “Stuart Fails” takes a far more innovative approach. The HBO Max comedy — the first “Big Bang” spinoff to air on a streamer rather than on broadcast — does follow a figure from the juggernaut hit as he undertakes his own adventures. But Kevin Sussman’s titular comic book store owner doesn’t merely continue to tend to his small business in Pasadena, California. Instead, Stuart hopscotches through alternate dimensions in search of a way to undo a full-blown apocalypse. It’s a far cry from a few nerds trading one-liners in an apartment, and productively so.

To pull off this hard genre pivot, “Big Bang” co-creators Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady have brought on sci-fi veteran Zak Penn (“X-Men: The Last Stand”) as a collaborator. “Big Bang” was always adjacent to *science*, of course; its protagonists were physicists and biologists in the professional orbit of Caltech, even if the show itself was more easy viewing than intellectually rigorous. But *science fiction* is new terrain, and from its first moments, “Stuart Fails” takes infectious delight in sticking Stuart and “Big



Brian Posehn, Kevin Sussman and Lauren Lapkus play characters beamed into a new reality every episode.

Bang” geologist Bert (Brian Posehn) in the middle of a “Fallout”-style hellscape, complete with steam-punk outfits, zombies and giant flying moths. You see, a couple members of the original “Big Bang” crew accidentally triggered the end of the world through some quantum something-or-other, and an alternate version of Stuart beams in from another timeline to say he alone can fix it.

Stuart and Bert then secure the show’s driving MacGuffin, a machine that beams them into a new reality each episode, from “Big Bang” regular Kripke (John Ross Bowie) — here sporting the same Elmer Fudd-esque speech affect, but with a new day job as a bloodthirsty warlord. Stuart’s ex-Denise (Lauren Lapkus) completes the central quartet, who serve as a grounding baseline while

their surrounding environs vary wildly around them. One moment, they’re in a utopian society with no concept of private property; the next, they’re in a world where everything is basically normal, except people evolved from cows so they eat grass and chew cud. Sometimes the gang are magicians. Sometimes they’re centaurs.

The playful, clever tone of “Stuart Fails” is underscored by a Danny Elfman theme song and a credits sequence that constantly swaps in new, jokey title cards to discourage skipping. (Plus, a literal “do not skip” sign, with an arrow pointing directly at the button.) Run times as short as 15 minutes maintain a breezy feel, and the distance of “Stuart Fails” from the original concept of “Big Bang” ironically makes it easier for familiar faces to drop in. I’m forbidden from disclosing *which* “Big Bang” stars outside the main cast of “Stuart Fails” make an appearance, but those who do can stop by for as few or as many cameos as they want, often while playing completely different people. One timeline’s scientist, it turns out, can be another’s horned demon. Of course, the constant change endemic to “Stuart Fails” means sacrificing some of the comforting sameness of a “Big Bang”-style hangout. But the comic chemistry among the main players provides just enough — and besides, the thrilling potential of a constantly wiped slate is worth the trade.

From its first moments, “Stuart Fails” takes infectious delight in sticking Stuart in the middle of a “Fallout”-style hellscape.



‘Goosebumps Every Time’

→ It was 2016, and Travis Scott was standing on the precipice of becoming hip-hop’s next big thing. Onstage at British Columbia’s FVDED in the Park, the Houston native blazed through the riotous tracks from his first few projects — songs like “Pick Up the Phone” and “Antidote” that have positioned him as rap

music’s most calamitous newcomer — plus Big Sean’s “All Your Fault,” which he outfitted with his signature Auto-Tune yelps.

In retrospect, that was the golden age of Scott’s titanic ascent over the past decade, the culmination of years of building out his own wild world. By then, he’d released a pair of mixtapes, “Owl Pharaoh” and “Days Before Rodeo,” that led to his critically heralded debut album from 2015, “Rodeo.” His performances had become the stuff of lore: He was famously arrested for disorderly conduct at Lollapalooza in 2015 after encouraging audience members to climb over the barriers into the security pit. The following year, fans flocked to witness Scott raging in real time,

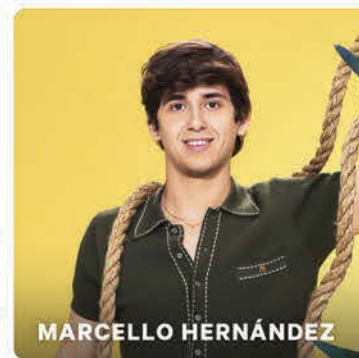
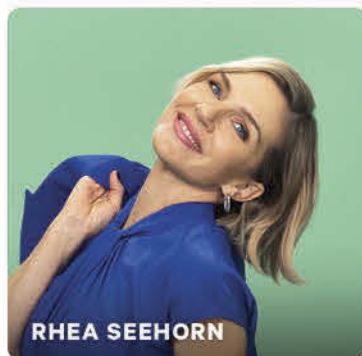
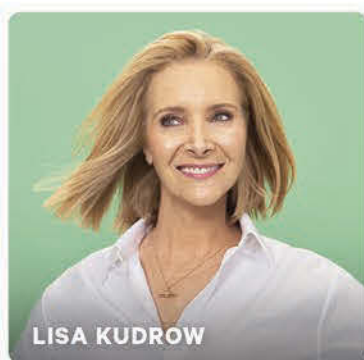
whether during his opening slot on Rihanna’s “Anti” tour or as a guest during Justin Bieber’s “Purpose” concert at Madison Square Garden.

Scott, meanwhile, was looking at the long game. Following the release of his 2016 sophomore album, “Birds in the Trap Sing McKnight,” he took full flight as a mogul by establishing brand deals with Nike and McDonald’s, launching Cactus Jack Records and, most recently, venturing into the world of cinema via an appearance in Christopher Nolan’s “The Odyssey” and a first-look deal with Paramount Pictures. But for that one period a decade ago, Scott was just living in the moment, ready to become a hip-hop superstar. — *Steven J. Horowitz*

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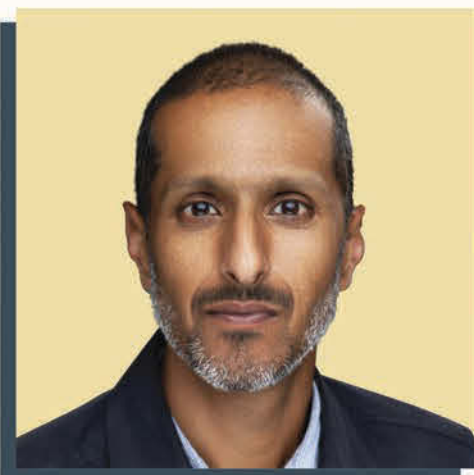


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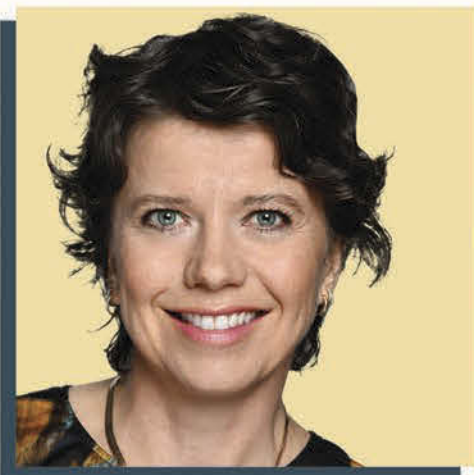
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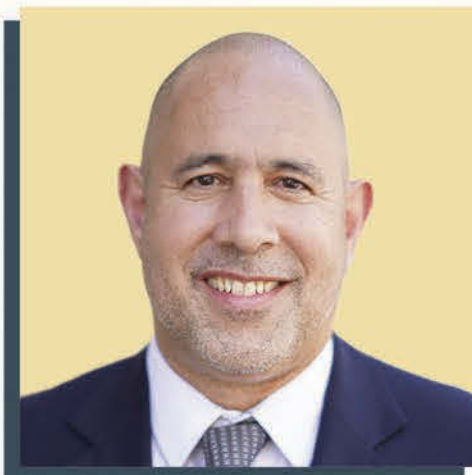
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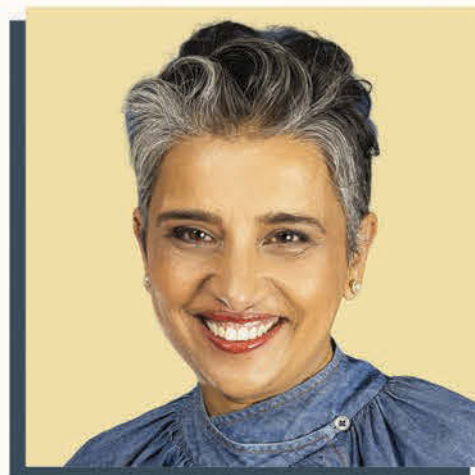
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