

MONTHLY MOVIES

COPYRIGHT (C) T. Rob Brown

Movie Review column for *Dvino Magazine*, a monthly production of *The Laredo Morning Times*.

March 2021

Copyright © 2021 T. Rob Brown, owner TRB Photography & Writing

2021 off to rough cinema start, but expected to pick up

By T. Rob Brown

To say the least, 2021 has been a real disappointment thus far in terms of cinema.

Despite the pandemic, 2020 managed to slip out a few big blockbusters and a handful of notable films. I'm sure I missed some of the year's biggest flicks due to COVID-19 and the closing of all of our local cinemas. As I look through a list of one critic's best films of 2020, I realize I've only seen a handful of these (a much lower number than my usual movie going year). I prefer to see films at the actual cinema as much as possible.

In all fairness, we're barely into the third month of the year as I write this. Even in a typical year, the film scene doesn't really pick up until spring and then launches into the summer blockbusters, lulls a bit in the early fall, then culminates in a cinema-worthy climax of fireworks in the form of the holiday blockbusters. This year might still be able to attain this if more coronavirus vaccines can get distributed and administered so we can resume somewhat normal lives.

Our local cinemas have yet to open back up and that may not change for a bit longer. We even saw, since last month's column was written, that our second-run cinema—often called “the dollar theater”—operated by Cinemark is now closed permanently. That's a sad blow to local moviegoers who wanted to see inexpensive movies on the big screen just before they head to disc and digital media outlets.

For a moment, let's talk about the upcoming 2021 films that show some real blockbuster potential.

With the late February official title release for the third film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe Spider-Man franchise, fans are really gearing up for 2021's *Spider-Man: No Way Home*. Sony and the MCU team up again to bring us our friendly neighborhood wall crawler (Tom Holland) who we last saw fleeing as the infamous cynically jaded journalist J. Jonah Jameson (J.K. Simmons) outed Peter Parker's secret identity at the end of *Spider-Man: Far From Home*.

Fan speculation for this film jumps all over the place due to some interesting casting announcements and "insider" reports that point to an *Into the Spider-Verse* type of story. None of this is substantiated and isn't all that likely—I suspect if we get a Spider-Verse tie-in it will happen late in the film. Unless Holland gives one of his famous slip-ups in one of his media interviews or on his social media accounts, we may not know until the film's Dec. 17, 2021, release.

Sure, the title does hint at the possibility of long-distance travel. Does that mean we're actually going to meet alternate reality versions of Tobey Maguire and Andrew Garfield reprising their own Peter Parker/Spidey roles or even other famous Spider-Verse characters? That still remains to be seen. I personally will get excited when I see Spider-Man 2099 (Miguel O'Hara) finally portrayed on the big screen in more than an animated cameo role.

What do we know for sure? Jamie Foxx, who played villain Electro in *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*, is slated to return again as Electro but Foxx himself said he's not portraying the same Electro—referring to the blue-skinned version we saw previously. We also know that Alfred Molina, who played villain Dr. Otto Gunther Octavius—commonly called "Doc Ock"—in *Spider-Man 2*, is returning for this film as well. Whether he is just playing the scientist version of himself or the actual villain remains to be seen. Also announced for this film is the inclusion of Doctor Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch), which is another reason fans suspect it may be intertwined with the multiverse concept. While not officially announced yet, fans suspect Simmons will again reprise his role as Jameson—this seems like a no-brainer. He originally played the role in the Maguire Spider-Man films directed by Sam Raimi and for years fans continue to talk about how they can't imagine anyone else stepping into those shoes. Coincidentally (perhaps), Raimi is directing *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*, which is slated for 2022.

Other notable upcoming films I'm looking forward to this year, providing there are no further delays, in no specific order: *Godzilla vs. Kong* (March 25), *Ghostbusters: Afterlife* (Nov. 10), *The Suicide Squad* (DC Comics, directed by James Gunn, Aug. 6), *Venom 2* (June 25), *Matrix 4* (Dec. 22), *Dune* (Oct. 1), *Mission: Impossible 7* (Nov. 19), *Death on the Nile* (Sept. 17), *Top Gun: Maverick* (July 2), *Snake Eyes* (G.I. Joe, Oct. 22), *Fast & Furious 9* (F9, June 25), *The Beatles: Get Back* (Aug. 27), Marvel Studios' *Shang-Chi: The Legend of the Ten Rings* (July 9), Marvel Studios' *Eternals* (Nov. 5), and of course, the long-awaited *Black Widow* (May 7) and James Bond's *No Time To Die* (Oct. 8). Sony's *Morbius* was pushed back until Jan. 19, 2022.

In regards to film-related MCU TV releases, we just finished *WandaVision*, which began Jan. 15 on Disney+ and ended in February. I watched every episode—no spoilers here—but be assured it's an original concept that is a great way to bring the official MCU-tie-in shows to the TV format. Up next, we have *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier*, which begins March 19, followed by *Loki* on June 11, and *What If...?* an animated series featuring the voice talents of the MCU, even including the late Chadwick Boseman (Black Panther), debuting sometime later in the year. Marvel rounds up the Disney+ offerings in late 2021 with *Ms. Marvel*, not to be confused with *Captain Marvel*, and *Hawkeye*, which stars Jeremy

Renner as the title character and proves to introduce us to Kate Bishop, the Hawkeye of the Young Avengers.

Also, did they ever update the release for *Free Guy*? That's one I'm really looking forward to and they announced a while back that it had been postponed indefinitely. Ryan Reynolds is one of my favorite actors and this film concept looks original and as fresh as a banana split. It looks like another piece of comedic action genius—with video game culture thrown in for the cherry on top. A quick Google search later reveals the new release date for it is May 21. Well, I guess I have plans during my Maymester break before summer classes.

So what about those 2020 films you might have missed out on? Here's a short list of some of my favorites that I managed to get to watch (not presented in any particular order and omitting *Tenet*, *Bill & Ted Face the Music* and *Wonder Woman 1984*, which we looked at last issue):

- *Soul* (animated, Pixar) directed by Pete r Docter, featuring Jamie Foxx and Tina Fey. An emotional film that makes you rethink your own life and the value of your accomplishments. This film is definitely one of the saddest and deepest films in the Pixar Verse. If you loved *Inside Out*, this film should be right up your alley. Rated PG at 1 hour and 40 minutes. IMDb score: 8.1/10. Rotten Tomatoes Tomatometer: 95% and Audience Score: 88%. Only released internationally in cinemas (domestically on Disney+) with a Box Office Mojo total of \$130.9 million.
- *The Invisible Man* directed by Leigh Whannell, featuring Elisabeth Moss, Aldis Hodge and Storm Reid. While I'm not always a horror film fan, this particular piece was better than I anticipated—despite it being about a woman dealing with a super creepy stalker ex-boyfriend (a subject that gives me the heebie-jeebies). All I can say is that Moss' character was a whole lot braver than I am. Given its title, I expected it to be derivative of other similarly titled films but it held its own. Rated R at 2 hours and 4 minutes. IMDb score: 7.1/10. Rotten Tomatoes Tomatometer: 91% and Audience Score: 88%. Released domestically and internationally with a Box Office Mojo total of \$143.15 million.
- *News of the World* directed by Paul Greengrass, featuring Tom Hanks and Helena Zengel. As a longtime journalist and a fan of the Western genre, I found this film to be an interesting look at the people who read the news in communities before we had TV news anchors. While that's the concept behind this film, the heart of the film is really about Hanks' character's mission to return a young girl to her family and the father-daughter-like bond that grows between them. Rated PG-13 at 1 hour and 58 minutes. IMDb score: 6.8/10. Rotten Tomatoes Tomatometer: 88% and Audience Score: 89%. Released domestically only with a Box Office Mojo total of \$12.19 million.
- *Borat Subsequent Moviefilm* (on Amazon Prime) directed by Jason Woliner, featuring Sacha Baron Cohen and Maria Bakalova. While I wasn't a huge fan of the original film, which I thought was going mostly for shock value, I saw this one scrolling across my suggested list on Amazon Prime and decided to give it a try. In many ways it was a better film than the original. On the surface, it seems like a silly movie about silly people doing silly things. But once you look past that clever veneer applied by Cohen, you see a world filled with satire poking fun at outdated world views and U.S. politics—with some situational humor thrown in for good measure. The scenes featuring former New York

City Major Rudy Giuliani were shocking—especially when you find out he had no idea he was being filmed. It really raises questions about the ethics and morals of the people we choose to lead us. Rated R at 1 hour and 35 minutes. IMDb score: 6.7/10. Rotten Tomatoes Tomatometer: 85% and Audience Score: 64%. Released domestically only on Amazon Prime, strategically just prior to the U.S. election, this film has no Box Office Mojo record. For comparison, the original *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* (2006) brought in \$262.55 million worldwide.

Again, until it's safe to return to our local cinemas, we'll continue to bask in the electronic glow of films like these. As they say both on the stage and in Hollywood, "The show must go on."