

# 'Dunkirk,' 'Get Out' may give Oscars a crowd-pleasing punch

The stranglehold that autumn prestige films have on Oscar season just might be wilting in the summer sun. Christopher Nolan's World War II epic "Dunkirk" hits theaters Friday, but the overflowing reviews have already made it abundantly clear: It's a major Oscar contender and a best-picture front-runner - even in July. And "Dunkirk," which analysts expect to debut this weekend with \$60 million-plus in domestic ticket sales, might not be the only box-office hit to crash this year's awards season. The zeitgeist-grabbing sensations "Get Out" and "Wonder Woman" could also be players come Academy Awards time.

It is, of course, exceptionally early to handicap the Oscars. And it's far from uncommon for early breakouts to recede once the fall film festivals start firing out heavily anticipated releases from Hollywood's most acclaimed directors. Steven Spielberg, Paul Thomas Anderson and Alexander Payne are just some of those waiting in the wings this year. But any influx from the rest of the calendar year would be a welcome change of pace for an awards season that has in recent years only further solidified as a predominantly September-December affair. Last year, August's "Hell or High Water" was the earliest best-picture nominee.

### Major motivation

Aside from spreading out what are potentially some of the year's best movies, any awards love for the likes of "Dunkirk," "Get Out" or "Wonder Woman" would give the Oscars something it has



This image released by Warner Bros Pictures shows a scene from "Dunkirk." — AP

often lacked in recent years: major release crowd-pleasers. "It's not really a factor for us, the awards thing," says Emma Thomas, producer of "Dunkirk." "This film we primarily thought of as an entertainment. For us, we make films for audiences. My feeling is always: If your film works and people engage with it, anything that comes later is a huge bonus."

"Dunkirk" may bear the look and seriousness of an Oscar season film, right down to the wool coats. But shot in 70mm IMAX, it also has much of the visceral spectacle of a summer movie. Thomas and Nolan have also previously had success July. It's when they released "Inception" (which earned eight Oscar nods and won four

awards) and "The Dark Knight." The Oscar oversight of the latter, released in 2008, was seen as a major motivation for the expansion of the best-picture category the next year from five nominees to up to 10.

"We've had very good luck in July in the past and we like this date. It's an accessible movie," said Thomas. "When you put movies at the end of the year, you're sort of saying something about it. You're almost limiting it, in a way, and we don't want to limit the film." The Oscars haven't been without crowd-pleasers. "La La Land" made more than \$440 million globally. "Hidden Figures" charmed North American audiences to \$230 million. The year before, the May-

released "Mad Max: Fury Road" crashed the Academy Awards with 10 nominations and six wins. "Dunkirk" may be a similar force in craft categories. Its ensemble nature may leave less room for acting attention, though recent Oscar-winner Mark Rylance is a standout. More notably, Nolan seems likely to finally land his - some would say overdue - first directing nomination. He has already earned the praise of fellow filmmakers like Rian Johnson (who called the film "an all timer") and Jon Favreau ("believe the hype").

### Digitized movie world

Other summer movies might also shake up the Oscars. The acclaimed romantic comedy "The Big Sick" has the backing of Amazon, which last year similarly acquired "Manchester by the Sea" at Sundance and made it an Oscar heavyweight. "The War for the Planet of the Apes" even has some buzz, including pleas for considering Andy Serkis' motion-capture performance as the ape Caesar. Such an honor, while unlikely, would be a game-changer in an increasingly digitized movie world. Jordan Peele's horror sensation "Get Out" (\$252 million worldwide after opening in late February) could well be the first horror film nominated for best picture since 1991's "The Silence of the Lambs." At the least, Peele should be a likely nominee for best screenplay.

Patty Jenkins' "Wonder Woman" has been an even bigger box-office dynamo and earned nearly as good reviews as "Get Out." Whereas Peele's film was received as landmark film for its fusion of genre with a satirical critique of race in

America, "Wonder Woman" set a new record for top-grossing film by a female director. Jenkins and star Gal Gadot could well be in the hunt. The unlikely awards run last season of "Deadpool" suggested voters may be open to awarding a superhero film. A campaign for Jenkins, who helmed the Oscar-winning "Monster," would be closely watched since only four women have ever been nominated for best director. Kathryn Bigelow, the sole winner of the four, also has a film upcoming: her ambitious Detroit riots drama "Detroit," out Aug. 4.

Usually, a highly relevant, socially conscious film from one of Hollywood's most celebrated filmmakers would be plunged right into awards season. But the calculus was different for "Detroit," which was deliberately timed to the 50th anniversary of the riots. And she, like many others, doesn't love the increased emphasis on Oscar season. "It's not why we make these films," said Bigelow. "The motivation behind the release has to do with the 50-year anniversary," she said. "I think it's important to honor that and the resiliency of the city of Detroit. Whatever happens along any other lines, I have no idea." Bigelow knows from experience. Her "The Hurt Locker" was a June release but went on to best "Avatar" at the Oscars. "To say that it was even a remote thought would be in inaccurate," she said, laughing. — AP



This image released by Universal Pictures shows, from left, Tiffany Haddish, Regina Hall, Queen Latifah and Jada Pinkett Smith in a scene from the comedy "Girls Trip." — AP

## 'Girls Trip' a wonderfully hilarious destination

Get ready to know the name Tiffany Haddish. If there were such a thing as Comedy Oscars, she would win for "Girls Trip." Like Melissa McCarthy in "Bridesmaids," Haddish steals this film from her big-name co-stars: Queen Latifah, Regina Hall and Jada Pinkett Smith. All four actresses have shining moments of comedy and heart in director Malcolm D. Lee's ode to female friendships, thanks to the winning script by Kenya Barris ("black-ish") and Tracy Oliver ("Barbershop: The Next Cut"), but Haddish emerges as the most memorable. She has a scene with a grapefruit that will go down in the annals of hilarious movie moments.

The "Girls Trip" here is to the Essence Festival in New Orleans. A group of friends who called themselves the Flossy Posse back in college in the '90s travel there for a long-awaited reunion after one of their members, self-help guru Ryan (Hall), is invited to give the festival's keynote speech. She's joined by her longtime besties: Journalist Sasha (Latifah), who runs a celebrity-gossip website; Lisa (Pinkett Smith), an uptight, divorced nurse with two young children, and brash, outspoken Dina (Haddish), who hasn't stopped partying since graduation.

Ryan and her retired football star husband Stewart (Mike Coulter) have billed themselves as the couple that has it all, and they have a lot riding on her Essence appearance: They're poised to sign a major corporate contract at the festival that would bring them Oprah-level success. Their agent (Kate Walsh), who insists on awkwardly using street slang, warns Ryan against getting too "turned" over her girls' weekend, lest she jeopardize the deal. The posse's trouble begins when Sasha receives a paparazzi picture of Stewart in a compromising position. Could it be the perfect couple isn't so perfect after all? What about their lucrative contract?

The women in "Girls Trip" are so distinct and well-drawn, they're universally relatable. Everyone has a wild friend they wish was like Dina or one as tightly wound as Lisa. Many of us know people so driven they might compromise their personal standards to achieve more

public goals. If only we were all as glamorous as Sasha, who consistently rocks incredible hairdos, as composed as Ryan or as riotous as Dina, who's like Id personified. Her enumeration of what she plans to do to Stewart in revenge for his scandalous photo is another scene-stealing moment. Her plans are so graphic, they can't be printed here. The Flossy Posse is #friendship-goals.

### Nothing is gratuitous

"Girls Trip" definitely earns its R rating. There's crude language, overt sexual jokes, drug references, public urination, bar fights and full-frontal male nudity. And, girl, it is funny. Nothing is gratuitous. The story is both outrageous and realistic, grounded by the women's friendship. Because the film was actually shot during the Essence Festival, there are countless cameos. Look for Mariah Carey, Maxwell, Ava DuVernay, Terry McMillan, Iyanla Vanzant, Morris Chestnut, Faith Evans, Common, Diddy, Ne-Yo, Doug E Fresh and many others.

This film delivers for all adult audiences. Regardless of your race or gender, you'll be laughing all the way home. The members of the Flossy Posse are fully realized people: accomplished people trying to have fun and find themselves as they navigate their grown-up lives. They just do it with more outrageous swagger than most.

I can't wait to see this film again (and again), and to watch Haddish in whatever she does next. "Girls Trip," a Universal Pictures release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association of America for "for crude and sexual content throughout, pervasive language, brief graphic nudity, and drug material." Running time: 122 minutes. Three and a half stars out of four. MPAA definition of R: Restricted. Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian. — 'Despacito' declared most streamed song ever 'Despacito' declared most streamed song ever 'Despacito' declared most streamed song ever — AP

## 2 NEW HARRY POTTER BOOKS SET TO BE PUBLISHED IN OCTOBER

Two new books from the Harry Potter universe are set to be released as part of a British exhibition that celebrates the 20th anniversary of the launch of the series. The British Library's Harry Potter exhibition, "A History of Magic," opens in October and runs through February 2018. In an earnings statement released Tuesday, British publishing house Bloomsbury revealed that two new Potter books will be released in conjunction with the event.

"Harry Potter: A History of Magic - The Book of the Exhibition" promises to take readers through subjects studied at Potter's wizarding school, Hogwarts. "Harry Potter - A Journey Through A History of Magic" will touch on mystical things such as alchemy, unicorns and ancient witchcraft. Both books will be published in October. — AP



This file photo shows the Palace Theatre in central London which is showing a stage production of, "Harry Potter and the Cursed Child." — AP



In this Sept. 4, 1996 file photo, Rapper Tupac Shakur arrives at New York's Radio City Music Hall for the 13th Annual MTV Video Music Awards. — AP photos



In this file photo, Madonna, left, sits with her adopted children David, Stella and Mercy, at the opening of The Mercy James Institute for Pediatric Surgery and Intensive Care.

## Auction of Madonna's panties, love letter from Tupac halted

An impending auction of pop star Madonna's personal items, including a love letter from her ex-boyfriend the late rapper Tupac Shakur, a pair of previously worn panties and a hairbrush containing her hair, was halted by a judge on Tuesday. Manhattan state Supreme Court Judge Gerald Leibovitz ordered Gotta Have It! Collectibles to pull 22 items from its rock-and-roll-themed auction scheduled for yesterday. The Material Girl had earlier sought an emergency court order saying she was "shocked to learn" of the planned online auction of the Tupac letter and had no idea it was no longer in her possession.

The fact that I have attained celebrity status as a result of success in my career does not obviate my right to maintain my privacy, including with

regard to highly personal items," Madonna said in court papers. "I understand that my DNA could be extracted from a piece of my hair. It is outrageous and grossly offensive that my DNA could be auctioned for sale to the general public." Court papers said the Tupac letter was expected to fetch up to \$400,000. Tupac, one of the best-selling rappers of all time, dated Madonna in the early 1990s and died of injuries suffered in a Las Vegas drive-by shooting in 1996.

Madonna, behind such hit songs as "Like a Virgin" and "Vogue," has sold hundreds of millions of albums. Other Madonna items scheduled to be auctioned were private photographs taken at a bachelorette party at her Miami home, personal letters and cassette tapes of unreleased recordings.

Madonna's court papers name Darlene Lutz, a former friend, art consultant and "frequent overnight guest" in Madonna's home when she was "not in residence," as behind the sale of the property.

A spokesman for Lutz and the auction house said the allegations will be "vigorously challenged and refuted" in court. "Madonna and her legal army have taken what we believe to be completely baseless and meritless action to temporarily halt the sale of Ms. Lutz's legal property," spokesman Pete Siegel told the New York Post. "We are confident that the Madonna memorabilia will be back." — AP

## 'Despacito' declared most streamed song ever



In this file photo, singers Luis Fonsi, left and Daddy Yankee perform during the Latin Billboard Awards in Coral Gables, Fla. — AP

Puerto Rican singer Luis Fonsi's "Despacito," whose reggaeton beat has swept the globe, yesterday was named the most streamed song of all time. The song's label, Universal Music Latin Entertainment, said "Despacito" in its original and remixed versions had reached 4.6 billion streams across platforms including YouTube and Spotify. "Despacito" - a racy track full of sexual innuendo which features Puerto Rican rapper Daddy Yankee - went viral soon after its release in January and found an even wider audience in April when pop celebrity Justin Bieber appeared in a remix.

"Despacito" dethroned another track with Bieber, the Canadian's 2015 song "Sorry," which has 4.38 billion plays, according to Universal. "Despacito" - which means "slowly" in Spanish - has spent 10 weeks at number one on the US singles chart, the first Spanish-language song to reach the top spot since "Macarena" in 1996. "Streaming is a connector for audiences worldwide and it has helped my music reach every corner of the planet," Fonsi said in a statement.

Lucian Grainge, chairman and CEO of Universal Music Group, the world's largest label conglomerate, called "Despacito" the biggest hit of 2017. "Streaming has opened up the possibility of a song with a different beat, from a different culture and in a different language to become a juggernaut of success around the world," Grainge said in a statement.

Reggaeton - which has roots in Jamaican dance hall and hip-hop - has historically provided a voice to black Puerto Ricans and has been shunned by the US territory's elite. Streaming - the on-demand selection of music online - has rapidly grown in recent years. No central body combines streaming data across all platforms, giving leeway to labels to announce figures and feats. "Despacito" has soared on YouTube where it is already the fourth most watched video ever at 2.66 billion views. While popular on Spotify, it was in 39th place on the all-time list yesterday. — AFP