

YOUTUBE FOLLOWS AMAZON INTO MOVIE THEATERS

YouTube has announced it is making a movie in-house to be released in theaters, in a development seen as a step towards the model of new-media innovator Amazon. “Vulture Club,” which is in post-production, stars Oscar winner Susan Sarandon (“Dead Man Walking,” “Thelma and Louise”) as an emergency room nurse whose son has been kidnapped by terrorists.

Directed by Iranian-American Maryam Keshavarz (“Circumstance”), the thriller also stars Edie Falco (“The Sopranos,” “Nurse Jackie”) and Matt Bomer (“Magic Mike,” “American Horror Story: Hotel”). “Vulture Club” follows the singular journey of a woman abandoned by her government who finds community in the most unexpected places,” Keshavarz said in a statement. “It’s an honor to work with Susan Sarandon, Edie Falco and Matt Bomer who are the incredible talents and an innovator like YouTube to tell this timely story.”

Online entertainment magazine IndieWire hailed the move by YouTube Red—the Google-owned company’s \$10-a-month streaming service—as “a significant strategy shift.” The platform showed Barbara Kopple documentary “This is Everything: Gigi Gorgeous” on limited New York and Los Angeles theatrical runs ahead of its February YouTube Red release. But the company appears to have changed direction since telling

IndieWire last year it was not making movie theaters a fulcrum of its release strategy.

Powerful perspective

YouTube Red, founded in 2014, has distributed around a dozen feature-length fictional movies for its subscribers and is working on a handful more. It moved into films for the general movie-going public with sci-fi comedy “Lazer Team” in January 2016, but that was a low-budget project with unknown actors that failed to make a dent at the box office. “Vulture Club,” with its all-star cast, belongs in a different league alongside two other recent YouTube Red acquisitions—Eminem’s satirical hip-hop drama “Bodied” and Morgan Spurlock’s “Super Size Me 2: Holy Chicken!” While the Eminem movie is also bound for theatrical release, YouTube dropped the Spurlock sequel after the filmmaker admitted to sexual misconduct and harassment in the past.

In “Vulture Club,” Sarandon—recently nominated for Emmy, Golden Globe and Screen Actors Guild awards for FX miniseries “Feud: Bette and Joan”—plays a mother who struggles to free her kidnapped journalist son. After running into roadblocks with government agencies, she discovers a clandestine community of correspondents and advocates who might be able to help the war reporter,



In this file photo Susan Sarandon attends the Premiere of ‘Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story’ during 2017 Tribeca Film Festival at Cinopolis Chelsea in New York City. — AFP

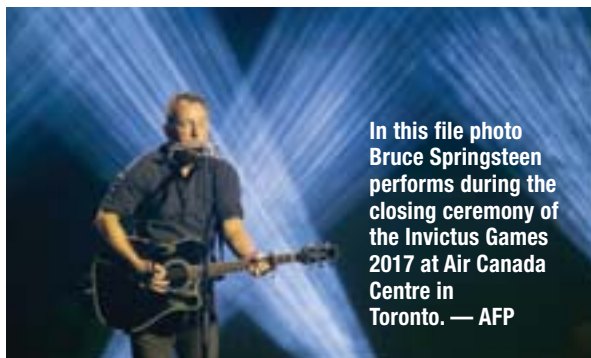
played by Julian Morris (“Pretty Little Liars”).

“This emotional drama grapples with relevant issues journalists around the world face today,” said Susanne Daniels, YouTube’s global head of original content. “Maryam Keshavarz lends her powerful perspective as an Iranian-American filmmaker, and Susan Sarandon’s moving performance immediately drew us into this compelling film.”

Sanctity of cinema

YouTube Red said principal photography on “Vulture Club” was complete, but gave few details on its theatrical release other than confirming its big-screen debut would precede its streaming release. Netflix has shown little regard for the perceived sanctity of cinema, annoying some filmmakers—notably Christopher Nolan—and sparking calls for bans from film festivals by debuting its movies online only or at the same time as in theaters. Amazon Studios, on the other hand, has partnered with Bleecker Street, Lionsgate and other entertainment companies to give its original movies a theatrical window of several weeks ahead of their internet release. The company is now accepted in the industry as a conventional movie studio, its back catalogue including Oscar nominees and winners such as “The Big Sick,” “Manchester by the Sea” and “The Salesman.”

The company plans to average approximately one movie a month and its upcoming in-house theatrical slate includes Luca Guadagnino’s horror remake “Suspiria” and Gus Van Sant drama “Don’t Worry, He Won’t Get Far on Foot.” “We don’t have any news to report on a theatrical partner at this stage. Perhaps later once we identify a partner,” a YouTube Red representative told IndieWire of “Vulture Club.” — AFP



In this file photo Bruce Springsteen performs during the closing ceremony of the Invictus Games 2017 at Air Canada Centre in Toronto. — AFP

Bruce Springsteen extends Broadway shows until year end

Bruce Springsteen on Wednesday extended a run on Broadway until December as the rock legend’s unusually intimate shows keep fetching top dollar. It marks the third extension by Springsteen, who started the performances in October in the 960-seat Walter Kerr Theatre. Excluding several breaks, Springsteen will perform four to five shows weekly until his new closing date of December 15.

The show by Springsteen, who for decades has sold out arenas, has become one of the hottest tickets on Broadway, often drawing more than blockbuster musical “Hamilton” on the resale market. Springsteen has tried to prevent ticket scalping through a new fan verification system by Ticketmaster but many fans have nonetheless been distraught by resale prices that can run up to \$1,000.

Announcing the extension of his show on Facebook, Springsteen said that only fans who previously signed up for verification but could not buy tickets would be invited to the latest round, for which prices begin at \$75 a seat. The 68-year-old balladeer of the working class has earned a reputation for marathon, free-wheeling concerts with his E Street Band. By contrast, Springsteen on Broadway performs alone with a piano and guitar, with a career-spanning setlist that changes little each night. —AFP

Troma guru Lloyd Kaufman: My career in the slimelight

With a library of 800-plus movies, a cult following and a record for giving stars their break, Lloyd Kaufman could be the biggest movie mogul you’ve never heard of. For half a century, the 72-year-old co-founder of Troma Entertainment—the world’s oldest independent film studio—has been the enfant terrible of comedy horror, a low-budget Abbott and Costello for the gross-out crowd. Troma’s iconic B-movie back catalogue includes such squelchy, sanguinary delights as “The Toxic Avenger,” “Surf Nazis Must Die,” “Poultrygeist: Night of the Chicken Dead” and “Tromeo and Juliet.”

The movies—mainly shown these days in art house theaters and on college campuses—haven’t made money since the 1990s but Troma’s mutants have become icons of American schlock culture. “Troma has left a big mark on the countryside of the moving images industry. But we are not that well-known,” laments Kaufman, who describes the studio he founded with university friend Michael Herz as “jalapeno peppers on the cultural pizza.”

Troma was a stepping stone to Oscars glory for Oliver Stone and Kevin Costner as well as a filmmaking hothouse for James Gunn (“Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 1 and 2”) and Trey Parker and Matt Stone (“South Park,” “Team America”). Other luminaries whose early work can be found in Troma’s library of self-produced and acquired movies include Robert De Niro, Dustin Hoffman, Vincent D’Onofrio, Samuel L. Jackson and Eli Roth.



Lloyd Kaufman, President and co-founder of Troma Entertainment, poses with his red tie of cows going ‘Moo!’ in Marina del Rey, California. — AFP

Not for the thin-skinned or politically correct, the filmography is a Pandora’s box of cannibalism, radioactive goo, bodily fluids and pneumatic breasts, not to mention relentlessly mocked racial, religious and sexual stereotypes. AFP caught up with Kaufman at his oceanside hotel as he visited Los Angeles for the west coast premiere of his latest opus, the onerously-titled “Return to Return to Nuke ‘Em High: AKA Vol. 2.”

Disco-dancing chicken

The second part of an \$800,000 revisiting of Troma’s 1986 classic “Class of Nuke ‘Em High,” it deals with environmental degradation, bullying, anti-LGBTQ prejudice and

school shootings, all in the inimitable Troma style. The movie reunites fans with Tromaville High School classmates and lovers Chrissy and Lauren, who battle fellow students who have turned into vicious mutants after eating contaminated tacos as part of a corrupt school meals program.

“Poultrygeist,” a satire of the chemical-industrial food complex, focuses on a fast food restaurant built on a native American burial ground that sparks a disco-dancing chicken-human hybrid zombie apocalypse. “The Toxic Avenger,” considered by most to be Kaufman’s finest work, stars 90-pound (40-kilogram) weakling Melvin Junko, who falls into a vat of chemical waste and emerges as Toxie, New Jersey’s first superhero.

Pretty much ignored upon its release in 1984, it eventually proved to be Troma’s breakthrough into the mainstream consciousness, celebrated by arthouse types from Greenwich Village to Tokyo. It has spawned three sequels, a stage musical, a Marvel comic, video game and a children’s cartoon series, and is due to be inducted into the US Library of Congress this year. “The people in Tromaville are... perfectly capable of running their own lives but they suffer,” Kaufman says.

“They are victims of a conspiracy of the labor elite—labor leaders who make millions of dollars while the constituency is eating dog food.” To say Kaufman is outspoken would be to under-sludge the radioactive pudding. A twinkle in his eye, he enjoys pulling the rug from under establishment figures he considers pompous or corrupt. — AFP