

Lifestyle | Music & Music



US-German actress Zazie Beetz



US actor Josh Pais



US actress Frances Conroy



British actor Leigh Gill

Security stepped up as 'JOKER' opens in US movie theaters

Police in major US cities were on alert on Thursday as "Joker" opened in movie theaters after weeks of publicity surrounding its disturbing portrait of a bullied loner raised fears it might spark violence. "Joker," an origin story about Batman's comic-book arch nemesis, stars Joaquin Phoenix in what movie reviewers have called a brilliant but terrifying performance as a mentally unhinged outcast who unwittingly finds fame through an act of violence.

The DC Comics villain is associated with a 2012 mass shooting at a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, a suburb of Denver, during a screening of a different Batman film, "The Dark Knight Rises." Families of some of the victims expressed concern about the new film, and it will not be shown in the Aurora multiplex. Officers wearing helmets and armed with assault rifles stood outside a screening of "Joker" at the New York Film Festival on Wednesday night, where audiences had their bags searched and K9 officers were on duty, video footage showed.

Police in New York, Los Angeles and Chicago said in statements that, while they knew of no specific threats, they were deploying additional officers or closely monitoring movie theaters where the "Joker" is playing. Hollywood website Deadline cited an unidentified New York law enforcement official as saying that plainclothes officers would be stationed inside some movie theaters in the city. The NYPD could not confirm the report. Charles Kiwacz, 31, described the Aurora shooting as "an isolated incident."

"I don't think there's any fear at all. I think it's the exact opposite - people wanting to go out and show that this movie can be just that, just a movie," the podcast host and producer said as he bought a ticket for "Joker" near New York's Times Square. Tyson Sheehan, 32, a Los Angeles-area music student from Australia, said he was keen to see the film after "looking at all the trailers and everything," but jitters about its subject matter, coupled with what he sees as "lax" US gun laws, gave him pause.

"It's definitely deterred me from going into the theater and seeing it ... at least for the first week or two," he said as he strolled along Hollywood Boulevard on Thursday evening. Costumes and face masks have been banned for moviegoers at two US theater chains - AMC and Landmark - while the Alamo Drafthouse cinema group warned parents not to bring their children. The Parents Television Council (PTC), a media watchdog, issued a similar warning on Thursday. "Parents may believe that this film is appropriate for kids given that it is an extension of the popular Batman franchise," the PTC said in a statement.

Movie studio Warner Bros. said last week the film was not an endorsement of real-world violence. "It is not the intention of the film, the filmmakers or the studio to hold this character up as a hero," Warner Bros. said in a statement. Despite the controversy, the movie is expected to take in a bumper \$80 million or more on its opening weekend in North America, according to box-office analysts.

"Joker" director Todd Phillips criticized people who have attacked the film without seeing it. "I didn't imagine the level of discourse that it's reached in the world, honestly," Variety quoted him as saying at the New York Film Festival on Wednesday. "I think it's OK that it sparks conversations and there are debates around it. The film is the statement, and it's great to talk about it, but it's much more helpful if you've seen it."



From campy clown to terrifying madman, **Joker** no longer a laughing matter

There are no capes, no special powers and no battles between good and evil in the new "Joker" movie, whose portrayal of the most famous villain in comic book history is the most chilling twist on the character in 50 years. The Joker has been depicted on television and in movies since 1966 and has undergone a series of ever darker transformations from his early days as a campy clown with a mirthless laugh. "It's barely the same character," said Matthew Belloni, editorial director of the Hollywood Reporter. "I think the Joker has reflected the times in which he is portrayed."

"Joker," starring Joaquin Phoenix and opening in movie theaters worldwide this week after winning the top prize at the Venice film festival last month, is the first film where the Joker is the lead character but there is no Batman. Set in 1980s New York, the Warner Bros film is a standalone origin story that depicts the man who becomes Batman's arch-nemesis as an isolated, bullied, delusional, mentally-ill loser who unwittingly inspires a populist rebellion manned by other outcasts adopting red noses and clown masks.

"The new Joker is a plunge into nihilism. There is no redemption at all. It is a lot grimmer to watch than even Heath Ledger's Joker in 'The Dark Knight,'" said David Crow, an associate editor at pop culture website Den of Geek. Phoenix, 44, whose performance is seen by awards watchers as a likely contender for a best actor Oscar next year, told reporters in Venice in August, "I didn't refer to any past creations of this character."

Largely a prankster

Phoenix's take on the Joker is far removed from Cesar Romero, who was the first actor to play the role in the 1960s "Batman" television series, which was mainly aimed at children. "Romero didn't even shave his mustache for the role. He put the make-up on top of the mustache. He

had a lot of fun with it," said Crow. In 1989, Jack Nicholson brought his edgy, maniacal touch to the character in the "Batman" movie but was still largely a prankster.

Ledger reinvented him as unsettling and unhinged in 2008 in "The Dark Knight" in 2008, when the Joker became a terrorist in a post-Sept. 11 2001 era beset by fears of anarchy and chaos. Yet Ledger, who won a posthumous supporting actor Oscar for the role, "still played it a bit like a rock star, there was a bit of grunge glamour," said Crow. "Batman gets to stop him in the end. He does blow up a hospital but he never took it to a truly irredeemable place," added Crow.

Phoenix, by contrast, turns in a performance so nerve-racking that it is difficult to watch at times, said Belloni. "If this was not a comic book character it would be among the most chilling characters I have ever seen in film. It's really disturbing," Belloni said. The film has an R rating in the United States, meaning those under 17 need to be accompanied by a parent. "It's not for kids, and they won't like it anyway," the Alamo Drafthouse movie theater chain said in a warning on its website ahead of the opening weekend.—Reuters

In reversal, Placido Domingo to receive Mexico music prize

Opera superstar Placido Domingo will receive Mexico's Batuta prize in classical music after all, organizers said Friday, a day after stating it would be withheld over a flood of sexual harassment accusations. Domingo was chosen in May to receive the first edition of the prize in Mexico City during a ceremony this Saturday, along with 15 other honorees. However, organizers said Thursday they had decided to put his award on hold "until all this has been clarified."

Changing course again Friday, they decided Domingo would in fact receive the award, but said he would not attend the ceremony in person, instead addressing the gala by video. "We wish to clarify that the organizing committee has not withdrawn Maestro Domingo's award. On the contrary, the classical music community celebrates the Spanish tenor's six decades of absolute dedication to the arts," they said in a statement. Domingo "will personally address a special message to the ceremony," they added.

"We are still going to give him the prize. We just hope for better times ahead and that everything gets better for him," the head of the organizing committee, Rene Platini, told AFP. The latest drama comes after Domingo, 78, resigned Wednesday as general director of the Los Angeles Opera, effectively ending his career in the United States. He also withdrew last week from all performances at New York's Metropolitan Opera. Several other US opera houses have cancelled concerts featuring

him because of the sexual harassment allegations. Domingo is accused by 20 women of forcibly kissing, grabbing or fondling them, in incidents going back at least to the 1980s. The "King of Opera" has responded that "all my interactions and relationships were always welcomed and consensual." Highlighting international fault lines in the #MeToo scandal, Domingo's career has continued to thrive in Europe even as it is imperiled in the United States.

He performed to a chorus of bravos this summer in Austria and Hungary, and has upcoming concerts in Zurich and Moscow. The Batuta, which organizers hope to make an annual prize, will be awarded to 16 honorees including British composer Michael Nyman, Mexican soprano Maria Luisa Tamez and Mexican conductor Enrique Batiz, who is himself facing sexual assault allegations.—AFP



Spanish tenor Placido Domingo gestures as he performs during his concert in the newly inaugurated sports and culture centre 'St Gellert Forum' in Szeged, southern Hungary. — AFP

Late INXS singer remembered in intimate film 'Mystify'

A new documentary seeks to move away from "rumors and tabloid headlines" to paint an intimate portrait of late INXS frontman Michael Hutchence, charting his rise to global stardom and personal troubles. "Mystify: Michael Hutchence" features interviews with family members, colleagues and former partners - includ-

ing singer Kylie Minogue and model Helena Christensen - about the rock singer, who was found dead in a Sydney hotel room in 1997 aged 37. A coroner ruled he had committed suicide.

Hutchence found fame as the charismatic singer and lyricist of Australian rock band INXS, which formed in the late 1970s and is known for songs like "Need You Tonight", "Never Tear Us Apart", "Mystify" and "Suicide Blonde". Director Richard Lowenstein, who knew Hutchence on a professional and personal level, said he wanted to provide "a compassionate and authentic record left behind of a very important part of the history of popular music". — Reuters

Beatles classic 'Abbey Road' tops charts again after 50 years

Classic Beatles album "Abbey Road" is back at number one in Britain half a century after its first release, with the band breaking their own record for the longest gap between stints at the top of the charts. The band's final studio album with its instantly recognizable zebra-crossing cover came out in September 1969, six days after John Lennon told his bandmates he was leaving the group. It was the UK's best-selling album for 17 weeks, and on Friday a special 50th-anniversary edition featuring unheard material took the top spot once again.

"It's hard to believe that Abbey Road still holds up after all these years. But then again it's a bloody cool album," tweeted band member Paul McCartney. With 49 years and 252 days since its last reign, the album has had the longest gap between UK number ones-a record previously held by the Fab Four's "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band".

Two years ago a 50th-anniversary edition of "Sgt. Pepper", which Rolling Stone magazine has named the greatest album of all time, topped the charts again after 49 years and 125 days.

Last month, hundreds of Beatles fans mobbed the street outside Abbey Road Studios in northwest London to celebrate five decades since the band were snapped at the pedestrian crossing there. The photograph of Lennon leading Ringo Starr, McCartney and George Harrison over the road in single file became an all-time classic when it appeared on the "Abbey Road" sleeve, which unusually did not feature the name of the band or the record. The album, which features songs including "Come Together" and "Here Comes the Sun", was also the week's best-selling vinyl, shifting around 9,000 physical copies.—AFP