

'Made in Italy' film becomes healing process for Neeson and son

Eleven years after the sudden death of actress Natasha Richardson, her husband Liam Neeson and their son have found renewed healing in their first film together, "Made in Italy." "Reading the script was like, what? This is so weird. Like, surely Mom has a hand at, like, why this is happening right now,"



Liam Neeson and Micheal Richardson

said Micheal Richardson. The film, out on demand on various broadcast platforms today, centers around a father and his estranged son who attempt to renovate a Tuscan home inherited from his late wife.

Natasha Richardson, the star of movies like "The Parent Trap," died at age 45 after suffering a severe brain injury in a skiing accident in Canada in 2009. Writer and director James D'Arcy wrote the script before Richardson died, and when he sent it to Neeson, it was with a lot of trepidation. "I thought we could get a pretty insulting note back saying, 'how dare you send him a script like that?'" And actually, it was completely the opposite. He really responded to it personally," D'Arcy said.

Neeson suggested his real-life son be cast in the film, but wanted to make sure Richardson was protected. "He's a pretty young man and he had a terrible trauma 10 years ago. And I did not want him to be traumatized in the making of the film," Neeson said. The movie is filled with romance, comedy and a message of hope - which Neeson hopes helps people during the stresses of the coronavirus pandemic. "It's important to say that we have each other. We have to help each other," he said. —Reuters

From omelet to octopus, Gomez gets quarantine busy with TV cooking show



Selena Gomez

Singer-actress Selena Gomez has been cooking up a storm during the coronavirus lockdown and is now ready to share her hilarious and sometimes embarrassing efforts with the rest of the world. "Selena + Chef," a 10-episode unscripted series in which famous chefs appear remotely to teach Gomez to cook dishes ranging from omelets to octopus, gets its debut on the HBO MAX streaming platform on Aug. 13. It was shot using remote cameras inside Gomez's kitchen in her Los Angeles area home where the "Lose You to Love Me" singer was in quarantine with her grandparents and three friends.

"I thought this would be something lighthearted, because I was getting definitely down," Gomez, 28, told television reporters during a preview on Wednesday. "This was an opportunity to make people smile. I hope they are going to laugh because I look like a fool," said Gomez, whose 185 million Instagram following is one of the largest in the world. "I love cooking, I just don't know how to do it all the time." Spills, burns and sometimes inedible dishes emerge as chefs including Antonia Lofaso, Ludo Lefebvre and Roy Choi appear on screen from their own kitchens to teach the former Disney Channel star how to tackle pasta, tacos, cookies and other meals.

The octopus did not go so well. "People really didn't like that," Gomez recalled. And the French omelet turned out to be more complicated than she envisaged. "It was really difficult because I am so used to doing it the American way," said Gomez. Gomez said she has made several of the dishes again since filming ended, but asked what she was best at whipping up fast she kept to her old favorites. "I can kill PB and J," she said of her peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. —Reuters

Portia de Rossi speaks out as criticism of Ellen mounts

Actress Portia de Rossi defended Ellen DeGeneres on Monday after a social media campaign called for the talk show host to step down following reports of a hostile work environment for employees on set. De Rossi, who has been married to DeGeneres for 12 years, posted an "I Stand By Ellen" hashtag on her Instagram account. "To all our fans... we see you. Thank you for your support," the former "Ally McBeal" actress wrote on Monday. "The Ellen DeGeneres Show" has won multiple Emmy awards but both the talk show and DeGeneres herself have been under fire for weeks because of complaints by former productions staffers about a hostile workplace that included racism and bullying by upper management and claims that the comedian is mean-spirited.

Warner Bros. Television, which produces the talk show, conducted an internal investigation and said last week that staffing changes and other measures were being taken to address the issue. DeGeneres also emailed staff, expressing regrets about the gulf between the show's happy public face and what was sometimes happening backstage. Rather than dampening criticism, the developments led to the #ReplaceEllen hashtag, which went viral on Monday. Users suggested that celebrities ranging from British singer Harry Styles to former U.S. first lady Michelle Obama should take over the show. Warner Bros. Television on



Portia de Rossi and Ellen DeGeneres

Monday did not respond to a request for further comment. Other celebrities like Argentine polo player Nacho Figueras and DJ Samantha Ronson also publicly supported DeGeneres. "She makes the world a better place for millions of people every day and we cannot hit her because something may have not been perfect," Figueras wrote on Instagram. —Reuters

Eyeing big China box office, Hollywood bows to censorship

The lure of the massive Chinese market has led Hollywood to readily self-censor its films to please Beijing, according to a new report by Pen America, an anti-censorship group. Screenwriters, producers and directors in the huge US film industry are changing scripts, deleting scenes and altering other content, afraid of offending Chinese censors who control the gateway to the country's 1.4 billion consumers, according to the report released Wednesday. The actions include everything from deleting the Taiwanese flag from Tom Cruise's bomber jacket in the upcoming "Top Gun: Maverick," to removing China as the source of a zombie virus in 2013's "World War Z."

But it also means completely avoiding sensitive issues including Tibet, Taiwan, Hong Kong politics, Xinjiang and the portrayal of LGBTQ characters, the report said. Faced with blacklisting

and other punitive measures, Hollywood producers are even censoring films not targeting the Chinese market, in order to not impact others planned for Chinese theaters, Pen America says.

"Steadily, a new set of mores has taken hold in Hollywood, one in which appeasing Chinese government investors and gatekeepers has simply become a way of doing business," the report said.

Lucrative market

Pen is a global organization which speaks out for the protection of freedom of expression for writers and artists worldwide. It says Beijing enforces one of the world's most restrictive censorship systems, and numerous members of the group's China arm have been jailed, including Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo, who died in 2017 while serving an 11 year prison sen-

tence. Censorship is now centralized under the Chinese Communist Party's Central Propaganda Department, which decides whether a foreign film gets access to what is soon to be the world's largest movie market.

Only a handful of foreign films are released in China each year. The market's importance is clear. Hollywood films like "Avengers: Endgame" and "Spider-Man: Far from Home" made more money in China than in the United States. "The Chinese Communist Party, in fact, holds major sway over whether a Hollywood movie will be profitable or not-and studio executives know it," the report said. That explained why former Disney chief executive Michael Eisner apologized to Beijing after it banned the 1997 film "Kundun" about the Tibetan Dalai Lama, the report said. —AFP