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Boseman tipped for posthumous glory with 'Ma Rainey' swansong

Four months after his death shocked the world, trailblazing US actor Chadwick Boseman makes his heartbreaking, hotly Oscar-tipped final film appearance in 1920s blues drama "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom." The "Black Panther" star portrays a feisty, irreverent horn player struggling to make himself heard in a Chicago music world riddled with racism and exploitation, in the August Wilson play adaptation out Friday on Netflix. Boseman's role as the piece's tragic hero takes on added poignancy by his death at age 43 this August from colon cancer—a diagnosis he never publicly discussed, or even shared with his co-stars during production.

Viola Davis, who plays the real-life "Mother of the Blues" Ma Rainey, has described her co-star's role as "one of the greatest—if not the greatest—role for an African-American actor in history," distilling the historic trauma of the Black experience. "I'm looking back at how tired he always seemed," Davis told The New York Times about the film shot last year. "Now we know that the role mirrors Chadwick's life... it mirrors the life of every Black person grieving, and especially the life of a Black man," she

added. Boseman had secretly battled through his cancer diagnosis to become the first Black star with his own superhero epic in the record-breaking Marvel franchise. 2018's "Black Panther" was nominated for best picture at the Oscars and grossed over \$1 billion worldwide. Last week, Disney paid tribute to Boseman by announcing that his iconic role as T'Challa will not be recast in the sequel.

'Sharing his genius'

In his final film, Boseman's cornet player Levee has been hired to support Ma Rainey, who has traveled from the Deep South to record her hit songs on a sweltering summer afternoon in a cramped back-alley studio. As diva-esque Ma Rainey battles duplicitous producers who want to cash in on her voice and send her packing, Levee plots his own path to solo musical glory while revealing a childhood ravaged by white brutality. In a bravura performance, Boseman delivers searing monologues that vow to "make the white man respect me" and curse a God who "hates your Black ass"—interspersed with moments of impish charisma, foot-shuffling dance moves and outrageous flirting.



In this file photo Actor Chadwick Boseman arrives for the 90th Annual Academy Awards, in Hollywood, California. — AFP photos

"Ma Rainey" is the second of Pulitzer Prize-winning Wilson's 10-play "Pittsburgh Cycle" to be adapted by producer Denzel Washington, with each chronicling the African-American experience in a different 20th-century decade. In a quirk of fate, Washington once funded the studies of a group of young Black US actors attending a prestigious British summer drama program—including a then-unknown Boseman. "I'm happy that I got to be a part of sharing his genius

with the world," said Washington in the film's production notes. "I miss him and I love him. On film we'll always have him and I'll never forget him."

'Every ounce'

For Boseman, that course in Oxford was a seminal opportunity to study Shakespeare, Beckett and Pinter—but also fostered a desire to propel the works of Black playwrights into the same canon. "I always felt like black writers

were just as classical," he once told Rolling Stone. "It's just as difficult to do August Wilson, and the stories he's telling are just as epic." Academy voters may have begun to take note, awarding Davis an Oscar for Washington's previous Wilson adaptation "Fences" (2016). As "Ma Rainey"—who in real life was supported by a young Louis Armstrong and Bessie Smith-Davis dons gold teeth and a fat suit as she sashays her hips, croons country blues and pours prima-donna scorn on those around her. She is also being tipped for a repeat Oscar bid.

But Davis and director George C. Wolfe have little doubt over Boseman's credentials to become the third posthumous acting Oscar winner, after Heath Ledger (2008's "The Dark Knight") and Peter Finch (1976's "Network.") "Chadwick is my baby... (he) was just an artist," Davis recently told journalists. "Chadwick put his entire being into Levee... Levee demands that because of the Herculean scale of the role," said Wolfe. "He put every ounce of his heart and passion into it." — AFP



This combination of file pictures shows (from top left) Hong Kong martial artist and actor Jackie Chan arriving for the 2019 British Academy Britannia (BAFTA) awards at the Beverly Hilton hotel in Beverly Hills, US actor Harrison Ford arriving for Disney's "The Call of the Wild" premiere at El Capitan theatre in Hollywood, California, US actor Sylvester Stallone arriving for the Los Angeles premiere of the HBO documentary "Very Ralph" at the Paley Center in Beverly Hills, US actor Clint Eastwood at the 10th Annual Governors Awards gala hosted by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences at the the Dolby Theater at Hollywood & Highland Center in Hollywood, California, US actor Danny Trejo arriving for "Dora and the Lost City of Gold" premiere at the Regal Cinemas LA Live in Los Angeles and Austrian-US actor Arnold Schwarzenegger posing during a photo call to promote the film "Terminator: Dark Fate" in London. — AFP

Never too old: Five ageing action heroes

While other men of his age are eyeing up stair lifts, Harrison Ford is dusting down his bull whip to play all-action hero Indiana Jones one more time at 78. He is not the only superannuated male Hollywood star to be pushing the age envelope—and audiences' ability to suspend their disbelief.

Clint Eastwood, 90

Hollywood may be in strict lockdown but it hasn't stopped Eastwood directing "Cry Macho", where he stars as a tough, washed-up old rodeo rider taking a dysfunctional family by the scruff of the neck. Nor was there anything lily-livered about the octogenarian drugs smuggler working for a Mexican cartel he played in his last movie, "The Mule" (2018). The tough-talking former mayor of Carmel was pushing 80 when he made short work of gang members in "Gran Torino" in 2008 — "Make my day, punk."

Sylvester Stallone, 74

A mere stripling at 74, Stallone is rumored to be limbering up to reprise his role as a mercenary leader in "The Expendables 4". The action franchise he created has been a boon for Hollywood retirement homes, giving Bruce Willis, Dolph Lundgren and Jean-Claude Van Damme a late ironic glow to their careers. Sly is soon to play a hired gun in "Little America"—set at a time when "China owns America"—and a supervillain in the cartoonishly ultra-violent "The Suicide Squad". Last year's "Rambo: Last Blood" saw him go into combat yet again as the monosyllabic Vietnam vet, though whether Rambo can retire gracefully remains to be seen.

Arnold Schwarzenegger, 73

He may be trying to save the planet in his day job as crusading environmental campaigner and politician, but Arnie can't quite tear himself away from his swords and cyborgs past.

The Austrian returned in "Terminator: Dark Fate" last year and may be about to don his loincloth once again in the forthcoming epic, "The Legend of Conan". Not even three heart operations in four years—the last in October—can stop him. "I'm back," he quipped after his 2018 surgery, the catchphrase of his "Terminator" cyborg killer.

Danny Trejo, 76

The "Machete" star with the toughest face in Tinseltown and the grittiest backstory to go with it, is making up for all those lost years in prison with a plethora of upcoming action roles including in "Machete Kills in Space". Trejo, a former boxer, was a bit-player until he broke through thanks to his cousin Robert Rodriguez who directed him in "Desperado" in 1995, with roles in "Heat" and "Con Air" soon following. Look out soon for him in "Renegades", "The Prey", "Death Rider in the House of Vampires" and "Zombie Bride".

Jackie Chan, 66

One of the world's most beloved martial arts heroes is alive and, well, kicking—coronavirus pandemic be damned. As the virus spread early this year, reports said the Hong Kong born star who has appeared in more than 100 films was under quarantine after catching the virus. Worried fans sent him face masks. Chan took to Facebook to say he was virus free—"I'm very healthy and safe"—and would donate the face coverings to people who actually needed them. Chan's latest film, a Chinese action adventure flick entitled "Vanguard," was supposed to come out in January of this year, but this was delayed until September because of the pandemic. In this movie Chan plays a UK-based accountant forced to finance the work of a terror organization. — AFP

Sundance unveils pandemic lineup, Redford son's final film

Next month's Sundance will be the first major festival highlighting movies made during and about the coronavirus pandemic, as organizers Tuesday unveiled a lineup featuring the final film by co-founder Robert Redford's late son. Due to Covid restrictions, the indie film extravaganza will largely leave behind its usual mountain base in the western US state of Utah, showing premieres online and at nationwide drive-ins and arthouse theaters.

Among them is "Life in a Day 2020," Ridley Scott and Kevin Macdonald's follow-up to their 2011 documentary painting a "global portrait of life on our planet" using thousands of videos shot and submitted by members of the public from a single day in July. The filmmakers received 300,000 submissions, as people around the world adjusted to their radically transformed life under an unprecedented pandemic. "These windows into their

lives are really extraordinary," director of programming Kim Yutani told AFP, calling the project a "huge undertaking."

"Not only is it the 10-year anniversary, this is such a significant year," she added. Also on show will be "In the Earth," a virus horror film shot in 15 days in August by Ben Wheatley, and documentary "In the Same Breath" which claims to explore the Chinese government's efforts to "turn pandemic coverups in Wuhan into a triumph for the Communist Party."

Several films also address racism following this year's mass protests against police violence, including "Summer of Soul," musician Questlove's first movie about the huge, forgotten "Black Woodstock" festival that took place in 1969 Harlem. Rebecca Hall's directorial debut "Passing," based on a 1929 novella about two African-American women struggling with their race and gender identities in New York, will also appear. Other highlights among 72 feature films include Nicolas Cage's supernatural action-horror "Prisoners of the Ghostland," and cult musical biopic "The Sparks Brothers" from Edgar Wright. With the Oscars submissions deadline delayed by coronavirus, Sundance movies will this year be eligible to compete for April's Academy Awards.—AFP



Robert Redford

2020 in records: K-pop and the planet get super-hot

Records tumbled across the board in 2020, from the warming planet to the humble rowing machine.

Hot...

Meteorologists recorded a temperature of 130 degrees Fahrenheit (54.4 degrees Celsius) in California's Death Valley in August—likely the hottest ever measured with modern instruments.

Hot...

Antarctica, home to enough frozen water to lift global sea levels dozens of meters, smashed its temperature record too with a high of 20.75 degrees Celsius (69.35 Fahrenheit) — the first time the continent has broken the 20C barrier.

Hot...

Average global temperatures in January, April, May, September and November were the hottest ever on record.

Priciest pigeon

A Chinese buyer paid a world record 1.6 million euros (\$1.9 million) for a Dutch female homing pigeon called New Kim who was put up for auction for just 200 euros.

Longest lockdowns

Half of the planet was locked down in March, just three months after the virus was detected. But the prize for the longest lockdown goes to Buenos Aires where residents were officially confined from March 20 until November 8 — 234 days.

Foreign language first

Trailblazing South Korean boyband BTS became the first group to have a foreign-language song enter the US Billboard chart at number one, in the latest musical record claimed by the K-pop sensation.

Craziest climb

A 53-year-old British man climbed (and descended) the equivalent of the height of Mount Everest, 8,850 vertical meters, over the course of four days using the stairs in his home to raise money for charity.

Most F1 wins

In October British driver Lewis Hamilton overtook Michael Schumacher with a record-breaking 92nd Formula One victory in the Portuguese Grand Prix.

Accidental achievement

The aptly-named Australian Georgie Rowe broke a world record for indoor rowing while she was training at home during lockdown.

Germany's blackest day

In what Germany coach Joachim Loew said was a "black day", Spain beat the four-time World Cup champions 6-0 in the Nations League, handing them their worst defeat in 89 years.

Deepest dive

Slovenian Alenka Artnik, 39, broke the world freediving record after a dizzying descent to 114 metres with a monofin, spending three minutes and 41 seconds underwater.

Ugandan track master

Ugandan Joshua Cheptegei broke the 10,000m track world record in October with a time of 26 mins 11 seconds. In August, he had shattered the much-vaunted 5,000m world record that had stood for 16 years. — AFP



Boyband BTS