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'LORD OF THE RINGS' AND 'ALIEN' STAR IAN HOLM DIES AGED 88

Oscar-nominated British actor Ian Holm, famed for his roles in Hollywood blockbusters "Lord of the Rings" and "Alien", died on Friday aged 88, his agent said. Nominated for an Oscar for his portrayal as the coach Sam Mussabini in the 1981 award-winning film "Chariots of Fire"—which also saw him earn his second BAFTA and best supporting actor award at the Cannes Film Festival—Holm appeared in a host of top international films. He played the main antagonist Ash in the first "Alien" movie, and featured in "The Madness of King George" and "The Aviator".

Holm suffered with a Parkinson's related illness, his agency said in a statement. "It is with great sadness we can confirm that the actor Sir Ian Holm CBE passed away this morning at the age of 88," said the statement. "He died peacefully in hospital with his family and carer." US actress Mia Farrow led a parade of stars paying their respects, calling Holm "unfathomably brilliant". "He was among the giants of the theatre," said Farrow, who appeared on stage with Holm at the Royal

Shakespeare Company (RSC).

British comic and actor Eddie Izzard tweeted: "The great Ian Holm is dead. Wonderful actor and it's so sad to see him go. Farewell, you did great work Sir." Director Edgar Wright said Holm was "a genius actor who brought considerable presence to parts funny, heartbreaking and terrifying".

Late global fame

Among the other notable movies he appeared in were "Oh! What A Lovely War", "Time Bandits", "The Day After Tomorrow", and "The Fifth Element". His final film role came in 2014 in "The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies". His portrayal of Bilbo Baggins in the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy secured global fame in later life. But he had already established himself before that as a star of the theatre with the RSC, which he joined in 1958, and appeared regularly on British TV. He won a Tony in 1967 for his performance as Lenny in the premier of Harold Pinter's play "The Homecoming" on Broadway. He was Pinter's favourite actor: "He



In this file photo taken on April 29, 2019 British actor Ian Holm (centre) poses on the red carpet arriving for the UK premiere of the film Tolkein in London.—AFP photos



British actor Ian Holm gestures during the photocall of French director Arnaud Desplechin's film "Esther Khan" in Cannes on May 19, 2000, "Esther Khan" is running for the Golden Palm at the 53rd Cannes Film Festival.

puts on my shoe, and it fits!" the playwright is reported as saying.

The artistic director of the RSC, Gregory Doran, called Holm "quite simply one of the RSC greats". The National Theatre in London, where he performed a memorable Lear in 1997, described him as an "extraordinary actor" in a tweet. As well as his Oscar nomination he was also nominated for six British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) awards. BAFTA said it was "very sorry"

to hear of his death. Holm was born in Essex, east of London, to a psychiatrist father and a mother who was a nurse, in 1931. He was awarded a knighthood in 1998 for services to drama. As well as his acting career, he also served in the British Army, completing national service in Austria. He was married four times and had five children. His third wife was "Downton Abbey" star Penelope Wilton. The couple divorced in 2001, 10 years after getting married.—AFP

Finnish prodigy Makela to lead Paris Orchestra

The 24-year-old Finnish prodigy Klaus Makela is to be the next musical director of the Paris Orchestra, the French culture ministry said Thursday. The young conductor will lead the orchestra when the Paris Philharmonie concert hall reopens after the coronavirus lockdown on July 9 with pieces by Ravel and Beethoven.

But Makela will not officially start as musical director until September 2022. He is currently principal conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic. The acclaimed cellist succeeds the British conductor Daniel Harding, whose time with the orchestra ended last August. Makela—one of a wave of "flying Finns" who have stormed the heights of classical music in recent years—began his meteoric career at the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra in 2017.—AFP



Finnish prodigy Klaus Makela

Warner Records signs Black Lives Matter protest singer, 12

A 12-year-old whose song protesting police killings of African Americans in the US went viral has been signed by Warner Records, his producer said on Instagram Thursday. Keedron Bryant's song I Just Wanna Live, about his fears growing up as a black man in America, will be released on Friday, which is the Juneteenth holiday



Keedron Bryant

Hollywood poised for big-screen gamble as theatres reopen

After more than three months of coronavirus-mandated limbo, Hollywood is headed back to the big screen—and hoping that Russell Crowe's road rage thriller "Unhinged" will jump-start the recovery. The action film, due out July 10, is set to be the first wide release since US theatres shut their doors in mid-March. Christopher Nolan's much-hyped "Tenet" will follow soon after. But will the gamble pay off for those quick-moving studios? While top theatre chains across the country plan to fire up their projectors in the first half of July, screens in badly-hit New York and Los Angeles don't yet have permission to reopen.

And even with social distancing and sanitation measures boosted, moviegoers' enthusiasm for piling into dark, enclosed auditoriums amid a possible "second wave" of virus cases may fluctuate. AMC, the world's largest theatre chain, caused a stir by initially declining to mandate face masks, saying it did not want to be "drawn into a political controversy." It did a U-turn on that policy Friday following an outcry.

Everyone from indie distributors to blockbuster studios will be carefully watching to see how the experiment with new theatrical releases proceeds. "Hollywood is not a place where competitors are known for wishing each other well very often," said "Unhinged" producer Mark Gill. "And in this particular circumstance, everybody is hoping we do well." His movie bucked the industry trend, shifting its release date forward from September, as larger studios gobbled up all the prime opening slots deeper into 2020. Solstice Studios decided the lack of competing new titles, and dearth of other distractions such as major sporting events, outweighed the danger of flopping early—which in any case is reduced for a mid-budget, \$33 million movie. "The more we looked at it, it's risky of course, but it still looked like it was worth doing," Gill told AFP.

'Worth the risk'

"Somebody had to go first—it's definitely worth the risk," said Jeff Bock, a senior analyst for industry tracker Exhibitor Relations. "But I think the odds are stacked against it." While the decision to open "Unhinged" early has generated buzz—its trailer drew 210 million views in a week—its studio's pockets are less deep than those of its rivals when it comes to marketing, he noted. But "Unhinged" is really a "set-up for the other studios," he added, noting that the true litmus test will be the first

marking the end of slavery in the US. Bryant first posted the acapella gospel song on his Instagram account on May 26, the day after another African American, George Floyd, was killed by a white policeman in the city of Minneapolis.

Floyd's death—one in a long line of black people killed by white law enforcement—ignited mass Black Lives Matter protests against police brutality and a national reckoning on racism in America, both in the past and today. "Every day I'm being hunted as prey. My people don't want no trouble," Bryant sings. The original post has been liked well over three million times, and drawn praise from Barack Obama to Katy Perry.

It also caught the attention of producer Dem Jointz, who reportedly added music. Dem Jointz said in an Instagram post Thursday that he was "Thankful" to share the song alongside the Bryant family and Warner Records. The US music giant will reportedly donate proceeds from the song to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).—AFP

major studio titles, including Warner Bros' \$200 million-plus "Tenet," out July 31.

Nolan—its influential director who is best known for "Inception," "Dunkirk" and the Batman "Dark Knight" trilogy—has pushed for his ambitious and secretive sci-fi thriller to stand firm with its early theatre release. Still, it was recently shuffled back by two weeks, giving New York and Los Angeles screens breathing space to reopen. Disney's "Mulan" is also due in July—shortly after Disney World and Disneyland reopen—though some analysts predict it may yet be switched to a later slot if families are seen as still nervous about going to theatres. "Word-of-mouth will be based now on not specifically which films are actually good, but which theatres are following all the guidelines," said Bock.

'You're dead'

The dangers of jumping the gun were highlighted in China, where theatres in several provinces optimistically reopened in late March, before closing again days later. The capital Beijing is now experiencing a new COVID-19 outbreak, prompting the authorities to lock down parts of the city. If fresh outbreaks are traced back to screens in the US, "theatres are going to shut down very quickly, and for a very long time thereafter," predicted Bock. Those concerns were evident in Los Angeles on Friday, when bars and tattoo parlors were cleared to reopen—but theatres notably were not. Still, Gill is focused on the tens of thousands of empty movie theatres itching to reopen across the country, but with nothing new to show—and no certainty on whether audiences are willing to return. "You can have theatres open and a good movie and be all by yourself and do everything right," he said. "But if nobody's coming, you're dead."—AFP



In this file photo taken on June 12, 2020 a woman walks past the El Capitan Theater which is closed due to the Covid-19 virus, on Hollywood Blvd, Hollywood, California.—AFP

Cobain 'Unplugged' guitar sells for record \$6 million at auction

The guitar that grunge rock icon Kurt Cobain played during his legendary 1993 MTV Unplugged performance sold Saturday for a record \$6 million, the auction house said. The retro acoustic-electric 1959 Martin D-18E that Cobain strummed for Nirvana's career-defining performance in New York—just five months before his suicide at age 27—sold after a bidding war to Peter Freedman, founder of RODE Microphones, Julien's Auctions said.

At \$6.01 million after fees and commission, the instrument was the most expensive guitar ever sold at auction, among other records. The starting estimate was \$1 million. Freedman said he plans to display the guitar in a worldwide tour, with proceeds going to benefit performing arts. "When I heard that this iconic guitar was up for auction I immediately knew it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to secure it and use it as a vehicle to spotlight the struggles that those in the performing arts are facing and have always faced," the Australian was quoted as saying by Julien's Auctions.

The guitar was sold with its case, which Cobain had decorated with a flyer from punk rock band Poison Idea's 1990 album "Feel the Darkness." Until now, the most expensive guitar in history was a Fender Stratocaster, dubbed "Black Strat," used by Pink Floyd guitarist David Gilmour. It had been sold by the musician for nearly \$4 million during a charity sale in June 2019. Nirvana's acoustic performance during the taping for the popular MTV Unplugged series on



In these file photos, the guitar used by musician Kurt Cobain during Nirvana's famous MTV Unplugged in New York concert in 1993, is displayed in the window of the Hard Rock Cafe Piccadilly Circus in central London prior to the auction of the guitar in Beverly Hills in June.—AFP photos



November 18, 1993 became what is considered one of history's greatest live albums. It included renditions of Nirvana's hits "About A Girl" and "Come As You Are" along with covers including David Bowie's "The Man Who Sold the World." In October 2019 Cobain's cigarette-singed cardigan worn during the "Unplugged" performance sold for \$334,000.—AFP



Batman and Kim Kardashian headed to Spotify podcasts

Spotify has penned a podcast deal with DC Comics—home to Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman—bringing scripted superhero episodes to the audio streaming platform. The deal announced Thursday follows a separate Spotify deal with Kim Kardashian West for a criminal justice podcast, as the Swedish platform continues to splurge on a raft of original content. The multi-year deal with DC parent WarnerMedia for an "original slate of narrative scripted podcasts" will explore "new shows based on the vast universe of premier, iconic DC characters," the companies said in a statement.

It did not confirm which comic book characters would feature, or the cost of the deal,

which will also include "new dramatic and comedic podcasts" based on other Warner Bros. titles. But the deal comes as Spotify ramps up its podcast content, including a reported \$100 million outlay last month on "The Joe Rogan Experience," the most downloaded podcast in the United States.

On Wednesday, it emerged Spotify had inked an exclusive deal with Kardashian West, the reality star turned criminal justice advocate. The show will investigate the case of Kevin Keith, a convicted mass murderer who maintains his innocence for the 1994 deaths of three people including a four-year-old child, according to the Wall Street Journal. Keith's death sentence was commuted to life in prison by Ohio's governor in

2010 due to unanswered questions in his case.

Several dozen former judges, lawyers and prosecutors believe he may have been wrongly convicted and had called for his execution to be halted. Spotify confirmed the deal with Kardashian West to AFP, but declined to offer any further details. For a little over a year, Spotify has slowly been moving into the podcast world. In early 2019, it bought the podcasting company Gimlet Studios for around \$230 million, as well as the production interface Anchor for more than \$100 million. And in February, Spotify acquired The Ringer, a sports and entertainment production studio, for between \$141 million and \$195 million, depending on several variables.—AFP