

Lifestyle | Features

HOPKINS EXPLORES HORRORS OF DEMENTIA IN 'THE FATHER'

Convincing movie legend Anthony Hopkins to star in your first-ever film is a tall order for any director. But Florian Zeller the acclaimed French writer, adapting his own play "The Father" for the big screen — was so determined, he even changed his main character's name and birthdate to those of his dream leading man. "I really wrote the script for him. He was the desire and the dream," Zeller told AFP. "Until someone comes and says it's not possible, it means that potentially it is possible." Fortunately the gambit paid off, with the "Silence of the Lambs" actor signing up-alongside fellow Academy Award-winner Olivia Colman as his daughter-for Zeller's devastating dementia drama.

The film, containing elements of thriller and horror genres, takes viewers on a deliberately disorientating journey inside Anthony's fast-slipping mind. Family members become unrecognizable, and over-familiar strangers inexplicably appear in his own plush London apartment, which itself appears to shift before his-and our-eyes. "He is very known for parts where he is always in control of

everything," said Zeller, of Hopkins. "I thought that it would be powerful to see that very same person now starting to lose control... in a way, to let go of what we know about him, this Hannibal Lecter face."

'We were all crying'

The film screened at last week's Toronto film festival after rave reviews at its Sundance premiere in January. It is due to be released by Sony Pictures Classics in December. Seven months out from the Oscars, Hopkins is already seen by many as a safe bet for a sixth Academy nomination. As the true nature of his condition unravels, Hopkins draws upon a startling range of emotions, from paranoia and anger to desperation and emotional breakdown. "He's the master of subtlety. I've always admired the way he uses words, to create danger, anxiety," said Zeller.

The 82-year-old Welsh actor has spoken of concentrating on his own mortality in order to perform the role. "Anthony is a very instinctive actor-in a way he uses his instincts more than anything else, so



many times the first takes were better," said Zeller. "It's like magic in a way.... We were all crying on set."

'The Pearl Fishers'

It has been a long journey from Zeller's original French-language play "Le Pere," itself based on experiences with his

grandmother who helped raise him but who began to experience dementia when he was 15. A seamless English stage translation brought Zeller attention across the Channel and eventually in the US. The film will arrive more than eight years on from the play's Paris debut, to a transformed world. "With what we are going

through just now with the virus, when you see our grandfathers, our fathers, our grandmothers, so fragile-I think we are still very concerned and connected to the fragility of life," said Zeller.

But despite its weighty subject matter, the film is far from bleak. Hopkins imbues his mischievous character with spades of humor and charm, flirting outrageously with young Laura (Imogen Poots,) the latest in his long line of beleaguered carers. Music also plays a central role. Zeller convinced legendary composer Ludovico Einaudi to score the film. The Italian also scored this year's potential Oscar rival "Nomadland." And after Hopkins expressed his love for Bizet's "The Pearl Fishers," Zeller incorporated an aria into a script that also sees Anthony hum and dance along to classical music during a moment of clarity and levity in his kitchen. "I fulfilled that dream because he fulfilled mine," said Zeller. — AFP



Zynga out to cast spell with Harry Potter mobile game

Social gaming giant Zynga yesterday kicked off its global launch of a free puzzle game based on the beloved wizarding world of Harry Potter. "Harry Potter: Puzzles & Spells" is available on Apple and Google mobile devices and also on Facebook and Amazon Kindle, San Francisco-based Zynga said. "When the Harry Potter series first came to theatres, it was one of those rare moments when everyone was reading the same book, talking about the same film and coming together around a shared experience," said Yaron Leyvand, Zynga senior vice president of games. He said the game stays true to the Harry Potter stories and is "infused with the standout moments and delightful wizarding world flourishes that have captivated a global following."

Zynga said it licensed rights from the game unit at Warner Bros, which produced the Potter films based on the hit books by JK Rowling. The mobile game incorporates Harry Potter characters and voice-over recordings from the films, Zynga said. Chocolate frogs, spell casting and battling chess pieces are among the Potter world touches woven into the colorful puzzles that players are challenged to solve, according to the

company. "Mobile games have never been more popular or more important to people than they are right now," said Zynga publishing president Bernard Kim. "People are playing games for entertainment, relaxation and as an accessible source of comfort and connection." Zynga is known for games including "Farmville" and "Words With Friends." Puzzle games are some of the most popular among "casual gamers" thanks to their easy accessibility and the fact that they are free to download.

"Candy Crush Saga" by British developer King is among the most downloaded games on the Apple and Google Play stores, according to market tracker Newzoo. Mobile games are expected to generate more than \$77 billion in revenue this year, up some 13 percent from last year, Newzoo said. "We're all still experiencing the harrowing and unsettling situation that is the coronavirus pandemic," Newzoo mobile market lead Tianyi Gu said in a report on Covid-19's effects on the business. "Gaming has been a means of escapism and time filling for many people confined to their homes." — AFP

Luxury Geneva hotels face 'life-threatening' corona crunch

Behind its deep-red awnings, Richemont's blinds have been closed since July, after the coronavirus pandemic left the usually bustling five-star Geneva hotel starved for high-paying customers. Now, after a "catastrophic" summer, other luxury lodgings in the Swiss city—which boasts the highest hotel density in the world—are struggling to avoid the same fate. "We are in a profession that is truly in intensive care, and the condition is life-threatening," a stoney-faced Thierry Lavalley, who heads the Geneva hotel association and runs the five-star Fairmont Grand Hotel, told AFP. Before the pandemic hit, hotels in the city—a hub for diplomatic and international business activity—had been surfing on a wave of growth, with 3.2 million night stays annually for the past two years.

The sector was then struck by an "economic tsunami", Lavalley said. Switzerland, which has counted 50,000 coronavirus cases and nearly 1,800 deaths, dodged strict confinement measures seen in neighboring countries. But travel restrictions, event cancellations and months-long closures of restaurants and museums have taken a serious toll. By the end of July, Geneva hotels had booked just 693,000 night stays and they expect

no more than 1.3 million by the end of the year. That level was last seen in 1954, when the city counted half as many hotels as it does today.

'Hardest hit'

The hotel crisis is being felt across Europe, but the situation is particularly critical in Geneva, where the clientele is largely comprised of international business travellers and diplomats.

Individual clients coming for recreational tourism generally account for just a quarter of the total, Adrien Genier, head of the Geneva Tourism, told reporters recently. The remaining three-quarters are booked for people attending business congresses and seminars, or clients connected with large summits and meetings hosted by the United Nations and other international organizations.

But now, "there are no more congresses, no more business tourism, and the UN is barely moving. That makes Geneva the hardest-hit city in Switzerland," Lavalley said. During the first seven months of the year, Geneva hotels saw night stays shrink by 63 percent compared with the same period last year, and the full-year number is expected to be 75 percent lower, he said. —AFP



A picture in Geneva shows the sign of the Fairmont Grand Hotel Geneva after sunset as luxury Geneva hotels are facing 'life-threatening' corona crunch. — AFP

Lockdown inspires Beckham, de la Morena at fashion week

Many people struggled with the coronavirus lockdown but for designers Victoria Beckham and Emilio de la Morena, showing at London Fashion Week on Monday, it was a source of inspiration. "Limitations can be liberating," former Spice Girl turned designer Beckham explained in the notes for her easy, fluid and Seventies-inspired collection for spring/summer 2021. "Working remotely, for this collection we reacted spontaneously. We were instinctive. We

asked ourselves what has changed? Who do we want to be? What will we desire?" "This collection is about freedom-to explore, to dress up, to be yourself." Beckham's catwalk show is normally a glamorous affair, attended by her husband, former England footballer David Beckham, and their four children.

This season, due to coronavirus restrictions on social gatherings, her collection of 21 eclectic outfits was showcased in a video shot in the

Victoria Miro gallery of contemporary art. There were floor-skimming, apple green trousers worn with a shirt and trench coat for a nonchalant style, and a tuxedo jacket, black trousers and leopard-print scarf for a more glamorous touch. With more than a touch of the Seventies, there were also long, flowing dresses worn with heavy gold chain necklaces. Since launching her eponymous label in 2008, Beckham has become a major player in the fashion industry, selling clothes and acces-

sories in more than 400 shops around the world.

However she has yet to make a profit, reporting a loss of £12.3 million (\$15.7 million) in 2018, with sales down 16 percent to £35.1 million. The 46-year-old designer, believed to be worth £335 million, initially applied for the UK government furlough scheme to pay 30 of her 120 staff during lockdown, but withdrew her application after a torrent of criticism.—AFP



Creations by Spanish designer Emilio de la Morena are pictured alongside artworks, during a press preview for a presentation entitled 'Troubles' for his Spring/Summer 2021 fashion collection, during London Fashion Week in central London. — AFP photos



Spanish designer Emilio de la Morena poses for a photograph during a press preview for a presentation entitled 'Troubles'.

Unsexy selfies, huffy fashionistas as Milan opens

Getting a front-row seat to Milan's fashion week is harder than ever this year, with uninvited influencers and buyers nursing bruised egos as the shows started yesterday under coronavirus restrictions. The virus, which is resurgent in Europe, forced many luxury houses to put off confirming their presence until the last minute-and in the end, only a third have committed to appearing. Nevertheless, said the Italian fashion chamber's head Carlo Capasa: "In this year marked by the Covid-19 epidemic, fashion has demonstrated, despite the difficulties that lie ahead, a great strength and sense of unity." Missoni, the Italian label known for its explosions of colour, will start, presenting its new collection virtually, just like 41 other labels among the 64 spring/summer 2021 catwalks on the calendar.

In these social-distancing times, brands from Moschino to Versace and Prada have opted to simply stream their shows on social media. Not so Giorgio Armani, who will be showing his collection on Italian prime time television Saturday. Twenty-two houses are braving a live audience, from Fendi and Dolce&Gabbana to Eto, Ferragamo and Max Mara. "Organizing a fashion show with public present is a real headache at the moment," confesses an organizer at a major fashion house, who preferred to remain anonymous. "The number of seats has been drastically reduced and the seating plan, a diplomatic and political Tetris at the best of times, is driving us wild. We don't want to offend anyone, but we don't have enough room for everyone," he said.

Masked selfies

The ban on fashionistas travelling to Europe from China, South Korea or the US will certainly free up some strategic places. But their absence is also symbolic of the continued crisis in the sector, despite signs of recovery in China in recent months. Italian fashion revenue fell 30 percent in the first half of 2020, with a marked contraction in the second quarter. Those who get to physically attend shows will have to go through thermal scanners and use hand gel and face masks-rendering the obligatory pouting selfie in front of sashaying models rather less sexy than usual. Houses are keeping their fingers crossed that Italy's relatively low numbers of new cases-some 1,500 per day-do not dramatically rise to match those in Britain or France, which have been seeing up to 10,000 daily.

That could force last-minute changes for big names such as Valentino, which has already bowed to virus pressure by moving its Paris show to Milan this year to limit travel. To make an unprecedented fashion week even odder, Gucci will not be showing, the house having decided to reduce the number of its shows from five to two per year and hold them outside fashion weeks. Milan's edition this season will reflect the major themes in the headlines in recent months. That includes an initiative organized by the Black Lives Matter in Italian Fashion Collective to present five black designers under the title "We Are Italy". —AFP