

Arts and Leisure: Hollywood pumps up for the summer

by David_Elliott

Add one more cause of global warming: the long, hot summer of movies. Can our mental climate stand it?

PLEX FLEX - Former Eastwick witch Michelle Pfeiffer is now witch Lamia in the fairy-tale movie 'Stardust.' CNS Photo courtesy of David Jones. After a fairly strong spring (in box office, not quality), the Hollywood machine is reliably salivating over coming rewards. Hype began months ago and, at the plexes, the season fires up its grill for five months.

We'll itemize previews through August, with the usual loopholes about shifting dates, sloppy promises, etc. What's the overview?

Well, the god of cinema is in the details, the god of box office is in the numbers, but how bad can it be with Harry Potter, Ashley Judd in peril, a salute to Edith Piaf, sly Don Cheadle as wry Petey Greene, Johnny Depp in Sparrow flight, Parisian love, Sam Jackson in hotel hell, Pixar 'tooning, the return of "Killer of Sheep," and Charlotte Gainsbourg reaching Ellis Island?

OK, it might get as bad as "Ocean's Thirteen," but (please) no pre-emptive opinions. After all, dreams lead straight to popcorn, and this bin bulges promisingly:

MAY GIFTS

Old action pro William Friedkin gets back in the game directing "Bug" (May 25), a paranoia thriller with Ashley Judd as the lonely waitress badly bugged but fighting back ... Treasure is certain, if not yet counted, for the sequel "Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End" (May 25) a Johnny Depp-th charge likely to pulverize early summer, with Chow Yun-Fat and Keith Richards also riding the effects tide ... Sigourney Weaver is an autistic woman in "Snow Cake" (May 25) caught in a guilty triangle with Alan Rickman and Carrie-Anne

Moss ... Possible for May are "Once," John Carney's modern Irish musical set in lyrical Dublin; "Civic Duty," with Peter Krause worried sick about a new Islamic neighbor in the post-9/11 drama; and "Hollywood Dreams" is the latest low-budget scan of L.A. yack and yuks from Henry Jaglom.

JUNE CHOICES

"Chalk" (June 1) may scrape in, as Mike Akel's Texas-shot spin on high school from (gasp) a teacher's viewpoint ... In "Election Triad" (June 1) Johnnie To continues his Hong Kong kick-butt gangs saga ... Sorry, Gracie Allen fans, but "Gracie" (June 1) is about a girl (Carly Schroeder) who overcomes family loss by finding her path in soccer, urged on by a '70s hits soundtrack and Elisabeth Shue ... The demurely titled "Knocked Up" (June 1) is from "40 Year-Old Virgin" comedy maker Judd Apatow, about the aftershock of a one-night stand, with Paul Rudd, Seth Rogen, Katherine Heigl.

"Mr. Brooks" (June 1) is not the bio of Albert or Mel, but a violent thriller with Kevin Costner afflicted by a murderous alter-ego (William Hurt), and Demi Moore also tenses about it ... "Paprika" (June 1) is Satoshi Kon's futuristic anime, much-awarded ... Multiple takes on love flood "Paris, Je t'aime" (June 1), its short segments from directors like Olivier Assayas, the Coen Bros., Alfonso Cuaron, Walter Salles, Tom Tykwer, Gus Van Sant.

Luc Besson does a French variant on "Wings of Desire" as Rie Rasmussen plays a very sexy angel helping a scruffy suicide in Paris, in the fabulistic "Angel-A" (June 8) ... "Day Watch" (June 8) turns Moscow apocalyptic again in the violent Russian sequel to "Night Watch" ... In Eli Roth's "Hostel II" (June 8) the student blood horrors are now visited on Rome (which has seen worse) ... What more seasonal promise can be there be than "Surf's Up" (June 8)? Surfing penguins are 'toon-spoken by Jeff Bridges, Zooey Deschanel, Jon Heder, James Woods ... Probably the 1960 Rat Pack nonsense about 11 Vegas heisters was enough, but the profitably updated franchise swings again in "Ocean's Thirteen" (June 8). Maker Steven Soderbergh promises defter use of George Clooney, Matt Damon, Ellen Barkin, Brad Pitt, Don Cheadle and Al Pacino as a casino don.

On a team motivational trip to Hungary, weapons merchandisers find a personal use for guns in the Brit comedy "Severance" (June 15) ... In "Crazy Love" (June 15) Dan Klores and Fisher Stevens document the once notorious 1959 marriage of a couple who found that acid disfigurement was no impediment to devotion ... Surf's up again for "Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer" (June 15) with the fabs facing a highly metallic

longboard master in Tim Story's film with Ioan Gruffudd, Jessica Alba, Andre Braugher ... "Fido" (June 15) is no pooch but a cheerfully rotting 1950s zombie in comic spin with Billy Connolly, Tim Blake Nelson and Carrie-Anne Moss ... "The Golden Door" (June 15) from Italy's Emanuele Crialese has France's Charlotte Gainsbourg moving from Sicily to New York in the great 19th century migration.

"La Vie en Rose" (June 15) can only be the story of France's big-piped little sparrow, Edith Piaf, starring Marion Cotillard and another national totem, Gerard Depardieu ... Revived from retro oblivion is another female icon, "Nancy Drew" (June 15). Emma Roberts stars as tireless sleuth Nancy on the track of a film star's murder.

In "A Mighty Heart" (June 22) Michael Winterbottom tells the brave but bitter story of the terror-taken and murdered reporter Daniel Pearl, using Dan Futterman and Angelina Jolie as Mrs. Pearl (Brad Pitt produced) ... "D.O.A.: Dead or Alive" (June 22) spells it all out, in Corey Yuen's yarn of ace babes in do-or-die martial mania ... "Eagle Vs. Shark" (June 22) is an offbeat New Zealand comedy from Maori director and writer Taika Waititi in which animal dress-up changes some loners ... In "Evan Almighty" (June 20) Steve Carell repeats his role from the hit "Bruce Almighty" and now is chosen by God (Morgan Freeman, naturally) for a grand mission ... "September Dawn" (June 22) is Christopher Cain's Western about a wagon train and "renegade Mormons" and stars the estimable Jon Voight ... "Show Business: The Road to Broadway" (June 22) is Dori Berenstein's documentation of a B'way season.

"Live Free or Die Hard" (June 27) lets Bruce Willis strap on his big franchise belt again, saving our whole national infrastructure as bullet-headed McClane ... "Killer of Sheep" (June 29) gives us Charles Burnett's legendary, UCLA-shot 1977 vision of black life in South-Central L.A. ... Thence cometh "Ratatouille" (June 29), Brad Bird's Pixar cartoon of a French rat with restaurant dreams, voices including Peter O'Toole ... "You Kill Me" (June 29) sounds like the most generic of titles, but sharp John Dahl directed comic action with Ben Kingsley a boozing hit man, Tea Leoni his new babe from a mortuary.

This might also be the month of "Cashback," in which an art student finds artistic visions even in a supermarket ... and "Death at a Funeral," Frank Oz's drama of a rich, stressed British family with Rupert Graves ... and "Evening," Lajos Koltai's film of Susan Minot's novel as a female power drama for Vanessa Redgrave, Claire Danes, Toni Collette, Glenn Close, Meryl Streep ... and "Exiled" in which some of the "Internal Affairs" toughs and hotties team again for hard action in Macao ... and Michael Moore's new sock-umentary "Sicko," which probes every orifice of the American health care system.

JULY ENTRIES

The top weekend of summer has Robin Williams as a demanding cleric forcing Mandy Moore and John Krasinski through pre-nup tests in the Florida toot "License to Wed" (July 4) ... Werner Herzog made the documentary "Little Dieter Needs to Fly" about a pilot shot down over Laos and his gutsy survival of POW camp and jungle escape, now dramatized as "Rescue Dawn" (July 4) with ever-edgy Christian Bale ... The holiday weekend plugs into "Transformers" (July 4) as demolition director Michael Bay rehabs a popular Hasbro toy realm into an effects orgy of alien invasion with Shia LaBeouf, John Turturro and Jon Voight.

Eagerness rises explosively for Potter party No. 5, "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix" (July 13), the wizardly world now dealing with global terror and allegorical fascism, new spice including Ralph Fiennes and Helena Bonham Carter ... Daring to compete on fantasy turf is old pro Stephen King with "1408" (July 13). John Cusack is a horror writer checking into a nightmare hotel run by Samuel L. Jackson ... Daniel Auteuil is the haughty Frenchman trying to prove he has a friend in Patrice Leconte's comedy "My Best Friend" (July 13) ... Liv Tyler and Scott Speedman are a couple forced to improvise as three invaders seize their suburban home in "The Strangers" (July 13).

This weekend has an Aussie comedy about a bawdy mother-in-law, Brenda Blethyn starring in "Introducing the Dwights" (July 20)... John Waters' and now Adam Shankman's "Hairspray" (July 20) gets its third big do as a comedy, musically beehived by John Travolta (in drag) in Divine's fabled role of Edna, plus Queen Latifah, Michelle Pfeiffer and Christopher Walken ... "I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry" (July 20) is about an unlikely gay marriage in search of easy gain by a New York fireman, and those having sport with it are Adam Sandler, Kevin James, Ving Rhames and Steve Buscemi ... Don Cheadle plays legendarily street-rooted D.C. radio and TV mouth Petey Greene in Kasi Lemmons' "Talk to Me" (July 20).

Lindsay Lohan gets kidnapped and flips into dual-personality mode (the tabs will love this) in the thriller "I Know Who Killed Me" (July 27), also with Julia Ormond ... "No Reservations" (July 27) casts Catherine Zeta-Jones as a big-deal Manhattan chef, Abigail "Little Miss Sunshine" Breslin as her sparky niece, Aaron Eckhart the funny romance dude ... "The Simpsons Movie" (July 27) is show honcho David Silverman hauling the TV gang to the big cartoon screen, voices including Minnie Driver ... Also maybe in July are "Brand Upon the Brain," "Gypsy Caravan," "Interview," "Punk's Not Dead" and "Vitus."

AUGUST OPTIONS

A personal project for in-life partners Marc Anthony and Jennifer Lopez, "El Cantante" (Aug. 1) enacts the musical adventures and mishaps of classic salsa lovers ... Crater impact is rumored for "The Bourne Ultimatum" (Aug. 3) in which reality-honed director Paul Greengrass puts Matt Damon through more Jason Bourne thrill loops, including a search for his identity ... "Arctic Tale" (Aug. 3), from the "March of the Penguins" team, follows the white trek of a walrus and bear, narrated by Queen Latifah ... In "Hot Rod" (Aug. 3) Andy Samberg hates his stepdad but will jump a cycle over 15 buses to get him a heart treatment, while dear Sissy Spacek smiles ... "Underdog" (Aug. 3) brings back the cartoon pooch and voices like Jason Lee, Jim Belushi, Peter Dinklage ... Summer really settles in with "Daddy Day Camp" (Aug. 8) with Fred Savage directing and Cuba Gooding Jr. carrying the main comic load in a sequel to the rather pitiful Eddie Murphy film "Daddy Day Care."

"Becoming Jane" (Aug. 10) is not a Fonda workout but a view of young Jane Austen before she became the perfect lady novelist, and Anne Hathaway is always a sight to behold, here backed by James McAvoy, Maggie Smith ... Less Austenish, "Bratz" (Aug. 10) is based on a popular dolls brand and includes stars such as Paula Abdul ... Sadly, some of us aren't rushing for "Rush Hour 3" (Aug. 10) but fans will gather for another violent laffs spree with Jackie Chan and Chris Tucker (story? you care?).

Adding to depth of field, "The Signal" (Aug. 10) is a futurist trio from "three visionary directors," though the names David Bruckner, Dan Bush and Jacob Gentry might not race your blood ... Comparable in fantasy stretch but on a larger budget is "Stardust" (Aug. 10) with Matt Vaughn directing Neil Gaiman's lavish spin on fairy tales starring Charlie Cox, Sienna Miller and heaps of support including Robert De Niro, Peter O'Toole, Claire Danes, Michelle Pfeiffer.

"The Invasion" (Aug. 17) is another big fret about invading aliens and epidemic threat, but the good promise is that it stars Nicole Kidman, Daniel Craig and Jeremy Northam ... "Penelope" (Aug. 17) declares its need to be "a magical modern fairy tale" about a girl and a curse and pre-lib upsurge, to be fleshed out by Christina Ricci, Reese Witherspoon and James McAvoy.

Having nailed the words in "Spellbound," Jeffrey Blitz now diagrams a wishful nerd on a school debating team in the dramatized gotta-dreamer "Rocket Science" (Aug. 17) ... In a long month for short titles comes Greg Mottola's "Superbad" (Aug. 17), one more about guys and gals on high school grad night ... "Wedding

Daze" (Aug. 17) is not the 2006 comedy with John Larroquette but Michael Ian Black's MGM comedy with Jason Biggs looking for a replacement love and finding Isla Fisher ... "The Comebacks" (Aug. 24) has a past, losing coach coming back for a Last Big Chance, and what comeback could be greater than Carl Weathers?

Dane Cook plays a dentist suffering an old dating curse, yet blessed by Jessica Alba in the comedy "Good Luck Chuck" (Aug. 24) ... "Mr. Bean's Holiday" (Aug. 31) squeezes laughs on the Riviera from bumbling Rowan Atkinson and even Willem Dafoe ... "Halloween" in August (31) seems unfair, with grisly ham cooked by Rob Zombie with Malcolm McDowell and Brad Dourif ... and thus to "The King of Kong" (Aug. 31), Seth Gordon's film of Steve Wiebe attempting to break the classic Donkey Kong record of Billy Mitchell, their game rivalry a tiny-world joust of giants ... August may also provide "Ladron," "Manufactured Landscapes," "Moliere" and "Ten Canoes."

As for September, get the rec room ready for Scarlett Johansson in "Nanny Diaries." And so very much more.

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