



**3/6 THE GREATEST SHOWMAN MUSICAL**  
\$54 MILL BO 3254 SCREENS PG 105 MINUTES  
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

**Hugh Jackman (MAMMA MIA!, LOGAN, X-MEN: THE APOCALYPSE, SWORDFISH, PRISONERS, THE WOLVERINE)**

**Zac Efron (BAYWATCH, NEIGHBORS 2, DIRTY GRANDPA, PARKLAND, NEW YEAR'S EVE, 17 AGAIN)**

In the latter half of the 19th century, Phineas Taylor Barnum (Hugh Jackman), whose early traveling circus paved the way for his emergence as one of the world's first and foremost circus owners, thrived as a politician, a writer, and, some might say, a charlatan. But director Michael Gracey's slick, relentlessly bombastic musical *The Greatest Showman* would have you believe that he lived solely for the pleasure of entertaining. Barnum's many contradictions and personae are just too much for the film to process. Here, every character exists only to bring his dream to life, and almost every musical number is an exaltation of his ingenuity, the sole exception being "Rewrite the Stars," a love song between Zac Efron and Zendaya's characters that, ironically, is the film's most technically impressive, emotionally gratifying sequence.

In condensing Barnum's life into a generic rags-to-riches story, as well as taking great liberties with the timeline of many real events, *The Greatest Showman* mythologizes Barnum as a kind-hearted soul who celebrates and humanizes his various "curiosities," specifically little person General Tom Thumb (Sam Humphrey) and bearded lady Lettie Lutz (Keala Settle), while ignoring the blatantly exploitative nature of the business practices which helped make these individuals famous. The film never presents itself as a historical biopic so its fudging of dates and facts isn't inherently problematic. Yet the filmmakers perpetually reframe Barnum's ruthless, self-aggrandizing tactics as minor flaws that those closest to him overlook because of an unflappable desire to see him achieve his dreams.



In the film's second musical number, "A Million Dreams," Barnum sings to his wife, Charity (Michelle Williams), "I think of what the world could be/A vision of the one I see," to which Charity, who's already given up a life of luxury to marry him, responds in complete deference: "You may be right, you may be wrong/But say that you'll bring me along." These lines aren't only a perfect summation of Charity's lack of agency, but also that of Barnum's band of "oddities," who remain ever grateful to him for bringing them into the public spotlight, where they're greeted with immediate respect and acceptance rather than seen as the "freaks" that Barnum actually marketed them as.



The P.T. Barnum of *The Greatest Showman* is a capitalist Übermensch disguised as a man of and for the people, a swindler whose relentless self-promotion is masked not only by the absurd degree that nearly everyone fawns over his greatness but also by the songs that praise his egalitarian legacy. Even the pretentious theater critic who scorns Barnum early in the film comes around by the end, telling him that his work is a celebration of life. This revisionist hagiography plays like an Ayn Randian tribute to good old-fashioned ingenuity and hard work, where Barnum is the John Galt single-handedly holding the nascent showbiz world upon his shoulders and

everyone from his wife to his employees exists either to support him or to get out of his way. Although the film appears to be constructed as a showpiece for Jackman's song-and-dance skills, its spectacle is overshadowed by its archaic and misguided notions of American exceptionalism.

This will rent as well as **DESPICABLE ME 3, CARS 3, NUT JOB 2, PIRATES: DEAD MEN TELL NO TALES, and CAPTAIN UNDERPANTS.**



**3/6 LADY BIRD COMEDY**  
**\$38 MILL BO 2134 SCREENS R 93 MINUTES**  
**DVD/ COMBO**

**Saoirse Ronan (BROOKLYN, LOVING VINCENT, LOST RIVER, THE GRAND BUDAPEST HOTEL)**  
**Laurie Metcalf (TV—ROSEANNE, THE BIG BANG THEORY, SUPERGIRL, THE MCCARTHY'S, EASY MONEY)**

Greta Gerwig's *Lady Bird* is an uncommonly nuanced and intelligent film about the volatile relationships between teenage girls and their mothers, and it begins with a brash, borderline-surreal expression of frustration. It's 2002, and 17-year-old Christine McPherson (Saoirse Ronan) is at the tail end of a road trip touring colleges with her mother, Marion (Laurie Metcalf). They've just finished the 21-hour audiobook of *The Grapes of Wrath*, faces full of tears, and a fidgety Christine is unable to abide her mother's request to "just sit with what we heard." Like a lot of adolescent protagonists in modern coming-of-age films, Christine talks too often and too blithely, but Marion is a formidable sparring partner: "How did I raise such a snob?" she asks, shortly before Christine hurls herself out of a moving car onto the pavement. That's the sort of action that many teen movies would depict as a flight of fancy, a burst of quickly forgotten surrealism meant to illustrate an impulsive teenage mind; Christine spends the rest of *Lady Bird* sporting a fluorescent pink cast with the words "Fuck you mom" scrawled on it in black sharpie. Such glib, blithe quips are the motor oil of the teen comedy, but in her first outing as a solo writer and director, Gerwig is as sensitive to place and the fragility of young and old bodies as she is to her protagonist's often hurtful words.



Save her stubborn, overworked mother, Christine has trained all of her friends and family to call her *Lady Bird*, a sobriquet that straddles the line between dignity and cutesy appeal. *Lady Bird* has yet to obtain either trait, though her dyed hair does have a cardinal red tint. Inexperienced and unsure of how (and whether) to harness her evident ambition, she's a purely aspirational creation, and her hometown of



Sacramento comes off as ill-tempered toward irony or audacity. Though Gerwig uses bulky computer monitors and an ambient unease about violence (*Lady Bird* attends a Catholic school because her adopted brother saw a knifing at the local public school) to conjure the film's post-9/11 moment, her Sacramento is authentically behind the times, a town one character calls "the Midwest of California." Alanis Morissette and Dave Matthews Band blare from car speakers, and Bone Thugs-n-Harmony's 1995 hit "Tha Crossroads" is still the featured ballad at school dances.

Gerwig roots around in meaty class issues with a marvelously deft touch. In *Lady Bird*, economic status is a fact of life that determines people's upbringing and their future limits. *Lady Bird* isn't always quiet about it, and she helplessly looks up to her supposed betters, but she mostly accepts these realities. Instead of stealing from *Lady Bird*'s parents in order to pass as wealthy, she and Marion sift



through thrift store racks together; her primary act of financial rebellion is to secretly apply to the sorts of liberal, East Coast schools that her family can't afford with money socked away from a summer job. Though many of the mundane and enduring conflicts that erupt between mother and daughter are rooted in financial distress, the family's struggles become manifest in more subtle and devastating ways: Lady Bird's mother works a double on her 18th birthday, and her father, Larry (Tracy Letts), has to go back on expensive pills to treat depression because he's just lost his job.

The film's broader shift in perspective is its most impressive, as its sympathies gradually tilt from Lady Bird, a teen desperate to transcend her upbringing, to Marion, a mother who sacrifices her time and her body for her family without reward. Ronan, who seems to grow into her lanky frame over the course of the film, nails the sense that Lady Bird's life is a tendentious war between her ego and increasing sense of the world around her, while Metcalf masters Marion's inability to erase her frustration at her inability to be selfish or impulsive. Both performances are remarkable, brittle and diffident in wholly original ways that distinguish Gerwig's film from *The Edge of Seventeen*, *Pretty in Pink*, and other canonical coming-of-age works that attempt to honestly reckon with issues of privilege. A uniquely American comedy, *Lady Bird* is testy, humane, and firmly rooted in its time and place.

This will rent as well as **BATTLE OF THE SEXES, LAST FLAG FLYING, HOME AGAIN, GIRLS TRIP, and THE GIFTED.**



**3/6 THE MAN WHO INVENTED CHRISTMAS**  
 DRAMA \$6 MILL BO 720 SCREENS PG  
 104 MINUTES DVD/COMBO BEFORE REDBOX

**Christopher Plummer (DANNY COLLINS, THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO, THE FORGER, A BEAUTIFUL MIND, THE INSIDER, EYEWITNESS, SOMEWHERE IN TIME)**

On the eve of writing *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens (Dan Stevens) is three flops deep, with copies of the most recent of them, the anti-slavery travelogue *American Notes for General Circulation*, being burned in the streets. He needs a hit, and his publishers and creditors and pauper father (Jonathan Pryce) are all aware of it. His desperate pitch for an advance sees

him promising a Christmas tale, though as everyone is quick to point out, there's no longer any real market for yuletide cheer, since evidently celebrating the holiday went out with, presumably, the Spanish Inquisition. (Again, the film doesn't ever bother explaining the very things its title promises to depict.)

As the impossible weeks-long deadline looms for Dickens to write his story, arrange for ornate illustrations to accompany it, and get it to the printers in time for the tome to hit store shelves by December 25, he finds himself unable to shake the crippling weight of his recent failures. So even though the characters he's created for the book appear to occupy physical space with him in his writing chambers, Scrooge (Christopher Plummer) and the rest don't guide Dickens's pen so much as goad him into noisy fits of self-doubt, much to the consternation of his chambermaids (chief among them Mrs. Fisk, played by an utterly wasted Miriam Margolyes) and wife (Morfydd Clark), who by any right ought to be considering an appointment with the district sanatorium.

Dickens's tale positioned itself as a screed against the industrial age's inequities, and in support of the importance of kindness for society's downtrodden. The film's final message claims that the novella helped to create an



annual reminder that charity is one of humankind's finest virtues. Sure, why not? But the holiday that Dickens given credit for rescuing here also represents the splashiest, most firmly entrenched triumph of the same capitalism that his work so unambiguously held in suspicion, no more so than in hollow tinsel commercials such as *The Man Who Invented Christmas*.

This will rent as well as **BRAD'S STATUS, ALL SAINTS, STRONGER, THE GLASS CASTLE, and TULIP FEVER.**



### 3/6 THOR: RAGNORAK FANTASY THRILLER

\$303 MILL BO 4365 SCREENS PG-13

130 MINUTES DVD/COMBO

**Chris Hemsworth (DR. STRANGE, GHOSTBUSTER 2016, THE HUNTSMAN: WINTER'S WAR, AVENGERS: AGE OF ULTRON)**

**Tom Hiddleston (KONG: SKULL ISLAND, CRIMSON PEAK, I SAW THE LIGHT, THOR: THE DARK WORLD)**

At this point, the insular interplay between the titles in the Marvel Universe practically suggests to fans that they needn't feel pressure to seek out any non-Marvel films at all. And that sense of wan interchangeability has come through even among the most supposedly leftfield offerings like James Gunn's *Guardians of the Galaxy*. With one exception. By the standards of its kinsmen, *Thor: Ragnarok* is the flamboyantly roller-disco entry in an already uncomplicatedly cartoonish side franchise, and not because the film contrives to relieve Thor (Chris Hemsworth) of his mangy mane so as to further sex him up. But of course that doesn't hurt. Amazingly, *Ragnarok* breaks through the maxi-franchise's cynical cycles by arguably embracing its own disposability, and reveling in its vintage Williams-pinball mise-en-scène.

Back on the rainbow road to Asgard, Thor arrives fresh from defeating an oversized pile of embers bent on bringing about Ragnarok, the apocalypse that would spell the end for the glittering Nordic fantasia. He figures out that his miscreant brother, Loki (Tom Hiddleston), has been impersonating their father, Odin (Anthony Hopkins), who he left imprisoned on Earth. The two set off on a journey to find him, by way of a visit paid to Doctor Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch). Marvel films have never shied away from exposition overload, but few have given it more panache and less respect than Taika Waititi.

*Thor: Ragnarok* is the flamboyantly roller-disco entry in an already uncomplicatedly cartoonish side franchise.

Thor's brief interlude with Strange has the feel of an early-season episode of *The Venture Brothers*, firmly embedded in the nerdishness of its subject matter but still compelled to smirk at itself. Waititi, who directed *What We Do in the Shadows* and *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*, was clearly brought aboard to provide comedic genre-mashing of an edgier variety than Joss Whedon or Peyton Reed. And he comes about as close as anyone yet has to overturning the natural, monotonous order of things in the Marvel Universe.

Once Thor and Loki learn that Odin is dead, they scarcely have time



to mourn before their long-ago banished sister, Hela, the Norse goddess of death (Cate Blanchett, doing exactly what would be expected of the villainess from *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*), materializes and lays claim to the throne, projecting her brothers to a planet where metallic detritus is the precipitation and society is organized around a gladiator pit lorded over by Jeff Goldblum. (His character is named something else, but by now Goldblum is incapable of not playing himself and never gets cast *not* to.) Meanwhile, Hela starts tearing away the Asgardian Palace's freshest coats of granite, revealing murals depicting the murderous, plunderous hidden history of the kingdom's true legacy. Faster than you can say "Make Asgard Great Again," she's resurrecting the army of the dead and unchaining Fenris the wolf.

Even though the subtext here about the genocidal lies that great civilizations are invariably built upon threatens to deflate the film's soufflé texture, the Marvel Universe's unshakeable faith in the clear delineation between good and evil luckily prevents *Ragnarok* from ever truly buying what Hela's selling. Who needs hard evidence these days anyway? Instead, Waititi attacks the material with the juvenile spirit of kids doing battle with their action figures. So when Hela sprouts tar-black horns, why not? When Goldblum uses a scepter to dispatch some amphibious stool pigeon who then melts into a puddle of aquamarine glop, why not? When Hulk (Mark Ruffalo) crash lands into the gladiator pit from out of nowhere to spar with Thor, why not? In fact, the only question that Waititi dares to answer, based on the evidence, is whether he believes any of it means anything at all in the first place.

This will rent HUGE, like **DUNKIRK, THE HITMAN'S BODYGUARD, WAR FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES, WONDER WOMAN, and GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY 2.**



**3/6 WONDER WHEEL** DRAMA \$2 MILL BO  
536 SCREENS **PG-13** 101 MINUTES DVD/COMBO  
BEFORE REDBOX

**Justin Timberlake (INSIDE LLEWYN DAVIS, BAD TEACHER, STEP UP 2)**

Coney Island, the late 1950s: a once wondrous bastion of beautiful bodies in modest bathing suits and candy-colored attractions, now on the wane. Woody Allen's *Wonder Wheel* takes its name from the Ferris wheel in Deno's Amusement Park, built in 1920. The hulking structure, which has maintained a perfect safety record for 97 years and remains a tourist attraction, acts as a symbol for the allure of a better, more promising future, a reminder of salad days and the feeling of returning again and again to the same spot.

Mickey (Justin Timberlake), a lifeguard and aspiring poet, narrates the film, and he has the gaudy hyper-articulation of a freshmen writer. He's "poetic by nature," planning to "turn out a profound masterpiece" one day. He name-drops Eugene O'Neill and waxes poetic on *Hamlet*, so that we know he's a serious writer. Sweet and swoony, with his immaculate side part and honeyed pseudo-erudition, he's an aesthetic departure from Allen's usual neurotic avatars but retains their affinity for pontificating on life's mysteries by way of literary musings. He says that people often write their own tragedies, their hamartia being a self-fulfilling prophecy—though fate plays a role, of course.

"Enter Carolina," Mickey intones, as a young, waxen-haired ingénue (Juno Temple) saunters onto the boardwalk, the variegated rides alive around her, the reds and blues popping and the Ferris wheel looming over her like an unfulfilled dream. She's on the run from her gangster ex-husband, who has her marked for death. (Two Italian-American guys show up looking for her, and you know they're Bad



Men because they're played by Tony Sirico and Steve Schirripa.) She runs to her estranged father, the howling, bibulous Humpty (Jim Belushi), who operates a merry-go-round, though business is down, making the metaphor for his Sisyphian existence even more pitiful.

Mickey is having an affair with Humpty's wife, Ginny (Kate Winslet), an unhappy waitress, and one-time aspiring actress. With Mickey she finds a renewed sense of self-esteem; she laments her many bad decisions, the marriage she ruined and the one in which she's now trapped, the son who likes to set fires in apartment basements, the job she hates, her home which overlooks the boardwalk and once "housed a freak show." She suffers from migraines and takes slugs from a bottle when no one (or someone) is looking. Humpty is a brute, and when he gets a few drinks in him he gets violent, but he loves his daughter, in his own way. He wants better for her, repeatedly telling Ginny, without apparent care or concern for her feelings, that she won't waste her life being a waitress. Each pious utterance, however well-intended, only further augments his wife's resentment of him. He asks her to go fishing, even though she hates fishing. He asks her to go to a Yankees game, even though she hates baseball. She doesn't ask, or want, much from him.



This will rent as well as **BRAD'S STATUS, LAST FLAG FLYING, THE GLASS CASTLE, PARIS CAN WAIT, and NORMAN.**



**3/13 CALL ME BY YOUR NAME DRAMA**  
**\$8 MILL BO 174 SCREENS R DVD/BLU RAY**  
**THE BLU RAY HAS A DIGITAL COPY**

**Armie Hammer (NOCTURNAL ANIMALS, THE BIRTH OF A NATION, THE LONE RANGER)**

Adapted by James Ivory from André Aciman's 2007 novel, the film is set in northern Italy in the summer of 1984. Elio (Timothée Chalamet), a 17-year-old aspiring pianist, develops a bond with Oliver (Armie Hammer), an older academic who Elio's father, Mr. Perlman (Michael Stuhlbarg), invites to the family villa as his research assistant. A budding romance is stoked by shared interests: for the Bach and Debussy pieces that Elio studiously practices, transcribes, and reinterprets, and for the Psychedelic Furs song that Elio watches Oliver dance to at a party. In the film's most affecting sequence, Oliver professes his admiration for Elio ("You know more than anyone here"), and the two men, positioned on either side of a WWI memorial, come out to each other, literally crossing the divide of history.

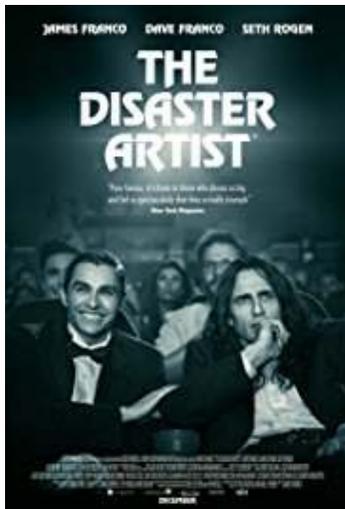
*Call Me by Your Name* is a fairly straightforward coming-of-age story that's at its finest in moments when the relationships—between Elio and Oliver, but just as crucially between Elio and his archeologist father—take on larger meanings than their literal context implies, and Guadagnino finds evocative aesthetic expressions for them. This is especially true of Oliver, an Adonis-like hunk who comes to Elio from a foreign land. Guadagnino shoots Oliver as Elio



must see him: statuesque, framed impeccably by windows and doorways, and glistening in the summer sun.

At one point, Guadagnino crafts a telling visual rhyme between Oliver, sunbathing by a pool, and one of Mr. Perlman's sculptures, lying on the beach. Sometimes, the filmmaker leans on such correlations a little too hard, as in a scene in which Elio's father, speaking to Oliver, suggests that the sculptures he catalogues are "daring you to desire them." But *Call Me by Your Name's* drama isn't always as simple as it seems, and a late sequence reframes Mr. Perlman as less a fringe element to this story than an instructive one, his love of art and his work a tragic echo of his own unfulfilled desires.

This will rent as well as **THE SNOWMAN, BRAD'S STATUS, BATTLE OF THE SEXES, TABLE 18, THE DINNER and TULIP FEVER.**



3/13 THE DISASTER ARTIST DRAMA  
\$22 MILL BO 1948 SCREENS R  
104 MINUTES DVD/COMBO

**James Franco (ALIEN: COVENANT, WHY HIM?. WILD HORSES, THIS IS THE END, LOVELACE, EAT PRAY LOVE)**

Taking a page from Wiseau's own multi-hyphenate ambitions, Franco directs and stars in the film, first lumbering into frame in monstrous fashion, back to the camera and face obscured by an unkempt mane of thick, greasy black hair. Tommy appears at an acting class attended by aspiring thespian Greg Sestero (Dave Franco), a handsome 19-year-old whose professed ambitions run afoul of his intense stage fright. When Tommy gets on stage after a mumbling rehearsal by Greg, he reads the "Stella!" monologue from *A Streetcar Named Desire*, though that's a generous assessment of his performance. Merely shouting "Stella!" over and over, Tommy devotes his energies to moaning and thrashing like a stuck pig, humping the air and climbing sets in what is, from a warped point of view, a surprisingly pure approximation of the hothouse nature of Tennessee Williams's play. The rest of the class giggles and looks away from the display, but Greg is transfixed, and he soon approaches Tommy to learn how to act so unguardedly and fearlessly as him.

Dave Franco plays Greg as Tommy's first and oldest fan, reacting to the man with a combination of bewilderment and affection. Greg finds himself drawn ever deeper into Tommy's air of mystery, stymied by all attempts to ascertain his age, birthplace, and the source of his seemingly bottomless wealth. Greg's friendship with Tommy is a contentious one, filled with obvious fondness



but often tinged with hints of jealousy because of how Greg, despite struggling to land even bit parts, swiftly snags an agent, Iris Burton (Sharon Stone), and then a girlfriend, Amber (Alison Brie). Tommy, of course, never gets anything out of auditions besides the terrified, placating smiles of casting directors who regard him like a bear that's wandered into the room and hope won't notice them as they gently urge it back out through the door.

Franco nails Wiseau's slurred, drawn-out manner of speaking and body language, the fundamental strangeness of his aura—the way that Wiseau's face always seems to remain slack and his heavy-lidded eyes droop sleepily even when conveying the most volcanic of emotions. Franco even uncannily expresses how Tommy's mirthless laughter has the feeling of punctuation, a means of desperately capping off a thought or line of conversation.



The specificity of Franco's performance carries over to the exacting recreation of *The Room* shoot. Franco's film dives into the insane folly of Tommy's passion project, how he buys, not rents, all of his shooting equipment, incurring massive costs for no other reason than to look like a big shot, or how he has a fake alleyway constructed to look exactly like the one outside the shooting stage. A portrait of Tommy as buffoon and tyrant emerges: He regularly harasses cast and crew to respect his vision while bombing dozens upon dozens of takes. In *The Disaster Artist's* centerpiece scene is the making of *The Room's* "Oh, Hi Mark" scene, and Franco captures, by way of Tommy's hapless frustration on the set, what was, by all accounts, a nightmare scenario. The entire production grounds to a halt as Tommy reads, over and over again, three lines of dialogue, and when he finally succeeds, if it can even be described as such, it's difficult for us not to share the crew's elation.

While *The Disaster Artist* perfectly communicates the surreal hell of what the original production of *The Room* must have been like, it's less successful at examining Tommy and Greg's friendship. In his accounts of the production, Sestero has described at length the curious, inexorable pull that Wiseau had on him from the moment that they met. For the sake of narrative expediency, the ups and downs of their long-standing, tumultuous friendship have been smoothed out, and as such an aspect of what informs *The Room's* unique appeal has been lost. Nonetheless, *The Disaster Artist* remains a loving tribute to Wiseau's creation, because sneakily hidden in the perfectionism of its recreations is the earnest belief that sometimes bad movies can leave as lasting an impression as the good ones, if not more so.

MATT DAMON

3/13 **Downsizing** SCI/FI SATIRE

\$23 MILL BO 2665 SCREENS **R**

135 MINUTES DVD/COMBO

**Matt Damon (THE MARTIAN, JASON BOURNE, WE BOUGHT A ZOO, CONTAGION, THE DEPARTED, OCEAN'S TWELVE)**



Alexander Payne has things on his mind: global warming, mass consumption, white privilege, liberal guilt, irredeemable women, redeemable men, and the gut-busting humor inherent in a Vietnamese refugee speaking in pidgin English. All this—and Udo Kier, too—is stuffed into *Downsizing*, Payne's I-guess-you'd-call-it-*ambitious* sci-fi satire about a world where people who want to make less

of a global footprint can literally shrink themselves.

That's in conception, anyway. In execution, proposes Payne, even a miniaturized human race will quickly fall back into their old wasteful, discriminatory habits. Give the filmmaker credit for the first 40 minutes, which intriguingly lay out the world that such a monumental scientific discovery might create. Our on-screen surrogate is Paul Safranek (Matt Damon), an amenable guy who works as a low-paid corporate medical consultant, and who hides his many personal disappointments behind an aura of lovable schlubbiness. Then



the opportunity to go small presents itself, and Paul and his wife, Audrey (Kristen Wiig), decide to explore their options.



These are *Downsizing's* best scenes because Payne, co-screenwriter Jim Taylor, and cinematographer Phedon Papamichael imaginatively visualize the process by which a person might get tiny. You have to have all your dental work undone, as an example, because fillings don't shrink and your head would explode. At one point, the filmmakers deliver a sublime visual gag in which a room of freshly miniaturized people are transferred to tiny stretchers by towering nurses holding disinfected spatulas. (Props, as well, to a gag featuring an oversized Saltine.) But then, without spoiling too much, Paul and Audrey's plan to live a blissfully Lilliputian life together doesn't pan out.

This will do as well as **LAST FLAG FLYING, BATTLE OF THE SEXES, LOGAN LUCKY, and THE BIG SICK.**



**3/13 FERDINAND** FAMILY ANIMATION  
\$61 MILL BO 2876 SCREENS **PG** 108 MINUTES  
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

**John Cena (DADDY'S HOME 2, SISTERS, THE WALL, TRAINWRECK)**

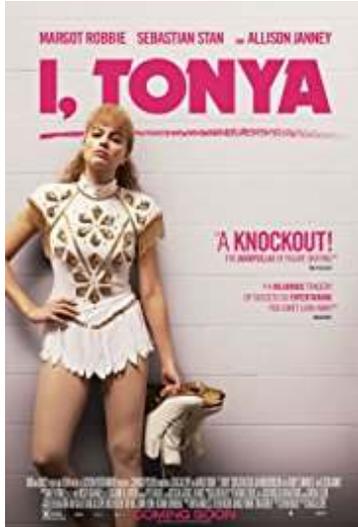
When Walt Disney Productions adapted *The Story of Ferdinand* into a short in 1938, the animation studio played up the main character's queer undertones. Here was a bull who not only had no interest in squaring off against the virility of the matador, he also lounged on his side, propping his head up with a limp hoof, sniffing flowers and rolling his eyes to the heavens. The story's inherent pacifism played into America's isolationist tendencies pre-Pearl Harbor, likely helping Walt Disney to win an Oscar, four years before he'd earn a trophy for doing precisely the opposite with *Der Fuhrer's Face*.

That's not to say that Americans are significantly more or less dove-friendly in 2017, but any potential subtext of Munro Leaf's children's book has been bleached out in the marketplace-oriented *Ferdinand*. The titular bull (John Cena, sounding like Seth Rogan for the duration of the film) remains staunchly opposed to being forced to spar: against bullfighters, against other bulls, even against the idea of fighting about being opposed to fighting, at one early point telling a churlish rival to just hit him if that's what he feels he has to do.



But in Blue Sky Studios's adaptation of Leaf's book, the plight of the bull who just wants to enjoy the beauty of nature is presented in the only terms that make sense to the American common denominator. Here, Ferdinand stands up for the preeminence of personal individuality. And the film is proud of that, which in theory would make for a truly *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*-worthy source of calm in the center of a stormy cultural moment.

This will rent as well as **DESPICABLE ME 3, LEAP!, NUT JOB 2, BOSS BABY** and **CAPTAIN UNDERPANTS**.



### 3/13 I TONYA DRAMA

\$12 MILL BO 517 SCREENS R 120 MINUTES  
DVD/COMBO COMBO WITH DIGITAL COPY

#### Margot Robbie (SUICIDE SQUAD, THE LEGEND OF TARZAN, THE BIG SHORT, FOCUS)

Memory is as unreliable as it stubborn, even in the short term. For years after the January 6, 1994 attack on figure skater Nancy Kerrigan, I can recall peers in school hallways recreating the assault, faux-victims collapsing to the ground and bellowing, “Why me? Why me?” Kerrigan never said that, though, and while *I, Tonya* gleefully muddies the waters about many elements of the Kerrigan-Tonya Harding story, it quickly and emphatically sets the record straight on that moment. If the “Why me?”

myth helped to consecrate the perceived feud between the two skaters, positioning Kerrigan as the spoiled princess to Harding’s butch, white-trash striver, Kerrigan’s actual reaction—“Why, why, why?”—more faithfully conjures the insane circumstances of the affair, a scheme by nincompoop wannabe henchmen that spun out of control. If Kerrigan and Harding had a feud, it seems to have existed purely on the ice; in hindsight, their story is less about what one skater did to another than about how we, as a country, decided to talk about them.

In depicting Harding’s brief, defiant triumph over poverty, abuse, and the perverse norms that define grace and athletic achievement, director Craig Gillespie’s film goes some distance in correcting the record on the Kerrigan-Harding affair, even as it peddles in speculation and misremembered facts. As a satire of the media and its craven consumers,



*I, Tonya* sprays its moral tirades and stylistic flourishes like buckshot, but after introducing the present-day, faux-documentary conceit that constantly warps and interrupts the proceedings, its narrative begins in the mold of an underdog sports story, with a young Tonya (Mckenna Grace) discovering a love for the ice between days spent chopping wood and reckoning with her parents’ divorce.



Tonya’s mother, LaVona Goldman (Allison Janney), is an acid-tongued, abusive parent with a grim reaper’s countenance who carries a thermos of spiked coffee in one hand and a chain of cigarillos in the other. A rare moment of sentimentality compels her to relent to Tonya’s dreams of figure skating. A teenage Harding (Margot Robbie) sews her own uniforms, makes a coat out of the skins of rabbits she’s shot, and out-jumps the competition; the sport’s notoriously conservative judges feign indifference, even after she begins doing things no American woman has done before on the ice.

This one will rent as well as **BRAD’S STATUS, BATTLE OF THE SEXES, STRONGER,** and **THE MOUNTAIN BETWEEN US.**



**3/13 JUSTICE LEAGUE FANTASY/ACTION**  
\$218 MILL BO 4167 SCREENS **PG-13**  
120 MINUTES DVD/COMBO  
28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

**Ben Affleck (ARGO, THE ACCOUNTANT, GONE GIRL, CLERKS, THE SUM OF ALL FEARS, SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE, CHASING AMY)**

*Justice League's* breakneck plot finds Batman (Ben Affleck) coming into contact with a vicious alien creature and instantly deducing that a global invasion is imminent, a conclusion that Wonder Woman (Gal Gadot) independently reaches just as quickly. The pair subsequently jump-start an initiative to recruit some para-humans they'd been monitoring and who are all reduced to their most basic attributes. The Flash, a.k.a. Barry Allen

(Ezra Miller), is a dopey, socially maladjusted nerd who treats the Justice League as a way to make friends. Aquaman, a.k.a. Arthur Curry (Jason Momoa), has his smug loner act positioned as a preening foil to Batman's brooding isolation. (Setting a new standard for superfluous shirtlessness in a superhero film, Aquaman takes pleasure, not pain, from his rugged individualism.) More interesting is Cyborg, a.k.a. Victor Stone (Ray Fisher), a young scientist and athlete who was rebuilt with machine prosthetics and digital programming after a terrible accident. Left with computational power that his human brain cannot fully comprehend, he struggles both with his complex feelings of being turned into a machine and halting ability to wield his new powers.



These and other characters, though, are never fully developed as the film's plot lurches forward to deal with the power-mad machinations of Steppenwolf (Ciarán Hinds). Flanked by winged aliens that resemble the Chitauri from *The Avengers*, this would-be world dominator speaks in threatening monologues as he seeks to unite three energy cubes (hilariously called Mother Boxes in a continuation of DC's weird maternal fixation) that are suspiciously like the tesseract from Joss Whedon's 2012 blockbuster. In fact, the extent to which *Justice League* follows in the footsteps of *The Avengers* is remarkable. That Whedon co-wrote *Justice League*, and even briefly filled in as its director, only deepens the connection between the two films, with his trademark comic relief evident throughout, especially in the Flash's awkwardness and throwaway bits like a funny gag involving Wonder Woman's lasso of truth.

When its tone slides firmly back into the murk, it's hard not to see DC's notion of heroism as borderline nihilistic.



Beyond the substitution of one intellectual property for another, practically nothing about *Justice League* distinguishes itself from what the Marvel Cinematic Universe was doing five years ago. The film's style, though, is very much Snyder's own. The filmmaker continues to fixate on fitting his characters into a political framework, with material gloomily rooted in economic malaise. Images of the Kent family farm being foreclosed in Superman's (Henry Cavill) absence speak to a kind of banal, mortal villainy more subtly at work on people than the cataclysmic horror visited upon them by super-powered beings. But Snyder again leans on his propensity for desaturated images, so much so that even scenes full of sunlight appear faded. Such dreariness is consistent with his past DC films, but it's still difficult to square how much *Justice League* wants us to look up to its superheros with the way the film underlines how little they enliven the world they protect.

Even the pops of color that should enliven *Justice League's* action sequences are muted by the palette's dingy browns and grays. During the film's climax, the superheroes' iconic poses are bathed under so much filthy yellow-red tinting that the sequence looks as if it were set inside photographer Andres Serrano's "Piss Christ." As giant tendrils of energy repeatedly burst from the ground all around the Justice League, adding to the general pandemonium of flying demons and laser fire, Snyder's camera whips around as bodies are flung to and fro by the force of super-powered strikes, resulting in blurs of motion that make it difficult to tell who's the target of any given blow. But it is all fun.

This will rent as well as **AMERICAN MADE, BLADE RUNNER 2049, KINGSMAN: THE GOLDEN CIRCLE, SPIDERMAN: HOMECOMING, and BABY DRIVER.**



### 3/20 JUMANJI: WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE

ACTION \$250 MILL BO 3801 SCREENS PG-13  
119 MINUTES DVD/COMBO

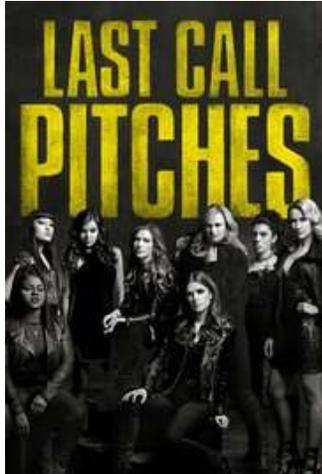
**Dwayne Johnson (THE FATE OF THE FURIOUS, SAN ANDREAS, CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE, FURIOUS 7)**

Because this is 2017, *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* sees the board game at the center of 1995's *Jumanji* almost obligatorily (and literally) transformed into a video game. Early on, there's some fresh humor to this film's ragtag group of tech-reliant high schoolers being sucked into the game and forced to adapt to the pros and cons of their new adult bodies: While the nerd emerges as the buff Dr. Smolder Bravestone (Dwayne Johnson) and the shy girl is revamped as the badass Ruby Roundhouse (Karen Gillan), the jock and the self-absorbed hot girl are cut down a few pegs, with the former

inhabiting the short and weak manservant Moose Finbar (Kevin Hart) and the latter ironically turning into a schlubby middle-aged man, Professor Shelly Oberon (Jack Black). But the manner in which everyone is reduced to a limited set of clearly defined strengths and weaknesses before being sent on a preordained journey feels every bit as pre-programmed, as the decades-old point-and-click adventure video games that the film alludes to throughout.



Once inside the game, the teens' new personae engage in obstacles set up in the brief high school-set scenes early in *Welcome to the Jungle*: scenarios depicting an awkward burgeoning relationship, a bully being put in his place, and a vain girl discovering the value of those close to her each taking center stage at some point along the way. Much of the film's first half is devoted to laboriously laying out the inner workings of the *Jumanji* video game's goal of having its players return a crystal to a remote statue to free a curse on the world of Jumanji. This leads, at the very least, to some amusing digs at the antiquated tropes of '90s-era video games, such as early titles in the *Final Fantasy* and *King's Quest* series. In-game characters mindlessly repeat lines of dialogue or arrive just in time to save our heroes from a disastrous situation to steering the characters toward an inevitable showdown with the main villain (here it's Bobby Cannavale playing the perpetually scowling Van Pelt). This will rent as big as **SPIDERMAN: HOMECOMING, IT, GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY 2, DUNKIRK, PIRATES: DEAD MEN TELL NO TALES, and GIRLS TRIP.**



**3/20 PITCH PERFECT 3** MUSICAL COMEDY  
\$101 MILL BO 3876 SCREENS **PG-13** 93 MINUTES  
DVD/COMBO BEFORE REDBOX

**Rebel Wilson (PITCH PERFECT 2, HOW TO BE SINGLE, THE BROTHERS GRIMM, PAIN & GAIN)**

A nostalgic closing montage that splices together memorable moments from the previous films in the *Pitch Perfect* franchise—which follows a group of female a cappella singers from college into young adulthood—only serves to highlight how little *Pitch Perfect 3* adds to what is otherwise a competently entertaining and sometimes subtly transgressive look at female friendship. The film not only fails to continue the complex conversation begun by its predecessors about both the power of women’s collective voices and the ways in which the world tries to silence them, but it doubles down on genre conventions that the franchise had previously been so adept at avoiding, further undermining the potential potency of its message.



After revealing that the post-college lives of these young women haven’t been playing out exactly as planned, the film reunites the group for one last performance—not an a cappella competition this time, but rather a battle of the bands on an overseas U.S.O. tour, with each group trying to impress DJ Khaled and be chosen to open for him at the tour’s final stop. It’s a premise that conspicuously exists for the Bellas to remind viewers that women are strongest when working together toward a common goal.

This will rent as well as **HOME AGAIN, HOUSE, PARIS CAN WAIT, ROUGH NIGHT** and **GIRLS TRIP.**



**3/20 THE SHAPE OF WATER** SCI/FI  
\$33 MILL BO 853 SCREENS **R** 123 MINUTES  
DVD/COMBO BEFORE REDBOX

**Sally Hawkins (BLUE JASMINE, HAPPY GO LUCKY, SUBMARINE)**

**Octavia Spencer (GIFTED, HIDDEN FIGURES, SMALL TOWN CRIME, ZOOTOPIA, BAD SANTA 2)**

Though set in Baltimore in the early 1960s at the height of the Cold War, Guillermo del Toro’s *The Shape of Water* truly takes place in Movieland: that generic realm of borrowed fantasies where [The Majestic](#) and

[Amélie](#) are also set. Movieland is beautiful in a wax-museum way—colorful, velvety, derivatively iconic, and consciously reminiscent of classic studio-era features—but there’s nothing in this dimension that suggests a spontaneous feeling or particularized texture. A diner in Movieland isn’t just a diner, but *the* diner: the mom-and-pop pie-and-coffee shop of your Norman Rockwell-fed dreams. Ditto the movie theater, which features a vast palace with red seats so luscious that they steal scenes out from under this film’s characters.

The lab where the Amphibian Man is imprisoned is a triumph of sensual gothic set design; a murky pool supported by a vaginal sewer grate could have been imagined by H.R. Giger. The set is bathed in swampy, silvery greens and blues, which increasingly permeate the film’s other locales as rain approaches, connoting Elisa’s sexual awakening with the Amphibian Man, while serving as a *deus ex machina* to whisk her and him away from the cruelty of a paranoid and intolerant patriarchal society. Said cruelty is embodied by Strickland (Michael Shannon), an official who seems to have arrived at the lab solely to work the Amphibian Man over with his cattle prod.



*The Shape of Water* has been made with a level of craftsmanship that should be the envy of most filmmakers, but the impudent, unruly streak that so often gives del Toro’s films their pulse has been airbrushed away. For all of this film’s impersonal gorgeousness, there isn’t a memorable image along the lines of the red soil from [Crimson Peak](#) or the shot of Federico Luppi’s Jesus Gris licking blood off a bathroom floor in [Cronos](#). Del Toro’s sentimental side takes over here, leaving the audience with a plot that fuses [E.T.](#) and [Free Willy](#) with a frustrated woman’s daydream of sexual salvation.

Though its narrative hinges on bestiality, *The Shape of Water* is studiously devoid of kink. Throughout, Del Toro is skittish about the practical implications of his concept, which the filmmaker utilizes for social platitudes, equating the Amphibian Man’s otherness with real-life alienation and prejudice. After sleeping with the Amphibian Man for the first time, Elisa tells Zelda (Octavia Spencer), a fellow cleaning woman, that his penis folds out of a crevice within his body, which she communicates through sign language. This is one of the film’s best moments, reveling in the pleasure that the drab Elisa is allowed to derive from discussing something naughty.

The film’s heroes are so tolerant that they don’t think to question the notion of a woman hooking up with a member of another species, which could be the wellspring for a lively, dirty punchline or two. Del Toro is aiming for critique via contrast, proffering a rosy vision of romantic acceptance that’s pointedly unpalatable to a real-life society governed by boundaries and biases. But such critique isn’t earned because del Toro isn’t willing to acknowledge uncertainty or emotional or moral fallibility on the part of his heroes, shifting all of humankind’s unsavory characteristics over to Strickland and other American and Russian military personnel. Why doesn’t Elisa, presumably romantically alone most of her life, feel *terror* once she’s found love?



*The Shape of Water* doesn’t allow you to discover anything for yourself. Elisa masturbates in her tub to a timer each morning, indulging a resonant ritual that’s connected, via an egg motif, to the Amphibian Man. One of Strickland’s gimmicks is that he chews hard candy while torturing people, and del Toro provides him with a speech in which he explains why he chews hard candy while torturing people. A moving

and initially unspoken visual rhyme—between the scars on Elisa’s neck and the Amphibian Man’s gills—is underlined during the climax. Elisa’s name evokes Audrey Hepburn’s character in *My Fair Lady*, and even Zelda’s middle name has been chosen so that Strickland may deliver a bad-guy speech synching the film’s narrative with the story of Sampson and Delilah.



This will rent as well as **GEOSTORM, WIND RIVER, BLADE RUNNER 2049, ATOMIC BLONDE, and FANTASTIC BEASTS.**



**3/27 FATHER FIGURES COMEDY**

**\$17 MILL BO 2902 SCREENS R**

**113 MINUTES DVD/COMBO**

**Owen Wilson (INHERENT VICE, BOTTLE ROCKETS, LITTLE FOCKERS, HALL PASS, NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM, YOU ME AND DUPREE)**

**Ed Helms (HANGOVER, VACATION, WE'RE THE MILLERS, NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM: BATTLE OF THE SMITHSONIAN)**

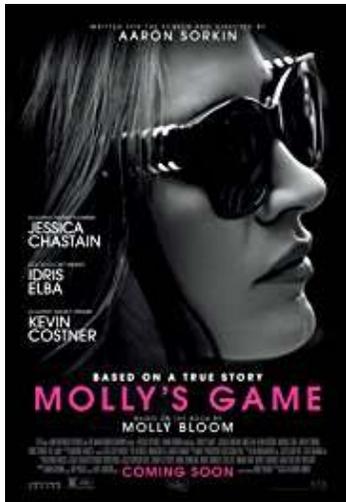
Daddy wasn't there to take them to the fair or change their underwear. Brothers Peter and Kyle Reynolds (**Ed Helms, Owen Wilson**), have long believed their father to have died of cancer, never knowing him. He's become somewhat of a mythical figure to Peter, who's dedicated his professional life to him, becoming a proctologist just like his old man.



Or at least, that's what his mother, Helen (**Glenn Close**), told her sons. As it turns out, their father is alive, believed by Peter to be an actor who carries the same facial features as the man in his photo. Of course, it's not that simple, and this leads the brothers down a road to find who is partially responsible for bringing them into this universe.



This will rent as well as **NEIGHBORS 2, HOME AGAIN, HOUSE, GOING IN STYLE** and **HOW TO BE A LATIN LOVER**.



**3/27 MOLLY'S GAME** DRAMA  
\$27 MILL BO 2348 SCREENS R 140 MINUTES  
DVD/COMBO

**Jessica Chastain (THE ZOOKEEPERS WIFE, CRIMSON PEAK, THE MARTIAN, INTERSTELLAR)**  
**Kevin Costner (FIELD OF DREAMS, THE BODYGUARD, DRAFT DAY, 3 DAYS TO KILL, THE COMPANY MAN)**

Aaron Sorkin deep dives into self-parody from the opening moments of *Molly's Game*, with underground poker organizer Molly Bloom (Jessica Chastain) introducing herself by way of a resumé recitation, recounting her achievements in high school and as an Olympic-class skier before

managing to turn her recovery from scoliosis surgery into a testament to her talent. The notion of life itself being subject to meritocratic evaluation has long been a running theme of Sorkin's work, which often barrages viewers with a list of bona fides in an effort to stress the impressiveness of an individual. But that setup works better when applied to White House staffers, web innovators, and other figures whose actions have social consequences, less so when stacking the deck, so to speak, in favor of a backroom game-runner.

It's to the advantage of *Molly's Game* that Chastain slips effortlessly into Sorkin's walk-and-talk rhythms and brings more spark to his writing than it's enjoyed in years. Molly, nurtured with a childhood of intense study and sports practice, possesses a ruthless focus that lends her a taut body language during poker games, all programmed charm and strict business talk, a sense of impatience with the foibles of others. She regularly dismantles her clients' excuses and their sexual advances with a measured tone that betrays only exasperation when she has to shut someone down more than once.



If Sorkin's prose style is most successful at enumerating the petty, anal aspects of his plots, it proves deadly when blatantly airing out themes. Intercut scenes of Molly defending herself from an F.B.I. investigation feature superstar lawyer Charlie Jaffey (Idris Elba), who agrees to represent her despite his contempt for her profession because he finds moral value in her refusal to compromise the professional and private lives of her players by selling lurid details to enrich herself. In a series of disturbing rants, Charlie insists that authorities should focus on "real" criminals instead of Molly, as well as warns his self-pitying client, who's willing to go to jail to avoid surrendering any sensitive information on her players, that women's jails are places for "drug dealers who get raped by prison guards," not the likes of some sweet and (mostly) innocent figure like her. Later, when Charlie expresses doubts about subjecting his own daughter to the same kind of rigorous parenting that she received, Molly offers up the ridiculous story about a woman she knew who worked as an escort solely to get a Chanel bag as proof that, if anything, Charlie should be even stricter with his child.



This will rent as well as **THE DARKEST HOUR, LBJ, MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS, LAST FLAG FLYING** and **DETROIT**.