

OPTIMISTIC AND UNFLAPPABLE

NOMINEES FOR THE ZANUCK AWARD EXPOUND ON CHALLENGES OF COVID AND MAINTAINING HEALTHY EQUILIBRIUM FOR CAST AND CREW.

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Jon Landau, Graham Broadbent and Nate Moore



PGA Presidents Stephanie Allain and Donald De Line



Rian Johnson, Todd Field and Jerry Bruckheimer



Kristie Macosko Krieger



Darren Aronofsky



L-R: Todd Field, PGA National Executive Director Susan Sprung, Jon Landau, Jonathan Wang, Rian Johnson, Graham Broadbent, Stephanie Allain, Nate Moore, Donald De Line, Darren Aronofsky, Katie Macosko Krieger, Gail Berman, PGA General Counsel Susie Casero, Jerry Bruckheimer



Gail Berman



Jonathan Wang

There were plenty of insights and a sprinkling of surprises when producers behind the 10 nominees for the PGA's Darryl F. Zanuck Award for Outstanding Motion Picture gathered for a panel discussion on February 25 at LA's Skirball Cultural Center.

For example, who knew that *Elvis* was the first live-action film produced by Gail Berman, the storied studio executive and recent two-term PGA president? Or that Jerry Bruckheimer (*Top Gun: Maverick*) was a first-time nominee?

The gathering, sponsored by *The Hollywood Reporter* and moderated by PGA Presidents Stephanie Allain and Donald De Line, stood as a reminder of both the eclectic nature of today's feature film landscape and the resilience of the filmmakers, whose productions across the board were affected by the COVID outbreak and its lingering aftermath.

"The most difficult part of the film for me was the day we got the call that Tom Hanks (who played Colonel Tom Parker in *Elvis*) and Rita Wilson had the coronavirus, which is what it was being called at that moment," recalled Berman about the film's early stages of production in March 2020. "We didn't know that much about the coronavirus at the time, or what their health was like, and then Warner Bros. said they were shutting the movie down."

Filming resumed in August of that year, when Hanks received a clean bill of health, and wrapped the following spring. But other productions did not have the luxury of weathering such a lengthy hiatus, or sustaining an extended production period.

"Working with an ensemble cast, we really couldn't shuffle their schedules a lot," said Rian Johnson, producer-writer-director of *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery*. "A lot of them had a hard out, so if we had someone go down and had a delay, we could have really been in trouble. But luckily we were able to keep everybody safe."

Juggling the availability of an all-star cast is one thing, but when your movie hinges on the participation of one key player, it's no less risky, COVID or not. "Cate (Blanchett) had a hard out," said Todd Field, producer-writer-director of *Tár*. "She's in every frame of the film. If she went down, that was it. There were no contingencies."

The primacy of writing was not lost on the group. Two of the producers on hand, Field and Johnson, earned a solo screenplay credit on their nominated projects.

"The hardest thing for all of us up here, and for *Avatar: The Way of Water*, was the script," exclaimed Landau, who with Cameron won top honors from the PGA and the Academy for *Titanic* (1998). "I think we're overshadowing that in our conversations about the production and all the things that we solved. We were faced with the challenge of doing a sequel that we wanted to be a stand-alone movie that stood on its own merits. That comes down to the script."

The gap between *Avatar* (2009) and its follow-up was exceeded considerably by *Top Gun: Maverick*. Principal photography commenced 33 years after shooting started on the original, even though a sequel was announced in 2010. Part of the delay had to do with the death of Tony Scott, who directed the first *Top Gun* (1986). But when preproduction resumed in 2017, the gap in time figured into the story—a blueprint that Bruckheimer cited as one of the project's biggest hurdles.

"It's always the hardest thing," said Bruckheimer. "How do you get a

