



Trent Reznor, Atticus Ross, Mia Neal, Leslie Odom, Jr. + more receive the 7th Annual Variety Artisans Award at SBIFF

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

The 36th Annual Santa Barbara International Film Festival presented by UGG continued with the presentation of and interviews with the recipients of the Variety Artisans Award, an honor that celebrates those essential to the filmmaking process and who have exhibited the most exciting and innovative work of the year in their respective fields. The evening is one of the most educational events of the festival serving as a primer for young people looking at the arts and crafts that support the film industry.

Nicolas Becker (Sound of Metal), Joshua James Richards (Nomadland), Donald Graham Burt & Jan Pascale (Mank), Alexandra Byrne (Emma), Alan Baumgarten (Trial of Chicago 7), Mia Neal (Ma Rainey's Black Bottom), Sean Faden (Mulan), Leslie Odom, Jr. and Sam Ashworth (One Night in Miami), Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross (Mank) discussed their work, their influence and offered advice to the younger generation with dreams of breaking into the industry with Variety's Senior Artisans Editor Jazz Tangcay. Clips from each of the films were shown in advance of the conversation. Following the conversation, David Wasco and Sandy Reynolds-Wasco presented the award to the artisans.

Some of the highlights from the conversation included:

Leslie Odom, Jr. on the genesis of Speak Now: "She (Regina King) showed us an early cut of her beautiful film and we went to work! We only had two weeks! If you use your time well a week is plenty of time, there is a lot of hours in a week. We just kept coming back to it and making it better every time we came back. Doing our best anyway, trying to be artisans, you know."

Mia Neal on the research she did before starting work on Ma's hair and makeup: "Ma is a very interesting character! If you think about, you know, this was a woman of color during the 1920s, probably the first generation born free from enslavement in her family to leave the rural south and to start to travel and be a blues singer and her lyrics very racy for the time. She had a husband and a wife."

She didn't follow the rules, she just set the tone. There aren't many photos of Ma. I think there's a total of 7 that exist in the world. A lot of our decisions were just based on descriptions that other people gave of her and then thinking about the psychology of her, just her life and where she came from and how she really recreated herself. Of course, I followed the leadership of Ann Roth, our costume designer, who through her research discovered that Ma Rainey wore horsehair wigs so we kept that authentic. Putting her in a fur coat in the summertime, that was like "okay, this woman follows absolutely no rules and social norms." Her clothing alone whatever store that would've sold that clothing, they would not have allowed blacks in at that time but she still had it. It's nice to have been challenged in that way where I didn't have the photos. I really got to play more with this psychologically than normal.

Mia Neal on the wig creation process: Leah Loukas and I built over 100 wigs to bring down for the production. That was for the background, for Ma's dancers, and then a separate set of wigs for the main principal characters. The horsehair wig came from Europe and it just came in a stalk. It had string tied around it and it was covered in manure and lice eggs, nothing active. It had clearly been stored away somewhere for a very long time because I had to peel it apart. The hairs were so wiry and thick that I could only fit one through the lace that I used to build the wigs on so the entire wig is single strand. I boiled it afterwards trying to clean it and clean it. I figured out that it softened the hairs once I boiled it, so I used that process to set the wig as well. I wish I would've timed myself close to 80 hours.

Trent Reznor on how their experience with Watchman helped their experience working on

Mank: From the timeline of things, we were deep in the world of Watchman when we knew Mank was coming out. Soul was also lingering around. We had quite a bit of time before we actually started working on these projects to deeply think about them and feel tremendous anxiety about them. We thought it [Mank] would require us, and it did, to move into a different lane that we're not that accustomed to, in this case, every note being played by other musicians in an orchestral setting, in a different style, with the added challenge of it happening during a pandemic. An opportunity came up during Watchman where we needed the exact same thing [as we needed here with Mank] so it was a good test run to see if we could pull it off and it worked out great and I think that experience gave us the confidence that we can pull off the unique to us challenges. We can adapt into this new canvas. It greatly influenced how we approached the score writing for Mank.

Atticus Ross on recording during the pandemic: The challenge was there is no other option. We were lucky we had a very good team on this who helped put the musicians together, phenomenal musicians, probably the only bonus of the pandemic was there wasn't a lot of music being recorded so we had incredible musicians at our disposal. Every part was recorded separately at home by the musician, our engineer would supply us with mics that would be transported from one place to another, sanitized, with instructions on how they should be set up to record. The sheet music obviously and then we basically just prayed to god that it would work out.

Sean Faden on creating the epic battle scene: We visited the Valley in the south of New Zealand in helicopters. We found a location that would work great for the open space. We knew if we added special effects steam. We ended up having 80 real soldiers for the imperial side and we had at most 67 horseman riders but in the end it had to look like at least 500 on each side. Sony Pictures Imageworks did that work. We started by creating soldier assets so we could replicate the soldiers. We built horses. We also needed to create the mountain that was going to be around it. I just used my

iPad to sketch where the mountain would be. The reason why that sequence works well is because it was conceived as an epic battle that was not going to be gory. We used layers of steam to hide some of the violence so it was almost just suggested.

Sean Faden on the transformation of Gong Li: The one takeaway from the visual effects is there's a lot of it, we did over 2,000 shots. Most of them are supporting the story and expanding the world that Niki [Caro] was creating. The scene plays out as one shot and the transformation is so subtle you almost have to play it back because there's so many layers. The mandate for that was to make it subtle to make it beautiful. It was a challenge to create something that was that sleight of hand.

Alan Baumgarten on his editing process: I had the great gift of a wonderful script and great performances from our incredible ensemble cast. It's just a matter of working my way through. Building it for the script and then finding the unexpected moments where we can explore and diverge from what was there on the page. I let the performances lead me. I find that when I'm working on a scene I really concentrate on that and I let the acting and the performance tell me which shot selection I want to be in and where I want to be for the emotional moments.

Alexandra Byrne on changing Emma's color palette changing with the seasons throughout the film: I was talking to Autumn and we felt that because the story goes over a calendar year, we could use Emma as the central character to tell that story. By making her the pivotal role, and locating her palette in a seasonal palette, we could then really put the other characters in her context which is how she viewed the world and that everything was orbital to her existence. It just helped us contain what could've gotten out of control.

On films that influenced and inspired them:

My parents thought it was really important to take us to see Spike Lee movies on the weekends that they came out. I do remember Malcolm X being a high watermark for Spike as a filmmaker at that time. I think because I had a context for the filmmaker too, I knew a little of Spike, I knew a little of Denzel, so just to see them achieve new heights had a profound impact on me and I don't think I've ever shaken that.

Leslie Odom, Jr.

I got hold of that Michael Jackson Thriller box set. It had the behind the scenes of Thriller. The other big one was Charlie Chaplin. The idea of the iconic always fascinated me.

Joshua James Richard

Raiders of the Lost Ark. I was blown away by the world that was created. It inspired me and I didn't know I was going to get into visual effects or anything like that at the time but I knew there was a world for being creative.

Sean Faden

Lawrence of Arabia. I was just astounded that this world existed. I'd never seen anything like it.

Alexandra Bryne

I was really into horror films growing up. It was something about that burnt face on Freddy Krueger. I was always fascinated like how do they do that? The first film that really transformed me was Little Women. That movie made me feel different about this industry.

Mia Neal

“I have to go back to the movies with the soundtracks that impacted me the most which would be Good Will Hunting and Magnolia. The entire Magnolia soundtrack probably planted the seed that I’d want to make music for movies one day.” • **Sam Ashworth**

“Bladerunner. I think for me the most important is the real-life. My favorite film is life.” • **Nicolas Becker**

“Birdman. It blew my mind. It was an eye-opener.” • **Jan Pascale**

“In Cold Blood which scared me to death. When I went to college I remember seeing a movie called Eraserhead and I think that was the movie that made me turn the corner there.” • **Donald Graham Burt**

The 36th Santa Barbara International Film Festival, presented by UGG, will continue through April 10th, 2021, online and with the two ocean-front drive-ins sponsored by TOYOTA. Tickets and passes are available at SBIFF.org.



About the Santa Barbara International Film Festival

The Santa Barbara International Film Festival (SBIFF) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit arts and educational organization dedicated to discovering and showcasing the best in independent and international cinema. Over the past 35 years, SBIFF has become one of the leading film festivals in the United States, attracting 100,000+ attendees and offering 11 days of 200+ films, tributes, and symposiums, fulfilling their mission to engage, enrich, and inspire the Santa Barbara community through film. In 2016,

SBIFF entered a new era with the acquisition of the historic and beloved Riviera Theatre. After a capital campaign and renovation, the theatre is now SBIFF's new state-of-the-art, year-round home, showing new international and independent films every day. In 2019, SBIFF opened its own Education Center in downtown Santa Barbara on State Street to serve as a home for its many educational programs and a place for creativity and learning.

Category

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Date Created

April 9, 2021

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