

Streaming And The Shifting Dynamics Of 21st Century Indie Film Distribution

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

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Ten years ago, MANCHESTER BY THE SEA would have been a Miramax or Paramount Vintage picture. Now? Itâ??s being distributed by a company that began as an online bookseller.



r the course of its existence, it has been sory for giant multinational hybrid companies. It has been through numerous cycles of boom and bust. It has given us both ***The Terminator*** and ***Terminator: Genisys*** (or as I prefer to call it, ***Terminator: Spylling Arror***). And, as with any institution that exists for an extensive period of time, Hollywoodâ??s methodologies have grown and changed. Low budget genre pictures are no longer made by the dozens on a production assembly line. Directors and actors work job to job, rather than on contracts built around a set number of films. The general structure and tone of blockbusters has changed time and again. And, just as the methods of producing films and the type of films that get made have changed, so too have the methods of getting them out into the world.



When Kenneth Lonergenâ??s ***Manchester by the Sea*** opens in theaters this week, it will be the latest [illegible]tion branch of the online bookseller [illegible] turned general internet juggernaut. It will receive both a theatrical and a home media release, but ultimately those are loss leaders for its eventual premiere on Amazon Primeâ??s streaming service. It will join ***Chi-Raq***, ***Wiener Dog***, ***The Neon Demon***, ***The Handmaiden*** and others as part of a sales pitch to its potential audience. That pitch goes something like this â?? â??We have distinctive films by distinctive filmmakers, and if you subscribe to our service, you will have access to them through what is currently being sold as the most accessible way to watch movies and television.â?• Netflix does something similar with its own original content, although they generally give more promotional focus to their serialized content as opposed to their standalone films. Streaming is still a relatively recent factor in the state of non-blockbuster film distribution, and it has major implications for film as a whole that are still being worked out. But on a purely business level, it is easy to understand why distribution for smaller films has turned so sharply towards streaming in the past few years. Through streaming, Netflix, Amazon and their peers in distribution are making a move that their predecessors could not.





[illegible] and semi-independent film distributors from the last century have [illegible] transformed. Miramax and New Line, arguably the biggest and most [illegible]dios, are now much smaller companies. The Weinstein brothers left [illegible]e Weinstein Company, and Disney ultimately chose to sell the company on. Its film library, which includes every one of Quentin Tarantinoâ??s pictures up to ***Kill Bill***, is now distributed by former rival Lionsgate. New Line has similarly lost much of the influence it once had, and it now exists as a subsidiary of Warner Brothers. Warner Independent Pictures (***Before Sunset***, ***A Scanner Darkly***)and Paramount Vantage (***No Country for Old Men***, ***Nebraska***) have been completely shut down. These companies and subdivisions lived and died on their ability to sell and spread comparatively small, specific movies as comparatively small, specific movies. New Line made its name with ***A Nightmare on Elm Street*** and the ***Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*** franchises, both of which were huge hits in comparison to their budgets. Miramax sold itself as a haven for filmmakers championed as auteurs â?? Tarantino, Kevin Smith and their peers. Paramount Vantage distributed the Coens after a string of unsuccessful movies, and Warner Independent Pictures backed Richard Linklater on two of his more ambitious projects (his first return to Jesse and CÃ©line, ten years after ***Before Sunrise*** and a cell-shaded adaptation of Phillip K. Dickâ??s quietly dystopian drug war story,

featuring a post-rehab pre-***Iron Man*** Robert Downey, Jr.). While some of these movies have become blockbusters, none of them (***Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*** aside, and even with the success of the cartoon, New Line could not put Disney money behind their adaptation) could initially have been sold as such. So they narrowed their focus, and tailored their products to a specific audience that they could reach. When they overplayed their hand, or the audience moved on, they failed.



Streaming enables the targeting of a more specific audience than ever before, for both good and ill. Amazon can play specifically to folks who want to see ***Manchester by the Sea*** or ***The Neon Demon*** and guarantee that they will have an audience, but it will be just as easy for a movie to get lost in the endless backrows, particularly if it is only pointed out to a specific audience. Itâ??s why Iâ??m glad Amazon has been making a push to get their movies into theaters, and why simultaneously I want them to push harder. Theyâ??ve distributed some really amazing movies, and I want those movies to have a life beyond an ad saying that they are now streaming on Amazon Prime.

(Source: http://www.birthmoviesdeath.com)

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