The Star Wars Saga Is Back

Like a tremor in the Force, the division stirred by "The Last Jedi" created friction in the "Star Wars" universe. That left director J.J. Abrams with additional clean-up work to do on "The Rise of Skywalker," a "Star Wars" movie made very much with devout fans in mind, and one that proves highly satisfying as an end not just to this trilogy, but a saga 42 years in the making.

Abrams (who co-wrote the script with "Justice League" scribe Chris Terrio) also directed "The Force Awakens," and in hindsight, Lucasfilm would have been wise -- or at least saved itself some headaches -- not to entrust its baby (one even more precious than the child in "The Mandalorian") to multiple artistic visions. Love or hate "Last Jedi," it went off in directions that seemed to depart from the groundwork that Abrams and company had laid out.

To that extent, "The Rise of Skywalker" feels like a welcome course correction, featuring sequences and references that more cynical minds will dismiss as "fan service," but which derive emotion and power precisely from the bond and investment the audience has forged not just with this permutation on the story, but all of it going back to the original trilogy.

It gives away nothing to note what's already been heavily promoted -- that Billy Dee Williams and Ian McDiarmid -- Lando Calrissian and Emperor Palpatine, respectively -- play roles in this film, reinforcing ties to those roots. The filmmakers have also chosen, less successfully, to construct the late Carrie Fisher's performance around available unused footage, a technical accomplishment that nevertheless proves awkward and limiting.

Perhaps foremost, "The Rise of Skywalker" seeks to recapture some of the fun and playfulness that has been a hallmark of the series, despite the backdrop of darkness and galaxy-threatening peril at its core.

In that effort, the movie wisely focuses squarely on its principals -- Rey (Daisy Ridley), Finn (John Boyega) and Poe Dameron (Oscar Isaac), as well as the villainous Kylo Ren (Adam Driver) -- finding meaty material and solid interplay for all of them. The tradeoff, such as it is, is that the few significant new characters scarcely register.

The themes are familiar. The "Star Wars" story has always hinged on choosing one's path. It has also returned, frequently, to world-destroying technology, with Death Stars bookending the original trilogy.

Recruited to finish the story he started, Abrams pretty obviously didn't intend to reinvent anything. But the strong sense of nostalgia that permeates the film feels especially appropriate in the context of completing a narrative that took so many decades to finally tell.

If there's a quibble, it's mostly in the first 45 minutes or so, as the movie sets up its central challenge, then essentially careens from one crisis to the next, in a fashion that comes across as a little too willy-nilly in its galaxy-hopping exploits.

The final hour, however, is filled with indelible moments, and the overall pacing is extraordinarily brisk. Unlike some blockbusters, there's precious little fat found on its two-hour-and-23-minute frame.

Like anything with a big, diverse constituency, there's no pleasing everyone with a "Star Wars" movie at this point, and the naysayers have a way of wielding the loudest megaphones -- occasionally in unpleasant ways that reflect a lack of perspective. While George Lucas' creation is immersed in myth, it was never meant to become a religion all its own.

Faced with that task -- and clearly mindful of the enormity of it -- Abrams has made a "Star Wars" movie aimed at the people who love it best. "The Rise of Skywalker" isn't perfect, but seen that way, it more than rises to the occasion.

*"Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker" officially premieres December 20 in the US. It's rated PG-13.*

**Chance The Rapper Cancels Tour In Sake Of Family Time**

Chance the Rapper has canceled his national tour, the Big Tour, which was scheduled to kick off in January.

The performer announced the decision in an Instagram post on Sunday, apologizing to fans and explaining that he is taking the time to be with family, create new music and develop "my best show to date."

"I know it sucks and it's been a lot of back and forth with reschedules and rerouting, but it's for the best," he said in the post.

It's not the first time the artist has made big tour announcements on social media.

Chance took to Instagram in September to tell fans he was postponing the tour -- which was slated to begin that month -- until the following year.

His reason then remains the same as it is now: The artist wants to spend time with his growing family.

Chance apologized to his fans, who continue to show up for his shows, but also to those who were planning on attending their first Chance concert during the Big Tour.

"I'm deeply sorry to anyone with a ticket who has supported me this past decade by coming to a show and rocking out with me and I feel even worse for anyone who was planning on making this their first Chance concert," he said.

Chance and his wife, Kirsten Bennett, have two young daughters, but the rapper sometimes finds himself torn away from the family by his career.

"When Kensli was born, I went on tour 2 weeks later and missed some of the most important milestones in her life, but more importantly I was absent when her mother needed me the most. At this point as a husband and father of two I realize that I can't make that mistake again," he wrote in his September tour delay announcement.

Those who commented on the post are widely disappointed, but expressed their support for the artists' decision.

"Take all the time you need Chance, we'll still he here," commented one fan, followed by a heart emoji.

"Sometimes you gotta step away from something good to achieve something better," another comment says. "Was looking forward to seeing you for the first time on stage, but will keep an eye out for the next time you hit up Montreal. All love."

Chance promises he'll be back soon, though. Just look out for him sometime next year.

"I promise to come back much stronger and better in 2020 and hope to see some of you guys there. I truly love you and God bless."

**Juice WRLD Dies Aged 21**

Rapper and singer Juice WRLD has died in Chicago, the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office said Sunday.

Juice, who was born Jarad Anthony Higgins, turned 21 on December 2.

The rapper suffered a medical emergency shortly after arriving at Chicago's Midway International Airport, according to people who were traveling with him, Chicago police spokesman Anthony Guglielmi said in an email to CNN. The rapper died shortly after at a nearby hospital, according to police.

"There were no signs of foul play and all individuals aboard the aircraft are cooperating with CPD and have given all of their information," Guglielmi said.

Police are waiting for the medical examiner to determine cause and manner of death, he said.

An autopsy hasn't been performed and no cause of death has been determined, Cook County Medical Examiner's Office spokeswoman Natalia Derevyanny said.

"Juice made a profound impact on the world in such a short period of time," the artist's label, Interscope Records, said in a statement. "He was a gentle soul, whose creativity knew no bounds, an exceptional human being and artist who loved and cared for his fans above everything else."

Juice was signed to Interscope Records in March 2018 after scoring hits on SoundCloud with "Lucid Dreams" and "All Girls Are the Same," according to Billboard magazine, which profiled the artist in March.

SoundCloud says Juice was the most streamed, liked, and reposted artist on its platform in 2018 and "Lucid Dreams" notched the most plays of any song last year.

Juice WRLD was named Top New Artist at the Billboard Music Awards in May.

Billboard said his songs reached its Hot 100 chart 25 times in less than two years. Juice was included on three songs on the Hot 100 ranking as of Saturday, Billboard said, including two as lead artist.