

Arts & Leisure

The New York Times



Carey Mulligan Isn't Interested In Your Idea Of Perfection

The actress has a new movie out, and has a lot to say about how Hollywood still views women.

BY KYLE BUCHANAN | PAGE 7

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DANNY EABRYE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

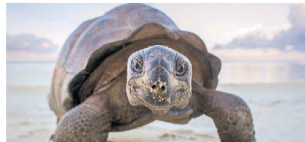
Carey Mulligan, who stars in Emerald Fennell's "Promising Young Woman," says, "We don't allow women to look normal anymore, or like a real person."



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It was a difficult year for the stage, but some people and organizations went above and beyond to help.



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Theater

Standing Up for Theater

With their field rocked by major challenges, these people and groups (some notable, some new) have stepped into the breach in various ways.



SARA KRUEGWICZ/THE NEW YORK TIMES

From Home, YouTube Show Is Outlet, Meeting Place and More

By ALEXIS SOLOSKI

In late February, Seth Rudetsky and his husband, James Wesley, finished hosting a Broadway-themed cruise that meandered through the Eastern Caribbean with talent like Lillias White and Beth Leavel aboard. As Covid-19 fears grew, Rudetsky, a Sirius XM radio host, concert accompanist and comedy writer, flew to Scottsdale, Ariz., for a show with the singer Norm Lewis.

Wesley soon joined him in Houston to host a political fund-raiser. That was on Thursday, March 12, the day that New York State announced that Broadway would shutter.

On Friday, they flew home to Orange County, N.Y. And then they went to work. Because while most shows couldn't go on—the governor had said so—they had already dreamed up one that could.

The first livestream of "Stars in the House," Rudetsky and Wesley's combination fund-raiser, variety hour, talk show, class reunion, endurance test, public service announcement and community drop-in center, hit screens on March 17.

Audio glitched. Wesley disappeared from the frame. Rudetsky struggled with his mute button. First run-throughs are like that.

But Dr. Jonathan LaPook, a medical correspondent for CBS Evening News, delivered coronavirus updates. And Keili O'Hara sang three songs, including "To Build a Home," from "The Bridges of Madison County," even if she had to start it over when a speaker buzzed.

Nine months in, hundreds of guests and tens of thousands of audience members have joined in. "Stars in the House" has released more than 250 shows, more like 300 if you count such spinoffs as "Plays in the House" and "Plays in the House Teen Edition."

During each show, hosted from their home an hour north of Manhattan, Rudetsky and Wesley solicit donations for the Actors Fund, which benefits entertainment industry workers. Their appeals have raised more than \$600,000, from nearly 8,000 discrete donors in 31 countries. (In a typical year, the Fund disburses about \$2 million, though this year is anything but typical.)

And the series, which airs live Monday through Saturday at 8 p.m. on a dedicated YouTube Channel, is still going. "Why would we stop?" Rudetsky said. "It would be so rude, now that people really have no money, to be like, we're no longer going to raise money."

Affection and Tension

In an early December Zoom call, Wesley and Rudetsky sat on a sofa in their New York home, which they share with their daughter, Wesley's mother, four dogs and one cat, and now, a makeshift broadcast studio.

Married eight years, they have the rhythms of the long coupled: interrupting (usually Rudetsky), over-talking (Rudetsky

Above, Seth Rudetsky, left, and James Wesley, the hosts of "Stars in the House." The show, an entertainment grab bag on a dedicated YouTube channel, has featured a parade of notables, right.

sky again) and finishing each other's sentences. In conversation, they demonstrate a mix of obvious affection and what Rudetsky described, in a phrase lifted from his friend Ana Gaseyev, as "simmering marital tension." He wants to put that slogan on a T-shirt.

"But it's fine," he said. For Rudetsky, "Stars in the House" was always about fund-raising. Wesley, an activist, sees it as offering comfort for viewers and participants both, providing appointment television when all other appointments have been canceled.

Way back in March, Wesley suggested another kind of comfort: reunions with cast members of beloved TV shows. They began with "Taxi" on March 30 and have continued with "Frasier," "L.A. Law" and more. They have also reunited the casts of musicals like "Carousel," "Fun Home" and "The Full Monty." "Beetlejuice," an early pandemic closure, has reunited twice.

demtic then to be on the front lines, helping everyone."

They also have a way of making guests feel immediately comfortable. Rudetsky displays an encyclopedic knowledge of seemingly every theatrical project. Wesley radiates a puppyish warmth. As hosts, they're unafraid to let their fandom fly. Annette Bening, a guest who now counts herself as a friend, explains their strengths this way: "Their sense of being in the moment and their spontaneity and their relationship with each other, they seem to play off each other with just this effortless charm."

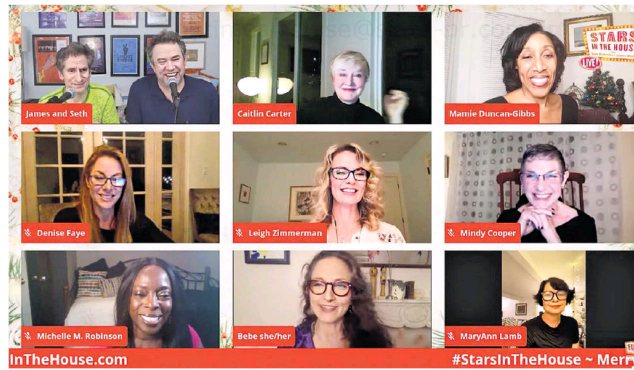
That charm isn't necessarily effortless. Remember "simmering marital tension"? In an hourlong conversation, Rudetsky mentioned several times that he had never intended to co-host. "I've never been a Kathie Lee with the sidekick," he protested. But they have learned a few tricks. Wesley will hold up his finger off camera when he

'One Can Only Give So Much'

For the first couple of months, Rudetsky and Wesley did two shows every day, which didn't leave time for much else. "I am a little bit jealous of our friends who are like, 'I've written three plays during the pandemic,'" Wesley said.

"Or baked bread," Rudetsky added. Some of their colleagues have worried about their workload. Bening has even called them to make sure they are OK. "I was just checking in because one can only give so much," she said. And in May, they did transition from 14 shows per week to a vastly saner six, which includes occasional guest hosts. But only because their matinees weren't receiving as many views or raising as much money.

"I kind of kept fighting it," Rudetsky said. "I was like, 'Some people need to watch every day.' And James was like: 'This is crazy. They can watch the repeats.'" (They can, via the YouTube channel.)



Covid, Rudetsky said, is a great leveler. Pretty much everyone in entertainment is out of work. So the show also functions as a virtual green room, a place to be unemployed together. (While neither host takes a salary for "Stars in the House," Rudetsky also hosts a separate daily show for Sirius XM and Sirius pays their part-time staff of 10.)

"Who shows up in that green room? Pretty much everyone. In part because Rudetsky and Wesley have shown up for them over the years. 'Here's what you need to know,' the actress Andrea Martin said. "They never, ever say no to any request that has been made of them."

The actress Sierra Boggess, a guest and occasional guest host, echoed her. "This is their calling," she said. "And there's no other way they would behave during this pan-

wants to ask a question. Rudetsky will try not to steamroll.

"We joke about how we hate each other, but there's just a typical amount of annoyance," Rudetsky said. "I think it's great. We're going to look back and love that we have this record of what we went through."

There are other records. Like the funds raised. Like the Drama Desk award and the award for service from the Museum of the City of New York. The Library of Congress has selected the series for its coronavirus web archive.

And then, more nebulous, there is the consolation it continues to provide. "I can't tell you how many people that I know that have told me this has gotten them through this pandemic," Brian Stokes Mitchell, the chairman of the Actors Fund, said. "They're really doing a great mitzvah."

When will "Stars in the House" end? "Knowing the two of them, I could not put any limits on it," Mitchell said. "This could go on for the rest of their lives for all we know."

Rudetsky had a slightly more reasonable limit in mind. "Look, this clown said we're doing it till Broadway comes back," he said, gesturing toward Wesley. "And I feel like we can't go back on our word." So that means at least five more months of jokes, songs, '80s TV reunions and amiable bickering.

They had a terrific show planned for Christmas, Wesley wrote in an email a week after the interview. And others for Christmas Eve, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. "We feel it's important to give folks a place of community they can turn to during the holidays," he wrote. "Plus, what else would we be doing?"

pressreader

Theater

ADVOCATING, AGITATING, CONNECTING, INVENTING



Andrew Lloyd Webber is a producer serving on committees. Performers signing petitions. Then there is Andrew Lloyd Webber, the most successful living musical theater composer...



Black Theater Coalition When Broadway returns after the pandemic sets up, the revival of 'Company' will include 10 young Black men and women as paid interns behind the scenes...



Jenna Doolittle Soon after the pandemic began, Jenna Doolittle started getting panicked messages from friends: How can I get financial help? Are there discounted classes for those out of work?...



Paula Vogel The playwright Paula Vogel found herself at home on Cape Cod last spring, thinking that the coronavirus could have her name on it...



Jared Mezzocchi Many theatermakers struggled to rethink their art form this year, but the multimedia designer Jared Mezzocchi was immediately at ease in the virtual world...

Actors and Writers Lobby For Congressional Support

By ELISABETH VINCENTELLI Art is what binds us. It illuminates the human condition. It's good for the soul. Those are the kind of arguments you usually hear when artists and cultural institutions ask for money...

Making the point that cultural workers are laborers, too.

down, what was on their mind was their own survival. Ishibashi said the campaign began simply as a way to rally the sector to advocate for the extension of Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation...

The letter hammered the group's essential point: The arts matter because they represent a lot of money and they create jobs. 'We're here to change the conversation so arts workers can understand their intrinsic value because it's tied to an economic worth, a dollar amount,' Ishibashi said...



JACQUE MOLLOY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Jeremy O. Harris Shares His Sudden Good Fortune

By MICHAEL PAULSON Jeremy O. Harris is a playwright, a performer and a provocateur. And now, he's a philanthropist. The 31-year-old author of 'Slave Play,' which is nominated for 12 Tony Awards, emerged during the pandemic not only as a vocal advocate for the beleaguered theater industry...

Jeremy O. Harris has championed theater in general this year, donating to playwrights, artists and libraries.

plays 'Heroes of the Fourth Turning' and 'Circle Jerk,' using a portion of the \$250,000 annual theater production fund HBO gave him when he signed a development deal. ■ Donated a collection of plays by Black writers to one library in each of the 50 states, Guam, Puerto Rico and Washington. ■ Pledged fees and royalties from 'Slave Play' to fund 500 microgrants, administered by the Bushwick Starr theater...

How would you describe the kinds of artists or works you're looking to support?

I want to make sure that we have a really fertile artistic landscape when we return to the theaters. And I think it's been pretty evident that I'm really excited about work that's challenging, that's scary, that probably wouldn't get support otherwise. It does seem like you're especially interested in supporting writers.

The library initiative is named for your grandfather, Golden, and the commissioning program for him and his wife, Ruth.

I was raised by my mom, but my grandma, Ruth, and my papa, Golden, took care of me a lot. My papa had to start working when he was 12 or 13, so he had a complicated relationship to literacy, and yet he was such a great advocate for me as a young reader. We'd go to the Rock House, [a convenience store] and I'd get two hot dogs with mustard, ketchup and chili, and a book. He died right before 'Slave Play' got moved from the Belasco Theater to the Golden Theater...

Even before the tumult of this year, you've had an interest in highlighting Black theater artists.

The structures of inequality that privilege whiteness have been a part of my understanding of the world for such a long time, because I grew up really desirous of knowing more people who did the things that I was interested in — like writing plays, like acting in plays, like writing books — who also looked like me. It was so exciting to see myself in Tennessee Williams, in Beckett and Caryl Churchill. But there came a point where I was like, 'Wait, have Black people never done anything like this?'

Do you think of yourself as wealthy, or how are you making all this happen?

I'm not so deluded as to say something like 'The money I made this year is inconsequential money.' It's a great deal of money. But I also know that amongst the elites of the New York theatrical community, my bank account pales in comparison. The fact that I made just under a million dollars this year after literally making no actual income for a decade feels like a really complicated thing for me to make sense of...

The \$50,000 commissions are above the norm for playwrights. How did you arrive at that amount?

I wanted to give someone a living wage in New York. I wanted someone to feel excited about spending a year and a half, maybe two, working on one play, and not feeling compelled to work in a coffee shop or to write in a [television] writers' room.

How well do you think the theater industry is doing at making a case for the art form during this crisis?

Obviously, theater is not on its last legs. Theater is this amazing mutating beast that doesn't hide when things get tough. It can roll with the punches. And the mutability of theater as a form is why there have been huge successes, like 'Circle Jerk,' in my opinion, and also some really amazing failures. There also will be experiments where you'll be like: 'I never want to see that again. That's an abomination that should not exist.'

Do you think of yourself as heroic? No, I would never say that about myself. For me it's not heroic — it feels like the obvious thing that a young artist without much to lose should be doing for their community.

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