

CALENDAR

Wednesday, October 17, 2007

calendarlive.com



STEFANO PALTERA For The Times

DRESSED UP: PJ Harvey in a concert gown? Mirroring her songs of repression, the musician tries to rock in a long dress.

POP MUSIC REVIEW

Caged bird singing

PJ Harvey opens up during a one-woman show about containment.

By ANN POWERS
Times Staff Writer

THE piano that PJ Harvey played during her solo show Monday at the Orpheum Theatre was adorned with homey things — a family photo in a frame, some kind of plastic stuffed animal, holiday lights, a metronome. What rocker keeps time with a metronome? Harvey used it only once, as a kind of acoustic drum machine, on her new song “The Devil.” But this art-rock queen of the meaningful scream is not given to empty gestures.

That little order-keeper belonged to the world Harvey animates on her just-released album, “White Chalk.” So did her bone-white concert gown, scrawled over with song lyrics, and the piano itself, deconstructed to expose every hammer hitting every string as Harvey, new to the instrument, labored to play it correctly.

Monday’s set list spanned every dynamic shift of the 37-year-

old Englishwoman’s 16-year career, from early tirades such as “Rid of Me” to her mid-career re-imaginings of myth and murder balladry. But Harvey always returned to the shy nightmares of “White Chalk.” In them, she has found a new way to tell her old stories of yearning and repression, focusing not on rebellion or despair but on what happens when one struggles to thrive within the cage.

Harvey’s spirit during this show, one of only two scheduled to celebrate “White Chalk” in the U.S. (the other was last week in New York), was hardly confined. She grinned and gently joked her way through the complicated program, alternately playing guitar, autoharp and an array of pedals, drum machines and synthesizers, moving around the equipment-filled stage like Miss Havisham in her mansion — minus any desire for a groom.

Her piano playing was elemental — not a shock, given that she’d only recently learned the

[See Harvey, Page E5]

SCRIPTLAND

Deadline dilemma

A possible strike has writers worrying about work that’s due after Oct. 31.



BRIAN HAOIWARA Brand X/Corbis

By JAY A. FERNANDEZ
Special to The Times

THE creative writing process is built on countless choices among infinite options. But in the last few weeks, two enormous decisions have been weighing heavily on screenwriters. Whether or not to vote in favor of authorizing a Writers Guild strike has been complicated by the related dilemma of whether to rush completion of a script before a potential walkout on Nov. 1.

Though the current WGA contract expires in two weeks (on Oct. 31), some writers have delivery deadlines that fall well after that date. If the guild officially pulls the strike trigger before a writer files pages, the writer won’t get paid for work done up to that point.

As the Alliance of Motion Picture & Television Producers (AMPTP) and the Writers Guilds of America, West and East, careen into an increasingly combative homestretch of eleventh-hour negotiation, the rest of the town — agents, producers, executives, writers, managers — is holding its breath. Studios have almost universally stopped making any new writer deals — from rewrites and polishes to entirely new screenplays.

Until a few weeks ago, agents were still making deals for their writer clients that had delivery deadlines beyond Oct. 31 (one agent places the shift in policy at the moment the WGA sent out its strike authorization letter to members on Oct. 1). Conventional wisdom at the time was that the WGA would continue to work without a new contract until the spring, when its sister acting and directing guilds’ contracts with the AMPTP would be negotiated and the collective bargaining power would be amplified.

[See Scriptland, Page E6]

Despite objections, ‘If I Did It’ is doing it

O.J. Simpson’s book was canceled, then revived, and now is a bestseller.

By JOSH GETLIN
Times Staff Writer

NEW YORK — It was derided as a cheap publishing stunt, a

that aims to “empower, inspire, motivate, and assist people who are victims of crime,” according to a note on the book’s last page. Yet the family does not know precisely how much of the proceeds will be made available or when, and the website for the foundation does not yet offer information about grants that may be available in the future.

Writers face deadline dilemma

[*Scriptland*, from Page E1]

Once the strike vote was activated (polling closes Thursday night) and a Nov. 1 writer walk-out was a real possibility, they first tried to rush script delivery. Then, in an effort to avoid "financing the strike," many companies stopped taking options on screenwriters' deals and instituted, as one writer put it, "a de facto lockout in features."

The WGA says it has even begun fielding questions from members and their attorneys about scenarios in which a studio has rescinded a rewrite assignment by claiming that, since the writer was given only oral but not written notes, no "commencement," or official request for work, actually occurred. Those writers whose rewrites were commissioned, and whose deadline falls after Nov. 1, may find themselves in limbo.

Once a strike officially begins, a writer cannot deliver creative materials and thus trigger payment (which should occur within seven days of delivery, per the terms of the current agreement) without violating the guild's strike regulations.

But if the draft or polish is filed the day before a strike starts, money is owed in standard fashion. (According to the Minimum Basic Agreement, "delivery" is not contingent upon approval of the script's quality; it is at the writer's discretion upon turning it in, which means that it would be extremely difficult for a studio to argue that a script delivered doesn't trigger payment.)

As it stands, there are a number of high-profile projects — one agent estimates two or three per studio — that straddle this timeline. So the question becomes one of balancing financial interests with artistic ones — always a fraught dilemma even without extra pressure from an employer to get work in early.

And jamming something in by Halloween to prompt a paycheck could have dangerous career consequences, whether it feels financially sound or not. "Nobody wants to deliver a half-assed script, because that's the quickest way to get [a bad reputation]," says one agent with several affected clients. "I don't care who you are, if you deliver something that's just halfway there, it's a problem. Whether they're owed money or need to pay their mortgage or not, I just don't see it happening."

It's good to be Peter Morgan

Despite an impolitic agency dust-up that caused him to jump from ICM to UTA two weeks ago, British dramatist, TV and film writer Peter Morgan remains the hottest thing since sliced crumpet.

Last week it was announced that Morgan has begun plotting a follow-up to his Oscar-nominated screenplay for "The Queen" that would focus on former Prime Minister Tony Blair's

On the Web

For the latest on the negotiations, read The Times' continuing coverage at latimes.com/hollywoodwriters.

relationships with Presidents Clinton and Bush. Two days later, Fox 2000 bought the remake rights to the Morgan-penned 2002 British TV miniseries, "The Jury," for playwright Beau Willimon to adapt and Marc Forster ("The Kite Runner") to direct.

Morgan has already adapted his own 2006 play, "Frost/Nixon," for Ron Howard to direct in time for a pointed presidential election-timed release next fall, with Frank Langella reprising his Tony-winning incarnation of the disgraced head of state. And he just finished polishing up one of the hottest properties of the last year, "State of Play," also based on a popular British miniseries (not his), coming on to the script after Tony Gilroy ("The Bourne Ultimatum") and Matt Carnahan ("The Kingdom"). Brad Pitt, Helen Mirren and Edward Norton are scheduled to star for Morgan's "The Last King of Scotland" director, Kevin Macdonald.

Morgan's adaptation of Philippa Gregory's novel, "The Other Boleyn Girl," will open next year, with Natalie Portman, Eric Bana and Scarlett Johansson starring. And he's currently working on a feature adaptation

of David Peace's book "The Damned United," about the chaotic 44-day reign of charismatic Leeds United soccer coach Brian Clough in 1974.

It's a prolificacy that extends to his quartet of offspring, ages 1 through 8, who double as great motivators. "When you have four kids, you're faced with a constant combination of worry and wanting to escape," Morgan says. "I have a tiny cupboard at the top [of the house] with a word processor."

Meanwhile, Willimon's own nascent political play, "Farragut North," has George Clooney and Leonardo DiCaprio eyeing an adaptation for Warner Bros. a full year before it even launches on Broadway.

"All I can say is I was very grateful I was in my 40s before anybody got interested in me, because it can be bewildering," Morgan says by way of concern for the youthful Willimon's sudden buzz-worthy status. "In the end you're just trying to do good work, and it's terrible if people suddenly think you have the answer."

Given the high demand for his writing services, it's clear that people are looking to Morgan for just that.

"And that's fine," he says. "As long as they don't expect me to believe it."

Scriptland is a weekly feature on the work and professional lives of screenwriters. Please e-mail any tips or comments to fernandez_jay@hotmail.com.