

The year that broke the movie mold

Warm-Up Questions:

- What is your favorite movie genre, and why do you think it appeals to you?
- Reflect on your recent movie-watching experiences. Have you noticed any changes in your preferences or in the types of movies being released?

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JUANA SUMMERS, HOST:

They're calling it **superhero fatigue**. 2023 was the year **cracks showed in Marvel's armor**. Audiences did not **flock** to see "Ant-Man" or "The Marvels" or, for that matter, to DC's "Flash" or "Aquaman." But that did not keep Hollywood from making \$2 billion more than it did the year before. Critic Bob Mondello wonders if 2023 might be the year that broke the movie mold.

BOB MONDELLO, BYLINE: Come back with me for a moment to July 19.

MONDELLO: Not a superhero in sight, and yet movies are all anyone can talk about. A hot pink comedy and a **brooding biopic**. Have been linked in the public mind, and Hollywood's **rulebook has flown out the window**.

MONDELLO: These are not star vehicles or pre-sold franchises - no spandex, no animation, no streaming. You have to go to a theater. And people are **lining up** - tens of millions of people. For a few blissed-out weeks, movies are the dominant art form again...

MONDELLO: ...All because Hollywood has done what people have been saying for years that it should - program something unexpected, something that isn't a **sequel**, something that makes seeing it in a theater with other people sound more appealing than sitting at home and streaming it in private. Three months later, that happened again.

MONDELLO: This time it was a pop star, Taylor Swift, bypassing movie studios and selling her concert film directly to theater owners. She and they made so much money in just a few weekends that cinemas are now looking at all sorts of alternative entertainments, from sports to stage shows.

MONDELLO: A filmed version of the live stage production of the Broadway musical "Waitress" made \$5 million last month.

MONDELLO: Marvel and DC, meanwhile, have been doing some serious **soul-searching**. Instead of each fielding four or five big-budget superhero releases in 2024, they've **radically** cut back. Partly that's about strike-related production delays, but it's also about **dwindling** box office, all

of which suggests a path that Hollywood could take. There is a model because something similar happened back in the 1960s.

MONDELLO: Studios had been chasing audiences with epics and musicals that kept getting bigger and more expensive, and audiences got bored and shifted to **scruffy** indie **flicks** like "Easy Rider" and "Midnight Cowboy."

MONDELLO: And then they shifted to a whole new generation of filmmakers - Kubrick, Spielberg, Lucas, Coppola - who had a different idea of what a movie could look like.

MONDELLO: It took the audience pointing the way. Scruffy indies and genre **mashups** had been around for a while. They'd just never been big box office. And today is much the same. Woman-directed films, serious biopics, concert movies are nothing new. They're just newly **in vogue** and also **in the pipeline**, so you'll be seeing more of them.

MONDELLO: This is a case in point - a Bob Marley heavy-on-the-concerts biopic. It's called "One Love," and it'll open on Valentine's Day.

Vocabulary and Phrases:

1. **Superhero Fatigue:** A state where audiences feel overwhelmed or bored by an overabundance of superhero-themed content.
2. **Cracks in the Armor:** Signs of weakness or vulnerability in something that was previously considered strong or unbeatable.
3. **Flock:** To gather or move in a crowd, usually to a particular event or place.
4. **Brooding:** Deeply thoughtful or focused, often with a somewhat dark or moody tone.
5. **Biopic:** A biographical movie that tells the story of someone's life.
6. **The Rulebook Flew Out the Window:** A phrase indicating that traditional expectations or norms were completely abandoned.
7. **Lining Up:** Forming a queue or eagerly waiting for something, typically an event or release.
8. **Sequel:** A continuation or follow-up of a story or series in a subsequent movie.
9. **Soul-Searching:** Deep and introspective reflection, often during times of uncertainty or change.
10. **Radically:** In a fundamental or extreme way.

11. **Dwindling:** Gradually decreasing in size, amount, or strength.
12. **Scruffy:** Having a rough or unkempt appearance.
13. **Flicks:** Informal term for movies or films.
14. **Mashups:** A blend or fusion of disparate elements, genres, or styles.
15. **In Vogue:** Trendy, fashionable, or popular at the moment.
16. **In the Pipeline:** Planned or in the process of being developed.

Comprehension Questions:

1. What trend, labeled as 'superhero fatigue,' is being observed in the film industry?
2. What were the characteristics of the movies that captivated audiences' attention, moving away from superhero themes?
3. How did Taylor Swift's approach to releasing her concert film impact the movie industry?
4. What historical comparison is made to the current shift in movie trends?
5. What types of films and entertainment are hinted to become more popular, as suggested by the phrase 'in the pipeline'?

Discussion Questions:

1. How do shifts in movie trends reflect broader cultural or societal changes?
2. Discuss the impact of 'superhero fatigue' on future movie productions and audience preferences.
3. What are your thoughts on the importance of indie films and genre mashups in revitalizing the movie industry?
4. How can movie theaters adapt to changing audience interests in the era of streaming services?
5. Share your predictions for the next big trend in movies based on current patterns.

Additional Activity: Create a Movie Pitch

- Develop a pitch for a movie that breaks away from current trends, focusing on a unique story or genre combination.

Writing Task: Analytical Essay

- Write an essay analyzing the cyclical nature of movie trends and the factors that drive these changes.