

much ado about cinema

reviews and essays on films and television



Bumblebee and the '80s Obsession

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The fashion! The hair! The cars! The music! Ah, the 1980s. Many others, myself included, have a tinge of nostalgia linked to that era even though I was born over a decade after. But somehow a fondness has developed. Or perhaps, an obsession? Particularly in the film and television industry, a slew of productions has been hitting our screens all inspired or based in the 1980s. From original stories like *Stranger Things* and *Ready Player One*, or reboots like *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Blade Runner 2049*, these remakes, rehashes, and re-dos have a keen finger for tickling the nostalgia gland and squeezing out that potential viewership to increase the revenue gross. And the latest 'victim' of the '80s deluge is the *Transformers* franchise, which is in dire need of a nostalgia remedy.

Bumblebee, as the title suggests, is a solo picture revolving around everyone's favourite yellow and black transforming Camaro but, and in true '80s fashion I implore, has had a makeover into an adorable yellow Volkswagen Beetle. Also starring Hailee Steinfeld, whilst isn't an '80s icon, recently portrayed a troubled teen in *The Edge of Seventeen* which is eerily reminiscent of coming-of-age classics of John Hughes. As stated before, the *Transformers* franchise is desperately due for rejuvenation as the financial and critical performances have decreased as they continue to release films.

New director to the franchise, Travis Knight, is one of the sharpest minds working in cinema. He's the mind behind stop-motion conglomerate Laika Studios and directed the wildly original *Kubo and the Two Strings*. Knight was born in the '70s meaning he spent his influential teen years growing up in the '80s becoming inspired by the barrage of films from Steven Spielberg or John Hughes. *Bumblebee* takes

heavy influence from *E.T.* An alien-like creature befriending teen whilst consequently being hunted by government forces. Sounds familiar? While it is not an uncommon narrative, it's familiar enough for audiences to receive comfort therefore becoming a safer bet for potential income.

While embracing this 1980s obsession is a sharp move from the producers, it is not entirely original. The family favourite superhero Spider-Man has received three different incarnations in recent memory (four if you count *Spider-Man: Into the Spideverse*). Fatigue was high for yet another Spider-Man film so something different had to be done. Enter Jon Watts. Promising a different outlook on Spider-Man, *Homecoming* focused on Peter Parker the human rather than the superhero and is predominantly based at his high school, slipping into the teen genre so popular in the '80s. In one sequence, Parker runs across various gardens paying light homage to a similar scene from *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. He even passes through a garden party with a family watching the film and yells out, "Good movie!" To finally solidify why a slight genre tilt was needed, the promotional posters prove why a nostalgia kick is necessary for updating an overused character.

SPIDEY RULES



TOM HOLLAND

**SPIDER-MAN™
HOMECOMING**

One kid's struggle to become an Avenger.

COLUMBIA PICTURES PRESENTS A MARVEL STUDIOS/PASCAL PICTURES PRODUCTION "SPIDER-MAN™: HOMECOMING" MICHAEL KEATON JON FANTHEAD ZENDEKA DONALD GLOVER
 TIGRE BANY WITH MARISA TOMEI AND ROBERT DOWNEY JR. COSTUME DESIGNER JUDITH "MICHAEL" GIACCHINO MUSIC BY MIKE KANEYAN EDITOR ANDREW COOPER PRODUCED BY JONATHAN SOKOLOFF
 WRITTEN BY DAN LEBONHATZ AND DEBBIE BEERMAN DIRECTED BY JONATHAN SOKOLOFF COSTUME DESIGNER JUDITH "MICHAEL" GIACCHINO EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS AVY KAUFMAN AND CHRIS MCKENNA
 PRODUCED BY JONATHAN SOKOLOFF AND JOHN FRANCIS DALEY WRITTEN BY JONATHAN SOKOLOFF AND JOHN FRANCIS DALEY DIRECTED BY JON WATTS
 CASTING BY KEVIN FORGE
 JULY 7
 SONY PICTURES
 A PARAMOUNT PICTURE

LEISURE RULES



MATTHEW BRODERICK

**FERRIS BUELLER'S
DAY OFF**

One man's struggle to take it easy.

A JOHN HUGHES FILM
 PARAMOUNT PICTURES PRESENTS FERRIS BUELLER'S DAY OFF
 MIA SARA ALAN RUCK COSTUME DESIGNER IRA NEWBORN EDITOR PAUL HIRSCH EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS MICHAEL CHINICH
 PRODUCED BY JOHN HUGHES AND TOM JACOBSON WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY JOHN HUGHES
 A PARAMOUNT PICTURE
 PG-13 PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED
 30029 FERRIS BUELLER'S DAY OFF

The poster team behind *Spider-Man: Homecoming*'s marketing pay homage to *Ferris*

Bueller's Day Off.

And in terms of income, *Homecoming* did more than okay, with a lifetime gross of over \$880 million. So, respecting childhood heroes has proven successful for Knight and Watts. But how does Spielberg respect himself?

With *Ready Player One*, Spielberg attempts to rekindle his youth with references from everyone's childhood alongside heavily remastered 80s' hits. In the movie, OASIS inventor, James Halliday, created the universe with inspiration from his childhood hence the overflow of '80s iconography. Halliday and his creation hark modern directors with their childhood inspired pieces as they're simply reflecting on 'easier times'. Many refer to this as the '30 Year Cycle' which has creators idolising on a period with less modern struggles. The 1980s was no exception as they too fetishized the 1950s with films like *Stand By Me*, *Back to the Future*, and *Dirty Dancing* returning to their directors' youth as escapism to their troubles — just like today.

Ready Player One is one of 2018's heavy hitting blockbusters including characters from all forms of entertainment culture. Yes, we see the Iron Giant beating the ever-living shit out of a Voltron but the 'wow' factor is never really there. Rather, just meh. Not being a fan of the film, I'm disappointed at how Spielberg lathered the screen with references expecting me to fall off my seat in excitement when in reality I slumped further down and attempted a nap. However far Spielberg has fallen from grace, his prominence with cult classics of the 1980s will always be remembered. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* were (and are) revolutionary but, nowadays he tries to make films like a young buck again even though films like *The Post* and *Lincoln* are far more interesting.



But with mainstream obsessions, there must be a leak into art house for the chance to pull in a larger audience. The films I've listed so far idolise the '80s as if they were heavenly ignoring the bubbling racism and homophobia buried in America. Last year's *Call Me By Your Name* (which I still regularly cry about in the shower) adopts costume and soundtrack from the '80s that ground the audience in the period. And by so graciously covering homosexuality, it gently levers the viewer into noticing the stigma through historical context, which is never explicitly mentioned, but is still lingering in the air. By receiving a multitude of award wins and nominations, the film has been brought forward into the public eye.

Recently, biopics have also been extracting a more 'realistic' approach to historical issues. *Straight Outta Compton* and *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* focus on prominent black game-changers in society dealing with prejudice, racism, and segregation. Using the 1980s as a backdrop, the filmmakers can highlight the advancements we've made but also criticise the persistent attitudes that still prevail today. Even crossing borders to the UK, we have *This is England*. A mighty delve into social realism in the UK and specifically targeting working-class groups and the erupting hate nature of racism being fed to younger generations. Both examples perfectly using the 1980s craze to their advantage by subtly extracting current quivers and aligning them with an idolised period.

With *Bumblebee* receiving all kinds of praise, it's interesting to see why the explosive creativity of the 1980s complements a smart filmmaker. If the 1980s is helping produce some of the most memorable content of recent years, then I'm all for it. We'll have to see how we affected the 30 Year Cycle once 2040 rolls around but, if non-Michael Bay *Transformers* films are coming out, I'll be happy.

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