

Newcomer brings modern sensibility to classic

Adaptation of romance centers on young tutor

By BRIDGET BRYNE
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LOS ANGELES

Ruth Wilson isn't very Jane Eyre-like in her opinion of the demure Charlotte Bronte character she plays on TV.

"Sometimes she can come across a bit pious and you want to sort of kick her bum and just say, 'Get on with it,'" says the young British actress, not long out of drama school, whose portrayal can be seen in a new adaptation of the oft-filmed romance novel.

The two-part miniseries airs at 9 p.m. Sunday and Jan. 28 on PBS's Masterpiece Theatre.

The story of a young Victorian governess who has to overcome abandonment, poverty, cruelty, emotional betrayal and something scary in the attic before finally finding true love first hit the screen in the silent era.

The best-known film version was made in 1944, starring Joan Fontaine and Orson Welles, who played Eyre's employer and eventual true love, Edward Rochester. The most recent feature version was released in 1996, starring Charlotte Gainsbourg and William Hurt.



Newcomer Ruth Wilson, left, stars as Jane, and Toby Stephens plays as Mr. Rochester in the Masterpiece Theatre production of "Jane Eyre," which will air on PBS stations in two parts at 9 p.m. Sunday and Jan. 28. The mini-series was filmed in England.

The last TV movie came in 1997, starring Samantha Morton and Ciaran Hinds. The director and screenwriter of the latest version are both women, as well as

something of British literary-adaptation experts: Susanna White, whose credits include six episodes of the Charles Dickens' miniseries "Bleak House," and

Sandy Welch, who scripted the Dickens miniseries "Our Mutual Friend."

"I think it's the first time a woman has ever done the adaptation, and I think that's a central thing to this piece, because its heart is absolutely centered on Jane, whereas a lot of them might have been called 'Rochester,'" White says.

So casting someone with a feisty spirit in the title role was particularly important to White, who discovered Wilson, now 25, via the traditional audition process.

"One of the qualities I really liked about her was you look at her one way and she's very beautiful, and then you look at her another way and she can look quite plain at times," White says. "That was something I felt was important to bring out, because I think one of the things people just love about the book is how Jane's a sort of Everywoman."

"Every young girl has been through that stage of life of feeling completely unattractive and no one is going to love them."

Wilson, meanwhile, sounded quite lovely and lively herself over the phone from London. She earned favorable reviews when the "Jane Eyre" miniseries aired last year in England, and is now in great demand. She was talking as she was riding in a car on her way back from rehearsals for the TV drama "Capturing Mary," in which she plays

the young version of a journalist portrayed by Maggie Smith.

She finds that amusing because it's Smith's son, Toby Stephens, who plays her sexy yet moody Rochester, who is haunted by his past love life.

"I called Toby and he went quiet when I told him I was playing his mom. He found that a bit weird," Wilson laughs.

Wilson says it was a complete blessing, for someone with her limited experience to act opposite Stephens, who was the villain Gustav Graves in the James Bond movie "Die Another Day," and has starred on stage in the title roles of Shakespeare's "Hamlet" and "Coriolanus."

But, she admits, "When I first heard it was him I was like, 'Oh, no,' because he's got an amazing sneer, with those flaring nostrils, and I thought this guy is going to be horrible and have a huge ego, but he's the total opposite to that. He's the most generous and lovely guy."

Wilson first read Bronte's 1847 novel when she was about 12. She used it as a reference while filming but didn't look at any previous screen versions so she wouldn't be influenced.

White first read the book when she was about 14.

"It grabbed me and it's a book that's never left me. There's a wonderful, passionate aspect to the story, but also the whole gothic element, a very scary story."

Films

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1)

"Things are going pretty well for Peter. He's got his girl, he's got his job and school," Maguire said. "Generally, Peter's in a good state. Of course, it doesn't stay that way."

If they matched the business their predecessors have done, those five films alone would account for nearly 20 percent of the \$9.4 billion haul that all movies rang up domestically last year.

Winter and spring have some intriguing movie prospects, including comedies from Eddie Murphy ("Norbit") and Will Ferrell ("Blades of Glory"), a dramatic turn from Adam Sandler ("Reign Over Me"), and thrillers featuring Hilary Swank ("The Reaping") and Sandra Bullock ("Premonition").

The fall and holiday season present such highlights as Will Smith in the apocalyptic tale "I Am Legend," Nicolas Cage in the sequel "National Treasure: Book of Secrets," Nicole Kidman in the fantasy "The Golden Compass," Denzel Washington and Russell Crowe in the crime saga "American Gangster" and the voices of Jerry Seinfeld and Renee Zellweger in the animated comedy "Bee Movie."

But as usual, the real heavy hitters are crowded into summer. Here's a look at what's up with summer's key movies:

'Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End'

When we last saw rascally buccaneer Jack Sparrow (Depp) in "Dead Man's Chest," Davy Jones had hauled him to a watery hell. Jack's pals (Orlando Bloom and Keira Knightley) joined their villainous rival (Geoffrey Rush) to begin a quest to retrieve him.

The new film picks up right at that point.

For scheduling and financial reasons, Bruckheimer and director Gore Verbinski shot much of the second and third films at the same time. The advantage for audiences: They only have to wait a matter of months to see



Geoffrey Rush, Keira Knightley and Johnny Depp, from left, star in "Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End," scheduled for release this summer.

how last summer's cliffhanger turns out, rather the usual two or three years between major sequels.

'Shrek the Third'

All an ogre wants is to settle down in the swamp with his not-so-beautiful bride. But Myers' Shrek finds himself drafted into the family business.

Shrek heads out with sidekicks Donkey (Murphy) and Puss In Boots (Banderas) to find the future King Arthur, a royal cousin next in line for the throne.

Meantime, Fiona (Diaz) finds herself mentoring Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Rapunzel and Snow White, teaching the pampered princesses to stand on their own.

'Spider-Man 3'

Maguire's bright-eyed Peter and Spidey also pick up where they left off in the last film. Peter's finally hooked up with girl-next-door Mary Jane (Dunst), managing to juggle his photography job, schoolwork, his love life and the superhero gig.

But after he gains fresh powers when his blue-and-red Spider-Man costume turns black, Peter's dark side asserts itself, leaving him caught in an inner struggle just as two new villains (Thomas Haden Church and Topher Grace) turn up.

And hanging over all of Peter's

problems is the enmity of his former best friend, Harry (James Franco), who blames Spider-Man for the death of his father.

'Ratatouille'

On the heels of the rodent cartoon "Flushed Away" comes another rat tale, this one from the animation masters at Pixar.

"Ratatouille" follows the adventures of a rodent living in Paris who dreams of becoming a French chef, despite family objections and the obvious obstacles to the idea of rats in the kitchen.

'Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix'

Boy wizard Harry (Radcliffe) and buddies Hermione (Watson) and Ron (Grint) come back to school for year five, only to find a conspiracy in the magical community afoot over the return of the dark Lord Voldemort (Ralph Fiennes) in the last movie.

Disbelieving that the evil one has come back, bureaucrats hamstringing Hogwarts headmaster Dumbledore (Michael Gambon), appointing a new instructor whose classes leave the kids ill-prepared to defend themselves against the dark arts.

So Harry and his crew form a secret society to learn the magic tricks they need to take on Voldemort.

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