

'Spider-Man: No Way Home' has fun embracing the multiverse

By Katie Walsh
Tribune News Service

Back in 2018, when Phil Lord and Chris Miller took audiences "Into the Spider-Verse" with Spider-Man Miles Morales, they reinvented, and reignited, what superhero movies could do, and indeed, could be, completely turning the nature of the superhero movie inside out, while retaining its heart, soul and sense of thrilling adventure.

It's clear that writers Chris McKenna and Erik Sommers, who also wrote "Spider-Man: Homecoming" took note, and inspiration, bringing the Spider-Verse into the most recent, live-action iteration. Helmed with verve and wit by director Jon Watts, who has directed all three of the Tom Holland-starring "Spider-Man" films, "Homecoming," "Far From Home" and now, "No Way Home," the multiverse freshens the formula while also looking back fondly at some of

our favorite things about Spidey, now and then.

Coming off "Far From Home," our intrepid Peter Parker finds himself in quite a pickle back home in New York when the evil Mysterio reveals his identity on TV news outfit "The Daily Bugle," as J. Jonah Jameson (J.K. Simmons) is now a blowhard broadcaster. For your friendly neighborhood Spider-Man to be unmasked as a quiet high school student who was unfortunately involved in Mysterio's drone attacks in London, it puts Parker in quite a public predicament, and during college applications no less! When he and his besties Ned (Jacob Batalon) and MJ (Zendaya) are rejected from MIT due to the controversy, Peter turns to his not-so-friendly neighborhood wizard, Dr. Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch) for some way to turn back time.

It shouldn't be out of bounds to mention that the spell cast by

Strange rips open the multiverse, and former supervillains start to pour in, including Doc Ock (Alfred Molina), the Green Goblin (Willem Dafoe) and Electro (Jamie Foxx). Will there be even more visitors from other Spider-Verses? You'll have to turn up at the theater to find out.

Peter Parker, in every iteration, has always been a deeply earnest do-gooder, those qualities embodied perhaps most innocently by the youthful Holland, and that is at the emotional core of "No Way Home," especially inspired by Peter's empathetic Aunt May (Marisa Tomei). These aren't his supervillains, so maybe he can send them back where they came from just a little bit less villainous? Therein lies the quandary and conundrum of "No Way Home," which is: Can you change someone's fate? It seems, not without a large sacrifice of your own.

The multiverse approach does indeed liven up the pro-



Matt Kennedy/Sony Pictures

MJ (Zendaya) and Spider-Man (Tom Holland) jump off a bridge in "Spider-Man: No Way Home."

ceedings that can get rather rote over the many, many versions of Spider-Man. Though it's curious which tropes have a staying power that goes uncriticized, like including the ever-present grayscale airborne CGI climax, and certain emotional beats that are hit time and time again. Watching these repeated moments play out with different actors has a surreal quality, as if we are really in a multiverse.

But despite these limitations, "Spider-Man: No Way Home" is a fast, loose and funny romp through Spidey's greatest hits. It whips through its two hour, 28 minute runtime at a break-neck pace, though it takes it's time to breathe in the emotional moments. Turns out it's a good thing when our Spider-Man flicks gain sentience, because it doesn't get much more fun than this at the movies.

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