movie review

BY JAY BOBBIN

'Glass' shines enough against its forerunners

Ever since his success with "The Sixth Sense," which now goes back more than 20 years, it's been clear that M. Night Shyamalan is a filmmaker who likes to stretch. That hasn't always worked, but two examples where it has are "Unbreakable" and "Split."

The writer-director merges characters and situations from those movies in "Glass," named for the character Samuel L. Jackson played in "Unbreakable." He turns up again in the 2019 effort – which FX shows Wednesday, April 21 – as does "Unbreakable's" Bruce Willis, whose alter ego is a self-styled, special-powered vigilante on the trail of the multiple-personality villain played by James McAvoy in "Split."
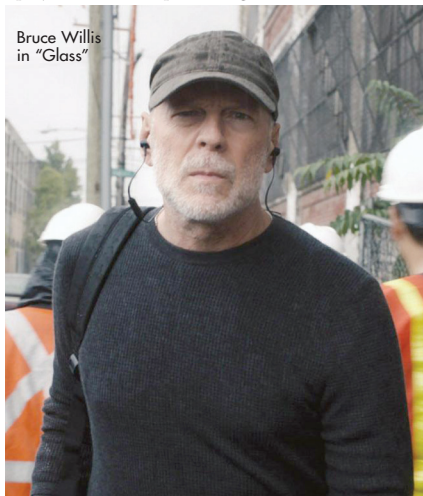
McAvoy also reprises his role here, and it's only a matter of time before all of those figures converge ... with Sarah Paulson in another American horror story as a psychiatrist who surveys all of them. That may sound rather dry, but don't worry: The stuntmen and special-effects experts eventually earn their keep.

Shyamalan's ambition with "Glass" is clear: It's pretty bold for a moviemaker to go back to two of his earlier projects and attempt to merge them, but the director has built something of a cinematic universe of his own. He set the groundwork for "Glass" well, but the catch is to make the combination work fully.

Bruce Willis in "Glass"

Fans of "Unbreakable" likely will enjoy seeing Willis in his role again as much as he appears to enjoy playing it again. Indeed, he puts forth more conviction and energy than he had in some time, and he was working quite a bit ... which speaks to his relative level of interest in each piece of material. Of course, he knew what he was getting into here, having worked with Shyamalan before.

That also goes for Jackson and McAvoy, the latter of whom actually is given the most to take and run with. That could be a matter of his again playing several characters rolled into one, but he's the real protagonist of "Glass," being the fiend pursued by Willis. And he is still every bit the fiend, though "Split" was overall a stronger story on its own, the same argument that can be made for "Unbreakable."

It certainly helps to have seen "Unbreakable" and/or "Split" to get the most out of "Glass," but it's not an absolute requirement. And in trying to cobble all of the pieces together, Shyamalan makes "Glass" a reasonably satisfying reflection of its former selves.