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In Theaters: 'Brave,' 'To Rome With Love' and 'Lola Versus'

BOB DOUGHTY: Welcome to THIS IS AMERICA in VOA Special English. I'm Bob Doughty.

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: And I'm Christopher Cruise. This week on our program, we tell you about some new films.

(MUSIC)

BOB DOUGHTY: Summer is a popular time for Hollywood studios to release movies. Films for young people are especially popular, since most of them are out of school for summer vacation.

In the animated film "Brave," Merida is a young Scottish princess skilled with a bow and arrow. She goes against tradition and rejects marriage. Kelly Macdonald is the voice of Merida.

PRINCESS MERIDA: "I am Merida, firstborn descendant of clan DunBroch, and I'll be shooting for my own hand!"

QUEEN: "Merida! I forbid it!"

"Brave" is an example of a trend in fairy tale movies. Young princesses are shown as strong and independent. Two recent versions of "Snow White" also present her in untraditional ways. How are young audiences reacting to the new image?

(SOUND)

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: In nineteen thirty-seven, Disney's "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" captured the imaginations of children around the world. The princess from the Grimm's fairy tale is weak and helpless. She waits for her prince to rescue her from the wicked stepmother.

(SOUND: "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs")

But fairy tales are being reinvented. In the new movie "Mirror Mirror," Snow White still ends up in the arms of the prince. But she also outsmarts the queen

and wins the kingdom. The second new version of "Snow White" is called "Snow White and the Huntsman."

HUNTSMAN: "Who are you. Why the queen wants you dead?"

SNOW WHITE: "She wants everyone dead, all of us."

HUNTSMAN: "Why are you so damn valuable?"

SNOW WHITE: "You should know. You are the one hunting me."

SNOW WHITE: "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's fairest of them all?"

Snow White battles for her kingdom. She even saves her man.

(SOUND: Screaming)

BOB DOUGHTY: Wendy Tucker is a librarian at an elementary school in the Washington area. She says children are interested in these new versions of old fairy tales.

WENDY TUCKER: "When the movies come out, they want the book, which is great for me. I try to encourage them to read the book before the movie, and oftentimes they've seen the movie and I tell them there is a book. They get excited."

But young people still enjoy the classic stories.

GIRLS: "They give us a different look of different time periods and how people acted back then. Also, they include magic and fantasy." "Sometimes I like the calm elegance of the old ones. But sometimes I sort of feel like I need a big production to be in front of me."

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: Librarian Wendy Tucker says once upon a time, parents read these stories to their children to teach them lessons.

WENDY TUCKER: "They wanted to emphasize how dark something was in order to make the beauty shine. And a lot of the fairy tales and fables were told to children before television, radio was invented, as a way for parents to control and teach good versus evil."

Today the stories still teach, but the lessons have been modernized for a new generation.

(MUSIC)

BOB DOUGHTY: Woody Allen has set most of his films in New York. But the writer and director has used other cities in the past few years, including London, Barcelona and Paris. His latest comedy is a collection of stories called "To Rome With Love."

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: The film begins with the camera moving past ancient ruins, classic fountains and modern high-rise buildings. "Volare," the hit song from the nineteen fifties, plays in the background. The stars include Penelope Cruz, Jesse Eisenberg and Alec Baldwin. But the movie begins with a real-life Roman traffic policeman who turns to greet the audience while directing traffic.

TRAFFIC OFFICER: "I'm from Roma and I see in Roma -- all is a story."

Visitors and locals falling in love. A business executive who becomes famous. An opera-singing funeral director. These are all stories in Woody Allen's "To Rome With Love."

WOODY ALLEN: "A terrible title, incidentally. My original title was 'The Bop Decameron' and nobody knew what 'The Decameron' was, not even in Rome. Even the Italians didn't know."

"The Decameron" was a fourteenth-century Italian novel containing one hundred separate stories.

BOB DOUGHTY: "To Rome With Love" is Woody Allen's forty-third film. He says the script partly grew out of ideas he had collected on his desk.

WOODY ALLEN: "There will be a little note written on a matchbook or on a piece of paper that says, for example, 'A man who can only sing in the shower.' It will occur to me at the time that this could make a funny story."

Italian tenor Fabio Armiliato plays the funeral director who sings in the shower. But he loses his voice on stage in front of an audience.

Another story is about Antonio, a newlywed played by Alessandro Tiberi. His honeymoon is interrupted by Anna, a prostitute played by Penelope Cruz. She mistakes him for a client she was paid to entertain.

PENELOPE CRUZ: "She is a character that has no filter in her brain and says everything the way that she feels. It is so liberating and refreshing to be able to play somebody like that."

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: Woody Allen himself has not appeared in his past six films, but he returns with an acting role in "To Rome With Love."

He says he chose Rome for practical reasons, because his financial backers put up the money for a film to be shot there.

Alec Baldwin says the city created a light, breezy atmosphere.

ALEC BALDWIN: "I think Italy and Rome have more of a sense of humor than a lot of other places I've been. I mean every cliché I'd heard about, it was true. It was so pleasant and relaxed to shoot there."

"To Rome With Love" also features Italian comic star Roberto Benigni, Australian actress Judy Davis and American actress Greta Gerwig.

(MUSIC)

BOB DOUGHTY: In another new movie, "Lola Versus," Greta Gerwig demonstrates why she is quickly becoming popular in the world of American independent cinema. She stars as Lola in this comedy about the modern dating scene. Lola is almost thirty-four years old and planning to get married for the first time. Her fiancé is Luke, an artist.

But Lola is so busy writing her doctoral paper and planning the wedding that she misses some major signals from Luke. They break up, and so does her carefully planned future. Lola, guided by her best friend, Alice, has to find her way back into the dating scene.

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: Daryl Wein co-wrote and directed "Lola Versus."

DARYLY WEIN: "As a male writer, I try to put myself in the shoes of a woman and, obviously, I have a lot of female friends, and I can pick up on a lot of female experience, but we were trying to write what we thought was a necessary portrait of a single woman. We felt like there were all these broadly drawn romantic comedies like 'Sex and the City,' 'Bridget Jones's Diary' and now 'Bridesmaids.' They're all funny and glamorous, but they didn't feel as authentic and specific to our reality."

Zoe Lister-Jones co-wrote "Lola Versus" and co-stars as Alice, Lola's best friend.

ZOE LISTER-JONES: "The trick is to always make that person grounded, so that was my challenge. But she is obviously the comic foil, so that's a really fun part to play."

Lola herself, Greta Gerwig, says this is not the usual romantic comedy.

GRETA GERWIG: "It is not a traditional rom-com, but if you tried to put it within that structure, then the person she is always meant to end up with is herself. And then she gets that ending and she falls in love with herself. As soon as she gives herself enough time to sit down and breathe, she realizes she is actually OK, that she doesn't actually have to fill any hole in her life that she was so sure was there before."

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: "Lola Versus" features Joel Kinnaman as Luke and Hamish Linklater as Lola's friend since high school. Debra Winger and Bill Pullman play Lola's parents. The movie was filmed in New York.

(MUSIC)

BOB DOUGHTY: Brianna Blake produced our program, with reporting by Penelope Poulou and Alan Silverman. I'm Bob Doughty.

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: And I'm Christopher Cruise. We have videos about the movies we talked about today. You can find them at voaspecialenglish.com. You can also find texts and MP3s of our programs, along with podcasts and other activities for learning English. Join us again next week for THIS IS AMERICA in VOA Special English.