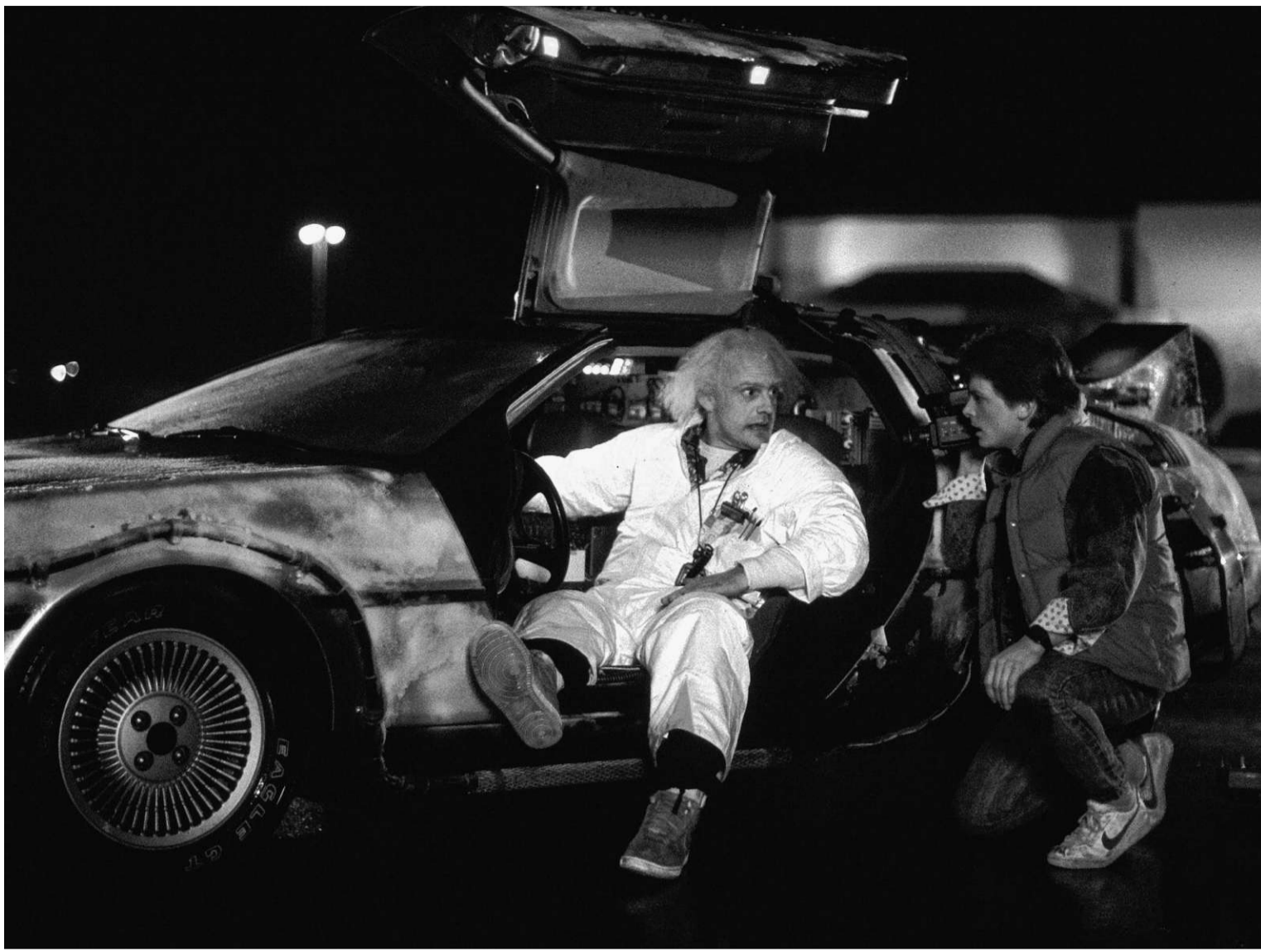


## THIS WEEKEND

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Christopher Lloyd (left) and Michael J. Fox in "Back to the Future."

# Retro movies are hitting big at the box office. Why fans and theaters are going back in time

BY CERYL DAVIES  
*Los Angeles Times*

LOS ANGELES

Ahead of a 50th anniversary screening of "Jaws" this month at the AMC Theatres in Century City, even the trailers were nostalgic.

Moviegoers saw previews of Marty McFly taking flight in a DeLorean in 1985's "Back to the Future," the Von Trapp family sharing a musical picnic in the Austrian hills in 1965's "The Sound of Music" and Tom Hanks launching into space in 1995's "Apollo 13."

And those are just a few of the movies that are returning to theaters this year to celebrate landmark anniversaries.

The box office shows there's a demand to be met, as many classic titles outearn various new releases during opening weekends.

Over Labor Day weekend, "Jaws" came in as the second-highest-grossing movie with a domestic opening of \$8.2 million, behind Zach Cregger's horror hit "Weapons." Steven Spielberg's breakout blockbuster was shown in 3,200 theaters and made around \$15 million

worldwide. Earlier this year, the 20th anniversary screening of "Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith" also ranked second with \$25 million for its opening weekend, under Ryan Coogler's "Sinners." It raked in about \$55 million worldwide, bringing the title's total gross box office to more than \$900 million.

It's almost as if movie studios, filmgoers and theater owners alike are pining for a time when the movie business, now struggling more than five years after the COVID-19 pandemic, was the center of popular culture in the U.S. Before social media and Netflix dominated people's attention.

David Berger, who owns the Ojai Playhouse, a 111-year-old theater with one screen and 200 seats, finds that when studios come to him with a digitally restored classic, he'll probably see strong attendance. On Sept. 10, he played a 40th anniversary screening of "The Breakfast Club" and sold 125 tickets.

"It's about getting away from streaming and taking a break from your phone and the world—really just letting the magic of movies do its thing," Berger said. "So, we book a lot of nos-

talogue repertory anniversary films, and they do really well. Sales overall are really up."

Studio executives and moviegoers offer competing theories about why older titles are getting traction on the big screen. Some see it as an anniversary year coincidence. Others look at it as a way to cushion theaters' thin movie slates, which have not recovered from the pandemic. Some think it's a way to keep movie theaters in business, as these screenings tend to happen in the middle of the week and help maintain steady crowds.

By the end of 2025, there will have been roughly 100 anniversary and re-release showings brought to screens around the country, according to Comscore. In 2019, Comscore shows that there were a little over 60 re-release and anniversary screenings.

Before the pandemic, most such screenings were for one or two days and were hosted by specialized distributors, such as Fathom Entertainment. Re-releases and anniversaries weren't often screened as traditional releases from major studios. That's been changing ever since.

Paul Dergarabedian, a senior

media analyst at Comscore, says audiences should expect an uptick of re-releases whenever a year ends with a 0 or a 5.

Titles with loyal fanbases, like 2005's "Pride & Prejudice" (\$6 million), 1990's "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" (\$4 million) and 1975's "Monty Python and the Holy Grail" (\$1.1 million) have capitalized on this market. These films didn't have a chance to celebrate in 2020, when theaters were closed because of COVID-19.

The rising interest has boosted the business of Fathom, which for more than 20 years has specialized in bringing oldies back to theaters, as well as various documentaries, performing arts shows and faith-based content. Chief Executive Ray Nutt has also noted an increased interest in the area. Anniversary showings of these "classics" tend to make up between 20% and 40% of Fathom's annual revenue, equating to \$20 million or more.

"I'm proud to say that over the last two years, we've increased our revenue by 45% and 48% respectively," said Nutt. "We've had record-breaking years, and classics have been a really important part of that."

Fathom and Lionsgate are gearing up for the return of the "Twilight" saga to theaters for its 20th anniversary. All five films, along with roundtable footage with author Stephenie Meyer, will be screening around the country from Oct. 29 to Nov. 2. Kevin Grayson, Lionsgate's head of distribution, said the series is slated to screen in about 1,000 theaters. But with strong presales, he said the footprint will probably expand to 1,500 to 2,000 locations.

"'Twilight' has been out for a long time," Grayson said. "But after seeing the significant ticket sales it has already brought in, you can tell people want that communal experience."

Executives say these showings are good for business and come with little downside.

Studios can dust off a movie they already own and create hype through marketing. The screenings may appeal to fans who may have never seen the movie on the big screen before. While they're not as profitable as a massive new blockbuster, the additional revenue makes them worth the effort.

"We make a real business out of [these screenings] every single year," said Jim Orr, Universal Pictures' president of domestic theatrical distribution. "Everyone understands that the best way to experience a movie is truly on the big screen."

Even with re-releases, franchises come out on top.

Disney had a 30th anniversary screening of "Toy Story" over the weekend, ahead of the new "Toy Story 5" hitting theaters next year. The studio is also presenting a re-release of "Avatar: The Way of Water," a few months before the newest installment, "Avatar: Fire and Ash," arrives in December.

"It's expensive to market a movie on a global basis," said Andrew Cripps, Disney's theatrical distribution head. "When you've got an established franchise and you're building on something that's had an audience in the past, it's a lot easier to build your campaign on top of that, rather than starting from scratch."

Last year, there were indicators that demonstrated the audience's growing demand to see older movies on the big screen. "Interstellar" earned \$15.2 million for its Imax re-entry, and "Coraline" achieved \$34 million to commemorate its 15th anniversary.

Many moviegoers attending an evening screening of "Jaws" said they wanted to see the movie "the way it was intended," embracing the communal experience of fear and laughter in the theater.

"I haven't seen 'Jaws' in years, and seeing it on the big screen felt ceremonial in a way," said Culver City-based Ella Paseua, a recent subscriber to AMC's Stubs A-List subscription program. "I could watch it at home. But these anniversary screenings are meant for the community. People were applauding when the shark was caught. You don't get that at home."

# EA announces new 'skate' game available for early access now

BY GIESON CACHO  
*The Mercury News*

It's been a long five years, but the fourth game in the "skate" series is on the verge of being released to a wider audience. Electronic Arts announced that Early Access for the game would be available Sept. 16, and players will get to explore the four areas of San Vansterdam in a game that has been rebuilt for this era of gaming.

That means the "skate" reboot will be free-to-play, and it will follow the model of other games such as "Fortnite" and "Marvel Rivals." That means players will be able to jump in

and enjoy it on the free track, but they can spend money on a premium skate. Pass for more items and perks. That also means this entry is designed to grow with the community.

The team at Full Circle is introducing seasons, with the first one focusing on the 90s. Each season will have a theme with new content such as additional tricks and features like party voice chat.

As for the progression of the game, it sounds as though "skate" will follow the path of previous games, in which players go around the city and tackle challenges and through that they unlock more neighborhoods and areas to skate.



ELECTRONIC ARTS/TNS TNS

The "skate" franchise is finally returning after more than decade, and it will feature the elements of a free-to-play game.

Players will have to master the game's main gameplay draw—the Flick-it System. Full Circle said the team rebuilt it from the ground up in the Frostbite engine. It's the bigger differentiator between "skate" and the other major skateboarding franchise, "Tony Hawk." Whereas

Activision's game relies on button presses to do tricks, "skate" requires players to use the right the thumbstick to perform a multitude of moves, creating a more granular and more realistic experience.

It takes a while to master, but when it does, the skating experi-

ence feels more rewarding.

Fans will have a chance to check out the new "skate" when it's released on PlayStation 5, Xbox Series X|S, PlayStation 4, Xbox One & PC via Steam, Epic Games Store and EA app.