

THREE BILLBOARDS OUTSIDE OF EBBING, MISSOURI (2017)

- Released on December 1st, 2017 (Limited)
- 1 Hour 55 minutes
- 15,000,000 (estimated)
- Directed by Martin McDonagh
- Written by Martin McDonagh
- Blueprint Pictures, Film 4, Fox Searchlight Pictures
- Rated R for violence, language throughout, and some sexual references

QUICK THOUGHTS

- Marisa Serafini
- Phil Svitek
- Demetri Panos

DEVELOPMENT

- McDonagh was inspired to write *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* after seeing billboards about an unsolved crime while traveling "somewhere down in the Georgia, Florida, Alabama corner"
- Of the event that inspired the film, McDonagh stated "the rage that put a bunch of billboards like that up was palpable and stayed with me"
- Eventually he was inspired to create a fictional scenario around such a situation, noting, "Once I decided, in my head, that it was a mother, everything fell into place."

WRITING (Martin McDonagh)

- The character of Mildred was written with Frances McDormand in mind
- McDormand initially felt that she was older than the character was written, and suggested that Mildred be Angela's grandmother; McDonagh disagreed, feeling that it would change the story too much
- There are several allusions to *Don't Look Now* (1973). Not just the storylines of both films being about parents grieving the death of a daughter. The film Dixon's mother is watching on telly about "the dead girl" is *Don't Look Now*; we hear a few brief notes from Pino Donaggio's score. Red is the key colour in both films: the eponymous billboards are bright red and the agency guy is called Red. Both films have a dwarf, a useless priest and hopeless cops, a nasty fall and a massive knife, children left to play alone by water, a kids' toy bobbing in water

STORY/TOPICS

CAST:

- Eventually McDormand's husband Joel Coen convinced her to take the part
- McDormand took inspiration for her character from John Wayne. This eventually inspired Sam Rockwell to take inspiration for his character in part from Wayne's co-star in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, Lee Marvin, noting that he wanted to make his character "the exact opposite" of Mildred

FRANCES MCDORMAND (Mildred)

- The bandanna Mildred wears is an homage to The Deer Hunter (1978), of which Martin McDonagh and Sam Rockwell are avid fans. During the filming of *Seven Psychopaths*, they often discussed the movie with its star Christopher Walken

- Upon winning the Screen Actors Guild Award for Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Leading Role for her role in the film, Frances McDormand became the first actress to win two awards in the category; she had previously won her first award in the category in 1997 for Fargo (1996)

WOODY HARRELSON (Willoughby)

- Woody Harrelson would often use his breaks from shooting to sign autographs and take pictures with locals who had come to watch the filming. During an extended break one day, he played an impromptu guitar performance at the music store next to the police station set
- “Woody Harrelson’s character has written a series of letters, their subject matter quite serious, and Harrelson is reading them aloud in voiceover.” I had just wrapped, I was literally, physically on my way out the door, and they said, ‘Hey Woody, one more thing! There’s these three letters you’ve got to read!’ And I was like, ‘You’ve gotta be kidding me.’ So I just read ‘em real quick, boom boom boom, and that was it, they were done. And it’s amazing, because those are probably my favorite part of the character in the movie.”
- “I thought it would be good,” Harrelson says, and then the movie received a seven-minute standing ovation after its premiere in Venice. “It makes you really understand how long a minute is.”

SAM ROCKWELL (Dixon)

- “It’s supposed to be a deliberately messy and difficult film,” McDonagh said, saying he isn’t too angry about the discussions that have erupted over the movie. “Because it’s a messy and difficult world. You have to kind of hold up a mirror to that a little bit and say we don’t have any kind of solution. But I think there’s a lot of hope and humanity in the film and if you look at all those issues with those things in your heart, we might move on to a more interesting place.”- McDonagh
- Sam Rockwell wore padding to make his character appear chubbier
- One of the comic books that Dixon reads, and has a shirt of, is 'Incorruptible'. Written by Mark Waid, it tells the story of a villain who is thrust into the role of a hero. This parallels Dixon's own journey through the film

LUCAS HEDGES (Robbie)

- “I knew that *Three Billboards* was going to be great just because of the cast and how amazing the script was. I wasn’t there for most of the film, but I just knew it was going to be great.”
- “These scripts are really exciting and fortunately I’ve gotten the jobs.”
- “That was an amazing experience where I did say a lot of words that my dad taught me not to say growing up.”
- “*Three Billboards* really challenges the audience and is very daring in the ways in which it talks about American politics and the race relations in America today, the relationships between civilians and the police force.”

CALEB LANDRY JONES (Red Welby)

- “Mildred Hayes [McDormand’s character] terrified me. It felt like it worked in real time, Frances playing Mildred... I wasn’t sure what to think – did she hate me, did she like me? “I’m intimidated, oh gosh she does hate me, da da da da da”, all these insecurities. It probably helped me, you know. Doing those scenes and being nervous, all those feelings that came naturally were feelings that worked so well for the character of Red.”

SYMBOLISM/TRIVIA/EASTER EGGS

- There is no town in Missouri named Ebbing. The town where the movie is filmed is actually a small mountain town in western North Carolina called Sylva
- The three billboards say: "Raped While Dying", "And Still No Arrests?", "How Come, Chief Willoughby?"

DIRECTING (Martin McDonagh)

- McDonagh admits that the [Dixon racist] backlash did hurt for a little, but he realizes he's "not making films for six year olds" and he's not making "The Avengers," and therefore a more polarizing response is always a risk.
- First feature film directed by Martin McDonagh not to star Colin Farrell
- Lowest body count for a Martin McDonagh film (2)
- "Martin is incredibly relaxed about the whole thing. Sometimes directors are really insecure. I don't just mean new directors. Obviously everything can be put back again, but if you remove a scene it will really throw them. But because Martin was so secure in his own self as a director, and in the performance of the characters, he'd let me do anything!"- McDonagh

PRODUCTION/CINEMATOGRAPHY (Ben Davis)

- Principal photography began on May 2, 2016, in Sylva, North Carolina
- Filming lasted 33 days
- Production staff welcomed locals to watch outdoor scenes being filmed at public locations, provided they were not disruptive. Each shooting day, crowds would form to watch the proceedings, often upwards of 100 people. During breaks in shooting, the actors would approach the crowds to sign autographs and take pictures
- Several locations used for shooting were businesses that were repurposed or given facades for use during shooting. Most notably, the Police Department building was a consignment furniture store; the building was rented, crews redressed the interior and exterior, even special effects scenes involving pyrotechnics were filmed, then the building was remodeled to its previous state and returned to the business owners
- The "deer scene" was filmed with Becca, the White-Tailed Deer at the Western North Carolina Nature Center. Becca's trainer/caretaker is award-winning singer/songwriter, Ben Wilson

EDITING/VFX (Jon Gregory)

- "[McDonagh] had talked about a year previously when he had written it and he sent me the script to make sure I was available."
- "I would be assembling, and he would be shooting. I was probably just picking the last take [of each shot] just to get the thing thrown together, and to see if we needed pick-ups or anything like that before we moved on to a different location. What was good about this one was it was all set in one little town, so up to a point they could pick stuff up whenever they needed to."
- "[McDonagh] ran through the assembly two or three times just as it was, to get the feel of things. I don't know any other director who works this way, but Martin would take all the dailies home and go through all the takes for about eight, nine or 10 weeks, regardless of whether they were selected takes or NG takes, for performance. And he would make note of every line. Incredibly thorough. And then he would pass all that material on to me on a daily basis, and I would try to assemble it into a film. It wasn't always possible. Some of his choices you couldn't actually put together because visually they'd be all over the place. But I had to work through it. It was quite painstaking."
- ABOUT DIXON: "One of the main things we had to really work on was Dixon. At the beginning of the film, he's not a likable character. He's a racist cop and all the rest of it. We had to make sure

that by the time you got to the end of it you had some kind of sympathy for him. That was the most interesting bit — to try to get the audience to like him, knowing the sort of guy he was.”

- FLASHBACK: Decided to move a flashback of Mildred's final conversation with her daughter, which ends in an ugly argument, to an earlier point in the story. In so doing, they quickly realized that their decision changed [Mildred] character. Gregory explains that in the original script, the flashback occurred deeper into the film, but the filmmakers became concerned that "by leaving it so late, you're going to lose sympathy with this woman. But by setting the flashback earlier in the film, "You know that it's not really about the burning of the billboards; it's about her trying to come to terms with the last conversation with her daughter. If you know her story a lot earlier, you are more sympathetic with Mildred no matter what she does."

SOUND/MUSIC (Carter Burwell)

- The score is provided by [Carter Burwell](#), who also supplied the score to Martin McDonagh's other films [In Bruges](#) and [Seven Psychopaths](#)
- As well as Burwell's score it features songs by [Joan Baez](#), [Monsters of Folk](#), [Townes Van Zandt](#), and [the Four Tops](#)

PROMOTION

- *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* premiered in the main competition of the [74th Venice International Film Festival](#) on September 4, 2017
- It also had screenings at the [2017 Toronto International Film Festival](#), the 2017 [San Sebastián International Film Festival](#) (where it won the Audience Award), the [BFI London Film Festival](#) and the 2017 [Zurich Film Festival](#)
- It was also screened at the [Mar del Plata International Film Festival](#)

BOX OFFICE

- In the United States, [Fox Searchlight Pictures](#) released *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* on November 10, 2017, beginning with a [limited release](#), before [going wide](#) on December 1
- As of February 11, 2018, *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* has grossed \$45.3 million in the United States and Canada, and \$55.5 million in other territories, for a worldwide total of \$100.9 million

RECEPTION

- RT: 93% / Audience 87%
- The site's critical consensus read, "*Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* deftly balances black comedy against searing drama – and draws unforgettable performances from its veteran cast along the way."
- Audiences polled by [CinemaScore](#) gave the film an average grade of "A–"

SEQUEL/LEGACY

- Academy Awards: including Best Picture, Best Actress, and two nods for Best Supporting Actor (for Woody Harrelson and Sam Rockwell).