

STUDIO NEWS

by
Kim
Williamson

MPAA MAKES FRIENDS ONLINE

The Motion Picture Association of America plans to periodically survey a new online consumer panel "about all things related to the movies—from theater attendance to home-video rental and advertisements to piracy." MPAA head Dan Glickman says the surveys will provide the studios with "consistent, focused consumer intelligence"; an expected 7,500 participants could have signed aboard at mymoviemuse.com (or mpaa.org) for the first quarterly survey, and that number could double within a year.

AMPAS MUSES ON MUSEUM

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, which already runs the esteemed Margaret Herrick Library housing a world-class collection of film and film-industry materials, has hired exhibit design and planning consultancy Gallagher & Associates to plan and develop a museum of the moving picture. AMPAS president Sid Ganis said that groundbreaking at a Hollywood location near famed Vine Street, where the Academy has a film archive, could come in 2009, with museum completion by 2012.

In other Academy news, some 120 filmmakers and film executives have been invited to join the AMPAS roster. Among the names on the suit side are MPAA head Dan Glickman, Time Warner president and COO Jeff Bewkes and Paramount Pictures president Gail Berman; scruffs include actors Joaquin Phoenix, Heath Ledger, Jake Gyllenhaal, Keira Knightley, Hayley Mills, Ving Rhames and David Strathairn. Werner Herzog is one of six directors tapped; Noah Baumbach and Dan Futterman are among seven writers.

FERRELL KICKS OFF NEW HOME

Gary Sanchez Productions is the name of the new production shingle of comic actor Will Ferrell and filmmaker Adam McKay; they have a two-year first-look deal at Paramount Vantage for low-budget (less than \$15 million) comedies. The company is named for a former NFL placekicker from Paraguay, who finances. Ferrell as a cast member and McKay as a writer joined the "Saturday Night Live" team on the same day in 1995; the duo has paired for "Anchorman," "Elf" and "Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby."

DISTRIBUTION NOTES

Flying High: First Run/Icarus Films, which has been distributing documentaries since 1987, has announced it is slating nine theatrical releases for the second half of its 20th year. The lineup includes the cine-essay "The Case of the Grinning Cat" by legendary French documentarian Chris Marker ("La Jette," remade as "12 Monkeys") and "Our Daily Bread," jury prize winner at the 2005 Filmfestival Amsterdam...New York-based distributor Outsider Pictures has announced a seven-picture theatrical slate, the first to bow in August (Spiro Taraviras docu-

mentary "Buzz"; upcoming titles include a drama, a teen romance and "These Foolish Things," a World War II romantic drama starring Anjelica Huston, Lauren Bacall and Terrence Stamp...Sunn Here We Come: Sunn Allied Releasing, a niche market distributor for minority-created and minority-produced films with urban and faith-based themes, has been launched by Lang Elliott, president and CEO of Sunn Classic Pictures (best known for "Grizzly Adams"), and principals of the law firm Bobbitt & Roberts, who have been involved with the Urbanworld, African American and Pan African film fests. Planned for 2007 release is a new version of "Pinocchio"...Promise Made: Theatricals for children and families with faith-based and positive-value themes will be the focus of Promise Media, a new co-venture by Burbank-based DIC Entertainment, best known for small-screen cartoon programming, and Thomopoulos Productions, headed by ex-ABC honcho Tony Thomopoulos...All of the rights, title and interests of Franchise Pictures and SPE Holding Corp. will be sold at a bankruptcy auction to be held Aug. 24, 2006. Titles include "The Whole Nine Yards" and its sequel and Sylvester Stallone headliners "Get Carter" and "Driven"; bidders will need to beat an early offer of \$27.25 million for the entirety of the film library assets...Fox owner News Corp. cut its guidance for fiscal 2006, lowering its projected operating income growth to 8 percent from 12 percent.

Foreign Affairs: In Spain, new Madrid-based mutual guarantee fund Audiovisual SGR will underwrite bank credit from leading savings bank La Caixa and several other institutions for production, distribution and exhibition; meanwhile, each facing a \$3 million fine for anti-competitive practices, Warner Sogefilm and Buena Vista Intl. Spain are appealing the judgments to the Audiencia Nacional, the Spanish national court; similarly fined, Hispano Fox-film and Sony Pictures Releasing de Espana are also expected to appeal.

ON THE MOVE

Former Procter & Gamble CEO John Pepper has been named chairman of the board of Disney, replacing George Mitchell, and ending speculation that Apple Computer CEO Steve Jobs, whose Pixar Animation Studios was recently purchased by Disney (making the Apple co-founder DIS' largest single shareholder), would want the post...Warner Bros. Pictures has promoted Scott Forman to senior vp and assistant general sales manager of domestic distribution, reporting in part to arm president Dan Fellman...Lionsgate's Erick Schimik has been upped to senior vp/media and research for motion pictures...Bruce Long has been named president of National Lampoon Inc.; the former Technicolor Creative Services strategic planning and business development exec vp will target college audiences, saying "we want to be the next great brand, online, on campus and on air"...Jeremy Steckler and Matthew Greenfield have come aboard at Fox Searchlight as production senior veeps; the Fox specialty arm also promoted Stephanie Allen to exec vp/creative advertising and new media...Lisa Schwartz has been named senior vp/sales and business development at IFC Entertainment...A sign of the growing import of new media (see following news section), MTV Films exec vp David Gale is becoming MTV Networks'

exec vp/new media and specialty film content, a new post at the Viacom-owned company. Gale will seek, develop, acquire and produce longform narrative content and branded films for all platforms, including along with theatrical the online, wireless, DVD and video-on-demand windows.

NEW MEDIA

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GUBA GETS GOING

Sony has joined Warner Bros. at Guba, a video-sharing site that offers new releases for \$19.99 and library titles for half that. The service marks an early move by studios outside their owned-and-operated Movielink and Cinema Now efforts; BitTorrent has a pact with Warner Bros. and several indies and is in talks with more distributors, and online heavyweights Apple iTunes and Amazon are expected to join the skirmish before 2007. Also, the Sundance Channel has pacted with Google Video, which launched in January, to handle downloads of feature films, priced at \$9.99 to own or \$3.99 for a 24-hour rental.

GUBA GETS GOING

The HD DVD format, taglined "the look and sound of perfect," found support from the home video divisions of Universal, Warner and Paramount, along with Microsoft and Toshiba, with the announcement at the recent Video Software Dealers Association meet in Las Vegas of a \$150 million marketing campaign. Competing HD format Blu-ray from Sony will likely see a marketing push tied to the release of the company's Playstation 3 gaming platform, expected in November; the PS3 comes with a Blu-ray player built in. How big is the market? The Entertainment Merchants Association's latest annual report on home entertainment spending, which had shown numbers flat over the past two years, says the new-generation formats will revive sales, with consumer home-video spending expected to grow to \$28.9 billion by 2010 and \$30.3 billion by 2015. Meanwhile, video-on-demand spending will rocket to \$4.2 billion in 2010 and \$9.8 billion five years later. By comparison, theatrical box office is forecast by the EMA to reach \$10.1 billion in 2010 and \$11.7 billion in 2015.

GO: FOR IT

go2, an Irvine, Calif.-based provider of local search and directory information over mobile devices in the U.S., pacted with New York digital content company Cellfish Media and Paramount Pictures for a integrated mobile campaign for "Nacho Libre." "go2 has proven to be effective" in previous efforts for the studio, said Paramount interactive licensing vp Sandi Isaacs. "Mobile end-users are ready to view information on their handsets in large numbers." The search provider ran ads on its go2 Movies portal and provided links to "Nacho Libre" content. In 2005, go2 Movies delivered 71 million mobile-phone page-views of real-time local movie-guide content, a 34 percent gain over 2004 numbers.