

Riding off into the sunset

Sundance shows off new talent, style in independent films

ARK CITY, Utah (AP) — The locals call them PIBs: People in Black.

Every year they arrive, clad in black and armed with cell phones, pagers and attitude, ready to do battle in Hollywood style, in this mountain ski resort.

The Sundance Film Festival ended last weekend, and PIBs went home, some with movie deals, some without. Some moments in the rock band, now:

THE OVERCOMING ADVERSITY AWARD

It wasn't among the honors ended out last Saturday night, but he just couldn't ignore what the makers of *American Movie* had to go through to get their documentary.

During the Jan. 26 screening, ees of the movie theater's ventilation system broke loose and fell to the audience, which included any studio executives looking to possibly buy the film.

Three people were hurt, none seriously.

True to the show-business ethic, the screening went on. In the end, any Pictures Classics paid \$800,000 for the movie, the true-life comedy of a man obsessed with mak-

ing independent films. **BIGGEST DEAL THAT MAY NOT HAVE BEEN THAT BIG**

Depending on whom you talk to, Miramax either did or didn't spend \$2.5 million for *Happy, Texas*, a hilarious tale of two escaped convicts who wander into a small Texas town, only to be confused with being a gay couple hired to help train the town's little girls for a beauty pageant.

Sources close to the acquisition deal insisted that Miramax spent only \$2.5 million in cash, plus agreed to a generous cut of the box office if the movie does well.

Some of Miramax's rivals said the studio couldn't have gotten off that cheaply and suggested Miramax — burned before with big Sundance acquisitions that didn't meet expectations — was playing loose with the facts to save face.

Miramax denied that. And all the filmmakers would say was that Miramax didn't have the top cash offer, but they were impressed with the studio's commitment to market and distribute the movie. It's expected to arrive at theaters later this year.

COMING TO THEATERS ...

Other deals struck in the snowy ski resort above Salt Lake City didn't generate any controversy — nor that much money. All were in the \$1

million range or below, peanuts compared with the \$6 million to \$10 million transactions the festival has seen in the past.

Among the deals: Artisan Entertainment picked up the creepy horror film *The Blair Witch Project* for a little over \$1 million. Fine Line Features paid \$1 million for one of the best movies at the festival, the mother-daughter road picture *Tumbleweeds*, and \$400,000 for one of the funniest, the boy-meets-boy gay sex comedy *Trick*.

In addition to getting *American Movie*, Sony Pictures Classics paid what sources said was the "low six figures" for *Twin Falls, Idaho* about Siamese twins.

Rogue Pictures, a division of October Films, picked up *Kill the Man* with Luke Wilson (price unknown), while October got the festival's Centerpiece Premiere movie, *Sugar Town* with Rosanna Arquette and Ally Sheedy, for \$1.25 million.

FACES TO WATCH

The best performances at Sundance came from a young Canadian actress, Sarah Polley, in two films. She played the awkward young woman living with a much

older photographer in *Guinevere* and the teen-ager having a truly bad night in the Gen-X actioner *Go*.

Another standout, though in much different fare, was Steve Zahn as the none-too-bright escaped convict who finds himself teaching a bunch of 5-year-old girls how to prepare for a beauty pageant in *Happy, Texas*. Zahn won a special prize at Sundance for his performance.

Other performances offered new looks at familiar TV faces including: Jean Smart of "Designing Women" as the steely mother in *Guinevere*, Tori Spelling of "Beverly Hills 90210" as the high-strung actress in "Trick," and Barbara Barrie of "Suddenly Susan" as the brittle middle-aged teacher in *Judy Berlin*.

HOW 'BOUT THAT STEVEN SPIELBERG, INDIE GUY

Normally, the independent film scene is associated with your outlaw directors with fashionably hip goatees, overextended credit cards and lots of that independent vision thing.

You don't normally think Steven Spielberg. But actress Laura Dern, who was honored at the festival, singled out the box-office king as being as indie-minded as the next PIB on the block.



ALLY SHEEDY

with Rosanna Arquette and Ally Sheedy, for \$1.25 million.

Viewing habits bridging race issue

NEW YORK (AP) — By standard television measurements, "The Steve Harvey Show" isn't a hit. Last week it ranked 101st on the Nielsen Media Research list of 132 prime-time programs.

Among African-American audiences, though, the WB's Thursday night comedy is the most popular show on the air.

It's one example of how African-Americans and whites differ in what they watch.

A new study, however, shows the races may be finding more common ground as networks go to a better job putting together multiethnic casts.

During the last three months of 1998, six shows ranked among the 20 most-watched series in both African-American and white homes, according to the study by TN Media, an advertising buying firm.

They were "ER," "60 Minutes," "Monday Night Football," "Touched By an Angel," "NYPD Blue" and "The CBS Sunday Movie."

Two years ago, the two races had only "Monday Night Football" in common as a favorite show.

The three entertainment series on the recent list have multiethnic casts, which is becoming a more frequent practice, Stacey Lynn, vice president of broadcast research at TN Me-

dia, said.

Younger networks that tried to establish themselves by appealing to an African-American audience — Fox, the WB and UPN — have recently broadened their appeal, she said.

CBS is now the top-rated network among both African-Americans and whites after several years in which Fox had the largest claim on the black audience, the study said.

CBS's ratings are remarkably similar for both races.

That may be because CBS's shows appeal to an older audience and many of the African-American-oriented programs on other networks are aimed at young people, Lynn said.

"At some point, there is a lot of common ground, and age is one of those things," she said.

The WB and UPN still have significantly higher ratings among African-Americans.

So far, the WB is doing a much better job than its rival in broadening its audience without alienating African-Americans, Lynn said.

NBC is having the most difficult time attracting an African-American audience. NBC Entertainment President Scott Sassa said last month the network needed to do a better job reflecting the country's diversity instead of concentrating on wealthy, white city-dwellers.

EZRA

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Ezra purchased a building themselves and transformed it into Fudge Studios.

With the combination of a new studio, producer and a new drummer, Travis McNabb, the band has created a sound promising to please the hardcore Ezralites as well as average listeners.

Bassist Tom Drummond said in a press release he thinks Better Than Ezra is an example of a band with albums that do not keep a consistent sound, but instead set out to inspire.

"There are a lot of bands who feel like they started writing music ... that sounded one way and feel like they are supposed to write an album that still sounds like their first record," Drummond said. "You should write music that inspires you."

Better Than Ezra will perform at Rodeo 2000 as post-party entertainment for Delta Sigma Phi's Miss Greek A&M pageant this Friday. Stretch Princess, a trio from England, will open for Better Than Ezra. Jeremy Newton, director of the Miss Greek A&M pageant and a senior management major, said the concert is primarily a charity event and not just another Greek event.

"Really and truthfully, it's a great event that benefits a great charity," Newton said. "The Delta Sigs aren't out to turn a profit for themselves. They're out to benefit the battered women of Brazos Valley."

Proceeds from the concert will be donated to Phoebe's Home, a battered women's shelter.

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