

Record number of women submit films for Sundance

PARK CITY, Utah (AP) — Heather Graham gets to karate-kick her male co-star across a room. Director Mary Harron pulls the strings on a male psychopath running loose with a chain saw. Golden Globe winner Janet McTeer fights an academic glass ceiling in the early 1900s.

Better days are here for female filmmakers, at least on the independent movie circuit. The lineup of 113 feature films at the Sundance Film Festival through next weekend includes a record 29 pictures directed by women.

"I'm thrilled at what's happening on a personal basis as a woman and as a fan of these films," said Liz Manne, who co-founded film distributor Fine Line Features and now is executive vice president of programming and marketing for the Sundance channel. "The originality we're seeing from these women is remarkable."

"Anyone who thinks these are a bunch of chick flicks is really making a mistake," festival co-director Geoffrey Gilmore said.

Among the field:

— *American Psycho*, Harron's brutish, bloody adaptation of Bret Easton Ellis' novel about a 1980s Wall Streeter whose hobby is serial murder by ax, pistol, chain saw or nail gun.

— Sofia Coppola's *The Virgin Suicides*, a dark comic tale of a group of spirited sisters in a repressive family. The director is the daughter of filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola.

— Gurinder Chadha's *What's Cooking?*, a skillfully layered love song to Los Angeles told through the turmoil of four ethnically diverse families as they prepare for Thanksgiving. The movie was the premiere feature for the festival's opening night last week.

— Maggie Greenwald's *Songcatcher*, starring McTeer, who won a Golden Globe Sunday for *Tumbleweeds*, as a musicologist in 1907 who embarks on independent research in Appalachia after she is denied a promotion in male-centered academia.

— Karyn Kusama's *Girlfight*, about a high school senior who bucks her father and begins rigorous training as an amateur boxer.

"If you could open a dictionary to the word 'director' 40 years ago and it had a picture, you would probably see some white guy with a beret and boots," said Lisa Krueger, director of *Committed*, which stars Graham as a jilted wife on a

"It's great just to see the excitement among all these women who made movies and got them here."

— Valerie Brieman
director of *Love and Sex*

Manny and Lo.

Even with film schools turning out more female graduates and more women moving into studio management, female directors say they generally have a harder time than their male counterparts finding money to make their movies. Valerie Breiman said it took almost six years

to finish her Sundance entry, *Love and Sex*, a screwball comedy starring Famke Janssen.

"It's great just to see the excitement among all these women who made movies and got them here," Breiman said.

"We're all just kind of jumping up and down. I hope it's not just a fad. I hope women will be able to continue to make more and more movies."

Financial success ultimately dictates whether a director will be able to continue to make movies and graduate from low-budget independent films to costlier productions. With exceptions such as Penny Marshall or Mimi Leder, Hollywood rarely considers female directors for big-budget pictures.

"It's very important and interesting to tell stories about women, but Hollywood unfortunately doesn't view a lot of those as profitable," said Zeinabu irene Davis, who directed *Compensation*.

The movie, which explores segregation and deaf culture through parallel stories in two time frames, took Davis seven years to finish. She said she hopes the Sundance exposure will help to land future directing jobs for her and other female filmmakers.

"I certainly hope so," Davis said. "Otherwise, what am I doing here?"

News in Brief

'Millionaire' leads Nielsen's again

NEW YORK (AP) — This season's most monotonous: "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" was the most-watched TV show last week. And the most popular. And the third most watched.

The game show gave NBC another weekly Nielsen victory, and made it headed season race even tighter.

"Millionaire" drew 29.5 million viewers Sunday, competing for the Golden Globe awards person, but and 30.1 million last Tuesday spent his y

Thursday was the best. "I mean 32.4 million people watched McGinnis under the game show's a crying, I'm biggest audience. It was sad that I g win on a night NBC is a Back it dominating.

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