

SHOWDOWN AT SUNDANCE

Indie filmmakers bring out their big guns

If you're an indie film fan and you like mixing with Hollywood's A-list, the Sundance Film Festival can be 10 days in snowy paradise.

Robert Redford's film festival has uncovered fresh filmmaking ideas and rejuvenated the independent film scene.

Sundance made its debut in 1976 as a showcase for indie films. The annual competition is divided into dramatic and documentary categories with audiences, judges and filmmakers voting for their favorites. But Sundance isn't about awards; traditionally, it has represented a one-time chance for no-name filmmakers to land distribution deals. That tradition is changing — many of the films premiered at this year's festival came in with distribution deals, sparking some deal-less indie filmmakers to create Slamdance '95: Anarchy in Utah, the "guerrilla international film festival" [see below].

Still, thousands of cinephiles and hundreds of filmmakers converged at this year's Sundance Festival in tiny Park City, Utah, in search of the new auteurs of the

'90s. With more than 400 screenings, the festival also boasted receptions and parties, where word traveled fast of the best films to see. Midway through the festival, a handful of films were generating a buzz, including eventual winners: *The Brothers McMullen* and *Living in Oblivion*. As the hype for these films grew, their screenings became much harder to get into.

Filmmakers who made it inside the surprisingly shoddy theaters were in for a treat — makers of the small-budget labors of love were often on hand for Q & A sessions following the screenings.

A casual atmosphere permeates Sundance, where industry execs who wouldn't give you the time of day in Los Angeles or New York hobnob with Scorsese wannabes.

Just as last year's winners — *Hoop Dreams*, *Spanking the Monkey* and *Clerks* — enjoyed limited but successful runs, winners of this year's festival hope to challenge the movie marketplace, too. But all is not lost for filmmakers who walk away empty-handed. Just look at Academy Award nominee Quentin Tarantino,

whose 1992 Sundance entry, *Reservoir Dogs*, was snubbed.

This year, a number of world premieres — *Before Sunrise*, *Miami Rhapsody*, *The Basketball Diaries* and *Funny Bones* — lured celebrities to the ski village. Everyone from supermodel Naomi Campbell to Beach Boy Brian Wilson was on hand to party at Park City's bars and clubs. Even typically low-profile festival president Redford

attended a few parties to press the flesh and congratulate guerrilla filmmakers.

Just being at the Sundance Film Festival is impressive, especially for those hoping to work in film. Students interested in attending next January's festival should remember to bring lots of cash and a good helping of patience. Individual screening tickets go for \$7 to \$15. A "Day Timer" pass — including 17 screenings (before 6 p.m.), three panel discussions and admission to the hospitality suites — runs \$125. And for a cool \$2,500, the "Fast Pass" will get you into any screening and any party. If you can't reserve tickets, show up for the first half of the festival, when screenings and parties are still crashable.

With its rising prestige, Sundance has become the hip festival. But hype and pandemonium from Hollywood are slowly outweighing the intimate feel that festival personnel encourage. Enjoy the innocence for the next few years before ultimate Hollywood glitz sets in.



Discussing the finer points of indie filmmaking

Michael Horowitz, The Daily Bruin, UCLA

By Michael Horowitz, The Daily Bruin, UCLA

The Other Film Festival



The Sundance Film Festival may be the name on the lips of moviegoers, but many indie filmmakers and producers aren't looking to that indie help hand.

On this year's indie list: John Fitzgerald (*Self-Portrait*), Shane Kuhn (*Redneck*) and Dan Mirvish (*On the Edge*). Sundance just wasn't interested in these filmmakers' low-budget fare. But instead of taking no for an answer, the young filmmakers decided to take a chance and create their own alternative film festival.

Slamdance '95: Anarchy in Utah, the first annual guerrilla international film festival, was born.

The trio rented theaters and auditoriums around the U. of Utah to coincide with Sundance. They had T-shirts, posters and baseball caps printed up with the red Slamdance logo. And they made sure that producers, actors and agents who couldn't schmooze their way into the mostly sold-out Sundance screenings caught wind of Slamdance's free screenings in nearby Salt Lake City.

The trio's endeavors have already paid off: Several of the 12 films screened at Slamdance caught the eyes of distributors or earned invitations to other competitions and festivals.

"We struck a nerve in the independent film community," Mirvish says. "Slamdance forced people to rethink what independent film really means." He says Slamdance's 12 low-budget wonders were made for a total of less than \$1 million combined.

Mirvish and the other Slamdance producers gained respect in the indie film community for their resourcefulness and determination. In an era when many people fear that the Sundance Film Festival has gone too mainstream for its own good, Slamdance '95 appeared out of nowhere and reminded everyone what the spirit of independent filmmaking is all about.

■ M. Sean McBride, Daily Utah Chronicle/
Twitch Magazine, U. of Utah

Slamdance '95: Anarchy in Utah movie pick

God Drives a Pontiac

Written/directed by Rex "Hoss" Thompson

God Drives a Pontiac is a film about religion, desperation and the art of selling used cars. "Iowa City" Bob is your typical kiss-ass used car salesman. His selling style changes when he receives a divine message: Sell truth! Die with the smell of an honest buck in your nostrils. At Bob's "Church of the Used Car" lot is Elvis the mechanic and Bob's daughter-in-law Turner. What makes the film work is that it has heart. Rather than violence or sex, *Pontiac* is about people and their relationships.

■ Sam Denton, Twitch Magazine, U. of Utah



John Fitzgerald's "Self-Portrait"



Shane Kuhn's "Redneck"