

# Oscar noms play well o'seas for most films

BY DON GROVES

LONDON—In foreign markets, "The Prince of Tides," "JFK," "Bugsy" and "Cape Fear" look set to reap the tallest dividends from the Oscar nods.

With the exception of "JFK," distributors booked these films for late February/early March. "JFK" started to roll out late January, using the Berlin Fest as a springboard and counting on Oscar noms as a double whammy.

The kudus could also provide a fresh lease on life for such pictures as "Silence of the Lambs," "Boyz

## HOLLYWOOD'S HI-LIFE CHIDED

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back into theaters will likely drive film companies to gamble on producing a blockbuster.

"If the lousy attendance numbers are from poor product quality, do you think they're going to spend less on the product?" asked Goodchild.

But Hollywood execs will find a chilly reception when they go to banks, hat in hand. Still federal rules restricting banks' so-called highly leveraged transactions have limited much lending to film companies over the past 18 months.

Despite a recent loosening of the rules, refinancing for several players, notably Time Warner, is still difficult, said Goodchild.

Another factor is Credit Lyonnais Bank Nederland's spate of bad loans. That bank's exposure to Parthe MGM, as well as others borrowers, has scared off others.

"There's a negative psychology about lending to film," adds Goodchild. "Too many banks got burned."



**TOM EVERETT**

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N the Hood" and "The Fisher King," which are either well into their runs or played out.

While no one can precisely predict their B.O. value, Academy Award nominations generate "terrific free publicity and awareness building, and that must increase want-to-see," says Columbia TriStar exec VP Tony Manne.

### Best film bonanza

Distributors agree that the richest payoff comes from winning the best film category. Best actor/actress and director, or a bunch of awards, also can stimulate biz.

The noms themselves are "an important marketing aspect," like "the Seal of Good Housekeeping," says Stan Fishman, chief booker of Britain's Rank Odeon.

Of the majors, Col TriStar probably figures to get the most mileage from the lead-up to the Oscars,

which will be presented March 30.

In territories like France and Sweden, where it handles Caroleo and Orion product as well as its own output, Col TriStar has a total of 44 noms to exploit.

"Prince of Tides" opened late last week in six European markets and South Africa, and it rolls out this week in many other territories.

Director-star Barbra Streisand held court for the European press last week in London and was due to continue her PR tour in Madrid, but had to return to the U.S. because of illness.

Speaking in Rome, Manne said every major Italian newspaper had devoted at least a full page to the noms. If Streisand's film wins for best picture, "you'll see the results jump," Manne said.

"Bugsy" is slated to bow everywhere during the period March 6-20, allowing a gap after "Prince of

Tides" so "we would not stumble over ourselves," per Manne.

Warren Beatty and Annette Bening have tub-thumped the film in Japan and will start a European tour this week.

Manne said Col TriStar's international offices have been told to try to arrange repeat runs or to extend or expand "The Fisher King," "Boyz N the Hood" and "Silence of the Lambs" to take advantage of their Oscar publicity.

That may not be possible in some territories where playdates are at a premium. "I have a problem with capacity," said Rank's Fishman.

He has agreed to rerelease "Silence of the Lambs" for two weeks in London starting Friday. The movie is already out on video, but Fishman figures he can wring out more dollars using the pitch "See it again on the big screen."

### 'JFK' strategy

Warner Bros. launched "JFK" in virtually all of Europe three or four weeks ago. The strategy was "get ahead of the pack, and stake a claim on theaters," said Frank Pierce, WB VP, Europe. "In some territories, holdovers take precedence over dating (new product)."

"We all believed the picture would get nominations. We wanted to be in the marketplace already rather than go afterwards," said WB Europe advertising/publicity VP Julian Senior.

WB increased the ad spending on "JFK" across Europe this past weekend to highlight the noms, using national newspapers and, in France, radio as well.

## MCA mulling two versions of 'Kitty'

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One station, KSTP-TV, Minneapolis-St. Paul, originally turned down "Kitty Kelley." When MCA TV broached the possibility of a half-hour version, the station renewed negotiations.

"It certainly changed our attitude," said John Degan, KSTP's program director, who added that a half-hour show is easier to schedule than an hour program.

If MCA TV goes ahead with the plan, each one-hour program would be re-edited into a half-hour.

Schwab said the company will make a final decision once the economics have been analyzed.

"Kitty" was one of the most-talked-about pilots at last month's National Assn. of Television Program Executives confab in New Orleans. Some reps, impressed by the show's pilot but concerned about its maintaining quality as an hourlong strip, believe a half-hour format could strengthen the show.

Jack Fentress, VP and director of programming at rep firm Petry National Television, said a half-hour version is "a very interesting alternative" for stations and would be likely to improve the show's clearance rate.

"I think it's a very good idea," he said. "In this climate, with so many

talkshows out there, and so many trying to get on the air, you have to offer something different."

Dean Bunting, program director at KCRG-TV, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, said his station didn't have the hourlong slot in early fringe that MCA TV requested for "Kitty."

"We had a half-hour slot in the morning we wanted to fill, so MCA said, 'Well, what if we offered you a half-hour version?' We were interested, but we hadn't heard anything like that before from a syndicator," he said.

While MCA TV's flexibility reflects its eagerness to gain clearances for the show, some stations that committed to the full hour may not be happy about the change.

Robert Finke, general manager of WPRI-TV, Providence, R.I., which already has cleared the show, conceded that he would have been more interested in the half-hour version than in the full hour. But Schwab said negotiations will not be reopened with markets already cleared for the hour.

Mark Barash, programming head at WPXI-TV, Pittsburgh, said the half-hour version "might have helped, might have opened up some areas" but added that he could have found a place for either the half-hour or the hour.

Bruce Marson, VP and general manager at WHDH-TV, Boston, said he would have cleared either version. "I was very impressed with the pilot. The host is polished but natural. It was refreshing to see a format that was something different than a host walking around with a microphone, a studio audience and a guest."

"Sally Jessy Raphael" began life in both hour or half-hour versions, and some stations clear half-hour editions of ABC's "The Home Show."

### AD CORRECTION

In the Don Messick ad (Daily Variety Feb. 7), the Charles H. Stern Agency, Inc. address should have read 1755 Wilshire Blvd., Ste. 2320, L.A., CA 90025. Harmon J. Png is a Warner Bros. "Tiny Toon Adventures" character.

"Nominations are a validation. They must add value and interest," Senior said.

Pierce credits "JFK" director Oliver Stone's tireless efforts to promote the film in Europe, helped by media reaction that was far more favorable than in the U.S., as the major contributor to the film's blockbuster results.

Sometimes skeptical of the value of Oscar contention, Pierce recalls "Driving Miss Daisy," which WB handled in the United Kingdom. "We rushed it out because of the nominations and the U.S. success, and it was disappointing," he said.

United Intl. Pictures orchestrated the release of "Cape Fear" internationally for late February/early March after its Berlin platform to take advantage of Oscar possibilities.

## FCC extends comment date

WASHINGTON—The Federal Communications Commission Friday extended for 20 days the deadline for parties to file comments on relaxation of cable network cross-ownership rules.

Capital Cities/ABC on Feb. 14 asked for a 30-day extension of the filing deadline. The FCC settled on 20 days, thus making comments due March 25. Reply comments are due April 7.

The Big Three, led by ABC, are pushing the FCC to change rules that bar webs from owning cable systems and vice versa.

Network affiliate groups and independent broadcasters have thus far been lukewarm to the idea, claiming that it could lead to greater power for cable operators.

## ORION KNIGHTS WHITE PREXY, CEO

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entertainment, which comprises syndication, video, cable and pay-TV, making him the first homevid executive to run a major studio.

Also, over the weekend an Orion spokesman denied reports that major layoffs are expected Thursday.

"Although the company continues to review all of its operations, as it always has, there are no layoffs currently contemplated," he said.

Sources said the number of expected layoffs could be significant. Last month about a dozen script readers were let go. At that time inside sources said another 60 or so staffers would eventually be laid off in New York and Los Angeles (Daily Variety, Feb. 19).

White, who will assume his new duties immediately, would not discuss his appointment Friday, saying through a spokesman that he will reserve comment until Bernstein departs.

Bernstein issued a statement saying, "During the difficult period of Orion's reorganization, no one made a greater contribution to the company than Len White."

On the subject of his departure, Bernstein added, "I also want to express my deep appreciation to all of the filmmakers and creative talent who have made a lasting contribution to Orion since its founding 14 years ago and to all my col-

leagues at Orion past and present who have made my association with the company such a gratifying and rewarding experience."

Paramount announced Bernstein's new job just two days after he had denied rumors that he would leave Orion during the bankruptcy proceedings (Daily Variety, Feb. 19).

White was handpicked for his new job by Bernstein, and a majority of the Orion board backed the choice.

### Takeover

White took over as Orion Home Entertainment chairman in March of last year upon the retirement of Larry Hillford, who died Friday (see obituary, page 37).

He had joined the company as president and chief operating officer in February 1987 when Orion started its homevid operation.

The homevid unit has been the bright spot for Orion during the past year.

The operation, which runs on a little overhead by industry standards, rang up \$181 million in sales. Orion's 1990 Oscar-winning "Dances With Wolves" set a record at the time of its vid release for the most units shipped, about 650,000.

Before joining Orion, White was president, North America, for CBS/Fox Video from 1982 to 1987.