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Tribeca Film Festival Gets More Selective

April 18, 2008

By Halley Bondy

If you're an actor in an independent film looking for screen time at future Tribeca Film Festivals, make sure your producer can write a first-rate application.

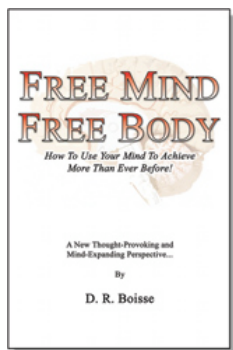
This year's seventh annual showcase, running April 23-May 4 in Manhattan, is the most selective in the festival's history. From a record 2,329 submissions, 121 documentary and narrative features will

be shown -- 37 fewer than last year and 54 fewer than in 2006. The schedule is the lightest since the festival's inception in 2002, and the admissions process was the toughest.

"We wanted a tighter schedule," said David Kwok, the director of programming. "That way we have more room to play around and the audience doesn't have some huge schedule to choose from."

Kwok conceded that the change will make it more difficult for actors to find exposure at Tribeca, but he hopes the scheduling experiment will make the festival more manageable and thus more popular. "A tighter program might encourage people to see more films because they can recognize their interests more quickly," Kwok said. "But the results have yet to be seen."

Among the lucky selections this year are *The Objective*, a thriller directed by Daniel Myrick (*The Blair Witch Project*); *Ball Don't Lie*, featuring Rosanna Arquette and actor-rapper Chris "Ludacris" Bridges; and *War, Inc.*, starring John Cusack, Marisa Tomei, and Ben Kingsley.



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Aside from screenings, there will be panel discussions, including one April 25 on the future of new media featuring Isabella Rossellini and Georg Szalai, New York bureau chief of The Hollywood Reporter, a sister publication of Back Stage. The festival will conclude with two special screenings of *Speed Racer*, starring Matthew Fox and Christina Ricci and opening nationwide May 9.

Despite the star-studded lineup and the schedule cuts, films don't have to depend entirely on big names for exposure. The festival's Discovery section showcases new talent and features 30 films this year, including *Bitter &*



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Twisted, the directorial debut of Australian actor Christopher Weekes, who also wrote and financed the film.

"We want a mix of big names and new talent," Kwok said. "In the end, it comes down to whether or not your film fits into the festival."

Tribeca's priorities range from international diversity to special interests. This year, 31 countries are represented, as well as a broad range of subjects, from Cuban singer Celia Cruz in the documentary *Celia the Queen* to sports in the Tribeca/ESPN Sports Film Festival. "We've always attracted a diverse audience, so we want to make sure there's something for everybody," Kwok said.

Los Angeles-based actor Laura Allen, who plays Julia Mallory on the tabloid drama series *Dirt*, stars in the festival premiere *From Within*, a thriller set in an extremist evangelical town. Allen has attended the festival in the past and is grateful to be back as a performer. "If the film does well at Tribeca, that is the best that we can hope for," she says. "We all just want it to be seen."

The festival was co-founded by Robert De Niro to stimulate the New York City economy after Sept. 11. As of 2007, it has attracted more than 2 million attendees and generated more than \$425 million in economic activity. "When I attended, I got a sense of pride in reinvigorating the town," said Allen.

But according to Kwok, Tribeca is changing with the times, and its programmers have bigger goals. "The festival has evolved from having a huge civic stamp on it to finding out where it fits on the festival landscape," he said. "We're looking to become one of the festivals that people recognize in the world."

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