



YOUTH IMPACT REPORT '07



# MINTING CHILD STARS

*Disney Channel and Nickelodeon have mixed methods for making kid careers*

By CYNTHIA LITTLETON

The reels kept coming in every few months to the Disney Channel offices in Burbank. A gawky pre-teen girl with a charming Tennessee drawl was determined to land the role of her dreams in a show that the kidvid cabler was developing about an everyday tween kid who happens to lead a double life as a rock star.

The great "Hannah Montana" hunt became the Disney Channel's version of the search for Scarlett O'Hara, dragging on for more than a year. The first time Disney Channel entertainment prexy Gary Marsh and "Hannah" co-creator/executive producer Michael Poryes saw 11-year-old Miley Cyrus on tape, they thought she was adorable and well-spoken, but a little too young and unpolished to fit the "Hannah" bill.

But Miley's persistence paid off. Just as producers were pre-

pared to go to pilot with a more experienced moppet, another Miley reel arrived, this time, with another year of acting lessons under her rhinestone belt. They had their Hannah.

"We made a bet on Miley that she had that star quality, the charisma and the 'it' factor to create this role," Marsh says. "For us, every casting session, every development project starts with the notion that we have to create our own stars. We don't have the same established pool of talent" to select from as adult shows do.

Cyrus' story of how she got the gig that turned her into a kidvid star is a good example of the unconventional talent scouting techniques used in the exploding world of tween- and teen-centric entertainment. Youth-oriented film, TV, music and DVD fare is a vibrant and fast-growing marketplace but one that remains dominated by the two powerhouse cablers that invented the contempo incarnation of the genre, Nickelodeon and Disney Channel.

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## WHAT'S INSIDE

From Disney's "High School Musical" TV phenomenon to Abigail Breslin's Oscar nomination and teen chart-toppers such as Joss Stone and Chris Brown, young performers and kid-centric entertainment are shaking up show business.

In *Variety's* first-ever Youth Impact Report (beginning on page A5), we highlight the under-21 talents who've changed the game in the past 12 months — music prodigies, leading ladies and burgeoning heartthrobs — as well as the adults who've guided their success.

— Peter Debruge,  
assoc. editor, Features



"Kid Nation"

## REALITY CHECK

## Unscripted kid craze vexes critics

By MICHAEL SCHNEIDER

The juice-box crowd shouldn't shelve those audition videos just yet.

The furor over "Kid Nation" didn't translate to big ratings, but it also hasn't scared off the networks from casting kids in reality shows.

For aspiring kiddie contestants, there's plenty on the air or about to launch: Fox's "Are You Smarter Than a Fifth Grader?" gamer, Discovery's "Endurance" competish, VH1's talent search "Danny Bonaduce's Child Star" and NBC's take on the U.K. hit "Baby Borrowers," about teens forced to take care of infants.

Then there are old standbys like "Wife Swap," "Trading Spouses," "Supernanny," "Nanny 911" and even "American Idol," which frequently put underage individuals at the center of the action.

Putting aside the wisdom of mixing in Bonaduce with aspiring underage performers, some of those shows may find themselves under a little more scrutiny than they did before the "Kid Nation" flap.

But ultimately, one network alternative topper says, kids are still fair game for reality TV — given a few caveats. First, shows with a comic edge can get away with more, including the use of kids.

Also, an adult needs to be at the center of the action — be it a host like "Fifth Grader's" Jeff Foxworthy or Bill Cosby on the "Kids Say the Darndest Things" revival, or parents in shows like "Supernanny."

"Adults don't feel comfortable watching a show that only stars kids," he says. "That usually sends a signal that it's a show for kids."

Adult supervision also counterbalances the image of kids crying, as it's quite tricky to depict kids in crisis.

"That's never entertaining," he says. "Kids and animals are considered innocent, and you can't put them in harm's way. That makes people upset."

Little kids are also a tougher sell — after all, the older and less innocent the minor, the more viewers feel they can watch guilt-free.

By adhering to much of that advice, which would cut down on-camera time, productions would also avoid some of the labor questions that have dogged "Kid Nation."

Of course, the worst offense — and the problem many critics have with "Kid Nation" — is that the show has to be interesting.

"What drove people away was the conceit," the rival network alternative exec says. "It's modest. If you're going to take the heat, there better be a payoff and the show better be entertaining. The payoff for all these shows is simply the rating. If you set a good rating, then everything's OK."

## MINOR CONCERNS

# COULD 'PREHAB' SAVE SHOWBIZ TEENS?

*Tinseltown managers say it's never too early for an intervention*

By YVONNE PUIG

It's been a rough stretch for young performers lately: Lindsay Lohan, Britney Spears, Haley Joel Osment. Misbehaving in Hollywood has always been the norm, but between the copious number of arrests and rehab stints, and the merciless flashing strobes of the paparazzi, being a young and sober star is more challenging than ever. And with all Hollywood does to steer kids in the wrong direction, resources in the way of guidance are surprisingly limited.

"A 'prehab' (program) would be terrific for young artists," says acting coach John Kirby. "However, most of the time, because of their desire to fit in and a great desperation for popularity, it becomes difficult to hold onto so many of the original values they were taught."

"I have a lot of compassion," says actress Ellen Page, whose edgy projects ("Hard Candy," "Juno") disguise someone she describes as "kind of a boring 20-year-old." Page flees L.A. for her home in Nova Scotia between shoots. "Everyone's so judgmental down there. No one really goes, 'Oh, why is this happening?' They just decide to judge these young girls who have been completely sexualized at the age of 16."

In such an environment, it seems that checking into swanky rehabilitation centers for 30 days often does more for a star's celebrity than for their values. To avoid this, some parents opt for school or church groups, or attend seminars.

Nickelodeon has a policy of putting its actors through a program called "Nick 101" at the start of each season. Executive producers and Nick execs bring the casts together and discuss everything from what a

See **PREHAB** page A43



**FALLEN IDOLS:** Drew Barrymore, Lindsay Lohan and Corey Feldman demonstrate the pitfalls young stars face. Though some underage burn-outs bounce back, the industry offers few tactics to prevent others from falling prey to reckless behavior.

# YOUTH IMPACT REPORT '07

In Variety's first-ever report on the under-21 talent scene, we spotlight the dynamic youngsters driving the business, as well as the over-21 pros guiding their creative and professional endeavors in film, television, radio, live and recorded music.

## NIKKI BLONSKY

**Recent breakthrough:** *As Tracy Turnblad*, "she's made me as much as I've made her," says "Hairspray" helmer Adam Shankman.

**Role model:** "My mother and grandmother — they have guided and loved me so much. There's nobody I want to be more like."

**What's next:** "I just finished my second film, 'Harold' with Cuba Gooding Jr. It's a very fun comedy. I continue to follow my dreams and hope and pray to play more great roles."

When I saw Nikki's first audition from the open call of hundreds of girls, my laptop started to glow," says director Adam Shankman.

The "Hairspray" helmer wanted to cast an unknown for the part of Tracy Turnblad, the plump teen who dreams of appearing on a local TV dance show, in the movie version of the Broadway musical. He fell in love with newcomer Blonsky's bubbly plus-size beauty and her friendly, high-energy vibe.

"I brought six girls to dance for me on the East Coast," Shankman says. "She did pretty well, but there were other better dancers. Still, I liked the way she loved her body and really shook it and had a good time."

Blonsky was 17 and dipping ice cream at the Cold Stone Creamery in Great Neck, N.Y., last year when she got news she'd landed the life-transforming role.

"I think Tracy is a one-in-a-lifetime type of character," Blonsky says. "I want to make a mark in Hollywood where heavyset girls are cast on the size of our talent, not just the size of our hips."

"In the audition, Nikki sort of tricked me," Shankman affectionately remembers. "Maybe the (dance) combination was easy." But once Blonsky relocated to L.A. to rehearse choreography and begin production, "We discovered

she couldn't dance at all basically. So she learned to dance on the movie. It's about perseverance — and she earned it."

Shankman believes that Blonsky will have a long career as a character actor.

"After I did 'Bringing Down the House,' people responded so well to Queen Latifah that studios started re-imagining parts originally thought of for males, for her," he explains. "I think that might happen for Nikki. There's going to be plenty of work for her. I would imagine she could also do really well in TV."

In her second film, "Harold," Nikki plays a sweet, quirky girl in love with the main character. Ally Sheedy and Cuba Gooding Jr. star.

— Betsy Boyd

Lalo Yasky/WireImage.com



## ABIGAIL BRESLIN

I like learning to do the stuff I've never done, like sword fighting," beams 11-year-old Abigail Breslin, who swashbuckles in her next movie, "Nim's Island." Another perk? "I get to climb a volcano."

Breslin has been scaling mountains of one kind or another since she was 5. She played Mel Gibson's daughter in "Signs" and an orphan opposite real-life brother Spencer Breslin in "Raising Helen."

"With some young actors you have to use a lot of tricks to get them to do something, but with Abby there are no tricks," says Garry Marshall, who directed her in "Raising Helen" and "Princess Diaries 2." "You just tell her what you want her to do and she's able to do it."

Of course, it was Breslin's turn as Olive, the hopeful beauty pageant contestant in "Little Miss Sunshine," that propelled her to the front of the child-actor ranks.

"We've been very fortunate," says manager Beth Cannon of Envision Entertainment. "Now, because of the nomination and the recognition of her talent, she doesn't have to audition anymore. We're sent just about every possible role that could work for her."

Breslin's salary may have gone up, but her home life hasn't changed much. "Abby's still expected to clean her room," observes Cannon, "and her family still lives in the same place in New York."

Kenny Goodman, Breslin's agent at William Morris (which co-reps her with Coast to Coast), believes Breslin's grounded home life and talent will keep her working for years to come. "Whether or not she'd been nominated, people still respond to her and want to work with her," says Goodman. "When I talk about Abby, I don't say she's a child actress. I say she's a phenomenal actress."

**Recent breakthrough:** Oscar nominated for "Little Miss Sunshine."

**Role model:** "Meryl Streep. She was able to show you how mad she was in 'The Devil Wears Prada' without ever yelling."

**What's next:** Breslin will star alongside Jodie Foster and Gerard Butler in "Nim's Island."

— Karen Idelson



Contour

# FILM'S FRESH FACES



## FREDDIE HIGHMORE

**A**ugust Rush" director Kirsten Sheridan had reservations about casting 15-year-old Freddie Highmore in her film's complex title role. August is a musical prodigy, a kind of transcendental figure on an unlikely quest to find his parents.

"In 'Finding Neverland,' (the character's) mother is dying. Everybody remembers that scene where Freddie's crying," Sheridan says, describing the role that earned Highmore a Critics' Choice Award and SAG nom. "I presumed I'd meet him and he'd be quite dark, whereas we needed August to have a lot of joy to counteract the hard stuff."

Meeting Highmore in person, Sheridan's reservations melted away.

"Freddie's very open to life," she explains. "He's wise and centered in himself. He's like a little Buddha."

During pre-production earlier this year, Highmore told Sheridan exactly how he'd like to approach the lost-boy role. She told him to go for it.

"Freddie had this crazy idea that every time he picked up an instrument, he would let rip with (pure) joy in living," Sheridan says. "He was so right. I think he could have directed the film himself."

The Brit followed up "Finding Neverland" in 2004 with a formidable turn in Tim Burton's "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory." Johnny Depp, who worked with Highmore on "Neverland," suggested him for the part.

Highmore recently completed "The Spiderwick Chronicles," directed by Mark Waters, in which he plays twins Jared and Simon Grace.

"It was great fun to try and get the differentiation," says Highmore, whose father, Edward, is an actor as well. His mother is a talent agent. Together, they've advised their son on his craft.

"You've got to try to get into the character — be angry if he's angry," Highmore explains. "Even if it looks odd going off and being upset in the corner, you've still got to do that."

**Recent breakthrough:** *November brings "August Rush" while "The Spiderwick Chronicles" follows next spring.*

**Role model:** *"Johnny Depp really stood out. He's so normal, and yet he's so famous."*

**What's next:** *"I've just done voiceover for 'The Golden Compass' and finished the second and third installments (of Luc Besson's 'Arthur' series). Now I'm in the last year at school before I have these big exams. You've got to work for them a bit, you know?"*

— Betsy Boyd

## JOSH HUTCHERSON

**H**e is not the stereotypical L.A.-based teen actor: The nearly-15-year-old rising star Josh Hutcherson — he's appeared in 13 films in just four years — lives in his tiny hometown of Union, Ky., where until last year he was home-schooled by his mother, Michelle. And with the exception of occasional meetings with his manager, studio execs and producers, he doesn't even hang out much in Hollywood.

"I've actually only filmed a couple of movies in L.A. The rest of my movies have been in Canada, New Zealand, Iceland," Hutcherson says. "Whenever I get done filming, I come home and just kick it. I go back to my regular life in Kentucky. For me, that's the best of both worlds."

So far, Hutcherson's balancing act is working just fine. His touching performance opposite AnnaSophia Robb in "Bridge to Terabithia" received high praise for the kind of emotional depth many adult actors can't pull off.

And since the adaptation was produced by family-film specialists Walden Media, Hutcherson solidified himself as the go-to guy for its revolutionary 3-D project "Journey 3D."

"When I first heard '3D,' I was like, 'I don't know,'" he says. "But then I read the amazing script and realized this is the wave of the future. Working on a set with a brand-new technology was unbelievable."

But Hutcherson doesn't want to get pigeonholed in fantasy adventures ("Journey" is his third after "Zathura" and "Terabithia") or family comedies. So this fall he'll earn his indie cred in "Winged Creatures," an ensemble drama co-starring Kate Beckinsale, Forest Whitaker, Jennifer Hudson, Jackie Earle Haley and Dakota Fanning.

"It's a darker script about a random diner shooting and how people's lives are affected by post-traumatic stress afterwards, so that was definitely a big shift from 'Bridge' or 'Journey,'" he says. "But that's what I wanted: a role playing a deep character surrounded by awesome actors."

— Sandie Angulo Chen



**Recent breakthrough:** *"Bridge to Terabithia" opened the most doors for me," he says, but "Firehouse Dog" also helped his exposure.*

**Role model:** *"Jake Gyllenhaal. He chose projects not based on potential box office but for the most diverse characters and stories. That's how I want to go about my career."*

**What's next:** *The ensemble indie drama "Winged Creatures" and next summer's "Journey 3D."*

## EMMA ROBERTS

**A**s a tyke, Emma Roberts, now 16, loved hanging out on sets. She mourned the nightly wrap, though she wasn't technically working. The daughter of actor Eric Roberts and niece to Oscar winner Julia Roberts, she had seen enough of the industry by kindergarten to know she wanted to act.

Even so, Roberts' mother wouldn't let her go on auditions for years. At age 9, though, she was invited to read for the role of Johnny Depp's daughter in "Blow," and her mom said OK.

"It wasn't anything too difficult, just a dialogue scene," Roberts remembers. "I went in there and had fun with it."

A couple of years later, Paula Kaplan offered Roberts a guest role on Nickelodeon's "Drake and Josh," which eventually led to a starring role on her own Nick show, "Unfabulous."

"Emma had a sense of humor in general and about herself," says the net-

work's senior VP of talent. "She was a very real girl to us. We saw her audition, and it all felt right."

Other casting directors sensed it, too, leading to more feature opportunities, first in the mermaid drama "Aquamarine" and later as the title character in this summer's "Nancy Drew," based on the popular girl-detective series.

Kaplan believes Roberts has what it takes to endure: "Emma is relatable. She can play a character who is funny and serious at the same time, and she's believable at both. It is rare to find a beautiful girl who is great with comedy."

From here on out, the actress intends to focus on features.

She's currently shooting the Universal/Working Title release, "Wild Child," playing Poppy, a spoiled Malibu teen sent to an English boarding school. In coming months, she'll act opposite Don Cheadle in "Hotel for Dogs."

— Betsy Boyd

**Recent breakthrough:** *"Playing Nancy Drew was hardest. I'm so opposite her in real life."*

**Role model:** *"(As a teen,) Drew Barrymore came through a rough patch, but she made a good transition. I love all of her movies."*

**What's next:** *"In 'Wild Child,' I have to wear a platinum-blond wig down to my waist. It's tough getting in and out of, but this is my favorite project so far."*

## ANNASOPHIA ROBB

Some stage parents set up shop in Los Angeles' Oakwood Apartments until their kids find work. Anna-Sophia Robb's parents prefer to keep her in Denver. The 13-year-old star of "Bridge to Terabithia" only travels to L.A. once a month for meetings.

Still, life is hardly normal. "Since third grade, I haven't had an actual school picture. I'm always out on picture day and for the re-take. Tomorrow will be the first time I'll be there," admits Robb, who relishes her dual existence as Hollywood movie star and Midwestern eighth-grader. "I'm kind of amused by middle and high school teenagers because I can step back and watch what they're going through."



Vera Anderson/WireImage.com

Robb made her name acting in movies her peers might enjoy, taking major roles in family films such as "Because of Winn-Dixie" and "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory" (she played Violet). But as Robb gets older, she's also selecting assignments with mature subject matter, including this year's "The Reaping" and upcoming pics "Sleepwalking" and "Jumper."

The layering of children's and adult fare isn't a conscious strategy, Robb insists; she just picks the projects she likes. "All I want is a good script," she explains. "I don't make films for fans. I make them for what me and my family like."

Robb employs an unwavering sense of what she likes and who she is. "I love to read and am kind of different from most of the kids at my school. I hate gossip and being catty and playing games with guys' minds — I'm not into it. I'd rather be reading a book," she says. "I have to laugh at it sometimes: You hear stories and then get to L.A. and there are bigger problems. Like world poverty. The kids at my school just aren't talking about that."

— Tara McNamara

**Recent breakthrough:** Played leading roles in both "Bridge to Terabithia" and "The Reaping."

**Role model:** "Charlize Theron. She is an amazingly strong, down-to-earth woman who cares a lot about the world. And she's also a great actress."

**What's next:** Reteaming with "Terabithia" director Gabor Csupo for Walden's "The White Giraffe" next spring. In negotiations with Disney on "Witch Mountain."



Ferdous Shamim/WireImage.com

## SAOIRSE RONAN

Learn how to pronounce Saoirse Ronan's name now ("sir-sha," rhymes with "inertia"), because you'll be seeing it plenty in the coming months. Born April 12, 1994, in rural Ireland, Ronan landed the three major roles every young actress her age was coveting, the leads in "Atonement," "City of Ember" and "The Lovely Bones."

"She's a natural," says director Joe Wright. "She seems to have some freakish acting gene that means she can just do it."

Based on a taped audition, Ronan landed the key role in "Atonement," 13-year-old Briony Tallis. The film studies her character at three points in her life — 13, 18 and 77 — and Wright was adamant about using separate actresses for each of the stages.

"I felt it was incredibly important that Briony was pubescent, if not pre-pubescent, that she was going through that horrific chemical change," Wright says. "So unlike a lot of films in which they cast the older version with someone who's a star, say, what we did was cast Saoirse first, and then we looked at older actors that could look like Saoirse."

Among the role's many challenges (though audiences would never guess it), Saoirse had to disguise her thick Irish brogue. "I've always had a good ear for accents," says the young thesp, daughter of actor Paul Ronan. Trying to convey Briony's inner thoughts was far trickier: "There are so many things going on in Briony's head. I just thought of how frightened and confused she felt when she saw these things."

"The amazing thing about Saoirse is that she acts from her imagination," says Wright. "She's never heard of Lee Strasberg. She isn't involved in emotional recall. I like actors who work with their imagination rather than their own crap."

"When I did 'Atonement,' I knew I want to do this for the rest of my life," says Ronan, who's now shooting "City of Ember" with Bill Murray in Belfast. "It's kind of like a drug: Once you start, you can't stop."

— Peter Debruge

**Recent breakthrough:** Major roles opposite Keira Knightley in "Atonement," Catherine Zeta-Jones in "Death Defying Acts" and Michelle Pfeiffer in "I Could Never Be Your Woman."

**Role model:** "I admire Keira. She gets a very hard time in the press because of her size and her shape, and she deals with it so well."

**What's next:** The lead in Peter Jackson's "The Lovely Bones." "I really like Susie and I can't wait to play her."



Contour

# FILM'S FRESH FACES

## MICHAEL CERA

It's not as if Michael Cera can't lie — in character, at least. For three seasons on Fox's "Arrested Development," he concealed his more-than-familial fondness for his first cousin Maebly.

But as an actor, the 19-year-old Cera is as guileless as they come, a key reason his profile is rising.

"The guy's incapable of having a false moment," says Jason Reitman, director of "Juno," in which Cera plays a teen father-to-be.

Cera almost seems too unassuming to break out big, but talent is triumphing over modesty.

"Michael is singular," says "Superbad" director Greg Mottola. "His rhythms, his sense of humor are unlike anyone I've known. There's an enormous sweetness to Michael, but it's counterbalanced by terror and revulsion. So there's tension to his performance, which is always more interesting."

In "Juno," Cera brings that vulnerability to a surprise pregnancy. Reitman believes one underappreciated aspect of Cera's ability is that unlike other actors whose ad libs go three times as long as the original line, Cera's unscripted moments often make the lines shorter and the script tighter.

"It's as much about pauses and strange emphasis on certain words as it is about changing the lines," Mottola adds.

Cera's "Clark and Michael" Internet comedy series, which he co-created with friend Clark Duke, not only shows Cera can play egocentric, it also hints at ambitions beyond acting for Cera. ("Mike is too smart to waste the rest of his life working for people like me," Mottola says.)

In the meantime, Reitman wonders if he'll ever see Cera's darker side. "What I'd give to see Michael Cera actually upset at someone," he jokes.

Says Mottola: "I predict that the Michael Cera tabloid story will be that he is missing in Canada, that he's gone 'Into the Wild' — but in Mike's case it will mean he went camping and forgot to tell his manager."

**Recent breakthrough:** Co-starring role in hit "Superbad," which passed \$100 million in domestic gross in September.

**What's next:** Toronto favorite "Juno" arrives in December, after which Cera will appear in "Youth in Revolt" for Dimension.

— Jon Weisman

## ELLEN PAGE

Unlike many of the other young performers in this issue, Ellen Page doesn't have a No. 1 album or legions of screaming tween fans. The 20-year-old Nova Scotia native is a Serious Actor, and as such, she has already tackled half a dozen roles so challenging they would give even her middle-aged peers pause.

In "Mouth to Mouth," Page played a runaway adopted by a cult of well-meaning skinheads who loses her virginity a la "Hounddog." In "Hard Candy," she courted controversy as a nervy 14-year-old who punishes a would-be pedophile. Earlier this year, she went from vigilante to victim in "An American Crime," the true story of an Indiana teen who was locked in a basement and tortured.

"It's not like I'm some sadistic individual that has purposefully sought out dark, dark material. It just often happens to be the characters that have felt the most honest and that I've wanted to play," says Page, who also made time to play Kitty Pryde in last summer's "X-Men 3." "The last two films I've shot have been comedies or 'lighter films.'"

First out of the gate is "Juno," provocative in its own right, in which Page plays a sardonic teen, knocked up by "Superbad's" Michael Cera, who decides to give her child up for adoption. Simply put, the movie will make Page a star.

"I read the script a couple years ago, and I really connected to this girl," she says. "She was like a lot of people I know, but branching away from that common stereotype (of shallow, silly teens) in popular media. Pretty much all I wanted was to play Juno — I was kind of obsessive about it."

And though edgy is the way she likes it, Page admits, "You have to be really, really careful when children and adolescents are being thrust into intense situations, because as much as acting isn't real, it's not exactly make-believe. You're going to those places in your heart and in your mind."

**Recent breakthrough:** Roger Ebert raved of her "Oscar-caliber" turn in "Juno."

**Role model:** "I'm a massive Sissy Spacek fan. I mean, 'Badlands'? Ridiculous! I think maybe you had to be a teenager in the '70s to have a career like that."

**What's next:** Laffer "Smart People" next spring. Waiting for the greenlight on lesbian werewolf movie "Jack and Diane."

— Peter Debruge



Jeff Vespa/WireImage.com



## JUDD APATOW

**M**cLovin proved quite the McFind for Judd Apatow. Christopher Mintz-Plasse certainly wasn't the first under-21 actor that producer-director Judd Apatow has uncovered to star in one of his films or TV series, but he might be the most memorable.

It's a credit to Apatow and his casting directors that newcomer Mintz-Plasse became the breakout star of "Superbad," the second of two Apatow comedies this summer to be huge hits.

"We love auditioning young people with little or no experience as it's really easy and fun to spot people with natural improvisational skills," says producing partner Shaina Robertson. "If an actor has been at it for a while, then they know how to work the audition room, but with younger actors it's easier to see what they will really bring to the role."

For teen co-star Michael Cera, "Superbad" gave the 19-year-old thesp a chance to use the experience gleaned from his "Arrested Development" days to play the straight man to over-the-top best friend Jonah Hill.

"Superbad" is hardly an isolated case in boosting young talent. As exec producer on NBC's beloved one-season-and-out series "Freaky and Geeks," Apatow saw potential in the likes of Samm Levine, John Francis Daley and Martin Starr, all of whom have had steady careers since. Lizzy Caplan, who had a four-episode arc in "Geeks," went on to star in two primetime series: "Related" and "The Class."

"Judd was very young when he started working in comedy," explains Robertson. "He is a mentor to many young actors, but he doesn't act as a father figure at all. More like the cool older brother you wish you had had."

— Stuart Levine

**Recent breakthrough:** As producer, Apatow's "Superbad" was a low-cost, highly profitable hit.

**What's next:** He's got a slew of films in production, including "Pineapple Express" with Seth Rogan and "Forgetting Sarah Marshall" with Kristen Bell.

## CARY GRANAT

**W**alden Media president Cary Granat's got a simple explanation for his secret in casting young performers — he's a dad.

"Most of us at Walden have kids and are close to them," he notes with a laugh. "And that makes it much easier

when we talk with child actors. I'm horrible talking to stars, but with kids, it's great because they bring such an energy and a rhythm."

Five-year-old Walden has become a major player in family films — with young performers usually playing the key roles in such diverse offerings as "Charlotte's Web," "Bridge to Terabithia" and "The Chronicles of Narnia."

"The key thing for us is that the kids really are the stars of the films," Granat notes.

And a key for Wal-

den execs is that the young performers bring along a "passion" for books — since nearly all Walden projects have been developed from popular children's literature. Granat and partner David Weil, head of parent company Anschutz Film Group, note that young star AnnaSophia Robb (who made both "Bridge" and "Because of Winn-Dixie" for Walden) is now writing her own mystery series.

Walden's guiding principle is fairly straightforward: producing films that the entire family can attend. As a result, the company works extensively with educators, librarians, museums and after-school youth programs.

Outside of the "Narnia" franchise, Walden's one of the least flashy film production companies in Hollywood. But it's on its way to becoming an increasingly high-profile supplier of

G-rated and PG-rated fare. After opening a dozen pics in its first five years, it now has seven films opening over the next 12 months, including "The Seeker: The Dark Is Rising" and "Mr.

Magorium's Wonder Emporium" this fall, "The Water Horse" at Christmas, "Nim's Island" (with Oscar winner Abigail Breslin) in April, "The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian" in May, "Journey 3D" in July and "City of Ember" next October.

Though all the "Narnia" films will go out through Disney and "Journey 3D" is a New Line release, nearly all of Walden's future films will go through Fox, thanks to the Fox Walden joint venture created a year ago to market and release family films with marketing vet Jeffrey Godsick in charge. "The Seeker" will be the company's first film under the Fox Walden banner.

— Dave McNary

**Recent breakthrough:** "Bridge to Terabithia" and "Charlotte's Web" each earned more than \$82 million at the domestic box office.

**Role model:** "Hal Roach and Steven Spielberg. Both are huge inspirations, and both blazed trails for family entertainment."

**What's next:** Seven pics in the next year, from "Narnia" to "Nim's Island."



# BIGSCREEN CHAPERONES

## DAVID HEYMAN

For some, the best thing about the “Harry Potter” films has been watching the parade of notable British thespians pass through its soon-to-be seven installments. Indeed, with the likes of Richard Harris and Maggie Smith, it’s easy to forget that there are a lot of other actors on the screen as well. And the vast majority of them are below the drinking age.

But David Heyman, who’s produced the five “Potter” films to date and expects to finish the series by 2010, is quite aware of the budding talent populating the franchise — and he doesn’t just mean Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson and Rupert Grint. He’s just as proud of Sean Biggerstaff, Tom Felton and Devon Murray.

“The smallest part is treated with the same attention and care as the lead roles,” he says. “Not just in the casting, but also the directing.”

But Heyman is reluctant to don the mantle of starmaker, insisting that the “Potter” series is not about minting new talent. “If they become that,” Heyman says, “it’s because of their commitment and

curiosity to develop their craft. We’ve given them the platform, but they’re here because they’re good.”

Good actors will seek out challenging projects, something not always consistent with wholesome family fare. But Heyman insists that he doesn’t stand in the way of such ventures. “You don’t put a stranglehold on an ambitious young actor who wants to stretch,” he says, talking of Radcliffe and his headline-making turn on the London stage earlier this year. “Everybody talks about him being naked in ‘Equus’ but not that his character blinded six horses. There seems to be more concern about Dan’s willy than the substance of the play. But I respect him and his choices.”

One reason Heyman’s young actors are so good is the master class that results from tyro thespians playing opposite past masters. “They’re learning by doing and also by watching,” acknowledges

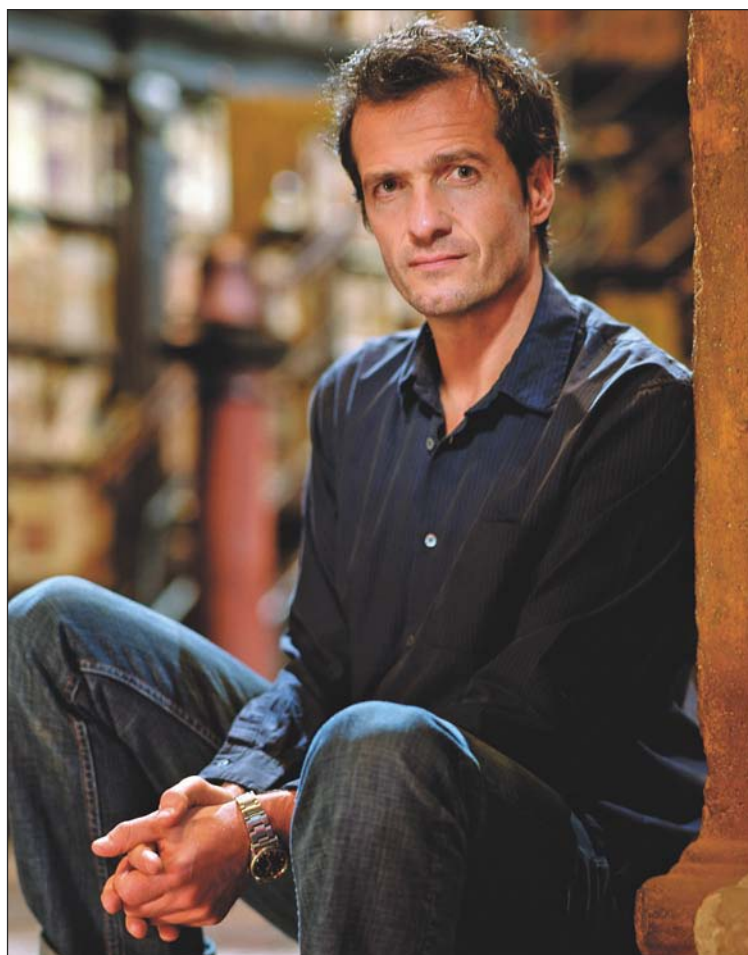
Heyman. “Dan, for instance, has talked about what he’s learned from Gary Oldman. The older actors are quite generous.”

— David Mermelstein

**Recent breakthrough:** “*Harry Potter*” recently pulled ahead as the top-grossing franchise of all time.

**Role model:** As former kid stars go, he admires Jodie Foster. “Also, the young cast of ‘*Harry Potter*.’”

**What’s next:** “Producing films other than ‘*Harry Potter*,’ specifically ‘*The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*,’ ‘*Is There Anybody There?*’ and ‘*Yes Man*.’”



## GUS VAN SANT

At the Toronto Film Fest, “*Paranoid Park*” star Gabe Nevins stands with his hands in his pockets facing away from a one-sheet emblazoned with a giant photo of his face. “It’s weird,” says Nevins, not sure what to make of the poster. “I can’t look at it.”

The 16-year-old Portland native is director Gus Van Sant’s latest discovery, playing a numb-to-the-world young skater with ties to an unsolved murder. “When I first started out, I had to use non-actors,” says the helmer. “In ‘*Mala Noche*,’ one guy was 16 from a suburb, and the other guy was a boxer — he was 21. They had natural abilities, but they weren’t experienced.”

As he grew into studio pictures, Van Sant started working with trained screen actors, casting professional teens in such youth-centric stories as “*To Die For*” and “*Finding Forrester*.”

Then came “*Elephant*,” Van Sant’s reaction to the Columbine shootings, which called for a more neorealist approach. “The local high school Portlanders were all really intense characters,” Van Sant recalls. “The trick was to find the ones that remain themselves in front of the camera.”

“*Elephant*” helped launch the careers of Alex Frost (“*Drillbit Taylor*”) and John Robinson (“*Lords of Dogtown*”), who still keep in touch with the director. Nevins isn’t so sure about wanting to become a professional actor. He auditioned for “*Paranoid Park*” after hearing the production was looking for extra skateboarders, never dreaming he might be considered for the lead.

Both Van Sant and his amateur star took some convincing.

“I was nervous. Even though I’d done ‘*Elephant*,’ this was different. This was the lead character,” Van Sant says. “A young actor, if he’s good, can take what’s on the page and mold it into something more, and a non-actor will basically give you their reading of it. That’s the choice.”

**Recent breakthrough:** Cast a complete unknown in the lead of his latest, “*Paranoid Park*.”

**Role model:** “Zac Efron. I really liked ‘*Hairspray*’ because it just looks like people can’t stop dancing. It’s not a Bob Fosse style, it’s an ants-in-your-pants style. It seems like people cannot hold it in.”

**What’s next:** Hoping to direct the long-gestating *Harvey Milk* biopic.

— Peter Debruge



## VANESSA HUDGENS

The biggest challenge of being a young actress is all the pressure," says the 18-year-old, red-hot star of "High School Musical." "It's almost like being a child star.

You're doing the thing you love, but all eyes are on you — all the time, and it can get to you."

If so, Hudgens seems to be handling her rapidly increasing workload just fine, despite the hurdles of being the

**Recent breakthrough:** Of "High School Musical 2's" success, she says, "We were all shocked when the first one became so big, but this went crazy."

**Role model:** "Natalie Wood. I've always been a huge fan. She was so graceful and made such wonderful movies."

**What's next:** "I've started work on my second album, and I'm reading scripts and looking for the right thing."

I loved dancing around the house, dressing up in costumes and acting like Catwoman and singing."

Hudgens parlayed her early enthusiasms into starring roles in local productions of "The Wizard of Oz" and "Cinderella," and went on to make her movie debut in "Thirteen" opposite Holly Hunter and Evan Rachel Wood. Since then, the home-schooled Hudgens has worked non-stop in both film and TV.

Like "HSM" co-star Ashley Tisdale, Hudgens also has musical ambitions, and last year she released her successful debut hip-hop/dance CD, "V." "My main priority is acting, but I got this great opportunity to do an album, and I love singing," she adds. "And seeing Justin Timberlake in concert inspired me to do my second album."

Hudgens also hopes to play Maria in "West Side Story" someday but says, "I don't really have a specific career plan. I'd just love to do movies in every genre."

A self-confessed fashionista, the star also does promotional work for Ecko Red clothing and Neutrogena. "Down the line I also want to have my own clothing line."

— Iain Blair

## ZAC EFRON

All the girls think he's dreamy — and for once, their mothers don't mind.

Clean-scrubbed "High School Musical" heartthrob Zac Efron, who grew up in San Luis Obispo and Arroyo Grande, Calif., in a non-showbiz family (his father is an engineer), began acting at 11 after his parents encouraged him to audition for school theater productions. His natural talent and singing chops soon got him roles in

productions of "Gypsy," "Peter Pan," "Mame," "Little Shop of Horrors" and "The Music Man."

He also won more dramatic parts in "ER" and "The Guardian," and then in 2004 joined the regular cast of "Summerland" after several guest appearances. This summer, the 19-year-old

"HSM" star and two-time Teen Choice Award winner debuted on the big screen in "Hairspray."

"He's ambitious and so talented, yet very self-effacing — just like Cameron Diaz," says "Hairspray" director Adam Shankman. "He doesn't care about being cute or cool. When we shot (the song) 'Without Love,' I made him make out with a photo of Nikki Blonsky for over two hours. I tortured him, and he was great about it."

"I cast him because we just couldn't let him go," agrees "HSM" director Kenny Ortega. "We'd pared it down to 40 kids, and the audition went on for hours, like an

old Broadway audition, and whatever I threw at him — improv, singing, dancing or athletics — he did. I couldn't wear him down. We'd pair all the kids up differently, and it quickly became clear that Zac and Vanessa (Hudgens) had this real chemistry."

An admitted "nerd" and straight-A student, Efron had already been accepted by USC by the time he signed on to do "HSM," but he deferred enrollment. For now, he's focused on his career and set to star in another musical, a remake of the '80s hit "Footloose."

But Shankman cautions that Efron "probably should back away from musicals for a while now. The best thing he could do is more drama or a comedy and cultivate a male audience. It's always tough when your audience is so heavily skewed in one direction."

— Iain Blair



**Recent breakthrough:** "High School Musical" and "Hairspray," his first feature film

**Role model:** He's always idolized "Hairspray" co-star John Travolta since seeing him in "Grease." Travolta made musicals "cool" for him.

**What's next:** "Seventeen," in which he plays an adult who wakes up one day as a hunky high schooler.

# CHANNELING TALENT

**Recent breakthrough:** *Selena Gomez from the "The Witches of Waverly Place": "We found her in a talent search a few years back"; David Henry of "Hannah Montana": "He's had a terrific career."*

**Role model:** *The people who gave Taylor her first casting biz job: Mike Fenton and Jane Feinberg. "They're risk takers, and it was great watching them work with great directors."*

**What's next:** *Disney Channel's next musical, "Camp Rock," starring the Jonas Brothers.*

## JUDY TAYLOR

**W**hat would a Disney Channel movie be without a talented, charismatic, yet wholly accessible star? A ratings flatliner.

It's a fact that the Disney Channel's movies and series have launched some serious stars in the last decade, and Disney Channel VP of casting and talent relations Judy Taylor's eyes are a big part of that success.

"A keen eye is invaluable, an innate love of actors and making a good match," says Taylor of what makes her a good casting director. She started out in the casting shop of Mike Fenton and Jane Feinberg in the 1970s, when they were working with directors like Francis Ford Coppola and Roman Polanski.

"We always want terrific actors that make it look easy. But the spin here is that at Disney we want relatability, that the kids are thinking, 'We're watching ourselves.' We try in our storytelling to (also) have the parents be comfortable," she says.

"High School Musical" was special for Taylor because it was the first musical the Disney Channel produced: "The auditions were different, since we had the dance phase, the singing phase. It took on kind of a different character. And then you saw the kids and their roles all falling into place." When that happens, it's magical, she says.

Taylor doesn't limit her talent searches to L.A., reaching out to New York, Chicago and various regions for prospects. The Disney Channel discovered its new star, "The Wizards of Waverly Place's" Selena Gomez, in Austin, Tex.

"We're in an age now that you can't leave any stone unturned. I'm very open to kids, wherever they come from. (As a casting director,) you go everywhere. You go to plays, showcases, comedy shows. You have to take every avenue," Taylor adds. "We don't even limit our searches to the U.S. and Canada. We're looking in Australia, New Zealand and Europe."

—Carole Horst



## KENNY ORTEGA

**K**enny Ortega, director and choreographer of "High School Musical" 1 and 2, credits several factors for his recent success, but chief among them is his ability to relate to the young performers he's marshaled to such winning effect.

"I started as an actor in musical theater as a young teenager," says Ortega, now 57, "and my love of musical film also began at an early age. So I had some history to share that could excite and inspire the cast. I think that helped them know they were safe and that it would work."

By way of example, he points to a scene in "HSM2" in which the pic's main hunk, Zac Efron, dances across a golf course. "You have to have the trust," says Ortega. "You can't think that this isn't going to work.

They believe that I'm going to lead them to the right place, and because of that, we've come to accomplish what we have under the constraints of a TV budget and a grueling schedule."

Of course, working with young performers presents special challenges. They can burn out physically and mentally more quickly than older artists. "You don't want people limping," cautions Ortega. "And you don't want to remove the joy. You want to keep them healthy and happy."

Yet Ortega seems to have struck the right balance. "I pay attention to what's going on in music and dance," says the director. "I try to keep one foot in the street. And having kept the enthusiasm that was there from the start makes it a little easier. I think that young performer still lives within me, and he shares the responsibility."

—David Mermelstein



**Recent breakthrough:** *Thanks to "High School Musical," Ortega says, "I'm in conversations about doing more of this type of work."*

**Role model:** *Christian Bale, whom I worked with in "Newsies" when he was 17. He's made great choices."*

**What's next:** *Developing a remake of "Footloose" with Zac Efron, plus TV pilots and a big-screen "HSM" movie.*

# CHANNELING TALENT



## DYLAN & COLE SPROUSE

**D**ylan and Cole Sprouse aren't afraid of the paparazzi.

"We had our first experience with them the other day at a chili cook-off in Malibu, but it's not that common," says Dylan. "If you just go out and have fun and ignore the paparazzi, they can't do anything to you."

It's probably no surprise these 15-year-old brothers feel so at ease in front of the lens. They've been at it nearly as long as they've been alive — the twins were sharing the role of Brett Butler's baby on "Grace Under Fire" even before they'd reached their first birthday.

Film and television roles followed, including being cast as the child Adam Sandler adopts in "Big Daddy" and working alongside Johnny Depp and Charlize Theron in "The Astronaut's Wife." But it was the Disney Channel's "The Suite Life of Zack and Cody" that made the twins featured players in the lucrative tween heartthrob market. And the brothers don't take that success lightly.

"My brother and I have really worked hard, and we don't take anything for granted because in this business, anything could change so drastically at any moment," says Cole. "Our dad tells us not to get a big head all the time."

The Sprouse brothers are now hoping to develop their brand in many of the same ways as the biz's most famous young twins. "We're doing very similar ideas in terms of our business, and we've partnered with the Olsen twins to do that," Dylan explains.

That partnership with the Olsens' Dualstar includes everything from a clothing line to books to DVDs — even deodorant. And the comparison with the girls doesn't bother these boys at all.

"They've done extremely well and been extremely successful," says Cole. "Doing as well as they've done with everything would be legendary."

— Karen Idelson

**Recent breakthrough:** Partnered with the Olsen twins' company, Dualstar, to better manage their potential.

**Role model:** "We'd both love to go down the same path as Will Ferrell," says Dylan. "Our favorite movie of his is 'Anchorman' because it's just so hilarious."

**What's next:** With Dualstar onboard, the Sprouse Bros. brand is just now starting to take off.

## HAYDEN PANETTIERE

**S**ave the cheerleader. See a career blossom. While 18-year-old Hayden Panettiere had been working steadily since appearing as a young girl on suders "One Life to Live" and "The Guiding Light," it's her turn as the indestructible teen on NBC's hit "Heroes" that has given her exposure she couldn't have imagined before the series premiered last fall.

**Recent breakthrough:** "I got semi-noticed for 'Remember the Titans,'" she says, but "Heroes" made her famous.

**Role model:** "Natalie Portman, because of how humble she is. ... She's done an amazing job of keeping her personal life and career separate."

**What's next:** "I did a film called 'Fireflies in the Garden' with Julia Roberts, Willem Dafoe and Emily Watson. It's a small role, but to be around those people was well worth it."

With that uptick in public awareness — and top ratings for a show that was one of the few breakout hits last season — comes distinct challenges, including having your personal life strewn across the tabloids and compounded by increasingly long hours on the set on a new season that's been stretched from 22 to 24 episodes.

"With the good comes the awful," Panettiere says just days after her birthday made for lewd comic fodder on the Emmy broadcast. "It's a very invasive business, especially when you're a young female. It can be very demanding and heartbreaking at times. People go after you and drag you down because you're an easy target."

Her previous work in primetime — roles on "Malcolm in the Middle" and "Law & Order: SVU" plus a nice arc in "Ally McBeal" back in 2002 — gave Panettiere invaluable experience, but those roles were limited in scope.

On "Heroes," Panettiere could remain busy for years, for which she — or any actor in her position — is appreciative.

"I didn't expect this much work, but at the same time I'm the kind of person that if I don't

have a lot to do, I go crazy," she says.

And as for where the multidimensional plot goes from here, well, she's as much in the dark as any avid viewer.

"(The writers) purposely don't tell us anything until we're filming, but I have faith in them," she explains. "There have been no storylines I've disliked."

— Stuart Levine

Jeff Vespa/WireImage.com



## PAULA KAPLAN

**B**ritney Spears' kid sister Jamie Lynn made an appearance on "Oprah" in 2002 that changed her life.

Paula Kaplan spotted her on the show and flew the 10-year-old from Louisiana to L.A. for a sit-down.

"We asked Jamie Lynn if she had any characters," recalls Kaplan, recently promoted to executive VP of talent and West Coast general manager for Nickelodeon. "She did an incredible old-lady security guard, and we were like, 'That voice came out of this little body?'"

Kaplan cast Spears on "All That," an established sketch comedy series featuring Amanda Bynes, and auds quickly confirmed her hunch about Spears' star potential.

"Somebody sent me an email say-

ing Jamie Lynn got the second-most fan mail after Amanda Bynes," Kaplan says. "I thought, 'We've got something here.'"

A 13-year Nickelodeon vet, Kaplan has overseen the casting of the network's top stars, including Bynes, Emma Roberts, Drake Bell, Josh Peck, Lil' JJ, Lil' Romeo and Nick Cannon. Once she's signed a performer, she monitors the child's progress and his or her fan base. Kaplan often makes swift recommendations to the network: Give this kid a show.

Spears graduated to "Zoey 101," a popular Nick sitcom which producer Dan Schneider created with the actress in mind.

Kaplan's success with kids' casting results from a combination of easy people skills (she started as PR direc-

## ALEXA FOGEL

**H**BO's "The Wire" is strictly for grown-ups, but the cast boasts some of the finest young actors on television. Thank Alexa Fogel for the discovery. With two Emmy Awards on her mantel, casting director Fogel says few thespians resonated with her as much as the Corner Boys, four virtually unknown African-American teens who became the emotional centerpiece of the latest season.

Child actors have a reputation — often well-deserved — of being pouty, stiff and unable to deliver a range of emotions. But discoveries Julito McCullum, Tristan Wilds, Maestro Harrell and Jermaine Crawford proved the antithesis to most of Fogel's experiences with kids.

New York-based Fogel, along with Baltimore casting director Pat Moran, delivered to "Wire" creator David Simon the four actors he needed, capable of keeping up with both the cast and the multifaceted script.

During the audition process, Fogel and Simon discussed the characters in depth and what acting skills would be key when seeking the right boy for each.

"The tricky thing was that first they read for me, then for David and then with each other in front of David," Fogel explains. "We worked entirely from the script, and it was my job to honor that script in some way."

Once each boy was cast, they were sent to work with Baltimore actor Robert Chew, who plays Prop Joe in the series and runs a local theater. There, under Chew's tutelage, they bonded and learned to work with one another, to the point where their lifelong onscreen friendship seemed completely genuine. (Chew also suggested local talent for smaller parts.)

Fogel says she cast these lead teens out of a pool of approximately 120 kids — from New York, Los Angeles and Chicago — in about six weeks. After seeing them read for the first time, she knew these would be her corner boys.

"These were really four special boys," says Fogel, who's also the founder of Beach Hill Films. "They had incredible instincts and listened well. These aren't your typical kids."



**Recent breakthrough:** HBO's "The Wire" called for dozens of strong African-American teen actors. Fogel delivered.

**Role model:** "(Casting director) Juliet Taylor, because she has great taste, loves actors and is a gracious human being."

**What's next:** Fogel just completed working on Simon's "Generation Kill," a seven-hour miniseries for HBO on the Iraq War.

— Stuart Levine



## ANGUS T. JONES

**W**hile some sitcom kids are relegated to being background fillers with the

occasional punchline, Angus T. Jones is the third lead, with his role referenced right in the "Two and a Half Men" title. Every week on CBS' hit show, Jones' character Jake goes toe-to-toe, comedically speaking, with Emmy nominees Charlie Sheen and Jon Cryer.

"I feel really lucky to be on the show every episode and get a lot of really funny lines," says the actor.

According to Jones, the only downside to co-starring on a highly rated TV show is the overwhelming number of middle-school assignments he has to do during breaks.

"I just started eighth grade, and there is just a ton of work to do," the soon-to-be 14-year-old says. "I hardly have any time during the week, so there are piles of schoolwork everywhere."

As for the oft-mentioned criticism that the dialogue is too racy for a comedy featuring a young star, Jones says it's not an issue for him or his family.

He even thinks it's funny that the Emmy telecast cut to him during the "Family Guy's" prime-time-skewering opening song: "Today they've got some shows that are remarkably obscene/Like that show about the little boy who lives with Charlie Sheen."

"The jokes used to just go over (Jake's) head," he says. "Now that he's growing up, I guess he kinda gets it — but not really."

With the 100th episode coming up and the ratings unwaveringly high, it's probable "Men" will be on the air well into Jones' teens, and the actor says he'd be happy to stay on the air for another four or five seasons.

"What's not to like?" he muses. "I'm learning a lot about comedy, and every one is just hilarious. Sometimes the hardest thing for me is not to laugh."

— Sandie Angulo Chen

**Recent breakthrough:** Jones owes his prime-time gig to one performance. "The Rookie" is what got me "Two and a Half Men." Chuck (Lorre), our executive producer, saw me in that and said, "That's the kid."

**Role model:** "I like Chris Farley and Jack Black. They're both hilarious."

**What's next:** Jones says he's happy focusing on "Men" and using his hiatuses as down time.



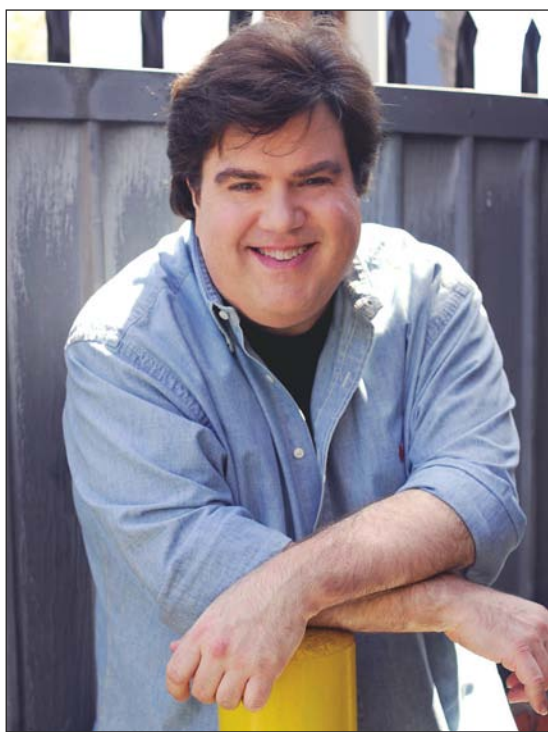
— Betsy Boyd

tor of Nick), business savvy and natural maternal instincts. After a certain amount of camera testing, Kaplan, a mother of two, sits down with each potential Nick hire.

"I want to be in a room with the kid so I can really engage with them and hear how they answer questions — without the manager or the mother," says Kaplan, who also co-exec produces the Nickelodeon-sponsored Kids' Choice Awards, an event frequented by such hugely popular teen stars-turned-megacelebrities as Justin Timberlake and Tom Cruise.

Kaplan is credited with raising the net's corporate profile, forging and maintaining relationships with studios and making the awards show a high-profile Hollywood event.

## CHANNELING TALENT



## DAN SCHNEIDER

**A** former child actor who appeared in “Head of the Class,” Dan Schneider has built a tween empire at Nickelodeon, creating such lineup staples as “The Amanda Show,” “What I Like About You,” “Zoey 101” and “Drake & Josh.”

While he seems to have remained in touch with the tastes of kids ages 6-14, Schneider, 41, says the appeal of his shows is always rooted in the casting.

“I don’t write a word until we have the cast set,” explains Schneider, who works his way past “the

kid actors who deliver their lines in a kind of ‘look how cute I am’ manner. I tend to avoid kids who are overly trained but don’t seem like real kids anymore.”

Schneider says he’s careful to create a low-pressure atmosphere in his casting sessions, where the youthful participants are at least asked about their day before jumping right in. He doesn’t necessarily expect the young actors to “nail it” the first time. “As a child actor, I hated it when you walked through door, and right away, whoever was running the audition would say, ‘OK, turn to page six,’” he says.

This thought-out approach to talent yields the short-term benefit of filling Schneider’s immediate casting needs and also cre-

ates a rather deep Nick bench of supporting thespians who have gone on to headline their own skeins.

For example, Schneider gave “Amanda Show” regulars Drake Bell and Josh Peck the keys to “Drake & Josh,” later promoting one of its players, Miranda Cosgrove, to his latest creation, “iCarly.”

“There’s not one little role, even if it has only a few lines, that we don’t look at seven or eight actors,” Schneider notes.

— Daniel Frankel

**Recent breakthrough:** His shows “South of Nowhere” and “Class of 3000” are going strong.

**Role model:** “Fergie” — Stacy Ferguson, the former “Kids Incorporated” performer, now with the Black Eyed Peas.

**What’s next:** A live-action pilot for Cartoon Network. “Stylistically, it’s going to have much more of an Asian cinematic influence, as opposed to a more traditional kid-television influence.”

## TOM LYNCH

**Y**ou might think he’d be slouching toward an early retirement, after more than two decades of generating signature hits for Nick-

elodeon, the N, the Disney Channel and others. But Tom Lynch seems to be gaining momentum.

Not only has Lynch expanded his efforts into animation with “Class of 3000” (co-created by and featuring Andre Benjamin) for the Cartoon Network, but his eponymous company has 14 pilots in development.

“It’s gone from being just in my head,” says the producer, who is supported by Tom Lynch Co. prexy Gary L. Stephenson and senior VP Jonas Agin. “It’s really operating as its own culture.”

From past hits like “The Secret World of Alex Mack” to present product like “South of Nowhere,” Lynch’s operating philosophy is to hone in on a youth perspective of the world, rather than preach to children or provide a vehicle merely for toy sales.



Eric Charbonneau/WireImage.com

Lynch says that when he began his children’s programming career with “Kids Incorporated” in 1984, he was seeking to speak “organically” to kids, adding that issues of identity are key.

“Whether they’re comedies like ‘Class of 3000’ or ‘Romeo!’ or more dramatic like ‘South of Nowhere’ or (the upcoming) ‘Interns,’ I think they all show what it’s like to be young and what that journey’s about,” he says.

Lynch isn’t challenged so much by having to target a particular demo as by the complexity of financing a show in the global, multiplatform age. Mostly, he just wants to make sure he has something new to offer his viewers, plenty of whom were “Kids Incorporated” fans who have since become parents.

“The big danger is repeating yourself,” Lynch says. “Once you do that, you can step into a kind of hackdom. I try to make every show current, but not so current that it’s redundant.”

— Jon Weisman

## MICHAEL OUWEELEN

**W**hen Michael Ouweleen joined Cartoon Network in 1996, “There was a hard and fast rule of no live-action people on the network,” the senior VP recalls. “I started to fudge with that because you needed stuff to contrast with cartoons.”

In 2003, Ouweleen hired a couple twentysomethings to host the net’s “Fridays” block, reaching out to local Atlanta schools for kids who might like to appear in the background.

That’s how he met Blake Michaels, the hyper 10-year-old “superfan” who recently took over hosting the Friday-Saturday “Fried Dynamite” block.

“I am digging this because now we’re working with people who are the age of our audience,” he says.

And on the original programming front, a one-off movie called “Re-Animated,” about a flesh-and-blood middle-school kid (Dominic Janes) who sees animated characters, naturally grew into the net’s first hybrid show, “Out of Jimmy’s Head.”

“It was a natural way of dipping our toe into the live-action pool,” says Ouweleen. “And then doing the live-action version of a cartoon, ‘Ben 10,’ seems normal to us.” That project, “Ben 10: Race Against Time,” debuts in November.

“What I’m hoping is that our casting for live-action directly influences our casting for animation,” says Ouweleen, who expects to see more young talent behind the microphone in the net’s not-too-distant future.

Though cartoon kids are traditionally recorded by women, the lead voice on “Foster’s Home for Imaginary Friends” comes from 19-year-old Sean Marquette, and upcoming toon “Chowder” stars pre-teen Nicky Jones.

“It’s sort of like the ‘Peanuts’ voices of old,” Ouweleen says. “There’s something about the decisions only a 9-year-old brain can make that makes it so much more funny.”

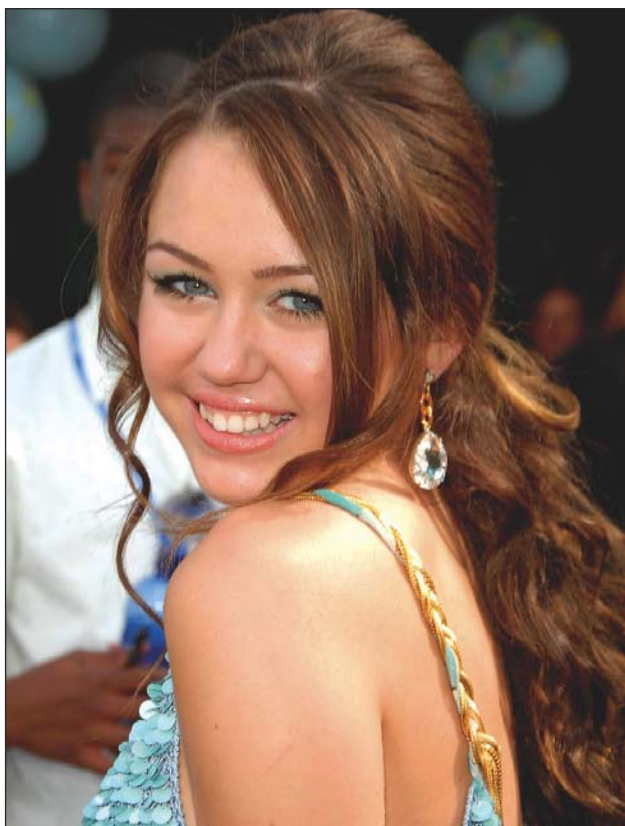
— Peter Debruge

**Recent breakthrough:** Cartoon Network’s new live-action programming. “The kids we’ve cast feel like they could come work at the network in 10 years. They have the same creative take and work ethic.”

**Role model:** “Ted Turner. Just how he approached building businesses. His spirit is still lingering around this place.”

**What’s next:** More live shows in development.





Jon Kopaloff/FilmMagic.com

## MILEY CYRUS

Unlike her smallscreen alter ego, Miley Cyrus can't hide her fame from her friends. The 15-year-old star has struck more than just a musical chord with kids worldwide: "Hannah Montana" is the most-watched TV series among kids aged 6 to 14, and between the show's two soundtracks, Cyrus has already sold 2.1 million albums this year.

But to hear her tell it, Cyrus' success as a recording artist and actress has nothing to do with her, but results instead from her family, friends and God. In retrospect, she believes the Big Guy was involved with her losing out on other gigs which might have come in the way of an opportunity she never anticipated: landing her own show on the Disney Channel.

Still shell-shocked, she says, "I was not looking for them, and they were definitely *not* looking for me."

But Miley's industry upbringing didn't prepare her for just how exhausting the work can be. When things get tough, she relies on uplifting mottos as a form of secret weapon. "We have a few phrases that my dad says all the time: 'If it ain't fun, it ain't working.' It's about making me happy — if it stops being fun, we turn around and go back home."

Another motto the two share: "It's not about success, it's about significance." Cyrus hopes her music means something to her tween audience. "I related to artists and got through hard times by listening to their music," she says. "I think I can do the same thing in helping (my fans) through their tough times."

— Tara McNamara

**Recent breakthrough:** *She's the youngest artist to have two No. 1 hits in less than a year.*

**Role model:** *"My dad! He has had an amazing career and stayed true himself. He is also a great humanitarian."*

**What's next:** *Her "Best of Both Worlds" tour, which combines songs from both identities: Cyrus' solo album and her "Hannah Montana" show.*

## CHRIS BROWN

Like Michael Jackson before him, 18-year-old R&B sensation Chris Brown's tracks touch upon an urban teenage boy's angst with the ladies, whether they're chasing or dissing him. He's just a bit more forward about it than his elders.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in Brown's first hit single "Run It," which debuted when he was 16: "Is ya man on the flo?/If he ain't ... let me know."

If nothing else, Brown sings the songs that make the whole club cut the rug.

Since arriving on the music scene two years ago, Brown's charm as a performer has helped him sell 3 million copies worldwide for his self-titled debut album, two Grammy nods (new artist and R&B contemporary album) and a burgeoning acting career. Not bad for a small-town kid from Tappahannock, Va. (pop. 2,000).

As early as the age of 11, Brown knew he wanted a career as a rap artist.

"Everything came natural to me," he says of his bravado vocal and footwork talent. "I didn't take chorus or dance lessons when I was kid."

He cut a demo tape, moved to New York and was soon discovered by music manager and former Def Jam exec Tina Davis. The teenager was then surrounded in the studio by top hip-hop talents, including Beyonce songwriter Sean Garrett, Miami-based producer Scott Storch and vid helmer Erik White.

He also got started onscreen, landing characters he relates to wholeheartedly, including a hip street dancer in "Stomp the Yard" and an aspiring teen musician in upcoming family drama "This Christmas."

"November is a big month for me," Brown says. "My new album 'Exclusive' comes out on the sixth, and my movie 'This Christmas' and my tour kick off on the 21st."

— Anthony D'Alessandro



Contour

Hip-hop mogul Jay-Z can, and frequently does, claim credit for an array of youngsters who have blossomed thanks to his support: Kanye West, Just Blaze and a number of first-growth French wines. But none of his investments has yielded as large a return quite as quickly as 19-year-old popstress Rihanna.

Shortly after being named president and CEO of Def Jam, the rapper signed the then-16-year-old Barbadian beauty queen and singer Robyn Rihanna Fenty to his roster. (She was first spotted by an American vacationing on the island who, conveniently enough, happened to be music producer and songwriter Evan Rogers.)

Def Jam quickly pushed her first single, the dancehall-influenced "Pon de Replay," to No. 2 on the sin-

## HILARY DUFF

She may be just over 5 feet tall, but Hilary Duff casts a long shadow in Hollywood, where the teenage star of “Cheaper by the Dozen,” “The Perfect Man” and “Cinderella Story” is already one of the hottest young actresses in town — as well as a one-woman empire with a clothing line (Stuff) and a successful recording career.

“As a kid, I did ballet and gymnastics like my older sister Haylie,” says the 20-year-old Houston native. “Then we did some acting classes and local plays, and we’d bug our mom to take us to auditions, so what began as a hobby got more and more serious.”

After a notable turn in the 1999 TV show “The Soul Collector,” Duff got her first big break, starring in the hit Disney series “Lizzie McGuire,” which spawned a hit movie as well. “That show really paved the way for me to go on to do other projects and also introduced me to the pressures of instant fame,” she recalls. “After the second episode, I couldn’t even go to the mall — it was total insanity. I didn’t know how to deal with it. There’s just no way to prepare yourself, and it hasn’t stopped since then.”

But the multitasking Duff has learned to cope, “mainly by just focusing on my career and working really hard,” both on her acting and music (she recently released her fourth solo album, “Dignity,” which she co-wrote). “But there’ve been sacrifices,” she admits. “I’ve missed out on doing typical teenage stuff with friends. For the past four years, I’ve also been touring musically, and while I feel the sacrifices have been well worth it, I’d now like a more normal life, so I’ll focus more on my acting.”

She returns to the screen with Sundance-bound “War, Inc.,” which she describes as “a very different character for me.” The shoot took her all the way to Bulgaria and gave her an opportunity to work with Ben Kingsley and John Cusack.

“It was scary but great,” she says. “As I get older, I want to challenge myself more and take more risks, but I don’t like to plan too much ahead. I don’t want to burn out. I always want to enjoy what I do.”

— Iain Blair

**Recent breakthrough:** Duff’s third album, “Dignity,” debuted strong and showcases a grittier edge for the triple threat.

**Role model:** “Drew Barrymore, Cate Blanchett — I admire their careers and the way they’ve stayed away from gossip and made personal lives for themselves.”

**What’s next:** “I’m doing another small indie drama, ‘Greta,’ with Ellen Burstyn, that I’ve pursued for three years.”



Todo Williams/WireImage.com

Jason Squires/WireImage.com

## RIHANNA

gles chart in advance of debut album, “Music of the Sun,” which moved respectable numbers in 2005.

After an enviable slot opening for Gwen Stefani on her U.S. tour, Rihanna released follow-up “A Girl Like Me” in 2006, scoring the singer her first No. 1 single, “S.O.S.” But it was this summer’s “Good Girl Gone Bad,” which saw Rihanna adopting a more provocative, grown-up image, that truly moved her into R&B’s top tier.

Lead-off single “Umbrella” entered the U.S. charts at No. 41, then immediately jumped to No. 1, where it remained for seven straight weeks. In the U.K., the track held top position for 10 weeks, the longest chart reign for a female artist there since Whitney Houston put out the equally ubiquitous “I Will Always Love You” in 1992. Yet unlike Houston and her other

predecessors, Rihanna mostly eschews broad, melismatic gestures for a Caribbean-tinged, often monotone, vocal delivery, and “Good Girl Gone Bad” plays to her strengths. By emphasizing that distinctiveness, as well as boasting a stellar list of contributors (including Justin Timberlake, Timbaland and CEO Jay Hova himself), the album also attained the kind of critical recognition that could be essential in separating Rihanna from her crowded peer group — even the terminal curmudgeons at Pitchfork gave the record a relative rave.

With a second single — the New Order-sampling “Shut Up and Drive” — already in heavy rotation and a modeling contract with Cover Girl, Rihanna could be well on her way to establishing an empire of her own.

— Andrew Barker

**Recent breakthrough:** Provided summer 2007 with its most inescapable tune; discovered several new syllables within the word “umbrella”; anchored the Tokyo leg of July’s Live Earth concerts.

**What’s next:** A fall tour through Europe and North America with fellow hot commodity Akon.

## JOSS STONE

Judging by the crowd at Joss Stone’s recent Greek Theater performance in L.A., the 20-year-old English siren wasn’t so much a magnet for her fellow teens as for their parents, baby boomers who grew up listening to the Motown sound in which she specializes.

That demo helped drive close to 9 million in worldwide sales for Stone’s albums. Her third disc, “Introducing Joss Stone,” went gold in the U.S. three months after its March shelf date. A four-Grammy nominee, Stone collected a trophy for her “Family Affair” redux, a track originally recorded by Sly & the Family Stone.

While the past three years have unleashed a windfall of retro-styled Brit chicks on the pop charts, Stone distinguishes herself from Amy Winehouse’s tabloid blues and Lily Allen’s outspokenness as the lovey-dovey hippie girl with her tie-dye floral fashion and relaxed attitude.

“I’m a very emotional person, so everything that comes into my world is over the top,” Stone says. “In the end, it all comes back to love.”

Stone’s affair with music began at the age of 12 when she began singing in the back of a choir. The songstress cut five songs on her karaoke machine and sent the tape to British talent show “Star.” Soon after, she found herself in New York auditioning for Steve Greenberg, prexy of S-Curve Records.

Her first album at 16, “The Soul Sessions,” touted covers of Aretha Franklin, Carla Thomas and others, leading to opportunities for Stone to share the stage with such greats as Stevie Wonder at the 2006 Super Bowl and Sly Stone at the 2006 Grammys.

“Everything comes back around,” she says. “If you look at the new music, they don’t use real instruments anymore. Whatever machine they’re using strips the feeling out of the sound. When you listen to the old records, you feel so much more connected.”

— Anthony D’Alessandro

**Recent breakthrough:** Chanel approached Stone directly about using her rendition of Nat King Cole’s “Love” in a spot.

**Role model:** “It’s not healthy to have just one role model. People shouldn’t model themselves on another person because you’ll always be upset.”

**What’s next:** Attached to star in a Duane Adler (“Step Up”) musical thriller set in post-Katrina New Orleans next year.



Barry Brecheisen/WireImage.com

# YOUNG AT CHART

## JEFF FRASCO

**Recent breakthrough:** *Coordinating tours for young acts, from "American Idol" to "Hannah Montana."*

**Role model:** *"American Idol" creator Simon Fuller and Disney Music Group CEO Bob Cavallo. "I've known them both for many years. They've been terrific mentors."*

**What's next:** *"High School Musical 2." Hopefully, it will tour sometime in 2008, and 'Idol' will go out again next July after the show's season finale."*

For Jeff Frasco, it's all about timing. As the roadshow ring-leader at Creative Artists Agency of such highly successful tours as the Cheetah Girls, "High School Musical," American Idol and the Hannah Montana Tour featuring Miley Cyrus, Frasco gets all his ducks in a row before launching a tour.

"Timing is very important, particularly when it's a TV property as well as musical property," Frasco says. "It has to be synced properly with the release of the record, the airing of the TV show and the release of the DVDs. It all has to be done right."

After a decade at William Morris, Frasco jumped to CAA seven years ago and in recent years has turned the tween tours business into a multimillion-dollar juggernaut for the agency. But it wasn't always this easy. When Frasco launched his first Disney-spawned tour, Cheetah Girls, in late 2004, it was a hard sell to some promoters. The tour sold out, but in much smaller venues.

"Nobody knew what was going on then or how big this would all become," Frasco says. "We came back the following year, and Disney timed it with the re-



lease of the record and the movie, and because of the timing, everything blew up. We wound up doing 89 arenas," he says.

The success continues: In the first half of 2007, the Cheetah Girls tour grossed an impressive \$6.1 million on a mere 21 shows, according to Pollstar, which tracks concert grosses. Frasco is now shepherding the Hannah Montana tour, which is experiencing instant sellouts.

"The demand level for the Hannah Montana tour is off the charts," observes Gary Bonjiovanni, editor of Pollstar. "And the excitement for these shows is reminiscent of the heyday of the boy bands era with New Kids on the Block and the Backstreet Boys."

— Adam Sandler

## BOB CAVALLO

Success hasn't changed Bob Cavallo.

"Bob is one of the few guys in the industry completely unaffected by the trappings that come with success," says John Sykes, president of MTV Network Development, who has known Cavallo for decades. "He knows his priorities. He's the same regular guy — whether he's managing Prince or running Disney music — that he has always been," says Sykes.

An ego-free, low-profile leader was exactly what Disney's music operation needed after two previous high-profile, but mostly unsuccessful, regimes. After 35 years as a manager, guiding the careers of acts as diverse as the Lovin' Spoonful, Prince and Earth, Wind & Fire, Cavallo signed on as chairman of the Disney Music Group in 1998.

"It was a new challenge, and something I thought could be fun," he says. "And I didn't know the record business was over yet," he adds half-jokingly.

Under his aegis, the Disney Music



Group — which includes four record labels and music publishing — has evolved from a moribund operation into one grossing nearly \$500 million in revenues, according to sources (Disney doesn't break out figures), and a 3.43% market share. While a single-digit share pales to some of its double-digit competitors, DMG nonetheless has the market cornered in music for the tween set.

Sales of music from Hannah Montana aka Miley Cyrus, Jesse McCartney and "High School Musical" are filling label coffers, and the acts are benefiting from high profiles due in part to constant exposure on Radio Disney and the Disney Channel.

"I knew early on we'd need to use the Disney Channel to overcome a lack of (non-Disney) radio play for our artists. The trick was how to use it properly," Cavallo recalls. "Hilary Duff was the model. She became a Channel star and made a mainstream record that sold 3.9 million units. She certainly turned things around for us."

— Adam Sandler

**Recent breakthrough:** *"Hannah Montana/Miley Cyrus seems to be what everyone is talking about," but Disney Music also has new records from Raven-Symone and Duff on the horizon.*

**Role model:** *"I looked up to Albert Grossman (legendary artist manager in the era of Bob Dylan and others). If I was insecure about something, I'd call him up and ask what he thought."*

**What's next:** *"The Jonas Brothers, we believe, are going to be big. They're making a film, have a TV pilot and will be the next wave. Plus, Grace Potter and the Nocturnals — the real deal."*

## JILL CASAGRANDE

When a band has a CD debut at No. 5, a single that shoots past Kanye West to No. 1 and a sold-out U.S. tour, you'd expect them to be a household name. But the Jonas Brothers are known only to households containing grade-schoolers. That's because the act gets airplay only on Radio Disney, exposure that has propelled the trio to deals for a TV series, movie and concert special with the Disney Channel.

The difference is Jill Casagrande, a longtime Disney Channel exec who last year took control of the only radio station to target 6- to 14-year-olds. Radio traditionally doesn't market to tweens, and as senior VP and general manager of Radio Disney, Casagrande helped maneuver the 53-station niche network into a wide-open market.

"Kids influence a great deal of purchasing, not just CD sales, but in all things," she says. "When you see 'Hannah Montana' and 'High School Musical' sales next to the artists we (adults) grew up with, it's what's taking people by surprise — not that kids are consumers, but that they rival adult consumers."

Both inhouse and non-Disney artists get a boost with promotions like "Incubator," which highlights a new artist every two weeks (Keke Palmer, Jordyn Taylor and Emma Roberts have all been featured), and "DJ Takeover," where guest artists pick the playlist and field questions from fans.

Most radio stations program for listening in 15-minute increments, but Casagrande is integrating Radio Disney into the daily lives of its young audience, while simultaneously assuring parents of good, clean programming.

"I want kids to feel they are part of the Radio Disney experience, that no matter where they are, this is their destination, and if they miss a day on Radio Disney, they've missed something important," she says.

— Tara McNamara

**Recent breakthrough:** *The "Incubator"-hyped Jonas Brothers' album debuted at No. 5, pushed by airplay on Radio Disney.*

**Role model:** *"It's tough for kids to be talented performers and maintain some level of normalcy, but I'm incredibly impressed by Miley Cyrus and the Jonas Brothers."*

**What's next:** *Disney star Jason Dolley may host a DJ Takeover to promote his pic "Minutemen."*



## MITCHELL GOSSETT

**M**ultitalents make all the difference, says agent Mitchell Gossett, director of the youth division at Cunningham Escott Slevin Doherty, who helps transform pint-sized actors, singers and models, among others, into A-list stars.

When interest exploded for client Jesse McCartney (his single “Beautiful Soul” hit while he was starring in WB series “Summerland”), Gossett smelled a trend. Now, for Gossett and his staff (most of whom have master’s degrees in acting), the strategy is to find youth with talent in one area and then develop their skills in another category.

“We negotiated Miley Cyrus to be the first artist to have deals with four areas at the Disney Co.: TV, film, consumer products and recording,” he says.

Studios and networks have come to depend on both Gossett’s pool of reliable child stars (his clients have carried everything from “Veronica Mars” to “Hannah Montana”) and his ability to detect raw talent in untested young performers.

His discovery of inexperienced AnnaSophia Robb supplied the innocence to Walden’s “Because of Winn Dixie.” Gossett was in Denver on one of his scouting treks when he saw Robb audition. “There was one beat while she was reading and she closed her eyes. I saw that she had it: the ability to disappear in a role,” he says.

Gossett’s agenting method draws from his previous careers as actor, director and talent manager. Thus, his clients get a hands-on rep who speaks their language, understands their struggle and can offer credible advice on how to improve their work.

No matter what his clients’ success, Gossett believes part of his role is to show them their value beyond commerce. Sure, he’s excited to have arranged Cyrus’ sold-out 50-city concert tour, but he confides that he’s equally proud “that she is donating part of every ticket sold to charity.”

— Tara McNamara



**Recent breakthrough:** *Counts Miley Cyrus and AnnaSophia Robb among his clients.*

**Role model:** *“My father put himself second to the family, always. I strive to be as wise as him.”*

**What’s next:** *“I discovered a young actress named Demi Lovato in Texas, and she just booked the lead in Disney’s ‘Rock Camp,’ which we think can be the next ‘High School Musical’ franchise.”*



Matthew Simmons/WireImage.com

## MEREDITH FINE

**C**oast to Coast agent Meredith Fine had reason to pop the Champagne cork after Oscar nominations were unveiled this year. One of her young clients, Abigail Breslin, nabbed a nom for “Little Miss Sunshine.”

Actually, Breslin was her second underage client to score an Oscar nomination. Her first was Haley Joel Osment.

The “Sixth Sense” star was Fine’s first big client. “I knew there was something really special about him, and time has shown that to be true.”

Timing is everything for youth agents, always on the lookout for age-appropriate material, since kids can play only one or two years younger or older than the part calls for.

“When I first started in the youth world, it was very competitive, so I had to focus on kids in wheelchairs who could dribble a basketball, or whole soccer teams” — she created a successful niche for unusual kids with unusual talents.

Fine’s strength was in finding commercial kids, she says, “and I realized that I had to bring in a strong theatrical person to work with me. And that’s when things started to change.”

Fine credits her partners — first Brooke Bundy, then David Eisenberg and Loch Powell — with finding East Coast and theatrical talent. She still has working relationships with all three (who eventually left to become managers), and now shares offices with Dana Edrick-Fletcher.

Together, they rep Haley and sister Emily Osment (a regular on Disney Channel megahit “Hannah Montana”), Abigail and brother Spencer Breslin and busy Michael Angarano (“Sky High”), whom she shares with ICM.

“We don’t want it to be too big,” Fine says. “I only rep as many as I can rep effectively.”

**Recent breakthrough:** *“I’ve just begun my 20th year, hoping for another 20.”*

**Role model:** *It’s more about inspiration to Fine. “I’m inspired in this business by loyalty.”*

**What’s next:** *“I’d love to see my clients nominated for more Oscars. I’ve booked two clients in Peter Jackson’s ‘The Lovely Bones.’ It was a very emotional booking for me. It’s one of my favorite books.”*

— Carole Horst

## BONNIE LIEDTKE

**T**he rants, ravings and begging for representation come in all shapes, sizes and disguises.

"People send pizzas with 8x10 glossies," says agent Bonnie Liedtke, who's often defined as "the Swifty Lazar of the kids TV and movie business." "They send live goldfish. And one guy even came in dressed as a waiter delivering food — with an 8x10 glossy!"

Forget the picture of agents scouring Schwab's for the next Lana Turner, or the myth of scouts in school yards. Today, hopefuls and dreamers chase the agents. Ferociously.

When Liedtke and her colleague Thor Bradwell joined William Morris in late May, it caused a seismic industry shift: It's the first time the legendary tenpercenterly has created a special unit devoted solely to unearthing gifted sprouts and arranging gigs for them.

After two decades toiling in the sandbox of tyke talent, the longtime moppets master has burnished her pedigree of discovering and nurturing young stars — including Zac Efron, Denise Richards, Leonardo DiCaprio and Hilary Swank.

Liedtke studies all demo reels, her eyes peeled for potential talent ranging from 10- to 19-year-olds, and gets recommendations from associates, complete strangers and friends — including both Swank and DiCaprio.

What does she look for? First and foremost, poise. Then charm.

And they must take acting classes.

But it's not all lollipops and cotton candy. "On one show, all four of my clients came down with chicken pox and had to be replaced overnight," she says.

The energetic soccer mom has two tots: Isabella, 7, and Maxwell, 10. But neither is interested in acting.

Yet.

— Bob Ellison



**Recent breakthrough:** *Placed four of her youngsters in "High School Musical 2": Zac Efron, Corbin Bleu, Ryne Sanborn and Olesya Rulin.*

**Role model:** *"I didn't really have one. But among the child stars who grew up, I really admire Leonardo DiCaprio and Hilary Swank."*

**What's next:** *"That's easy: 'High School Musical 3.'"*

## CINDY OSBRINK

**A**gent Cindy Osbrink says she can see the thing that makes a child a star almost right away.

"When I first saw Dakota Fanning, she was only 5, but she just lit everything up," says Osbrink, who also represents Dakota's younger sister Elle. "Discovering a talent like her is what makes me love my job."

Osbrink launched her own tenpercenterly over a decade ago, when the agent who was representing her own children retired. "I thought I'd do it myself, so I went to UCLA and took every entertainment business class I could find," she explains. Though her own children later decided they wanted to do other things, Osbrink stayed in the business.

"In the last five years, kids are getting more famous because of the Disney Channel and Nickelodeon, and the paparazzi and the media have responded to that," Osbrink says. "It's just everywhere now, so we've opened our own PR department here in the office."

Osbrink's method is to prepare her clients for dealing with the press: "We've basically media-trained the kids in how to remain positive during press junkets and how to be gracious to your fans, because without them you wouldn't be famous."

Osbrink also deals with parents pushing a child into the business. "I ask kids if they had a choice between skateboarding and going to an audition, which they'd prefer," she says. "If they tell me skateboarding, I know right there, because a kid who really wants it will miss their best friend's birthday just to be on a set."

— Karen Idelson



Mark Sullivan/WireImage.com

**Recent breakthrough:** *"Developing a program to prepare young stars to deal with the media."*

**Role model:** *Impressed by clients Dakota Fanning, Raven-Symone, Jenna Boyd and Tyler James Williams: "They were all naturally talented and confident."*

**What's next:** *Client Elle Fanning is filming "Nutcracker: The Untold Story," while Williams looks forward to more of "Everybody Hates Chris."*

## SARAH SHYN

**W**ith an innate ability for spotting young, raw talent and a roster of hot teenage stars including "Hairspray's" Elijah Kelley, "Disturbia's" Aaron Yoo and "Halloween's" Scout Taylor-Compton, agent Sarah Shyn has become one of the most influential players in Hollywood, a town she's always been part of.

"I grew up here with a lot of child actors, and early on I knew I wanted to be either an agent or a casting director," she says. "So after college, I got a job at Pakula/King & Associates, then did some casting work with Artz/Cohen and finally decided agenting was my calling."

Shyn joined CAA for two years, then moved to the Osbrink Agency, where she found her niche: "They focused on young talent, and they asked me to run their teen department. As much as I loved CAA, it felt like a sign for me, as I've always recognized young talent early on.

It's just this knack I have that I can't explain."

A year ago, Gersh hired Shyn away. "But it wasn't about moving to a bigger agency so much as being able to do what I love and create more opportunities for my clients, as well as develop young talent," she notes. Along with her gift comes a lot of hard work and dedication. "You read everything out there. Most of my clients, though they're very young, have very particular tastes. They're not typical teen clients. They're driven by material, not necessarily big studio projects."

Her recipe for success? "I always go by three things — the right look, whatever that might be; talent, which is huge; and if they can work the room — because the truth is, you can have talent and looks, but that won't always get you the job. The call-back is for that person with that natural charm and ability to make people comfortable."

— Iain Blair

**Recent breakthrough:** *"Getting Elijah Kelley the role in 'Hairspray.' It took some work to get him the audition. He wasn't an automatic first choice."*

**Role model:** *"Kevin Hwuane at CAA. He's a huge role model for me, and I learned the majority of what I do from him."*

**What's next:** *"Dana Davis is a new series regular on NBC's 'Heroes' this year."*



## BRAND BOYS

**Recent breakthrough:**

From fragrances to apparel, client Hilary Duff has conquered the international merchandising world for juniors fashion, focusing next on the Young Misses section.

**Role model:** "We haven't really borrowed from anybody," Thorne notes. "With (former clients) Mary-Kate and Ashley (Olsen), we created the tween branding business."

**What's next:** Thorne and Redlitz will attempt to age up—and man up—their brand strategy with Quincy Jones, establishing a merchandising campaign that involves such things as fashion and book publishing around the 74-year-old music impresario.

**ROBERT THORNE & GREG REDLITZ**

As head of Dualstar Entertainment in the '90s, Robert Thorne and his longtime collaborator, Greg Redlitz, built a brand licensing business around youthful TV stars Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen that was the first of its kind.

"There really wasn't anything to look to as a model at the time, save for maybe Martha Stewart," says Thorne, noting that well-known performers previously adhered to the "Hollywood representation model" when they sought to enter the merchandising world.

The problem, he adds, is that most agents and managers don't have time to keep track of what manufacturers and retail partners are doing with their client's name and likeness. "You can't just do deals and go away from them," Thorne notes.

Thus, under the guidance of Thorne and Redlitz, Dualstar developed a comprehensive strategy whereby manufacturing and retail partners are responsible for getting licensed product onto store shelves, while, according to Redlitz, "We take the lead to bring them marketing, promotion and press. The energy has to come from the brand. We do everything outside of the store."



Matthew Simmons/Variety

Buoyed by Olsen apparel deals with the likes of Walmart, Thorne and Redlitz grew merchandising into a billion-dollar enterprise for Dualstar, but were bought out by the twins in 2005. They quickly established the Robert Thorne Co. in Beverly Hills and signed a new client, Hilary Duff, who already had a sizable tween following.

As a merchandising force, Duff has emerged even more quickly than the Olsens, establishing tween-targeted apparel lines such as Stuff by Hilary Duff, as well as the Elizabeth Arden fragrance offering With Love... Hilary Duff.

"Her publicity level will continue to age up," Thorne notes, "and as she gets older, her business base will continue to expand."

Understandably, there are a number of tween performers who would love to have Thorne and Redlitz in

their corner. But with resources limiting how many clients they can juggle at once, the duo recently decided to vary their portfolio, signing music legend Quincy Jones.

"We decided to expand into a more male-oriented business," Thorne explains.

—Daniel Frankel

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## LONELYGIRL15

The aspiring actress had abruptly fled her May 2006 meeting with the producers at a West L.A. organic tea shop.

But when she got outside and answered her cell phone, 20-year-old New Zealand native Jessica Rose, a recent Universal Studios film school grad with no credits yet to speak of, was lured back into the project with a simple reassurance: "It's not porn."



Beckett

Indeed, "The Children of Anchor Cove" wasn't a feature film, conceded Miles Beckett, who at 27 was in the process of tossing away four years of med school — and borrowing money from his parents — to produce a viral video series focused on a mysterious teenager named Bree, aka Lonelygirl15. ("Jewish plastic surgeon becomes bum living in an apartment making a video," is how he describes what was then a bleak scenario.)

However, Beckett contended, the mysterious YouTube sudser he and his partners were planning — which, at least initially, would be successfully shrouded as vloggings of a real-life 16-year-old — would attract industry buzz and lead to bigger things for everyone involved.

By the Fourth of July, Rose had be-

come the first megastar of the Internet video age, and "Lonelygirl15" had become its first original hit, with the seminal "My Parents Suck" episode drawing an audience of more than half a million viewers — on par with cable TV — and eventually national sponsors such as Neutrogena to the skein.

For Rose, Bree was finally killed off over this past summer, but the role led her to starring on the successful ABC Family series "Greek."

As for Beckett and his business partner, Greg Goodfried, "Lonelygirl15" ended up becoming its own big thing. "We were taken around to the biggest TV networks and studios, and we were offered typical Hollywood development deals," recalls Goodfried, who initially obtained CAA representation for Lonelygirl15 by sneaking into the tenper-



Goodfried

century using his wife's employee access. Ultimately, these connections weren't really needed — launching LG15 Studios, Beckett and Goodfried decided to keep "Lonelygirl15" where it started, on the Internet, and have branched off their operation to London, where they're now shooting a second viral vid series, "KateModern."

— Daniel Frankel



Jessica Rose

Brian Ach/WireImage.com

**Recent breakthrough:** On Aug. 3, the season one finale of "Lonelygirl15" — which involved 12 short videos uploaded exclusively to MySpace within the span of 12 hours — produced the skein's biggest one-day viewership. In fact, a highlight video designed to catch viewers up generated 1 million views all on its own.

**Role model:** Co-creator Miles Beckett cites early podcasters Tiki-BarTV as providing key inspiration for "Lonelygirl15."

**What's next:** "Lonelygirl15" lives on even though its seminal character, Bree, was just killed off. The founders are now producing another Web series in London, "KateModern," that also targets a female-skewing twentysomething demographic.

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## ASHLEY TISDALE

There are late bloomers and then there's Ashley Tisdale of "High School Musical 2" fame. Barely 22, Tisdale is already a showbiz veteran whose career began at the age of 3. "I was discovered by a talent scout at a local mall," says the New Jersey native, who went on to appear in more than 100 commercials before landing leading roles in tours of "Les Misérables" and "Annie."

Tisdale is now best known for her role as Sharpay Evans, the Drama Club diva everyone loves to hate in "High School Musical 2."

"I love playing the bad girls — they're always more fun," she notes. Not that she's in any danger of being typecast — Tisdale also stars as Maddie, "a sweet, girl-next-door type" on Disney Channel's hit series "The Suite Life of Zack & Cody" and voices "funny-crazy" Candace in Disney's new animated series "Phineas & Ferb." She is currently in Montreal filming the starring role in "Picture This" for MGM Home Entertainment.

"I'm a workaholic," admits Tisdale, who is also an accomplished songwriter and recording artist signed to Warner Bros. Records. Her first solo album, "Headstrong," debuted at No. 5 in February, followed by a sold-out 42-city national tour with "High School Musical: The Concert," which featured several of her songs. "I don't want to choose between acting and music," she adds. "I want to do it all."

**Recent breakthrough:** "Definitely 'High School Musical.' I never expected it to be so huge."

**Role model:** "My mom. She instilled so much confidence in me. I don't really look up to anyone in the business. I want to set my own path."

**What's next:** "A big U.S. and European radio tour for my 'Headstrong' album. I'm re-releasing it and doing three music videos."

— Iain Blair

## SHIA LaBEOUF

How's this for a career arc — "Even Stevens" to "Holes," "I, Robot," "Disturbia" and "Transformers." And now he's shooting a little movie called "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull." And LaBeouf just turned 21 in June.

But the young star's future hasn't always looked so bright. By his own admission, the L.A. native had a rough childhood with a heroin-addicted father, turning to acting as a way out of his family's hand-to-mouth existence. After meeting child star Shawn Toovey of CBS' "Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman" at a party, LaBeouf showed up at the Beverly Hecht Agency and charmed his way into representation.

After some commercial work, his

**Recent breakthrough:** *One might argue the robots were the draw on "Transformers," but there's no denying that LaBeouf helped propel "Disturbia" to its \$80 million domestic gross.*

**What's next:** *Starring opposite Harrison Ford in "Indiana Jones 4."*

first break was landing the lead in Disney's "Even Stevens," and he then parlayed that teen success into a series of film performances ("Dumb and Dumberer," "The Battle of Shaker Heights," "Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle") that quickly revealed his natural talent and impressive range.

But it was this past summer that transformed his career. After "Disturbia's" exec producer Steven Spielberg saw LaBeouf's audition tape, he read him for a lead in Michael Bay's "Transformers" and then tapped him to play Harrison Ford's young sidekick in the eagerly anticipated "Indiana Jones" sequel. With his clean-cut image and versatility, he's now being touted as "the next Tom Hanks."

— Iain Blair



Chris Polk/FilmMagic.com

## STRAIGHT OUTTA KIDHOOD

## MARY-KATE &amp; ASHLEY OLSEN

**D**rinking age since June, the former “Full House” stars are individually working their way into grown-up performance careers — with a theme of vice emerging early on.

Mary-Kate has an ongoing arc on Showtime’s “Weeds” as a devout Christian who smokes a little bud. She’s also set for a small role alongside Ben Kingsley in “The Wackness,” which focuses on a psychotherapist who pays his shrink with “the kind.”

For her part, Ashley is in talks to star alongside Billy Bob Thornton and Kim Basinger in “The Informers,” an adaptation of a Bret Easton Ellis novel — a realm in which pot consumption could often be considered a mild indulgence.

How this transition to adult-career lives will affect, er, joint fashion-merchandising operations that drew the blueprint for the celeb licensing biz is anyone’s guess. In other words, how will parents of girls ages 4-14 feel about buying from Wal-Mart’s billion-dollar Mary-Kate and Ashley clothing line now?

A personal publicist for both thespians/fashion impresarios suggests that their apparel lines are already growing up along with their acting careers — the Row, for example, is full of high-end goods targeted to women in their late 20s and beyond.

In fact, just because the Olsens have established themselves as tween fashion icons “doesn’t mean they shouldn’t be allowed to work and do stuff that interests them,” she adds.

— Daniel Frankel

**Recent breakthrough:**

*The sisters’ fashion line the Row is going strong. Mary-Kate has a recurring role on Showtime’s “Weeds” this season.*

**What’s next:**

*Mary-Kate makes out with Ben Kingsley in the upcoming indie “The Wackness”; Ashley in talks on “The Informers.”*



Eric Charbonneau/WireImage.com



Kevin Mazur/WireImage.com

## JOSH PECK &amp; DRAKE BELL

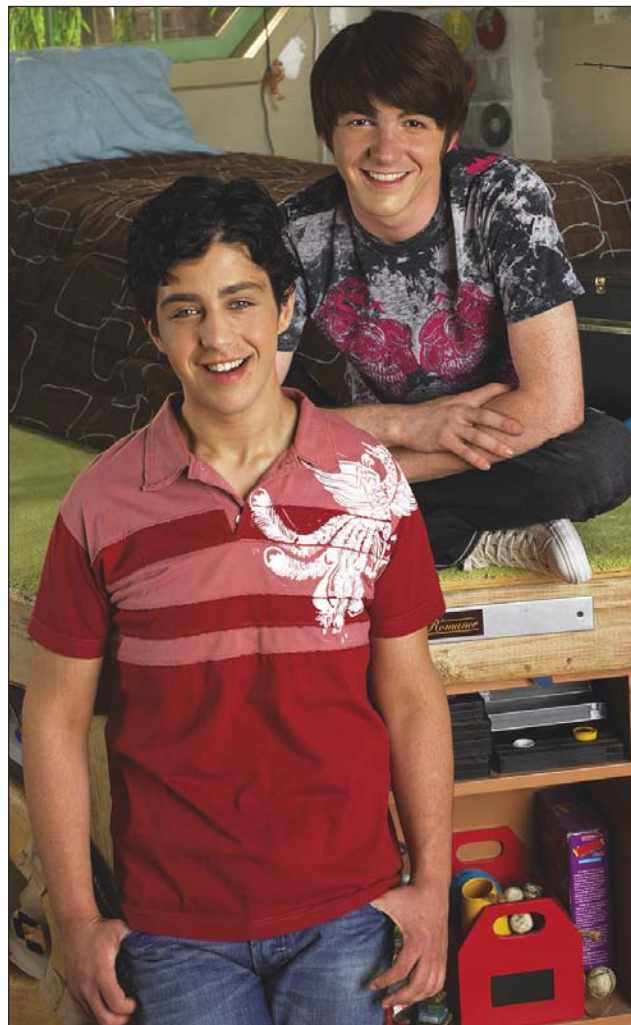
**A**fter four seasons as the eponymous stars of Nickelodeon hit “Drake & Josh,” Drake Bell and Josh Peck both have bigger, if different, fish to fry and are moving on.

For Bell, 21, that means a chance to develop his fledgling directing skills (he made his directing debut with the spinoff TV movie “Drake & Josh: Really Big Shrimp”) while still pursuing his acting and musical careers (he recently wrapped teen tour Nextfest and is shooting Dimension Films’ “Superhero” spoof opposite Leslie Nielsen).

For Peck, who turns 21 next month, it means moving away from teen fare into edgier, more adult projects. Peck next stars opposite Ben Kingsley in “The Wackness.” “I play a drug dealer who gets therapy sessions from Sir Ben’s drug-addled psychiatrist in exchange for pot,” he explains gleefully.

Bell and Peck first met as part of “The Amanda Show’s” ensemble before headlining their own show. “It was a total education, doing sketch comedy, writing and being forced to play five different characters with dialects,” Peck recalls.

“Ending it is bittersweet,” notes Bell, an Orange County, Calif., kid who began doing commercials at 5 and whose credits include “Jerry



Maguire” and “High Fidelity.” “It’s like graduating high school. You miss all your friends, but now I can do my music more and other stuff. I can’t wait to tour again.”

Bell, who plays “the Tobey Maguire character, except I’m a dragonfly” in “Spider-Man” sendup “Superhero,” is also keen to direct again.

“I’m ready to challenge myself in different ways,” says Peck, who grew up in New York City’s Hell’s Kitchen and describes himself as, “a sort of character from birth. I started doing standup comedy at 9 after my mom read about an audition for Sid Gold’s kids agency. He told me to get an act together, so I did, making observations about school, life, my mom — all the torments in a 10-year-old’s day — and that really built my confidence.”

That’s served him well in negotiating “the tough move” between teen stardom and adulthood. “So many kids rely on cuteness, and when that dissipates, they’re stranded,” notes Peck, who made his feature-film debut in “Snow Day” and later won an Independent Spirit Award for his role as a bully in “Mean Creek.” “Thank God I was never blessed with that cuteness. I always had to rely on technique and hard work, and that’s helped me so much.”

— Iain Blair

**Recent breakthrough:**

*Nextfest surprised me,” says Bell. “I had a song, ‘Makes Me Happy,’ in ‘Big Shrimp,’ and at the start of the tour it’d get the normal response. But by the time ‘Big Shrimp’ aired, people went crazy for it.” For Peck, “The Wackness” — it’s the first movie I’ve done which has totally engrossed me.”*

**Role model:** *Bell says, “I’d like to be like Dean Martin and do TV, movies, music, all of it.” Peck picks Ben Kingsley: “He’s this Oscar winner and big star, and he took the time to help educate me about this business and life.”*

**What’s next:** *Bell is about to start writing songs for his third album for a spring release. Peck is making “Drillbit Taylor” with Judd Apatow and Owen Wilson.*

# SPECIAL ALLOWANCES

*Reps fight notion that smaller stars deserve smaller salaries*

By RACHEL WIMBERLY

**D**uring the most recent pilot season, Cindy Osbrink, CEO of the Osbrink Agency, says one of her child clients auditioned at a network and was offered the part.

The only problem was the network claimed there was no money left in the pilot's budget and wanted the child to be paid as a guest star.

"I told them, 'He's in the family! How can he be a guest star?'" says Osbrink, whose client list includes Dakota Fanning and "Everybody Hates Chris" star Tyler James Williams.

The child actor ended up taking the job. "It comes down to either he's not in it at all or he's a well-paid guest star and the hope is the pilot gets picked up," Osbrink says.

It's not the first time Osbrink has had to deal with one of her child clients being offered less than adult counterparts on the same set for the same work.

Wendi Green, founder of Abrams Artists' youth department, who represents "Two and a Half

Men" star Angus T. Jones, also has fought to ensure her child clients receive fair compensation.

"It's truly about the role," she says. "If it's the lead of the show, you're going to be paid like an adult."

"It's not the age of the actor, it's the experience" that she says should be considered, Osbrink believes.

Jones, for example, is not going to be paid the same as a star like Charlie Sheen, but, Green adds, "If the show evolves around the child, you have all the leverage."

Mitch Gossett, director of the young talent division at Cunningham, Escott, Slevin and Doherty, says he thinks minors usually get "the short end of the stick" when it comes to equal pay.



Getty Images

"When producers sit down to make budgets, they pay child actors scale or slightly above," Gossett says.

But, he adds, often the role could be the child's big break into the industry, and sometimes taking a hit upfront may just pay off in the end.



Steve Granitz/WireImage.com

## AGENCY TURF WARS

# Boutiques rattled by poaching encroachment

By CAROLE HORST

**S**o you're a youth agent, and you've discovered a bright new talent, developed the talent, won over the talent's parents and have built a cozy, familial relationship.

Then along comes CAA. Or ICM. Or whatever big name — they want your client.

"It doesn't matter what age your client is, everybody wants talent," says Cindy Osbrink of youth-centric the Osbrink Agency.

"We boutique agencies are the bread and butter of the industry. We do the groundwork, we get them up and running. It's very easy for someone to ride on the coattails," says Lynn Eriks, commercials department director for Howard Talent West. "The other week, I had a couple kids doing very well, and all of a sudden I get a call saying that Ford Models had contacted them."

Big agencies want potential movie stars, but won't invest the time booking commercial gigs that give younger talent experience working with directors and being on

camera. "That's where kids get their feet wet and really get going," Eriks says. "When they do well commercially, then you can pitch them theatrically."

So how does a youth agency hold onto talent till they're old enough for adult representation?

The answer is complex. "Tons of patience, tons of hand-holding," Osbrink says. Youth agents know the ins and outs of child labor laws in every state, as well as abroad. They are loyal and protective of

See **POACHING** page A38

**LOYAL FANNINGS:** Sisters Dakota and Elle Fanning remain with the Osbrink Agency despite offers from top tenpercenteries.

Everything and everyone you need to know is at

Children *In* Film .com

## NETS COMPETE FOR MOST POPULAR CLICK

It's no secret that kids watch oodles of television, but they're increasingly turning their attention to the Web, so savvy networks are finding ways to reach young viewers online. Sites allow fans to participate in the creative process by taking online polls, submitting original videos and browsing virtual environments. — *John Young*

### NICKELODEON

Nick is leading the way in allowing viewers to interact with its programming. The new sitcom "iCarly" features a 14-year-old girl who hosts her own webcam show, which features homemade videos sent in by fans. More than 2,000 videos were submitted during the sitcom's week-end premiere on Sept. 8.

The two-hour show "ME:TV" also allows Nick.com users to submit their videos, the best of which are featured on air.

Nick.com also is home to Nicktropolis, a virtual environment where users chat with friends and post on discussion boards. More than 4 million people have registered so far.



"iCarly"

### CARTOON NETWORK

"Master Control," a two-hour block that premiered Sept. 24, lets kids choose the shows they want to watch after school. Users join one of three teams, and whichever team ends up casting the most votes gets to select the programming for that day.

On the channel's Friday-Saturday "Fried Dynamite" block, a 10-year-old host named Blake encourages viewers to upload videos, photos, letters and artwork, promising to unveil the most exemplary submissions during his show.

Additionally, Cartoon Network is developing

Mini Match, a virtual-world game scheduled to launch this month. Visitors will create their own characters, chat with other users and challenge friends in a variety of interactive games.

### ABC FAMILY

Instead of letting young adults influence the actual content of its shows, ABC Family is attempting to replicate the programs' thematic atmosphere as an online experience. An example is the site for cabler's teen drama "Greek." Users participate in a "virtual rush" in which they set up

a profile with pictures and videos, choose a house to rush and then compete in weekly fraternity-related challenges.

For "Kyle XY," ABC Family devised an alternate-reality game. Players begin at the fake websites for the Mada Corp. and the Latnok Society, then proceed to sites that may or may not provide clues about the show's mysterious lead character.

### 4KIDS TV

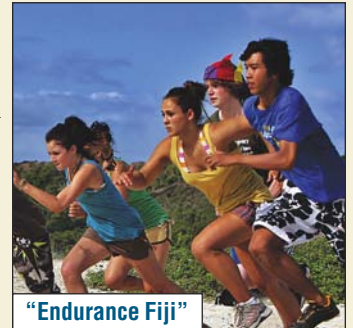
Fox's Saturday morning block launched a new site on Sept. 8 in conjunction with the beginning of its fall programming. The Web page features a selection of original games as well as streaming video of both current and past shows.

The site contains an avatar engine that allows users to manufacture their online personas. Kids

can communicate with others through rating, tagging, commenting and posting on the message boards. As users play with the site, they earn points that can be used to modify their avatars and purchase accessory items.

### DISCOVERY KIDS

"Endurance," the channel's popular reality competition show, has a prominent presence online. For the sixth season (premiering Oct. 13), fans selected the final two contestants by watching their audition tapes and then voting online. As the season progresses, users will be able to send questions to the contestants, who will then respond online. Furthermore, any of the opinions or information shared on the show's blog is eligible to be included as "in-program messaging" during an episode.



"Endurance Fiji"

### DISNEY CHANNEL

Before "High School Musical 2" started shooting, fans of the original hit telepic were able to vote for some of the specific things they wanted to see in the sequel. The winning requests included having Chad wear a T-shirt that read "I Majored in Vacation" and having Troy fix a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for his love, Gabriella.

## POACHING

*Continued from page A36*

their young charges. They often work in close partnership with the parents, which is key to everyone's career success.

Osbrink has so far kept Dakota Fanning and her sister Elle in her fold, putting their partnership down to "very loyal parents and the great communication between us. That's about it."

Indeed, the Fanning team is always looking for roles to stretch Dakota as an actress, and Osbrink enthuses about the young thesp's role in "Push," which she's filming now in Hong Kong. "It's 'Heroes' meets 'Alias' action; it's something she's never done before."

But is there a right time for a young actor to jump ship?

"You have to take each individual case and say, 'Hey we can really add to this team.' It's always better to be proactive than reactive if it's going to benefit your client and the client understands" what's entailed in the move, says Coast to Coast's Meredith Fine, who co-reps Michael Angarano ("Forbidden Kingdom") with ICM.

Youth agents stress that the big agencies aren't in the develop-

ment business and don't have the patience with young talent's careers that you get with boutiques.

"The right timing is when things are cooking and grooving, when you want to add content (to the client's repertoire)," Fine says. "The bad time (to leave for a big agency) is when there's a lull, and they want to resurrect their career; they think, 'Oh, someone else will want to make things better.'"

"Also what happens is the parents come into our agency pretty naive and then they go out to these auditions and they talk to the other parents, and that's when the nightmare happens," Eriks says. "I think they get overwhelmed and they don't trust their agents."

Sums up Fine: "My feeling is that in this business, there's a time for change. In the youth world, there's an understanding that we don't go after other people's clients. In the 'big world,' they go after talent whether the talent is 10 or 30. I understand the benefits of teaming with big agencies, and I co-rep with big agencies, and it is a good way to transition (youth clients) to the adult world. It's also a nod of respect and understanding where these kids have been all this time."

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## CHILD

Continued from page A1

For execs at both outfits, the search for fresh faces and potential breakout personalities is a 24/7, year-round pursuit that is a crucial element in their quest to remain hip and cool in the eyes of the most fickle of demographics.

"We meet with kids all the time, and we're always looking for relatability," says Paula Kaplan, executive VP of talent and West Coast general manager of Nickelodeon.

"What we're always trying to (showcase) on Nick is people who are regular kids — not the beauty-pageant-winner kind of talent. And we like diversity. You'll never see all blond girls on Nick, or all skinny girls. We live to mix it up so that the shows on air reflect the real world of a kid."

But it takes more than schoolyard charm to make it in the high-stakes world of kidvid these days, especially if a moppet has designs on transitioning to grown-up roles later on. Talent reps who specialize in youth thespians say there's never been more demand for triple-threat kids — witness the Disney Channel's phenomenal worldwide success with its "High School Musical" tuner franchise. Given that kids now have multiple platforms to become superstars in the tween universe, it's more important than ever that youthful performers are wise to the ways of the industry and have a strong support network behind them.

## The Nick teen fix

Nickelodeon is famous for its farm-team system of developing new shows around actors who are introduced to the Nick aud by supporting or guest-starring roles in other shows. It started more than a decade ago with the sketch comedy "All That," when execs and producers couldn't help but notice the chemistry between two of the troupers, Kenan Thompson and Kel Mitchell, who were given their own show, "Kenan and Kel." Amanda Bynes, Nick Cannon and Jamie Lynn Spears also served stints on "All That" on their way to starring in their own Nick series. Bynes' "The Amanda Show" featured Drake Bell and Josh Peck in supporting roles before they graduated to "Drake and Josh." Miranda Cosgrove, star of Nick's latest buzz-bin series "iCarly," was a regular on "Drake and Josh."

"I haven't been out of production since 1994," says writer-



**THE NEW CROP:** The Disney Channel looks for acting and musical talent in stars like Corbin Bleu, middle. Performers to have benefited from Nickelodeon's grooming include Amanda Bynes, top, and the Naked Brothers Band.

producer Dan Schneider, himself a one-time child actor who is now Nickelodeon's most prolific supplier of programs, including "Amanda," Spears' "Zoey 101," "Drake and Josh" and "iCarly."

"All of my shows have been farmed from a previous show. We take casting even minor roles on all of our shows incredibly seriously because that's how you keep it going," Schneider says. "You remember people who impress you (in auditions). Even if they're not right for the role we're casting, I file them in the back of my head and when I'm casting something else they are right for I can just say 'Aha! Go get that girl.'"

And once the show is ready to break, the kid star becomes the centerpiece of a multimedia marketing blitz that is usually focused more on launching its tyro entertainer as a new brand affiliated with a favorite channel than on strictly pumping the program. That's one reason so many of the latest hot properties — including Disney Channel's "Hannah" and "High School Musical" franchise or Nickelodeon's "The Naked Brothers Band" — emphasize music, which makes for a natural ancillary marketing hook through recordings and

live performances.

"The audience wants to have different access points for their (favorite) stars, and they want as much access as they can get," Kaplan says.

Having a rich Web presence is vital, of course, but it all still comes down to the TV property to drive everything else. There won't be much in the way of soundtrack sales, albums, books, merchandising or feature-film adaptations without a successful TV program to stoke demand and lend legitimacy to a newcomer.

"We have a lot of people come to us who now want the whole Disney package," says Marsh, citing the company's strength at cross-pollinating properties among its feature, publishing, Internet, music and theatrical productions. "We have to tell people, 'One step at a time. Let us help develop your talents.' Because it has to start out (on Disney Channel) to drive appeal. Once you've got that baseline level of awareness, then we can talk about what the extensions are, and with the right talent, the sky's the limit."

## Instant messaging

The fast expansion of the tween/teen market during the past dozen years has also had the effect of rewriting the rules of what it takes to become a kidvid star.

Forget the Shirley Temple model. For programs aimed at kids in the 6-15 range, execs and producers say, an actor must come off as extremely relatable to the aud in a kid-next-door way, yet their on-air personality has to be compelling enough to get a firm grip on a demo with short attention spans. Actors on Nickelodeon and Disney Channel live-action shows can't be too over-the-top, but they can't be too low-key either.

"A lot of kids are groomed through commercials, where the acting is bigger for the salesmanship factor. It can be a challenge to take them down a notch," Marsh says. "But it's easier to take someone down a notch than to raise them up a notch in terms of energy. If they're too low-key, you don't know if that's a choice or a limitation."

"A lot of it falls down to that first 10 seconds in the room and how they behave," says Bonnie Liedtke, an agent with WMA who has specialized in repping kid actors for more than 20 years. Among her finds over the years have been Leonardo Di-

Caprio, Hilary Swank and "High School Musical's" Zac Efron and Corbin Bleu.

In her first 10 years or so in the kidvid sector, the onus was on Liedtke to proactively scout for new faces. Now she doesn't have enough hours in the day to see all the genuinely talented interested in booking an audition. The fact that there are so many more employment options for younger actors these days has made many more kids focused on breaking into showbiz, Liedtke says.

## Popularity contest

Like most talent scouting processes, hopefuls generally come in the door at Disney Channel and Nick through agents, managers, casting directors and recommendations from others in the industry, particularly young actors them-

selves. Disney Channel execs periodically try to hold discreet open calls in various cities. They work through local talent reps and acting schools, and occasionally place a local ad that doesn't identify it as a Disney Channel-hosted audition.

Two years ago they made the rounds, and out of 5,000 kids who cycled through their stops in a handful of cities, a girl from Texas stood out in Marsh's mind. The young actress, Selena Gomez, was cast in the pilot for the spinoff of "Lizzie McGuire," which didn't go, and last year they gave her two more pilots, one of which became the recently launched series "The Wizards of Waverly Place."

"That's a question of betting on talent," Marsh says. "Once you find the person, you've got to make a commitment to give them work to get their shot."



Jesse Plemons, Actor, NBC's *Friday Night Lights*  
Texas Tech University Independent School District (TTUISD) Graduate

Chris Fielder, Stage Actor, *The Giver*, *The Boxcar Children*  
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Leven Rambin, Actress, ABC's *All My Children*  
Texas Tech University Independent School District (TTUISD) Student

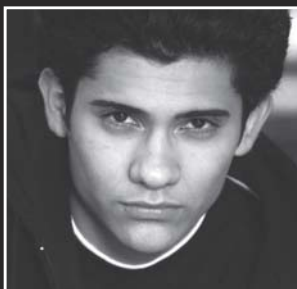
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**Celine Tien** Nickelodeon Game Show SWAT HMG Episode #1



**Ian Tien** House of Wong Penecostal D'Elmo Interval



**Chloe Lewis** Just Jordan Mr. 500 Britney Cordell Sears



**Brandon Waters** Honda Motorcross GMC



**Ryan Wynott** Brothers Solomon Tell Me You Love Me

**The Savage Agency**

## THE POWER OF YOUTH

# KID STARS GIVE BACK

A little peer pressure can go a long way, particularly when it means *Variety* using its peer-to-peer relationship with the industry to help raise awareness of philanthropic causes through the publication's first-ever Power of Youth event.

Some of Hollywood's top young talents — including Miley Cyrus, Andrea Bowen, Angus T. Jones, Tyler James Williams and Elijah Kelley — hit the Globe Theater on the Universal backlot Saturday from noon to 3 to lead a fete packed with games, performances — and lots of food.

"This event was created because *Variety* has the access and ability to reach the next generation of Hollywood and encourage these performers — who are influencers of popular culture — to be philanthropic and make a difference," says *Variety* associate publisher Brian Gott, who is the driving force behind the event.

St. Jude Children's Research Hospital benefits from the event and an online auction of items donated by the Hollywood community — including set visits to "Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader," "Heroes" and other series, movie premiere packages, VIP tickets to "American Idol" and other shows, plus luxury goodies and personal items from stars — shepherded by Charity Folks.

Guests at the event also will have a chance to bid, while the public can participate at [Variety.com/auction](http://Variety.com/auction) now through Oct. 19.

St. Jude's was an easy choice for this inaugural event. "St. Jude's entertainment ties, all the way back to Danny Thomas' relationship with *Variety* when St. Jude was founded 45 years ago (and specifically with *Variety* columnist Army Archerd), made it a natural fit," Gott says. Marlo Thomas, who has carried on her father Danny's legacy at St. Jude's, also will be a part of the festivities.

More than 70 young actors sit on *Variety*'s Youth Advisory Board, which is chaired by NBC Entertainment/Universal Media Studios co-chair Ben Silverman.

"We felt that Ben was a great example of a generation of Hollywood that is making a difference. He indicated he is a big fan of St. Jude's and offered to help however he could for this effort," says Gott, adding that "everyone at NBC Universal was amazing, from Ron Meyer to Ben Silverman and (NBC U chief) Jeff Zucker, to (NBC U TV Group publicity exec VP) Rebecca Marks. They came together and helped make this a reality."

— Carole Horst

**BIGGER THAN US:** Miley Cyrus will attend the benefit for St. Jude's Children's Hospital.

Al Pereira/WireImage.com



## PREHAB

Continued from page A2

"call time" means to how to prep in advance when they get scripts to how they need to conduct themselves in public when fans inevitably approach them.

"For a lot of our kids, getting on one of our shows is their first job," says Paula Kaplan, executive VP of talent for Nick. "They need to be told that they should never give out their phone number or email address. They need to be told in advance that they're now a public figure and people are going to come up to them."

The Screen Actors Guild also advises young actors and their parents through conferences hosted by its Young Performers Committee.

"These are daylong events bringing various aspects of the industry to parents or kids," says committee member Alan Simon, who owns On Location Education, a national tutoring service that provides studio and on-set teachers: "how to invest; how to work with agents, managers, casting directors; the hard work of training, of balancing family and career."

To many, the industry isn't solely to blame for

the goal shift. A tough-love boot camp for kids might help, they say, but a tried-and-true form of "pre-hab" already exists.

"It's called parenting, and on top of that, team members who have a soul and are ethical and are not just looking at these young people as a money-maker," says Sam Maydew, a manager at the Collective who works with such young talent as Emile Hirsch and Shareeka Epps.

"Imagine going around the county passing out Ferraris to kids who are 15 and about to get their driver's licenses," he observes. "Just because they're on these shows doesn't mean they're superhuman. They're still going through the same things that other teenagers are going through."

Tess Hightower, a therapist who often works with troubled Hollywood youth, says one problem is that the industry preys on youthful ambition.

"A lot of times kids get into acting because there is something missing in the early chapters of life," she says. "They feel abandoned. We call it a 'narcissistic injury': I'm going to go be a star and be respected and the show business family will be my new family. But then what happens is that the showbiz family becomes a recapitulation of the wounding. They go into it looking to be a star, and when they get there the sun burns too bright."

# UP NEXT

# MUSIC

## SEAN KINGSTON

Every time a dreamy artist steps off the Greyhound in Hollywood, there's that chance they'll make it. In the case of Sean Kingston, the 17-year-old cherubic tenor promptly scored a record deal with hip-hop producer J.R. Rotem days upon arriving in L.A. from his hometown Miami during the spring of 2006. It was a literal overnight success story, for a week prior Kingston had been living in the Miami bus station after being ostracized by a relative who disapproved of his musical aspirations. Persistent emails to Rotem and a MySpace page of music demos have clearly paid off for Kingston.

One night last April, while waiting around in the recording studio, Kingston heard Ben E. King's "Stand by Me" and asked Rotem to flip it. Within an hour, Kingston not only bore this past summer's No. 1 hit "Beautiful Girls," but a fresh R&B hip-hop sound that fused doo-wop with reggae. Two weeks later, Kingston had a self-titled album, which to date has shipped more than 350,000 copies. He is currently opening for Gwen Stefani and will tour with Chris Brown this fall.

— Anthony D'Alessandro



## PAOLO NUTINI

At 18, Paolo Nutini became a household name in the U.K. after his debut CD "The Streets" landed at No. 3 on the charts. The Paisley, Scotland, native and Celtic FC supporter quit school at 16 to become a roadie and pursue a music career with the encouragement of a musical granddad who brought everything from Scottish folk songs to boogie woogie to opera into the Nutini household.

On "The Streets," Nutini's deep, mature, evocative voice belied his youth, while his lyrics laid out personal stories and emotional anguish — all backed by a guitar-driven sound produced by Liverpool's famed Ken Nelson (Coldplay, Snow Patrol). A string of hit singles ("Last Request," "Jenny Don't Be Hasty," "New Shoes") and incessant touring — including opening for the Rolling Stones and Amy Winehouse — solidified his position as a bright new star on the Brit music scene.

Tapped for the lineup at the Ahmet Ertegun charity concert tribute, which headlines a reunited Led Zeppelin, the now-20-year-old Atlantic Records artist continues to write and tour.

— Carole Horst



## ELIJAH KELLEY

"Hairspray" standout Elijah Kelley broke into entertainment at age 11 when he answered a newspaper ad looking for young Atlanta-area talent. "They gave me a stick of bubble gum and said, 'Sell this to me right now,'" says Kelley of his first audition. "I did a corny two-second sale and they were like, 'Oh, my God, we love him.'"

Still in middle school, Kelley signed with an agent and landed parts in the television movies "Mama Flora's Family" and "A Lesson Before Dying." Then at 14, he decided to regroup, focus on high school in La Grange, Ga., and strive for normalcy.

Newly 21, Kelley's dual careers as actor and recording artist are taking off. He sings on the "Hairspray" soundtrack and produced a single, "Better Man," for Will Smith's nephew, K-Smith, featuring Omari-ron. Under a record deal with New Line, he is completing an album set for release in 2008.

"It's like pop-soul, the perfect fusion of Earth, Wind and Fire with Justin Timberlake, Usher and Sly and the Family Stone," Kelley says. "You get the funk of those days mixed perfectly with the pop of today."

— Betsy Boyd



## LIL' MAMA

Despite seemingly being the thousandth young hip-hopper with "lil" affixed to her name, this 18-year-old rapper is quickly establishing a reputation that's anything but diminutive.

Born Niatia Kirkland, Brooklyn-bred Lil' Mama's interest in the music business was sparked by her musician father, whose microlabel Familiar Faces was the first to release her debut single, "Lip Gloss," this past January. After securing a spot on the playlist of seminal Gotham hip-hop station Hot 97, the song quickly became a regional hit, attracting the attention of Jive Records. With the support of a larger label, the single went nationwide, cracking the top 10 of Billboard's Hot 100 and scoring Lil' Mama a VMA nomination for "Monster Single of the Year."

Not bad for a young star who has yet to even release a full-length album. That debut LP, "Voice of the Young People," is scheduled to drop in late October, with help from the likes of uber-producer Swizz Beatz and the Wu Tang Clan's resident iconoclast Ghostface Killah.

— Andrew Barker



## TAYLOR SWIFT

If a name is a self-fulfilling prophecy, Taylor Swift seems to be fulfilling hers. At 17, Swift is already a nominee for the Country Music Assn.'s prestigious Horizon Award. It seems like everything is moving fast for the high school senior, already on tour with Brad Paisley and hitting the road with Kenny Chesney in the spring. But when you consider the Nashville mantra that a country music career is an eight-year plan, Swift is right on target.

She began performing at local fairs when she was 10. At 12, she learned to play guitar and write her own songs, securing a publishing deal with Sony/ATV at 13 and a deal with Big Machine Records at 15. A year later, her first single "Tim McGraw" was a hit. Her self-titled, self-written album went platinum, thanks in part to her MySpace page, which received more than 24 million streams.

Swift plans to re-release her debut before heading back to the studio to record her second album in December. "Sometimes I still can't believe this is my life," she says.

— Tara McNamara



UP  
NEXT

## ACTORS

CHRISTOPHER  
MINTZ-PLASSE

The 18-year-old newcomer burst onto the scene as the dorky-yet-confident Fogel (aka McLovin) in the surprise summer hit "Superbad." A SoCal native, he was discovered through the Comedy-Sports Club, where he was active in his final two years at El Camino Real High School.

"I never thought I'd act in my life," Christopher Mintz-Plasse said in press notes. "My friend found out about the casting call and said, 'You look like you could fit the part. You should come down with us.'" After auditioning, the neophyte got called back three times before landing the starmaking role. "It was my first audition, my first acting role — the first anything I've ever done."

On the strength of "Superbad," UTA snapped up the hot young talent while he mulls his next role. — Iain Blair



ed his acting career at the age of 9 when he landed a Harry Potter toy commercial, the first job he ever auditioned for.

"That got me an agent," he says, "I did more commercials, and then my first big part in (Fox telepic) 'A Little Thing Called Murder.' My next big break was a supporting lead in 'The Sandlot 3.'"

Ludwig, who's also appeared in the TV series "The Dead Zone" and Sundance special jury prize winner "Eve and the Fire Horse," is "pumped" about "The Seeker." "Ever since I was a kid, I've wanted superpowers, and in this I can do almost anything except fly," he notes. "Millions of kids would kill to do this."

— Iain Blair

DAKOTA BLUE  
RICHARDS

At 13, the British schoolgirl beat out more than 10,000 other hopefuls at the open U.K. casting call last year to win the plum role of Lyra Belacqua, the young heroine of "The Golden Compass."

It probably helped that Richards was already a big fan of the fantasy project, which is based on the best-selling "His Dark Materials" trilogy by Philip Pullman, having read the books and seen the London stage play. But Dakota Blue Richards, who next appears in "The Moon Princess," had one hiccup before "Compass" even began shooting.

When director Chris Weitz called with the news of her casting, Richards' mother hung up on him by mistake while trying to put him on speaker phone. Luckily, the director persevered.

Now, the \$150 million New Line film, co-starring Nicole Kidman and Daniel Craig, looks likely to do for Richards what New Line's "Lord of the Rings" did for all concerned.

— Iain Blair

ALEXANDER  
LUDWIG

Just 14, Alexander Ludwig stars as Will Stanton, the lead in Fox-Walden's upcoming "The Seeker: The Dark Is Rising," based on the series of best-selling books by Susan Cooper. The Vancouver native start-



Albert L. Ortega/WireImage.com

## SELENA GOMEZ

As a tiny kid in Houston, Selena Gomez watched her actress mom rehearse theater and announced that she'd like to act, too — as soon as possible. Now, with the Disney Channel behind her, the "Wizards of Waverly Place" star is guaranteed to get a lot of attention.

When she was 6, Gomez and her mother attended an open call for "Barney."

"I had to stand in line with 1,400 kids and go through different callbacks," Gomez says.

After "Barney," Gomez booked a few commercials and a small part in "Spy Kids 3."

At 12, she traveled to Austin for a nationwide casting call for the Disney Channel.

"They flew us out to California," she says. "It was definitely scary. I was in this room full of executives and I was testing against girls who have done movies."

Gomez, now 15, passed the test. After landing small parts on "Hannah Montana" and "Suite Life of Zach and Cody," she's now a featured player in the new Disney laughter "The Wizards of Waverly Place."

She's also doing voiceover for "Horton Hears a Who."

"I'd like to do an album," she adds. "I wouldn't come out solo; I'd be in a band. That's what we're trying to get set up now (at Disney)."

— Betsy Boyd



## MIRANDA COSGROVE

**M**iranda Cosgrove, best known as the class know-it-all in "School of Rock," stars in "iCarly," a new Nickelodeon sitcom custom-tailored to her talents.

The 14-year-old actress, born in Los Angeles, was discovered in a restaurant when she was 3.

"I was singing and dancing and playing around, and a lady asked my mom if I wanted to join her agency," Cosgrove says.

Though her mother had reservations about letting her toddler daughter work professionally, the small child tried it, booked work easily and took a liking to the lifestyle.

"I remember doing a Mello Yello commercial when I was 4 and thinking it was fun," the actress says.

At 9, Cosgrove taped the pilot of "Drake and Josh" for Nickelodeon. She played Drake Bell's younger, mischief-making sister Megan three years running.

Recently, Schneider approached Cosgrove's mom to discuss a couple of sitcom concepts. He liked "iCarly" best, a show about a girl who launches her own Web show.

"I was so excited when I found out," beams Cosgrove, who also guested on "Zoey 101" and "Unfabulous."

"Miranda has turned into this great actress," says Paula Kaplan, executive VP of talent at Nickelodeon.

— *Betsy Boyd*

## KRISTEN STEWART

**I**f you missed Kristen Stewart in Jon Kasdan's "In the Land of Women," what a pity, for her coltish vulnerability as Lucy Hardwicke was the movie's high point. Her Lucy fairly screamed Real Deal in strained mother-daughter scenes with Meg Ryan and confessional encounters with lead Adam Brody.

Her previous work includes playing Jodie Foster's resourceful daughter in "Panic Room" and the nosy big sister in outer-space adventure "Zathura." But at 17, she's all grown up, as her most recent venture, Sean Penn's "Into the Wild," attests. In it, she plays precocious trailer-park teen Tracy, who comes on to star Emile Hirsch.

Next up for this L.A. native are roles in two indies, romantic drama "Yellow Handkerchief" and "Cake Eaters," Mary Stuart Masterson's directorial debut. But the big news is landing a part in the upcoming "Adventureland," director Greg Mottola's follow-up to "Superbad."

— *David Mermelstein*

## BRADY CORBET

**T**ribeCa rents being what they are, 19-year-old Brady Corbet remains to be convinced that he can make a living at the whole acting thing. His roles, however, reveal serious artistic potential: a teen coping with childhood sexual abuse in Gregg Araki's "Mysterious Skin," a menacing young sadist in Michael Haneke's "Funny Games U.S."

At first, "Acting was a means to an end for me," Corbet says. "I was interested in making films, not being in them." He began taking acting classes in Colorado at age 7, traveling out to L.A. for auditions. "It wasn't until I moved to Los Angeles at 13 years old that I finally got a real job. That was the film 'Thirteen.'"

That led to a leading role in "Thunderbirds" and a flurry of attention from the Tigerbeat crowd. But Corbet saw himself as more than a centerfold. "I've been very lucky. I've been able to work with some real filmmakers, real auteurs," he says.

— *Peter Debruge*

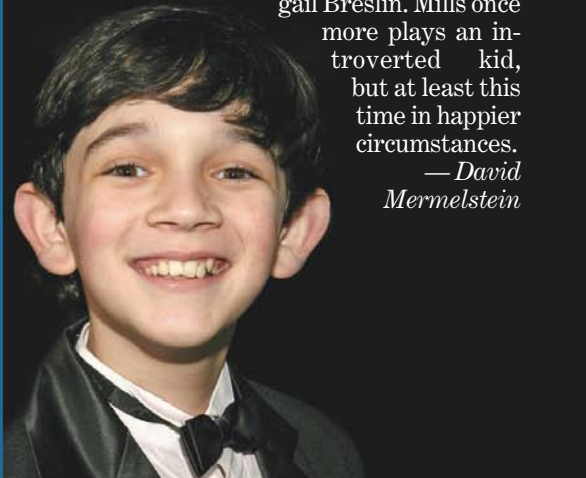
## ZACH MILLS

**S**ure, Ben Affleck earned praise for his performance in last year's "Hollywoodland," but the picture's real discovery was young Zach Mills, who played Evan Simo, son to Molly Parker and the pic's star, Adrien Brody. Mills lent a brooding edge to a part that could have gone unnoticed, holding his own in multiple scenes with his estranged screen parents.

But with his appearance in "Mr. Magorium's Wonder Emporium," opening Thanksgiving, audiences will see the lighter side of this Ohio native, now 11. More muse than troubled child this time around, he plays Eric Applebaum opposite Natalie Portman, Jason Bateman and Dustin Hoffman, the magic toy shop's 243-year-old proprietor.

Mills' subsequent project is the first "American Girl" feature, "Kit Kittredge: An American Girl Mystery," starring Abigail Breslin. Mills once more plays an introverted kid, but at least this time in happier circumstances.

— *David Mermelstein*



Maury Phillips/WireImage.com

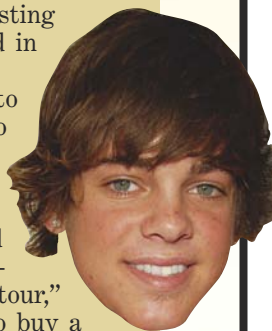
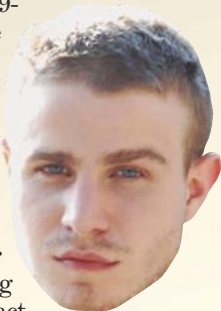
## [SPORTS]

### RYAN SHECKLER

**N**ow that Tony Hawk is turning 40, his heir apparent — 17-year-old Ryan Sheckler — is the new face of skateboarding. And let's be clear, that face is dreamy. Teen girls are watching Sheckler's MTV reality show en masse, making "Life of Ryan" the highest-rated new show on MTV this year. With the show greenlit for a second season, Sheckler's fame is outgrowing the skatepark into new career possibilities. "I've been getting some interesting scripts and am definitely interested in doing more," he says.

Turning a front blunt fakie into media opportunities is paramount to keeping the sponsorships coming. While other kids are thinking about prom and high school graduation, the youngest pro skater to take the gold at the X Games sees his future differently. "I will continue to skate and tour," Sheckler says, "I am also looking to buy a house and launch a few new businesses."

— *Tara McNamara*



## [DIRECTOR]



### LUKE EBERL

**N**ineteen isn't such a young age to make your first feature — if you're in film school. For Luke Eberl, whose "Choose Connor" debuted at CineVegas in June, "Everything I learned about directing came from being a child actor and just watching everybody and finding out how they work."

Eberl started acting at age 7 onstage in Colorado. He landed his first film part at 10, "and from that time I just knew this was a form of art that I was interested in participating in." Now 21, the driven young man found behind-the-camera work at the Boulder public access TV station, then moved out to Los Angeles, where acting gigs came regularly — most recently as the wounded Oklahoma soldier who connects with Baron Nishi in "Letters From Iwo Jima."

Eberl made friends with the other teen thespians he met on auditions and shoots: "The community of young actors in L.A. is kind of like a big high school actually," he says. When the time came, those peers pitched in to help Eberl produce his screenplay, about a middle-school prodigy who gets a crash course in political hypocrisy. The project called for two teen leads, and Eberl turned to casting director Deborah Dion, for whom he'd auditioned many times, to find the right kids.

"When I'm casting younger actors, it's a lot easier for me to see through their bullshit," says Eberl, who cites Woody Allen, Paul Thomas Anderson, Francois Truffaut and Andrei Tarkovsky as inspirations for his style.

Eberl didn't necessarily advertise his age when trying to get the project off the ground, lest investors get cold feet.

"The good thing is that when you're raising the money for a film, you're doing a lot of your work over the phone, so they're not really going to know I'm as young as I am," he jokes. "When older writers are trying to write movies, a lot of what they know about young people is recycled from television and other movies, and the advantage I had was being able to draw directly from life experiences."

— *Peter Debruge*

'WHEN YOU'RE RAISING MONEY OVER THE PHONE, THEY (DON'T) REALLY KNOW I'M AS YOUNG AS I AM.'

LUKE EBERL, DIRECTOR