

"KENNY JUXTAPOSES THE STORYLINE YOU EXPECT WITH THE VISUALS YOU DON'T EXPECT."
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FRACTURED PLAYGROUND

DIZZYING MENU FOR KID MEDIA

Nets discover the 'fun for all ages' label doesn't apply to today's tech-savvy moppets

By **DADE HAYES**

The chaotic and challenging task of entertaining kids and families is demonstrated vividly by recent TV ads for Chrysler's Town & Country minivan.

Touting ties with Nickelodeon and sophisticated onboard gadgetry, the spots show a typical family of four being able to transfer the individualized experiences in

the house directly to the road. Junior plays a videogame, his sister watches "SpongeBob SquarePants," mom listens to satellite radio, and dad gazes contentedly at the man-friendly dashboard and then the highway. Goodbye station wagon and "100 Bottles of Beer on the Wall."

That tableau is not so comforting for TV execs trying to woo family auds in a media landscape increasingly marked by customization and age fragmentation. Mobile devices, Web video, online social networks, videogames, DVRs and homevid options

have disrupted audiences' small-screen habits and upended traditional ad models.

Overall TV viewership has remained steady despite it all, but except for rare events (generally sports), the mass-audience virtual campfire has become a thousand points of light. In the kids-and-family racket, business has boomed of late, and yet the old label "fun for the whole family" is about as relevant as a G rating.

Nielsen's long-established, overlapping age ranges — 2 to 11 years old, 6 to 11 and

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Illustration by C.J. Metzger

B.O. REPORT CARD: FALLING SHORT

Child actors experience awkward year

With the exception of Miley Cyrus, young stars aren't opening movies — which is only normal, the pros insist

By TATIANA SIEGEL

Ever since Hannah Montana stormed onto the bigscreen in February and shocked industry watchers with a colossal \$31.1 million theatrical bow, studios have been looking to replicate the G-rated film's box office success with myriad kidcentric pics.

But in the ensuing months, nothing has come close to fulfilling the expectations set by "Hannah Montana/Miley Cyrus: Best of Both Worlds Concert Tour," which amassed \$65.3 million during its run, despite playing in only 687 theaters during its widest release.

Instead, films like Picturehouse's G-rated "Kit Kittredge: An American Girl," which took in just \$17.6 million after unspooling June 20, failed to become the talk of the cafeteria line, leaving Hollywood wondering whether Miley Cyrus' 3-D vehicle was a one-time phenomenon.

But Cyrus' agent, UTA's Mitch Gossett, insists "Kit Kittredge" did succeed among its intended audience. "Films like that have a life that is very long. So I don't think the book is written yet on that film," says Gossett, whose under-18 talent roster also includes Taylor Momsen and Chelsea Staub. "It's not like a 100-yard dash. It's more like a marathon, and they are just getting started with (that franchise)."

More importantly, Gossett and others agree that the kid-friendly marketplace is thriving, as evidenced by the number of high-profile tween-skewing properties in development around town.

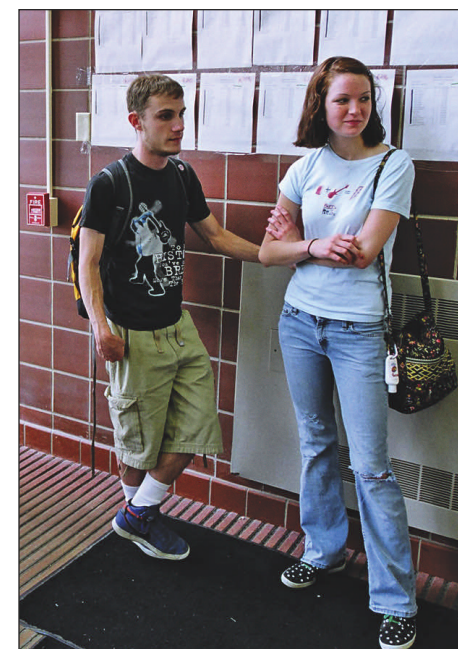
DreamWorks is fast-tracking "The 39 Clues," based on the Scholastic Media multiplatform adventure series. Steven Spielberg is eyeing the project as a directing vehicle, and Jeff Nathanson is penning the screenplay. Sony is also dipping into the Scholastic library with a bid to bring R.L. Stine's young-adult "Goosebumps" series to the bigscreen. Meanwhile, Paramount Pictures and Nickelodeon Movies recently greenlit M. Night Shyamalan's live-action fantasy adventure "Airbender," based on the Nick animated TV skein "Avatar: The Last Airbender."

New school thinking

"Kids are carrying a tremendous amount more power to drive people into movie theaters than they ever did before," says CAA's Nick Styne, whose clients include Selena Gomez and the Jonas Brothers. "That's because of the Disney Channel, Nickelodeon, the other family channels and the Internet. (These actors and actresses) are imprinting at a younger age into the fanbase."

Still, bigscreen hits featuring young talent remain elusive.

This summer, teens *didn't* flock to theaters to catch the documentary "American Teen," despite strong Sundance buzz and a catchy marketing campaign that harked back to seminal teen film "The Breakfast Club." The new PG-13 pic, which some deemed too similar to reality



MAKING ALLOWANCES: Despite strong reviews, such kidcentric pics as "Kit Kittredge: An American Girl," "Son of Rambow," "American Teen" and "Swing Vote" failed to take off at the box office, though they could prevail on homevid.

programming the target aud can get free on TV, earned only \$927,000 for Paramount Vantage after opening July 25.

"Son of Rambow," a well-reviewed U.K. import that plays like a cross between "Amelie" and "Goonies," also fared poorly with domestic audiences, capturing a mere \$1.8 million since bowing May 2, well below its \$8.3 million foreign haul.

And though the Kevin Costner dramedy "Swing Vote" featured a precocious 12-year-old female lead, Madeline Carroll, the PG-13 pic played almost exclusively to older audiences en route to a modest \$16 million haul following its Aug. 1 release.

For every "Harry Potter," studios have served up box office duds like "Bratz," a tween live-action pic (based on the successful line of toy dolls) that barely crossed the \$10 million mark, and the \$57 million-budgeted "Thunderbirds," which garnered a weak \$6.9 million.

Even Dakota Fanning, who became the go-to child thesp for her generation, has weathered box office woes in recent years. "Charlotte's Web" and "Dreamer: Inspired by a True Story" fell short of expectations. The actress also endured the wrath of pundits for appearing in the edgy drama "Hounddog," which features a rape scene.

Room for growth

Fanning, like "Kit Kittredge" star Abigail Breslin and "Atonement" star Saoirse Ronan, seems more interested in developing a long-term career rather than attaching herself to a hot brand. And that's exactly what young talent and their representatives should be doing, Styne says.

"A lot of agents and a lot of companies don't want their young actors that are maybe on a Disney or Nickelodeon or Fox Family show to go do an R-rated movie,"

he says. "When you put a child into an R-rated movie, I don't think it's irresponsible. An actor's job is to act, and they should be in the best material possible with the best directors possible. What we're trying to do here at CAA is put our better writers and directors with the young talent and make better movies."

Ultimately, good movies will find their audiences, Gossett says, especially when bolstered by the innovative campaigns that often accompany kid-friendly films.

"Marketing to kids is literally the new frontier," Gossett says. "The people who specialize in this type of marketing are coming up with the smartest, cutting-edge ideas. It's an area that encourages new models and new ways of thinking. I'm really impressed by their ability to develop viral strategies and online strategies. We haven't even seen the full potential yet, but it's keeping us old folks on our toes."

YOUTH IMPACT REPORT '08

MILEY CYRUS

Disney's teen queen

Miley Cyrus has it harder than you'd think. At 15, the "Hannah Montana" multitalent is torn between two worlds: that of Disney Channel TV personality and arena-filling pop star.

"I love doing it all," Cyrus tells *Variety*. "When I'm doing one thing, I always miss the other. When I'm on tour, I miss shooting the show and I miss the cast. When I'm shooting the show, I miss doing concerts and performing my music for all of my fans."

In the past year, that conundrum has only grown more complex. After Cyrus' "Best of Both Worlds" concert tour spawned a record-breaking 3-D feature, she effectively added the role of movie star to her resume — and don't be surprised to see a lot more of her on the bigscreen in the very near future. Next month, Cyrus voices Penny in Disney Animation's "Bolt," following it up with "Hannah Montana: The Movie" next spring.

"This is not a two-hour version of what you might be able to see on Disney Channel," assures Adam Bonnett, senior VP of original programming for the

network. For starters, the movie leaves the show's Malibu location for Cyrus' hometown of Nashville. Plus, she gets a new love interest (Adam Gregory of "90210").

Recent breakthrough: Her 3-D concert movie was so popular, Disney extended its one-week run, raking in \$65 million in the process.

Role model: "My mom. She's kept me grounded."

Up next: Disney toon "Bolt" will benefit from the star's voice, and "Hannah Montana" fans will get a bigscreen dose of the character in early '09.

It's been a real-life Cinderella story for the performer, who lobbied Disney casting directors for the "Hannah Montana" role. "She was this short little scrawny girl with a raspy voice — she almost had the voice of a truck driver. It made her stand out," Bonnett remembers.

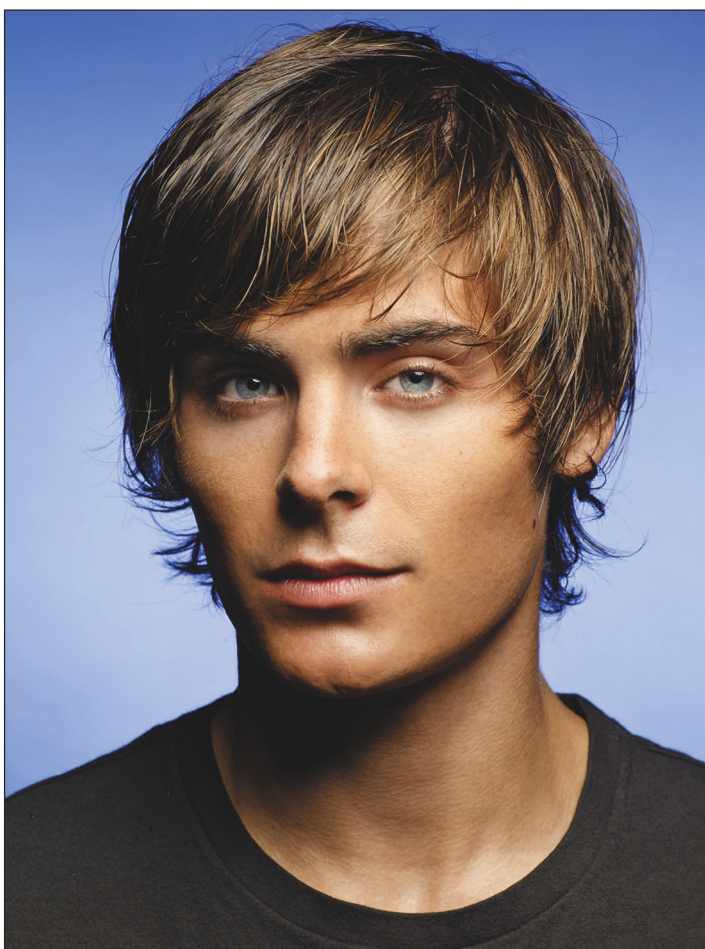
But audiences instantly connected with Cyrus, a bond the writers build by tailoring the show to the actress's real life. "If you got on the phone with Miley Cyrus today and said, 'What's on your mind?' the first thing out of her mouth would be, 'I'm excited to drive a car,' because she's about to turn 16," Bonnett says. "That inspired the writers

to do a story this season where Miley Stewart goes to get her driver's license and fails. And she realizes that if she goes back as Hannah Montana, they'll give it to her because she's Hannah Montana — that's all inspired by Miley's passion for getting behind the wheel."

— Heather Huntington



Getty Images



ZAC EFRON

'High School' heartthrob

Zac Efron is about to turn 21, and with the approach of full adulthood, the boy who made the tween girls scream is looking to more mature roles.

Efron shot to the top when "High School Musical" unexpectedly turned into a TV sensation in 2006, followed by "High School Musical 2," helping the franchise return some \$1 billion in profits to Disney.

With the momentum from his first bigscreen role in "Hairspray," he booked two more features and is now seen as a potential leading man.

While "High School Musical" will likely continue into editions 4 and 5, Efron may be hanging up his dancing shoes for a while.

"Lately, I'm leaning toward more challenging roles. Hopefully I can find something surprising," he says, adding, "I would be perfectly willing to make an independent film as long as I believed in the project."

He's off to a good start, landing the lead role in Richard Linklater's "Me and Orson Welles."

"Working with Rick was a dream," he says. "I'm learning to appreciate the different styles and methods of great directors. I think Zack Snyder or Gus Van Sant would be fun to work with."

Raised in Central California, Efron appeared in local theater productions before getting work on TV. And though song and dance made him famous, Efron is still weighing the kind of roles he plans to chase in the future.

"I can't say for certain how big a factor musicals will play in my career, but I will always be open to them," he says.

He'd also consider hitting the boards at some point: "Broadway would be an adventure. It requires a skill set that I'd have to rediscover. There is nothing like the thrill of performing for a live audience."

— Pat Saperstein

Recent breakthrough: His popularity explains why "High School Musical 3" is headed to theaters, not TV.

Role model: "What I would give to sit down with Johnny Depp and Leonardo DiCaprio for an hour of career advice."

What's next: New Line's "17 Again." He's also been approached to star in Paramount's "Footloose" update with "HSM's" Kenny Ortega directing.



Larry Busacca/Contour by Getty Images

KRISTEN STEWART

Vampire-loving vixen

Though the supernatural figures prominently in the movie "Twilight," Kristen Stewart secured the starring role of Bella Swan in a completely ordinary way. "I participated in a conventional audition process," says the actress, who got her break playing Jodie Foster's daughter in "Panic Room."

"Twilight" is a far cry from anything that's come before for Stewart, whose resume boasts roles in films by directors as diverse as Mike Figgis, David Gordon Green, Jon Favreau and Sean Penn.

The first to be filmed in the bestselling series of teen fantasy novels by Stephenie Meyer, "Twilight" centers on a romance between Bella and forever-17 vampire Edward Cullen. Thousands of teen girls would kill to be in her shoes.

Indeed, Stewart already had a taste of her imminent fame at last summer's San Diego Comic-Con panel, where she was greeted by the kind of screaming one usually associates with a Miley Cyrus concert. "That was the first time a physical manifestation of what everyone was talking about presented itself to me," she says, still a little shell-shocked.

Stewart says it was Bella's novelty that made her want to play the part. "She doesn't fit into the obvious role of victim," she explains. "The power balance is fascinating between her and the vampire. It's funny that she is so unsure and tortured about this relationship and that she is surefooted and confident for no reason. Bella is a powerful character."

"Twilight" may make her a star, but Stewart is already thinking about what's next, including "Welcome to the Rileys," starring James Gandolfini, and "Adventureland," directed by Greg Mottola.

"I was thrilled to do ("Adventureland") because it takes place in the 1980s and Jesse Eisenberg was already involved," says the actress. "It was a very cool project because we were in a theme park doing a comedy with the 'Superbad' team."

—David Mermelstein

Recent breakthrough: Landed the role of Bella Swan in "Twilight." If you don't know what that is, ask any teen girl.

Role model: "My grandma, for her strength and resilience."

What's next: "Adventureland," in which she plays opposite 14-year-old Jesse Eisenberg of "The Squid and the Whale" fame.

DAKOTA FANNING

The 'Bees' knees

Ladies and gentlemen, Dakota Fanning is back. It's been a rough couple of years for the Georgia-born thesp, as the child actress — who gained respect for her part opposite Sean Penn in "I Am Sam" and sustained it through a series of wise-beyond-her-years performances — struggled with the transition into more mature teenage roles.

Recent breakthrough: Weathering the rocky transition to young adulthood with her celebrated turn in "The Secret Life of Bees."

Role model: Jodie Foster. "I don't think anyone will ever be as amazing as she is. And if I can just be a fourth of how good she is, I would be totally happy."

What's next: Stars opposite Nicolas Cage in "Push" and voices the title role in Henry Selick's stop-motion "Coraline."

"I think the last movie people have seen me in was 'Charlotte's Web,' and I was considerably younger then," Fanning says, citing the Walden pic based on the classic book she shot nearly four years ago. "So a lot of people don't know that I'm 14 and going to be 15 in February."

According to Fanning, people still send her scripts that skew too young: "It's great to read those as well, but you just move on to the material that attracts you at the age I am."

Meanwhile, her first foray into more adult territory, 2007 Sundance selection "Hounddog," backfired when the film was dubbed the "Dakota Fanning rape movie" on account of an incendiary plot point. The actress says she is still "blown away" by the controversy over what she considers

"a great, great film."

"I was totally surprised it was talked about so horribly before it was done filming or edited, which was really sad and upsetting," Fanning says. "But I'm glad people will see it and be able to realize all that was blown out of proportion."

"Hounddog's" 18-month delay gave the actress a chance to enter high school — a change of pace after years of being privately tutored — and be more selective about her next career move.

To Fanning's delight, her follow-up in Fox Searchlight's "The Secret Life of Bees" earned rave reviews at the Toronto Film Fest, generating the kind of positive buzz that can lead to Oscar nominations. The tearjerker presents Fanning in a more mature light as a runaway who settles with a family of black honey farmers amid America's civil rights era. It even features a genuine romantic subplot — another step forward for the actress.

"Yeah, it was one of the first more serious ones I've had so far," she beams.

—Gregory Ellwood



Getty Images

DAKOTA BLUE RICHARDS

'Golden' girl

For her very first film role in "The Golden Compass," 14-year-old Dakota Blue Richards had to look delicate but act feisty, sharing the screen with a talking bear and a malevolent monkey in an elaborate fantasy world. The challenging role called for her to learn how to act with such human co-stars as Nicole Kidman and Daniel Craig against a vast range of special effects.

"I always find that when I am working with green-screen, I have to think twice as hard," she says. "Firstly, I have to think about what's going on around me, and after that, I can start thinking about what is going on for myself, and how I would react to it."

The London-born Richards, who had only appeared in school theater productions till she was cast in "Compass," convinced her mother to take her to a mass casting call to play Lyra, the pic's feisty heroine. Selected from thousands of hopefuls, she soon got the hang of working in an alternate world. "I liked the way I got to work in the most surreal situations — and act like it was something I see every day," she says.

After "The Golden Compass" came the lead role in a smaller-scale British fantasy adaptation, "The Secret of Moonacre," which premiered last month at Toronto. In "Moonacre," the animal-loving teen got a chance to interact with real animals instead of the computer-generated variety.

"Even though they were badly behaved sometimes, they were really cute and snuggly and lovely," she says.

The petite thesp enjoys reading fantasy novels — "They allow you to almost become part of a world more magical than our own," she says — and thinks some of her favorite books, such as Philip Reeve's "Mortal Engines" and Malorie Blackman's "Noughts & Crosses" trilogy, would make good films.

Looking forward, Richards is ready for weightier fare. "I would quite like to play a bad character — one of the baddies — in a drama," she says, "Someone more 'messed up.'"

Recent breakthrough: Starred in New Line's "The Golden Compass," which grossed \$372 million worldwide. Not bad for a feature debut.

Role model: Keira Knightley. "From what I've read and seen and heard, she seems a well-balanced person, even though she did start out young. She didn't go crazy on the fame."

What's next: Richards is currently shooting BBC film "Dustbin Baby," which is set to air at the end of the year. Her character, April, is more realistic and "not quite so magical."

— Pat Saperstein



Todd Pitt/Contour by Getty Images



ADRIAN ALONSO

Foreign exchange star

Adrian Alonso, the star of Patricia Riggen's Spanish-language drama "Under the Same Moon," went to sleep on Aug. 21 believing Javier Bardem had nabbed 2008's Imagen Award for best actor. When Alonso woke up the following morning, he found out he'd won.

"I couldn't believe it. I thought it was definitely going to Bardem," Alonso says with a laugh.

His triumph, Riggen says, isn't a surprise, considering how "perfect" Alonso was in the role of Carlitos, a nine-year-old Mexican boy who recklessly crosses the border to find his mother in Los Angeles. "He was the perfect combination: exactly like working with an adult but with the purity of a child," she gushes.

If that sounds biased, consider Boston Globe critic Ty Burr's review: "Mostly Riggen is lucky to have Adrian Alonso playing the boy, Carlitos Reyes. He's not a little heart-throb but a solid, serious kid — he'll be a truck when he grows up."

There are actors who wait their entire careers for that kind of praise, but Riggen

Recent breakthrough: His praised performance in "Under the Same Moon" has been recognized with Imagen and Young Artist awards.

Role model: "Al Pacino is my favorite actor. I love 'The Godfather.'"

What's next: "Left in L.A.," a script written specifically for Alonso, will be shopped around this month: "It's a comedy like 'Home Alone,'" he says.

says this is just the beginning of Alonso's "great, long career as a tremendous character actor."

"We just need to get him in rooms with casting agents," adds Featured Artists Agency's Brian Dreyfuss, who co-reps Alonso with William Morris' Thor Bradwell. "As you saw in the film, he can do everything. He gets very passionate about his characters and can do all the genres."

Although "Under the Same Moon" only shows Alonso speaking a few lines of English, the 14-year-old actor, who made his Hollywood debut as Antonio Banderas and Catherine Zeta-Jones' son in "The Mask of Zorro," is fluent and says he's been studying English for four years.

"I want to work in Hollywood," he says, "I want to act — in America, in Mexico, in Africa — it doesn't matter. What matters is the roles."

Riggen can't recommend young Alonso enough: "He brings so much to the table, he's a natural," she says. "I think of him as our next Anthony Quinn."

— Sandie Angulo Chen

ANDY FICKMAN

He's got 'Game'

Andy Fickman can do the industry's proverbial mailroom-to-filmmaker story one better: He started out as a tour guide at Universal Studios. "That just got me into the door in Hollywood," recalls Fickman, a Texas native.

Recent breakthrough: Paired child actors with Dwayne Johnson in sleeper hit "The Game Plan" and big-budget Disney reboot "Race to Witch Mountain."

Role model: "Amanda Bynes to this day continues to impress me. And AnnaSophia Robb - I have absolutely loved everything she's ever done."

What's next: "Race to Witch Mountain," with AnnaSophia Robb, opens March 13.

Working his way up from trams, Fickman also focused on the legit theater, directing popular plays in Los Angeles and New York. He adapted one of those stage shows, the marijuana-obsessed musical "Reefer Madness," into an Emmy-winning production for Showtime in 2005.

"'Reefer Madness' got me so much notice it really was a huge launch," Fickman says.

Turning his 'Reefer' high into feature gigs, Fickman directed two back-to-back family pics, Amanda Bynes starrer "She's the Man" and the \$147 million-grossing "The Game Plan," in which Dwayne Johnson meets his match in 8-year-old Madison Pettis.

"I learned so much from Amanda Bynes, who's been acting since she was 8," Fickman says. "I realized that

working with young actors, you're really just working with a talented actor, no matter what age they are."



Before "The Game Plan" had even wrapped, Disney tapped Fickman to helm its retooling of the 1975 sci-fi adventure "Escape to Witch Mountain." He cast Johnson immediately and knew exactly which young actress he wanted for the lead.

"AnnaSophia Robb broke my heart in 'Bridge to Terabithia,' and she was the first person who came to mind for 'Witch Mountain,'" he says. "I surrounded her with all these seasoned vets like Ciaran Hinds, Dwayne Johnson and Carla Gugino, and they ended up asking every day, 'Where'd

you find this kid?' She's amazing."

The family genre is one Fickman, the father of an 11-year-old son, is happy to master. He's heard the stereotypical warnings about working with kids, and he doesn't agree.

"I've come across many actors who are far more childish in their behavior than any of the kids I've ever worked with," he says. "I think the key is connecting, not approaching kids as 'child actors.'"

—Sandie Angulo Chen



Combs

CATHERINE HARDWICKE

Teen vampire queen

After establishing serious cred directing teencentric pics "Thirteen" and "Lords of Dogtown," production designer-turned-helmer Catherine Hardwicke chose to apply her adolescent-savvy sensibilities to a trickier project, high school vampire romance "Twilight" — a film that not only stars teens, but appeals to them as well.

That's an understatement of course, considering the rabid success of Stephenie Meyer's bestselling four-book series, whose fans call themselves "Twiards."

"The book is incredible. It draws you in. You feel what it feels like to be this teenage girl," says Hardwicke, who met Summit's Eric Feig and Patrick Wachsberger by chance at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival, where she was a juror. At the time, "Twilight" had only a small, albeit devoted, fanbase. "I don't think any of us had any idea it was going to turn into this," she says.

Today, "Twilight" is a full-fledged pop-culture phenomenon, and Hard-

Recent breakthrough: "Twilight" has been called "the next 'Harry Potter,'" and her adaptation brought the teen girls screaming at Comic-Con.

Role models: "Thirteen" collaborator Nikki Reed. "She's got a lot of fire and spice. I'd love to work someday with Dakota Fanning. I don't know what the right project is, but she does blow my mind."

What's next: "I'm looking at everything else (asking), is it as cool as 'Twilight'?"

wicke is feeling the pressure of pleasing the ever-growing audience of fans. Finding the right Edward Cullen, she says, "I think would be clearly the biggest casting challenge ever on the face of the earth. Because he's in every scene, he has to be this great actor, 17 years old, pale and the most beautiful man on the planet. I got calls from people of all ages: 'You'd better get this right, Catherine.'"

She picked 22-year-old Robert Pattinson, of "Harry Potter" fame. Many of her other actors are still teens, including Kristen Stewart and Taylor Lautner. "Thirteen" star Nikki Reed, now 20, also appears as young Rosalie Hale.

"It's been really a wild process, but really fun that the fans have been so excited about it," Hardwicke says. "We'd be in the middle of the night freezing our asses off in the rain and there would still somehow be 25 die-hard fans that found us. I want them to love this movie."

—Heather Huntington



DEBRA MARTIN CHASE

Spinning Cinderella stories

Diversity, empowerment and wish fulfillment underscore Debra Martin Chase's extremely popular productions. From the color-blind casting of the Emmy-nominated "Cinderella," starring Brandy, to the giddy chemistry of the Cheetah Girls ensemble to her success transforming young-adult bestseller "The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants" into a bigscreen franchise, Martin Chase has more than earned her reputation as "the Queen of Tween."

Her sophisticated eye for style and talent helped launch the careers of Anne Hathaway, America Ferrera, Mandy Moore and Blake Lively (she gave Lively her first paid gig straight out of Burbank High). The Harvard Law School grad worked her way up the studio system, moving from the legal department to exec assistant under Frank Price at Columbia Pictures to head of Mundy Lane, Denzel Washington's shingle, before landing her first-look deal at the Walt Disney Co. seven years ago.

Because of her success with "Cinderella," Martin Chase was pitched "The Princess Diaries," the first installment in the now-popular book series by Meg Cabot, which she immediately optioned. The critics were lukewarm, but girls eagerly embraced the modern twist on Disney's fairytale tradition. The film not only spawned a sequel but also propelled book sales (there are now 12 volumes in Cabot's series).

"The Princess Diaries" also boosted her career: "That movie changed the landscape in Hollywood by letting the powers that be see you could make a movie for girls and women and have it be successful," she says.

With kids watching more TV than ever, Martin Chase believes it is important to contribute work that not only entertains but also delivers a positive message. "It's immensely rewarding to know that you are having a huge impact on the self-image, values and life perspective of kids," she contends.

—Kathy A. McDonald

Recent breakthrough: Two Chase projects made a splash in August: Disney Channel debuted "The Cheetah Girls: One World," while "The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants 2" earned \$43 million for Warner.

Role model: Mentor (and Columbia studio chairman) Frank Price. "He took me under his wing as his executive assistant and was incredibly generous."

What's next: Another Cinderella story, this time against the backdrop of the NBA. In "Just Wright," Queen Latifah falls for an out-of-her-league basketball player.

LAURENT CANTET

Head of 'The Class'

When he set out to direct "The Class," a dramatic look at modern French society through the prism of an urban middle school, Laurent Cantet knew at least one thing: He didn't want to make another "Dead Poets Society."

"The teacher in 'Dead Poets Society' never makes a mistake," he says. "We wanted to show a teacher who is always improvising, always negotiating and always making mistakes."

That teacher, Francois (played by teacher-turned-thesp Francois Begaudeau, whose novel "Entre les murs" inspired the film), is a charismatic free-thinker who seeks to energize and challenge his students through informal, impassioned discussion.

Cantet encouraged a similar spirit of participation among his cast of young non-professionals, all of whom were students at Francoise Dolto Junior High, located in Paris' diverse 20th arrondissement, when the helmer and his crew showed up to start auditioning in November 2006. Unlike the fictional Francois, Cantet had no trouble managing and working with 20-odd adolescents.

"They're not used to adults listen-

Recent breakthrough: "This film really helped me find a method of working that I've been looking for — multiple cameras, and this way of mixing improvisation and direction."

Role model: "The first person who comes to mind would be (Roberto) Rossellini. It's difficult to have such a model."

Next project: "I won't have time before February or March to think of anything else."

ing to them and giving them this kind of attention. I think they were very, very impressed by that," Cantet says.

Though the actors were encouraged to improvise, Cantet and co-scribes Robin Campillo and Begaudeau conceived the project with distinct characters in mind. Esmeralda Ouertani, as an irrepressible chatterbox not afraid to put her teacher in his place, was essentially playing herself; soft-spoken Franck Keita, however, couldn't have been more different from the rebellious, disruptive teen he was asked to play.

When Cantet won the Palme d'Or at Cannes in May, he was joined onstage by his young actors, some

cheering enthusiastically, some making peace signs — a rare and bracing spectacle at a film festival that often favors the difficult and the obscure.

"In France, and I think all over the world, young people are judged very, very badly. Everybody is a little bit afraid of them — afraid of their vitality, maybe," Cantet says. "I wanted to show them as a group of valuable people who can think, listen, learn to live together."

—Justin Chang



BIGSCREEN CHAPERONES



Getty Images

SELENA GOMEZ

Disney's new 'It' Girl

Dallas native Selena Gomez, who turned 16 this summer, is already well on her way to becoming Disney Channel's Next Big Thing thanks to her own starring vehicle, "Wizards of Waverly Place," a hit show about a family of sorcerers who also run a sandwich shop, now in its second season.

The fast-rising teen star has been carefully groomed by Disney ever since the company discovered her at a nationwide open casting call four years ago. After three pilots (one gave birth to "Wizards") and guest spots on such high-profile shows as "Hannah Montana" and "The Suite Life of Zack & Cody," Disney tailored the show's mischievous lead character to suit Gomez's input.

Recent breakthrough: Her show, "Wizards of Waverly Place," is a runaway hit for Disney Channel.

Role model: "First and foremost, my mom." And Judy Garland. "I grew up watching 'Wizard of Oz' and 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow' was the first song I learned to sing." **Next:** "Music is another of my passions. I'm working on my first album for Hollywood Records. It'll be fun dance music, out next summer, and I'll be doing a national tour."

"When we began working on it, I wanted to be the tomboy character and maybe have a girly best friend — flip it around from the usual thing," she says. "I used the inspiration of some of my favorite shows, like 'Friends,' took some comedy from there, and they liked it."

Gomez next stars in Disney Channel original movie "Princess Protection Program," followed by "Another Cinderella Story" for Warner. "It's basically our updated version of the Cinderella story," she says, "so I drop an MP3 player instead of a glass slipper and he's got to find me through music."

Now one of CAA's youngest clients, Gomez "always wanted to act, since I was 6," she says. "I was an only child, and my parents were very supportive, even though they thought it was maybe just a phase." Driven and dedicated, Gomez even spent her ninth birthday at an open casting call for a role in the TV series "Barney & Friends" (she won the part), going on to work in "Spy Kids 3-D" in 2003.

"It's a bit of a sacrifice giving up your prom and normal childhood things," admits Gomez, who relocated to L.A. with her mother last year, "but for me it's completely worth it."

— Iain Blair

THOMAS DEKKER

The overachiever

Thomas Dekker dreads birthdays. Every year he makes a mental list of everything he wants to accomplish over the next 12 months, and every year he says there are 20 things he didn't get done. Only months away from his 21st birthday, Dekker has accomplished more personal goals than most of his middle-aged peers, with plenty left to tackle.

"I'm sure that's too much of an overachiever attitude, but that's the truth," he says.

A working actor since the age of 5, Dekker didn't really appear on the pop culture radar until landing the role of Zach, the cheerleader's best friend on "Heroes." Dekker left the show to play John Connor on Fox's "Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles," leveraging that exposure to pursue his varied career interests.

Recent breakthrough: Leapt from "Heroes" to Fox's "Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles." "I felt if I signed on, if it was successful, it would really kind of change everything, which it has."

Role model: "River Phoenix. I watched all of his films and thought he did some really revolutionary stuff for his age."

What's next: Plays a supporting part in Nick Cassavetes' "My Sister's Keeper," followed by a lead role in ensemble tuner "Fame."

In addition to the show, he has somehow also found the time to record two albums (with another in production), act in horror movie "Laid to Rest" and ensemble drama "My Sister's Keeper" and write a directorial debut, "Whore" — with another eight screenplays "mapped out completely in my head."

"Whore" began modestly enough, with Dekker using a 16mm camera to document street prostitutes, then snowballed as showbiz friends Rumer Willis, Brad Rowe and Megan Fox joined in. Dekker is tweaking "Whore" for possible festival play, but warns, "It's a tough film for people

to handle because it's very aggressive and provocative and dark."

After pushing himself hard throughout his teens, Dekker sounds almost satisfied with 20. "It's been a year where 'Terminator' has given me such an entrance into the public eye with everything else I want to do," says the actor, who will soon be combining his music and acting talents in "Fame."

"This is the first year where I feel like, 'I made a lot of things that are being heard, that are being seen,'" he says. "That's a really nice feeling."

— Gregory Ellwood



Getty Images



If you want to be a successful Japanese star, rather than going after movies, your agent should be booking you for TV or commercial opportunities, since the local culture is much more television-centered. Take 19-year-old Maki Horikita, a rising Japanese star keeping busy in TV, film and radio.

Her career took off after appearing on TV drama series "Nobuta wo Produce," playing a shy student who gets a popular makeover. She also entertained bigscreen offers, most notably a major role in acclaimed period drama "Always: Sunset on Third Street," for which she won the Japanese Academy's newcomer kudo.

MIRANDA COSGROVE

Virtually famous

After four seasons as Megan, the cute but conniving little sister on Nickelodeon's "Drake & Josh," Miranda Cosgrove was offered the opportunity of her young career: to headline her own Nick comedy, "iCarly."

"Dan Schneider created both shows, and at first when he told my mom and me he had an idea for a show for me, I was so excited I was kind of freaking out," says Cosgrove, who has known the executive producer since she debuted on "Drake & Josh" at age 9.

Recent breakthrough: Her series "iCarly" is a big hit for Nickelodeon.

Role model: Reese Witherspoon and Jodie Foster. "They were both actresses when they were young, still have strong careers and are very smart."

What's next: Two back-to-back TV movies: "iCarly" spinoff "iGo to Japan" in November and "Merry Christmas, Drake & Josh" in December. "I'm also really busy working on my CD."

A Los Angeles native, Cosgrove wants to eventually add to her five feature film credits, which include the Jack Black comedy "School of Rock" and the family laffer "Yours, Mine and Ours."

"I'd love to do a fun comedy like 'Mean Girls,'" Cosgrove says, "or cross over into more serious films — a good independent film, like Josh did," she adds, referring to Peck's recent coming-of-age indie "The Wackness."

And if there's any doubt Cosgrove is Nickelodeon's newest It Girl, she's also got a pop-rock solo album coming out on Sony Records next year.

"I have been helping to co-write," she says. "It makes the songs a lot more fun to sing."

— Sandie Angulo Chen



MARK INDELICATO

Scene stealer

Anyone who's watched ABC's "Ugly Betty" knows Mark Indelicato, even if they don't know his name. He plays Betty's precocious young nephew, Justin, as obsessed with high fashion as his aunt is indifferent to it.

It's a far cry from how Justin was initially conceived. "Justin was supposed to be the kid you see in a lot of shows," says Indelicato, now 14. "He was just supposed to be there and say something funny. I was surprised it arced so that he really matters, and I'm really happy the writers took my character seriously."

One of those surprises was Justin's reaction to an unexpected turn last season. "I liked when they made him the bad boy after his father died. It showed that I can do something different." That twist was a welcome change. "I wanted to be taken seriously. I don't want to be just a comedy actor forever," says Indelicato, who relates to some aspects of the character more than others. "Justin is an artist, as am I. We're all outcasts. But I'm not super-fashion-obsessed, and it's not as hard for me to make friends or be into what everyone else is into."

— David Mermelstein

Recent breakthrough: "In the new season of 'Ugly Betty,' Justin finds that he's more in touch with someone in school than he realizes."

Role model: "I definitely say America Ferrera, just because she's so successful at such a young age. She doesn't take any day for granted, even though she is a celebrity."

What's next: "I'm working on a music demo right now, wanting to join every other kid that's put out an album. Not super-Disney, but not so different that it's not marketable. It's pop with a twist."



MAKI HORIKITA

Big in Japan

The sequel landed her a best actress nod earlier this year.

But it was Horikita's turn in a TV series based on the popular gender-bending "Hana Kimi" manga that catapulted the young actress to fame. Playing into younger auds' appetite for androgyny, Horikita plays a lovestruck schoolgirl who enrolls in an all-boys school to get close to a cute guy.

Vulnerable and innocent, Horikita has an "ochanoma" quality (or living-room appeal) that goes over well with local TV viewers. "I noticed her striking talent the moment I met her," says casting director Masashi Yamaguchi, who has worked on

such films as "Ju-on: The Grudge."

But fame can be fleeting for young performers in Japan, where girl-next-door types tend to appeal more than out-of-reach stars, and there are always more around the corner. Still, Horikita fits the expectations on a young Japanese actress — pretty, demure, pure — with just enough spice to set her apart.

For example, her role on the hit show "Atsuhime" positions Horikita as a girl locked in competition with her mother-in-law Atsuhime. The young actress holds her own, able to undercut the show's eponymous princess with a single glare.

— Yuko Sekiguchi

Recent breakthrough: Her commercials for Fujifilm and Lotte led to acclaimed roles in films such as "Always: Sunset on Third Street."

Role model: "Halle Berry"

What's next: "Innocent Love," set to air Monday nights in Japan, the most popular timeslot for TV dramas.



LAUREN LEVINE

Choir coordinator

Lauren Levine has come a long way since her days making coffee and typing scripts for the “Max Headroom” show. “I don’t know which was worse,” she says, “my coffee or my typing.”

Levine, the producer behind Nickelodeon features “Bridgeto Terabithia,” “Shredderman Rules!” and “Gym Teacher,” was given the daunting task of developing a franchise for the network capable of rivaling Disney’s “High School Musical.” Her response? “Spectacular!” — a rock musical centered around a high school choir.

Recent breakthrough: One of the creative forces behind “Spectacular!” — a Nick tuner designed to take “High School Musical” head-on.

Role model: “I’ve loved all the kids I’ve worked with: Josh Peck, Bailee Madison, Nolan Funk.”

What’s next: “Even though my niche is kids and family, I’m also producing a theatrical R-rated comedy, ‘Stretch, 29,’ based on Damian Lanigan’s novel.”

“The challenge was working within a well-mined genre and coming up with something fresh where both the characters and the story sing,” Levine says. “Our priorities were to make it funny in the spirit of ‘Bring It On’ and romantic in a way that would make (‘Grease’s’) Danny and Sandy proud.”

Producer Jessica Horowitz and writer Jim Krieg were inspired by a

production of “A Night of Magic” at Burbank High School. The two pitched the idea to Levine, who turned to YouTube. “Search ‘show choir’ and you won’t be disappointed,” she says.

Levine sees “Spectacular” as ushering in a new kind of musical to young audiences. “If you put jazz hands, ’80s rock ballads and sequins in the blender, you have a whole new genre of musical comedy,” she says.

Whether teens will get behind the idea remains to be seen — “Spectacular!” is set to be released in early 2009. But Levine, already instrumental in Nickelodeon’s recent expansion of its film division, has taken on the “HSM” powerhouse, and she’s not stopping anytime soon.

“We’re planning to shoot four movies next year,” she says. — Yvonne Puig

BRENDA HAMPTON

‘Secret’ keeper

The Secret Life of the American Teenager” is hardly the first teen-focused story to feature a pregnant high school student, although its gestation period could easily be the longest.

“Years ago, when Susan Daniels was working at Fox, she came to me and said they were looking for the next ‘90210,’” recalls “Secret Life” executive producer Brenda Hampton. Fox passed, leaving Hampton to focus on “7th Heaven,” the show that launched a young Jessica Biel’s career.

“When ‘7th Heaven’ went down, I pulled out other pilots I’d written, and with this one in particular, I felt like I never got to write it the way I wanted to,” she explains. So Hampton penned six episodes on spec and pitched the show to ABC Family (whose “Greek” convinced her the channel might be open to the show’s potentially controversial subject matter).

“ABC Family is the new HBO for teens,” raves Hampton, who tackles everything from teen sexuality to cop-

ing with divorce to the upside of therapy on the show. “It’s ridiculous that people don’t talk about sex more with their children,” she says.

“Secret Life” was an instant hit with its target audience, beating both “Gossip Girl” and “90210” in ratings, creating steady work for more than a dozen up-and-coming young thespians in the process.

Hampton credits casting associate Peter Pappas of Valko/Miller with tracking down the right actors for each part. At 16, Shailene Woodley brought just the right mix of innocence and vulnerability Hampton wanted for the pregnant lead, while “India Eisley and Daren Kagasoff are going to be huge film stars one day,” she predicts.

The challenge, Hampton knows from experience, is holding on to her ensemble: “From ‘7th Heaven,’ I learned you have to get the cast to understand the commitment of working on a television show. I don’t want people to think it’s something they’ll do for a couple of years until they get a better gig.” — Peter Debruge



“American Teen” star Shailene Woodley with Brenda Hampton



Rob Sorcher sees no reason for Cartoon Network to take its name too literally. After all, by ignoring the “movie” in AMC’s moniker, the former programming head helped bring Emmy-winning series “Mad Men” to that network. So now that he’s back at Cartoon Network, why not mix things up by adding live-action movies, reality series, even sports to the lineup?

“We’ll have development across a broad spectrum — we will be in

every format,” pledges Sorcher, who began his TV producing career at CN in 1995, returning as chief content officer last November.

And if audiences are confused? “It’s only strange the first time it happens. After a month, it’ll feel like, ‘Wow, these guys just created a whole new youth culture net-

Recent breakthrough: Tackled touchy issues of adolescent sexuality in ABC Family’s hit show “The Secret Life of the American Teenager.”

Role model: “As far as writers, that would be Fannie Flagg. She’s the greatest American writer. I think she’s the Mark Twain of our time.”

What’s next: Traveling to Oklahoma to visit the Chickasaw Nation for a possible film or TV project. Also developing Flagg’s book “Standing in the Rainbow.”

ROB
Redro

“Chowder”



Dawn Ostroff (second from right) with '90210' stars Shenae Grimes, AnnaLynne McCord and Jessica Stroup

DAWN OSTROFF

Soaps dispenser

Recent breakthrough: "Gossip Girl," "90210" and "Privileged" each provide opportunities for young talent (and a few youthful twentysomethings) to act their age.

What's next: "Reaper" is a midseason entry for the CW. The net also just committed a pilot for "The Graysons," a look at Batman's sidekick, Robin, before he became a superhero.

Consider Dawn Ostroff the sorority mom.

As topper of the CW, Ostroff has reason to feel proud of how the net has opened the 2008-09 TV season. So far, "90210" is a Nielsen hit, and even the critical response wasn't bad (low expectations probably didn't hurt). Second-year series "Gossip Girl" remains buzzworthy, and newcomer "Privileged" came out of the gate in healthy shape.

With the CW catering to an 18-34 crowd, what helps sell the skeins is the believability of the under-21 thespians that populate the shows: Shenae Grimes and Tristan Wilds of "90210," Lucy Kate Hale and Ashley Newbrough of "Privileged" and Taylor Momsen of "Gossip Girl" (as well as Blake Lively and Ed Westwick, both of whom recently turned 21) have all resonated with teenage viewers.

"It's a great opportunity for these actors to prove themselves," says Ostroff. "Typically, teen roles can be juvenile, but the

characters these actors have picked are more realistic or heightened in a sophisticated way."

Ostroff, who credits her casting team in matching each actor to the appropriate character, says she equates the cast of "Gossip Girl" to that of a certain megahit NBC series.

"The chemistry on 'Gossip Girl' is similar to 'Friends,'" she says. "The first year of 'Friends,' the cast really took off and was photographed everywhere. That's what happened on 'Gossip Girl.' It's a one-in-a-million thing, like catching lightning in a bottle, and I think '90210' can do that as well."

"Gossip Girl" and "90210" are hardly the first CW series to have filled plenty of teen actor slots. In fact, it's something of a tradition for the network. "One Tree Hill" and "Everybody Hates Chris" are now in their sixth and fourth season, respectively.

Ostroff says, "We're lucky to have different shows that tap into a fantastic talent pool."

— Stuart Levine

RICH ROSS

Disney's tube topper

As president of Disney Channel Worldwide, Rich Ross knows it takes more than offering a set of custom-made mouse ears to persuade global audiences to keep tuning in.

While Disney is one of the most recognizable brands in the world, Ross doesn't take that connection for granted. He's constantly traveling around the world, coordinating all efforts to help launch and maintain the net's swath of successful programming.

Ross, who oversees 70 channels under the Disney banner that reach more than 600 million viewers, is well aware that while the Disney moniker might persuade viewers to watch a show or movie once, it's the quality of the programming that will keep them coming back.

"I like to think that what we take from the Disney brand is the strength of the storytelling and character development," says Ross from London, where he's helping to launch the net's latest original telepic, "Camp Rock."

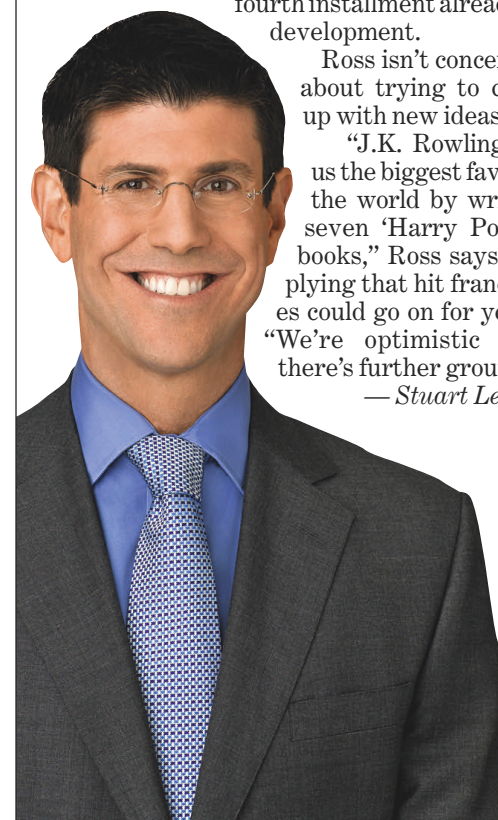
"What Disney gives us is a chance to speak to kids' families." Both in the States and around the globe, the "Hannah Montana" phenomenon (the skein is in production on its third season) continues to roll along, and series "Wizards of Waverly Place," which premiered a year ago, is also a hit.

And then, of course, there's the "High School Musical" franchise, which has helped create teen phenoms out of multitalents like Zac Efron and Vanessa Hudgens. The third edition hits the bigscreen on Oct. 24, with a fourth installment already in development.

Ross isn't concerned about trying to come up with new ideas.

"J.K. Rowling did us the biggest favor in the world by writing seven 'Harry Potter' books," Ross says, implying that hit franchises could go on for years. "We're optimistic that there's further ground."

— Stuart Levine



Recent breakthrough:

The former exec VP returned to Cartoon Network as chief content officer, putting live-action programs into the pipeline.

Role model: "The Flash." He got stuff done quickly.

Up next: Hiring the right team. "We're really populating the place from an executive point of view with TV people who think broadly and complement the animation studio we have in place here."

SORCHER

rewriting the rules

work," he predicts.

Sorcher's plans mean plenty of live-action opportunities for young talent: The net just wrapped "Scooby-Doo: In the Beginning," which imagines how the toon's Mystery Inc. team originally got together (the actors playing Fred and Shaggy are both 20, while Daphne and Velma are in their late teens).

With another "Ben 10" feature in the works, CN also snapped up film rights to "The Vanishers," an adventure comic

about two time-traveling fifth-graders.

"If you look at our entire network, you see a real pattern of dominance among male audiences, from kids all the way through Adult Swim," Sorcher explains. "We're going to take advantage of that and build upon it."

Young fans may even have a chance to host or participate in the programming (some shows, such as "Chowder," already feature kid voices). "It's an opportunity to put new faces on an existing brand," Sorcher says.

— Peter Debruge

THE JONAS BROTHERS

Sibling revelry

One year ago, only parents of Radio Disney-addicted children had heard of the Jonas Brothers. Today, 20-year-old Kevin, 19-year-old Joe and 16-year-old Nick Jonas are the epicenter of pop culture.

In the past year, the Jonas Brothers' "Burning Up" tour sold out, they won six Teen Choice Awards, they were the youngest group to grace the cover of Rolling Stone, and their album "A Little Bit Longer" became the third-biggest debut of the year, selling 525,000 units.

The secret to their success: humble pie, hard work and Disneyfication.

A failed first album with Columbia Records ("It's About Time") did succeed in finding them an admirer in Disney, which signed the band to Hollywood Records. The label masterminded a flawlessly timed layering of events.

"It was the perfect storm," says Ken Bunt, senior VP of marketing for Hollywood Records. "Their first album (with Hollywood) was released, followed by the Miley/Hannah tour, then their own headlining tour in spring of '08. 'Camp Rock' came out followed by their head-line arena tour. It was sustained growth over the last 18 months to two years."

Meanwhile, the Jonas Brothers grew

a fervent following by establishing a "we are just like you" relationship with their fans, offering insights into their personalities via goofy videos on MySpace and YouTube. Their concerts are rife with silly pranks, water squirting, rubber chicken throwing, cartwheels and pyrotechnics. The trio has even been known to bring bagels and cocoa to those in line to buy concert tickets.

Recent breakthrough: The trio had three albums in the top 10 at once, and a hit DVD in "Camp Rock." Their tour was such a hit, Disney shot a 3-D concert movie (a la "Hannah Montana").

Role model: "Stevie Wonder, the Bee Gees, all of those guys."

What's next: "Our TV show for the Disney Channel, called 'J.O.N.A.S.,' will be a lot different for us because we're a touring band. We're really excited to see how it is."

"We want to make the Jonas Brothers experience an event," says oldest brother Kevin. "When you want to see 'Camp Rock,' then you have a Camp Rock party with all of your friends. When we have an album, then you're the first one waiting in line to go buy it the midnight before the Tuesday."

They reward such devotion, showing up at the Virgin Mega-store in Times Square to greet the 800 people waiting in line to buy their self-titled Hollywood Records album when it was released.

That approach paid off. When "A Little Bit Longer" was released in August, "There were 15,000 people in line to buy the album. They had to shut down Times Square," Bunt says.

"We have a different connection with our fans," Kevin says simply.

—Tara McNamara



JESSE McCARTNEY

A whole new sound

Jesse McCartney disappeared just as his career was cresting. It turned out to be a brilliant move — as a result, the singer, songwriter and actor is now having one of the biggest years of his career.

"Leavin'," the first single from his third album, "Departure,"

was No. 1 on the top 40 charts for six weeks, selling more than 1 million digital singles. He co-wrote the song of the summer, Leona Lewis' "Bleeding Love"; voiced toon characters in "Alvin and the Chipmunks" and "Dr. Seuss' Horton Hears a Who!"; and saw his feature acting debut, in the indie film "Keith," finally hit the bigscreen (after shooting it three years earlier).

Though he may have been MIA, McCartney was far from idle. "I wanted to go away for a couple of years and hide and be creative," he says. "A lot of that was writing in the studio nonstop with other writers and by myself, taking trips to different parts of the world to write. When I came back on the scene, I wanted to have something to show for it."

One of those songwriting sessions gave McCartney what he'd been looking for: credibility. McCartney and Ryan Tedder of OneRepublic wrote "Bleeding Love" and felt it would be a good fit for a female vocalist. Simon Cowell and Clive Davis agreed, giving the song to Lewis, Cowell's "X Factor" winner. "Bleeding Love" has hit No. 1 in 32 countries.

"We had no idea it was going to be the hit it was," McCartney says.

The success also taught McCartney to be more concerned with trying than with failing: "I'm learning, at age 21, you can really do what you want, so I'm thinking of new ways of entertaining. I want to put together a production company and start producing. If it doesn't work out, it doesn't work out."

—Tara McNamara

Recent breakthrough: "A reinvention of my whole music career sonically. I've broken down a bunch of walls and reached past many hurdles to show growth to my fans."

Role model: "Will Smith. 'Big Willie Style' is one of the first records I bought as a kid, and now he's the biggest movie star."

What's next: "I just released my second single. The plan by early next year is to start touring and build up my acting repertoire."



TAYLOR SWIFT

Most-clicked country artist

For 18-year-old country siren Taylor Swift, fame is just a bonus. “The thing about me,” she says, “is that I never expect I’m entitled to success. I feel like you have to do the work to have a chance.” Unexpected words from a singer whose self-titled, debut album went triple-platinum in June. “I thought it would go gold,” Swift says. “Every day is a fairy tale.”

Swift has had a whirlwind year, to say the least. Her song “Change,” off her latest album “Fearless,” was selected by NBC to be one of a handful of songs played throughout the Olympics and included on the official soundtrack of the Games.

“The song is all about triumph over failure,” says Swift, whose success has been reinforced by numerous accolades: She was nominated for the best new artist award at the Grammys and won the Academy of Country Music’s best new female artist statuette as well as video of the year kudos at the CMT Country Music Awards — plus breakout artist laurels at the Teen Choice Awards and an MTV VMA nom for best new artist.

“The highlight has been winning the CMA,” says Swift, citing “my performance on the ACM awards under a downpour of rain” as a close second.

In May, Swift signed on as a spokesmodel for l.e.i. and has since designed a clothing line sold at Wal-Mart stores. “Pairing up with l.e.i. jeans was a way to get my toe into the big fashion world,” she says. “I wanted the clothes to be something my fans could afford.”

One of the first young singer-songwriters to develop a following through MySpace, Swift has been loyal to her base, dedicating 2007 CMT Breakthrough Video Award to her “MySpace fans.”

Recent breakthrough: Swift’s self-titled album went triple platinum in June. She wrote or co-wrote all the songs on her latest, “Fearless.”

Role model: Faith Hill and Ellen DeGeneres. “Both of them have been as famous as you can possibly be, but they are still real people.”

What’s next: “I’m going to start planning my headlining tour.”

— Yvonne Puig



George Holz/Contour by Getty Images



SOULJA BOY

Telltale singer

Under the name Soulja Boy Tell 'Em, Atlanta native DeAndre Way went from making beats on his laptop to selling millions of albums — well, downloads, actually — in just two years, shooting down the myth that the recording industry couldn't survive in the digital era.

“Crank That,” the first single off his Grammy-nominated debut album “Souljaboytellem.com,” sold 3 million downloads and 8 million ringtones, spawning a musical dance fusion that raised the bar for creativity in hip hop.

After 200 million YouTube hits, Interscope could rest easy: It had won the battle against file-sharing and at the same time signed the next superstar.

Soulja’s marketing attack on the Web showed that reality music parallels the success of reality television: “I was making beats and songs from the bedroom of my house, uploading them to MySpace,” he says. “I had the email for my Sidekick on my MySpace to stay in touch with fans. I started to get booked in Chicago, Minnesota, Georgia, Mississippi, Tennessee.”

That’s when multiplatinum producer Mr. Collipark took notice. “He sent an email to my phone and said he wanted to sign me, so I told him, ‘Fly down.’ We did the deal in my living room,” says Way, who was 15 at the time.

Before the ink was dry, he was touring with young rap sensations Bow Wow and Chris Brown, designing his own line of Yums sneakers and apparel, buying Atlanta club Excalibur, setting up record label S.O.D Money Gang Entertainment through Universal and being featured in a custom Soulja Boy cartoon to be released through iTunes and YouTube.

— N’neka Hite

Recent breakthrough: As record labels scrambled to keep up with digital technology, his platinum debut album “Souljaboytellem.com” proved there’s life after CDs.

Role model: “50 Cent was a big inspiration to me because of all the different things he did, like the videogames, the movie, how many albums he sold.”

What’s next: His second album, “iSouljaBoy,” drops in November.

Getty Images

STEVEN VINCENT

Record setter

When putting together the music that makes today's tweens swoon, Steven Vincent, vice president of music and soundtracks for Disney Channel, likes to keep it both classic and hip.

"The most important thing is for it all to feel relevant to kids' lives," Vincent says. "We decided the music should be as cool as any music they were listening to on the radio. We wanted to find a way to use that music in musicals and speak in their vernacular."

As for classic, Vincent — who studied film composition with the legendary composer-arranger Walter Scharf — believes the traditional structure of musicals keeps audiences in their seats. Familiar themes do the same.

"If you look, you see that 'High School Musical' is basically about peer pressure," Vincent says. "And you have a young girl who gets her heart broken for the first time, so it's easy to relate to those experiences."

From the beginning, Vincent pursued top pop songwriters to work on Disney Channel projects.

"It started out that our productions were going after people like Matthew Girard and Jamie Houston to work on things like 'The Cheetah Girls' and 'High School Musical,' but that's definitely changed," Vincent observes.

Now, talent comes to him. If director Kenny Ortega wants each of "High School Musical 3's" songs to have a different sound, reflective of the characters' unique states of mind, Vincent has no trouble convincing the right musicians to participate. And the excitement extends to other Disney shows, too. Newly announced "American Idol" judge Kara DioGuardi wrote a song for an episode of "Hannah Montana," for example.

Vincent thinks a changing recording industry is part of what makes these shows appealing to songwriters.

"We're still selling a lot of records, while the rest of the industry isn't," Vincent says. "Kids aren't quite at the point where they just want an MP3, because it's more of a souvenir if they have the record. It's the same reason why they still buy the mouse ears at Disneyland."

Recent breakthrough: "'Camp Rock' because it's not a break-into-song kind of musical. It's more character driven and takes the classic musical a step further."

Role model: "Walter Scharf, who was one of those old-time film scoring guys who taught me to take ego out of the process and make sure everything serves the film and director."

What's next: Has already released four singles from "High School Musical 3."

— Karen Idelson



DOUG COHN

Band leader

When Nickelodeon hired former VH1 and Atlantic Records exec Doug Cohn to integrate music into the Nick brand, SpongeBob SquarePants wasn't the only one crooning, "It's the best day ever!" That's because all the stars in the Nick family now have the potential to add "recording artist" to their resumes.

A four-year deal with Sony enables the cabler to develop, produce and finance television and music projects. The move came after Disney spiked past Nick as the top kids channel with tuners and series such as "High School Musical" and "Hannah Montana."

Now with Cohn one year into the gig as Nick's first senior VP of music marketing and talent, he's seen two Naked Brothers Band album launches, kept the Backyardigans' "Born to Play" CD on the top 10 kids music charts for nine months, grabbed 260,000 downloads for the "iCarly" theme song, managed three successful tours and developed a slate of music-centric skeins including one starring "Zoey 101's" Victoria Justice, a show about a boy band, and a "Drake and Josh" Christmas movie.

Everything clicked for Cohn in June, when he saw the results of leveraging Nick's synergy with Viacom and MTV Networks. "When the 'iCarly' soundtrack debuted at No. 1, it was a result of our plan all coming together," he says, citing appearances on the "Today" show and MTV's "TRL," a video "that played practically around the clock," in-store appearances and a big TV movie tie-in. The album even helped launch Leon Thomas III, another up-and-coming young Nickelodeon artist, by featuring his single "I Like That Girl."

Nick may have joined the music game later than its competition, but Cohn sees plenty of room for the brand to establish itself as a major player. "I don't mind that people are into Jonas Brothers and 'American Idol,'" he says. "That means there is an appetite for kids' music, which is great for us."

— Tara McNamara

Recent breakthrough: "Miranda Cosgrove. The 'iCarly' soundtrack debuted at No. 1 on the kids chart, so it's the start of a very exciting career for Miranda."

Role model: "Justin Timberlake. He went from being this kid in a boy band, and now he has the respect from all in the music industry, then you turn around and he has the most downloaded skit from 'SNL,' then he's hosting the ESPYs, then (he's in) movies."

What's next: "Spectacular!" could deliver a "High School Musical"-sized franchise for Nick, and more shows are in the hopper. "Part of our deal with Sony is a TV co-production deal ... to take our programming and add music. Soon we'll add a touring component."



Associated Press

DANIEL RADCLIFFE

Brightening Broadway

Since it's the first thing everyone wants to talk about: Yes, Daniel Radcliffe is appearing naked on Broadway.

The 19-year-old thesp, known to practically everyone as the young actor plucked from obscurity to play fledgling wizard Harry Potter onscreen, is starring in a limited Rialto engagement of "Equus," the 1973 Peter Shaffer play about a troubled young man who commits a sudden act of violence.

He's reprising a role he first played on the West End in a 2007 staging helmed by Thea Sharrock and co-starring Richard Griffiths, another alum of the "Potter" films.

Radcliffe's star power — not to mention that nude scene — helped make the play a smash hit in London last year, and in Gotham the show became the top-grossing nonmusical on the Street soon after it began perfs Sept. 5.

The actor acknowledges his role in "Equus" reps a departure from his Potter work but contends that wasn't the main attraction.

"There was definitely an awareness that this was the right thing to do, but I'd like to think it wasn't as cynical as 'strategy,'" he says. "When I first read the play, it hit me on a gut level."

With movie adaptations of J.K. Rowling's megahit books filming almost back-to-back since 2001, Radcliffe has had few opportunities to play anybody other than Harry. (The sixth movie in the series, "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince," is due out next summer.)

That'll be true for a bit longer. Not long after the Broadway version of "Equus" closes, he commences the long shoot for "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows," the two-film adaptation of the final novel in the series.

Through it all, Radcliffe has essentially grown up onscreen, and now onstage. He believes his turn in "Equus," for instance, has benefited from the experience he's gained since he did it last year.

"I think I've gotten better since we did it in London," he says. "I'm 18 months older."

Recent breakthrough: Reprising his much-discussed West End turn in "Equus" on Broadway, in an engagement now playing through Feb. 4.

Role models: His father, Alan Radcliffe, and his friend Will Steggle, who works in costumes and wardrobe on the "Harry Potter" films. "The thing they both have in common is they both steer their own ship."

What's next: Filming the marathon adaptation of the seventh Potter book, "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows."

— Gordon Cox

JASON ROBERT BROWN

Putting teens centerstage



Recent breakthrough: The Tony winner's kid-centric musical "13" opens on Broadway Sunday.

Role model: "Thornton Wilder, in terms of his ability as a writer to continue exploring. He never repeated himself."

What's next: "The Trumpet of the Swan," an adaptation of the E.B. White book, bows at the Kennedy Center in December.

Gary Gershoff/WireImage.com

Broadway isn't just for old foys.

Case in point: The new Broadway tuner "13," which features an all-teen cast and orchestra. The show marks the Rialto debut for almost all of its performers.

The production is the brainchild of Jason Robert Brown, the composer-lyricist ("The Last Five Years," "Urban Cowboy") who picked up a 1999 Tony for his score for "Parade."

He was originally approached a few years ago to create a young-adult book that would have a companion musical. That particular version of the project never came together, but eventually Brown's idea morphed into the musical opening Sunday on Broadway, after a run at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles two seasons ago and a stint at Goodspeed Musicals earlier this

See **BROWN** page 57

JENNIFER RUDIN

Trying out tykes

Jennifer Rudin, whose job involves scouring the country for young actors to appear in the stage versions of "Mary Poppins," "The Lion King" and "The Little Mermaid," should know a thing or two about what she's looking for. After all, Disney Theatrical Prods.' director of casting and talent development used to be a child actress herself, from ages 8 to 17.



"I did an episode of 'Sesame Street,' many after-school specials and a very well-known commercial," Rudin says. That experience helped shape her career path: "I decided I wanted to be a casting director when I was 12. I was at a final audition for a TV movie and I had this epiphany: The casting director seemed to have such a fun job, facilitating this creative process that was also very stressful, and I felt it'd be the perfect job — combining my love of actors and photographic memory, which I still have."

In college, the New Yorker interned for casting directors Meg Simon (now head of casting at Warner Bros.) and Marcia

See **RUDIN** page A57

Recent breakthrough: Took over casting and talent development for Disney's legit division.

Role model: Meg Simon. "She inspired me and taught me so much about championing actors and thinking creatively."

Next: "We're launching the tour for 'Mary Poppins,' and I cast 'Bolt,' the next Disney animated film."

ABBY BLUESTONE

Transitional authority

As head of the youth division at Innovative Artists, agent Abby Bluestone has a reputation for being with her clients for the long haul.

In recent years, she has helped guide young actors Amanda Seyfried (from “Mean Girls” to “Mamma Mia!”) and Luke Eberl (from “Planet of the Apes” to his directing debut, “Choose Connor”) into successful grown-up careers. As it happens, many of her clients are steady-working adults, such as Mary McDonnell and Jessica Walter, and she aims to steer her teen thespians toward similar longevity.

Recent breakthrough: “Amanda Seyfried is pretty much the best story out there. She’s a beautiful person inside and out. Her career is only going to expand.”

Role model: “I didn’t really have one.”

What’s next: “Shiloh Fernandez will be in ‘The United States of Tara’ soon. He’s a young Joaquin Phoenix.”

“They know they can count on me,” says Bluestone, who was briefly an actress herself, appearing in “Little Darlings” alongside Tatum O’Neal. “It’s very important for the people I work with to feel nurtured and loved, and I try to do that for them.”

With success comes competition, and among agents the big firms have a reputation for swooping in and poaching kid clients the instant they hit it big.

“Look, I’ve lost my share of people like anyone else, but the thing is that when they’re with me, they know I think they’re the most important thing in the world, and you’re not going to find that everywhere,” she says.

When signing young talent, Bluestone most often bases her decisions on the feelings she gets during a personal meeting.

“There’s no formula for this,” she says. “I don’t really look at tapes that much, to be honest. I just go with my gut, and that works for me.”

Bluestone hopes they never leave the nest, adapting to her clients’ evolving needs. Chris Warren Jr. graduated from “Love & Basketball” to the “High School Musical” series; Peyton List went from a “Sex and the City” cameo to playing the new girl on “Mad Men”; and “As Good as It Gets” Jesse James most recently appeared in “Jumper” — still just the beginning for each, she believes.

— Karen Idelson



WENDI GREEN

Children’s champion

Is the ability to spot young talent an inherited gene or the result of years of hard work and experience? For Wendi Green, head of the youth theatrical department at Abrams Artists Agency, it’s definitely the former.

“It’s a gift you’re born with,” she says. “Growing up, my dad always told me, ‘You’re born to sell,’ and I always loved kids and making them happy, so it’s a natural passion for me. I get so much joy out of changing their lives and watching them scream when they get a job.”

Born in New York, Green grew up in Los Angeles, got her bachelor’s degree in child psychology and development from Cal State Northridge, then worked on a cruise ship as the kids’ cruise director. After a stint at a literary agency, she began working as a talent agent.

“The company didn’t want a youth department, but all the clients I brought in were young. I couldn’t help it,” she says. “So I decided to go to Abrams — it was my first choice simply because they were under ‘A’ in the book — and after six meetings, I sold myself and the idea of a kids department.”

Green started off with “just me and 10 clients,” and now it’s grown to two other agents and assistants. In the past 12 years, Green, who discovered Katie Holmes, Frankie Muniz and Seann William Scott, has made Abrams an industry leader. She currently represents Madeline Carroll (“Swing Vote”), Angus T. Jones (“Two and a Half Men”), Adam Gregory (“90210”) and Nathan Gamble (“Dark Knight,” “Babel”).

“Twelve years ago, none of the agencies wanted to deal with kids, but that’s all changed,” she says. “That’s made my job a lot more competitive, but more fun, too. I still have the same passion for finding that magic. It’s all my gut, and I never doubt my gut.” — Iain Blair



Recent breakthrough: Client Madeline Carroll, 12, landed the lead in “Swing Vote” opposite Kevin Costner. “The critics all went crazy for Madeline. I wish I could drag everyone to the theater to see her.”

Role model: “Angus T. Jones has been on ‘Two and a Half Men’ for five years. During that time I have watched him grow into a caring, down-to-earth, professional young man.”

Next: “Every day is another exciting opportunity to break a new star.”

NICK STYNE

‘Rock’ star rep

Recent breakthrough: Demi Lovato and the Jonas Brothers hit it big with “Camp Rock.”

Role model: “My father.”

Up next: Lovato and the Jonases now have their own shows in the works: “Sonny With a Chance” and “J.O.N.A.S.”

With a sterling roster of rising stars that includes Selena Gomez, Demi Lovato, AnnaSophia Robb, the Rosso twins (Camilla and Rebecca), the Jonas Brothers, the Naked Brothers Band, Aly & AJ and Sara Paxton, Creative Artists’ Nick Styne reps some of the biggest under-21 talent in the business. But the proverbial dad doesn’t want to be known only as the go-to youth agent.

“I’m not just a kids guy,” he says, “but there is something amazing about it.”

Styne relishes the opportunity to

introduce new talent to the world in the hopes that he’ll be able to represent them for decades to come. For example, he signed Cameron Diaz before “The Mask,” when she was just a plucky 21-year-old brand new to the biz (she even followed him from ICM to CAA when he switched agencies in 2003).

“I feel like we’ve grown up together,” the actress tells *Variety*. “When I first started looking at agents, I said to him, ‘Your bullshit is the most believable.’ But then what I found out over the years was that it wasn’t bullshit.”

THOR BRADWELL

Accenting overseas talent

Thor Bradwell may count such tween superstars as Corbin Bleu (“High School Musical”) and Dylan and Cole Sprouse (“The Suite Life of Zack and Cody”) among his clients, but he’s just as excited about

Recent breakthrough: His client Jemma McKenzie-Brown is one of the new faces in “High School Musical 3” who looks poised to return for “4.”

Role model: Admires how James McAvoy, Denzel Washington and Russell Crowe have handled their careers.

What’s next: Increasing his international portfolio with more clients such as British actor Aaron Johnson, who stars in Matthew Vaughn’s “Kickass.”

discovering the next generation of possible leading men and women, many of whom he finds abroad.

“I love Disney, but that’s only one half of me,” the William Morris agent says.

Now that teens have become some of the biz’s biggest moneymakers with massive music and licensing deals, agencies are paying closer attention to the younger set.

Before Bradwell and his partner and mentor Bonnie Liedtke moved from TalentWorks to WMA, kids were handled by smaller specialty agencies.

“They used to say you would never work above a certain level with youth, but that’s changed,” he says. “We saw that the big agencies had a hole for 17- and 18-year-olds. It’s extremely competitive these days.”

Bradwell travels extensively, scanning local TV shows and performing arts schools and networking with agents and publicists in several countries to find new talent, with greatest luck in the U.K. and Australia. The actor playing a young Hugh Jackman in “Wolverine”? That’s Aussie Troye Sivan, a Bradwell client.

“These days studios and networks are willing not to cast just another pretty face. They want to cast the best actors,” he says, “What’s different about British kids is that they’re classically trained, they have a huge theater background.”

Styne remembers recently sitting down with Diaz, going over some old photos. They stopped at a picture of Diaz, Styne and her late father, Emilio Diaz, standing arm-in-arm at her first big movie premiere.

“We just looked at each other and realized, wow, we’ve been together for that long,” Styne recalls.

It’s exactly that sort of longevity Styne says he wants to maintain with his kids — a term he uses endearingly.

“When I look at these younger

artists now, I want to be sitting there with them 15 to 20 years from now looking back and saying, ‘Oh my God, Selena, remember when we were dancing at your sweet 16?’”

Styne says he loves to grow with his clients, no matter what their ages when the partnership begins.

“We represent some of the most talented people in the world, and some of the most talented people in the world are children.”

— Andrew Stewart



JASON WEINBERG

Balancing acts

Preferring to remain on the sidelines in a truly supporting role, talent manager Jason Weinberg, a founding partner of Untitled Entertainment, is behind the careers of so many A-list people, he gets a shout-out at most award ceremonies (Jean Smart thanked him at the recent Emmys; Hilary Swank at the Oscars).

Recent breakthrough: Has clients on “Gossip Girl,” “Greek,” “The United States of Tara” and more. Keke Palmer stars in her own Nick series this fall.

Role model: His first boss after college was Bobby Zarem, “a fantastic publicist and innovator” who imparted valuable lessons and beneficial teachings about talent and the biz.

What’s next: His goals are for his clients’ goals to be fulfilled.

Though Untitled mostly reps adults, the company’s roster also boasts such up-and-comers as AnnaSophia Robb, Keke Palmer, Blake Lively, Vanessa Hudgens, Spencer Grammer, Nolan Funk and Shiloh Fernandez, to name a few.

When it comes to guiding these performers, “Ultimately it’s all about career longevity,” Weinberg observes, “and also making sure they get to enjoy their childhood and have the right understanding of what they’re doing.”

He believes in balance for both himself and his clients: personhood before persona. “As managers, our job is to help our clients reach their goals, to be out there and be proactive and to protect them along the way,” he explains.

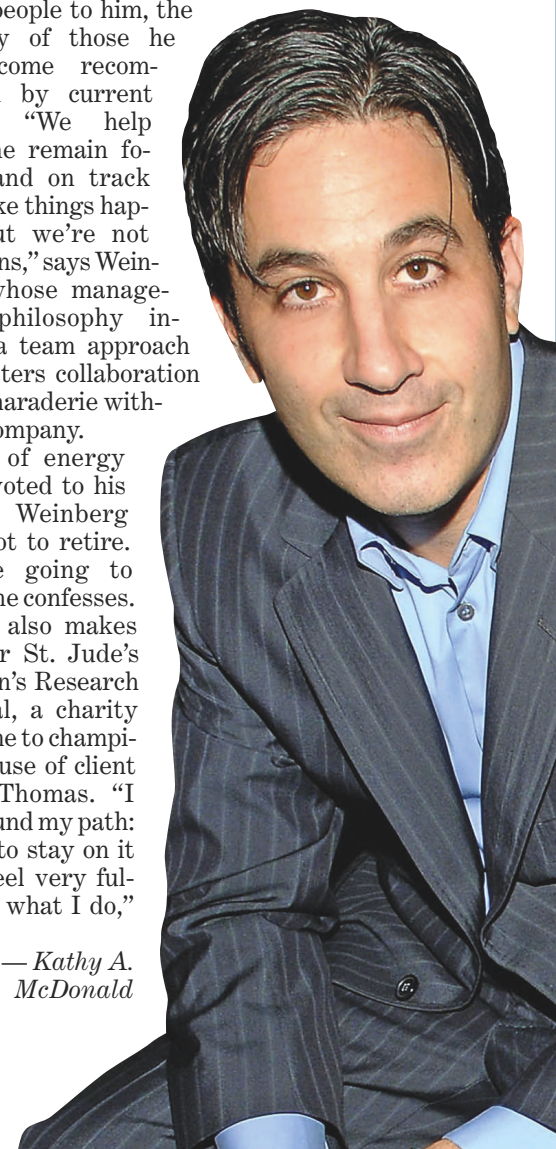
One way that’s possible is by being selective about his roster. Though agents, casting directors

and acting coaches all refer

young people to him, the majority of those he signs come recommended by current clients. “We help everyone remain focused and on track and make things happen, but we’re not magicians,” says Weinberg, whose management philosophy includes a team approach that fosters collaboration and camaraderie within the company.

Full of energy and devoted to his roster, Weinberg vows not to retire. “I love going to work,” he confesses. But he also makes time for St. Jude’s Children’s Research Hospital, a charity he’s come to champion because of client Marlo Thomas. “I have found my path: I want to stay on it and I feel very fulfilled in what I do,” he says.

— Kathy A. McDonald



FRED TOCZEK

Equal pay advocate

Times have changed since Fred Toczek added a thriving subspecialty in handling youth talent to his practice at the dawn of the “Harry Potter” age. Negotiating a deal for 11-year-old Daniel Radcliffe to take on the lead role in the franchise’s first film installment, 2001’s “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone,” Toczek had to overcome what was then a challenging bargaining position for young actors.

Recent breakthrough: Rebuilt his practice as Felker Toczek Gellman Suddleson, following the February departure of partners Peter Nelson (who reps Peter Jackson, among others) and George Davis.

Role model: “My partner Patti Felker. She is tenacious in representing clients but at the same time an absolute mensch.”

What’s next: Counts the split-up of the seventh and final “Harry Potter” adaptation “... and the Deathly Hallows” into two movies as a two-picture boon to client Radcliffe.

“A decade ago, kids were on a very standard pay scale,” explains the USC law school grad, who also repped a 17-year-old Vancouver native, Seth Rogen, when he landed his first break, Judd Apatow’s short-lived NBC series “Freaks and Geeks.”

“Now I think the market recognizes their importance. Lately that prejudice, or perception, has eased up, and they’re getting paid more in accordance with their market value.”

Toczek, whose other kid clients include Freddie Highmore and Dakota Blue Richards, credits the commercial success in recent years of not only youth-driven feature franchises like “Harry Potter” but also minor-led platforms like Disney Channel and Nickelodeon with changing the perception of the marketplace.

“It’s been a push from agents, lawyers and managers to get more equitable pay for young talent, but more than anything it has been the impact of that talent in the marketplace. These successes have helped people recognize the value of youth on all platforms, and this enabled us to have a realistic and reasonable conversation,” Toczek explains.

These days, Toczek says the good deals are easier to come by, as he has recently negotiated pacts for Simi Valley High student Shailene Woodley to star in ABC Family’s “The Secret Life of the American Teenager” and Jemma McKenzie-Brown to make more “High School Musical” sequels.

“With younger actors, the interaction is definitely more with the parents, but as they become teenagers, there is more direct involvement in the business side of their careers, which I embrace,” Toczek says. “My job is to balance that business side and make sure they have as normal a childhood and young-adulthood as possible.”

— Daniel Frankel



John Shearer/WireImage.com

STEVE WARREN

Big kids’ counsel



The press-shy Harvard Law School grad Steve Warren politely declined to be interviewed for this profile, partly for fear that his practice at Hansen, Jacobson, Teller, Hoberman, Newman, Warren & Richman might be too narrowly defined as youth-centric.

Warren is considered one of Hollywood’s top actor reps in general, handling adult clients including Christina Applegate, Drew Barrymore, Leonardo DiCaprio, Kirsten Dunst, Tobey Maguire and Reese Witherspoon.

Of course, those actors all started out in the business fairly young. And regardless of how he defines himself, Warren does seem to enjoy a surfeit of successful transition stories within his client roster.

Consider Dakota Fanning, the 14-year-old heavyweight, now venturing into more mature fare, such as the R-rated indie “Hounddog.” At the film’s 2007 Sundance premiere, the attorney could be seen ushering his young client down the red carpet like a

protective parent. A father himself, Warren has earned that invaluable reputation within the youth biz of someone who sincerely supports his young charges and knows how to talk to them.

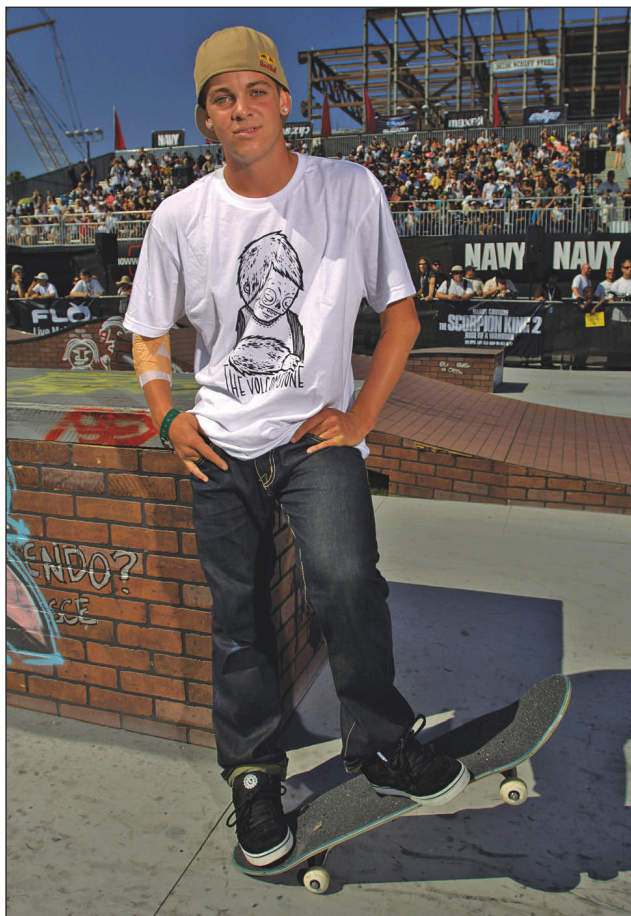
Recent breakthrough: He doesn’t take on many kid clients, but has guided young stars like Leonardo DiCaprio, Kirsten Dunst and Tobey Maguire into adulthood.

And while he might not be actively seeking more teen clients, Warren has also done right by such youngsters as Fanning’s sister Elle and “Everybody Hates Chris” star Tyler James Williams, largely because he considers their talents in much the same terms as those of the adults he represents.

According to colleagues within the industry, Warren takes interest in his clients’ careers and not just their deals, doing the diligence of seeing films and reading scripts so he knows what his clients are getting into.

“He cares about kids personally,” says Fanning’s agent, Cindy Osbrink. “I think the simple fact that he’s willing just to call to say, ‘Hi, what’s going on?’ shows that. He’s also one of the toughest attorneys out there as far as dealmaking and getting what’s fair.”

— Daniel Frankel



Corbis

RYAN SHECKLER

Skating sensation

It's easy to see why life is "awesome" for 18-year-old pro skateboarder Ryan Sheckler. He just won the X Games — again — this year, although he sheepishly admits it took him "five long years" to repeat his impressive gold medal feat of 2003, when he was barely 13. That first win cemented his place in skateboard history, which the San Clemente, Calif., native quickly parlayed into the hugely successful MTV reality show "Life of Ryan," which just wrapped its third season.

"I feel it's our best season ever, and we put a lot of effort into it," says Sheckler, who admits to being "totally surprised" by the show's success. "The fans love it and it's pretty darn accurate. For the most part, it's all our real stories and actions, we're all best friends, so it's just a lot of fun."

But Sheckler is serious when it comes to the business opportunities that his fame has creat-

ed. He started his own skateboard clothing line, Sheckler Merchandise, "to tie in with the show, but now it's escalated and we're currently talking to Etnies, my shoe sponsor, to get our own shoe line going," he reports. He also set up the Sheckler Foundation with his two younger brothers, both skateboarders, "to raise money and help injured athletes get back on their feet. I feel very strongly about that, although it's a little weird suddenly having to go to all these meetings. Now, everything is business, but that's OK."

He also feels comfortable with his newfound heartthrob status as the hot young face of his sport. "It's cool, man. It's part of my job and duty as a skateboarder, and it's led me to be this sort of icon for these little kids who want to skate, too, so I feel very blessed. I want to be the new Tony Hawk."

— Iain Blair

Recent breakthrough: "Winning the X Games a few weeks ago. That was a life-changing moment — it was huge!"

Role model: "My family. I'd be nothing without them. And obviously Jesus Christ for putting me on Earth. Skateboarding is my calling and what God sent me here to do."

Next: "We're shooting the Plan B skateboard video right now. It's going to take a year and a half to make, maybe two, because it has to be amazing."

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BO BURNHAM

Striking a chord

Bo Burnham was just fooling around on the Internet like any other high schooler in December 2006. Little did the Boston suburbanite know the video he posted for his piano ballad “My Whole Family Thinks I’m Gay” would catapult him into a budding career as a comedic musician.

The viral sensation got the young songwriter invited to last summer’s Montreal Comedy Festival, where none other than Judd Apatow flipped for the 17-year-old’s act. Shortly after his 18th birthday, Burnham signed a deal to write the script and songs for a feature in which he would also star, with Apatow producing.

Not bad for a self-taught musician who picked up piano and guitar when he wasn’t acting in school plays like “The Odyssey.” When Burnham noticed that “Family” was gaining an online following, he followed it up with more self-reflective songs about the doldrums of nerddom, such as outsider-looking-in rap “High School Party.”

Recent breakthrough: He’s the youngest standup to record his own Comedy Central special, timed to air in January when his comedy is re-released.

Role model: “Steve Martin, because he’s had such a great career canvassing stand-up, playwriting and films. What a comic renaissance man.”

What’s next: Judd Apatow is producing Burnham’s screenplay, based on his adolescent ditties and known as the “anti-‘High School Musical.’”

Even as the traffic for Burnham’s viral videos surged to more than 30 million hits, it didn’t dawn on the cut-up that he was popular with Hollywood until last fall, when he was called to the principal’s office: The Gersh Agency was on the phone, ready to sign him.

“It was 100% luck,” says Burnham on his Internet fame. “I wish I could say that my online work ethic was on par to Dane Cook’s, who managed his website and built his fanbase.”

Burnham’s blessed with a ’90s alternative tenor; his online performances feel like casual, singing-in-the-mirror tributes to Paul Simon or Elton John. Usually, it’s just him in his room at the synthesizer presenting his latest angst-ridden adolescent ditty. Ironically the clips’ popularity has made Burnham more popular with the “in crowd.”

“The kids who called me ‘theater queer’ are now asking me to come chill at their dorm,” he says. “My response to them: ‘We never hung out in high school.’”

— Anthony D’Alessandro

Shhh. Sounds like applause



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BLAKE LIVELY

Talk of the town

As the star of TV's reigning guilty pleasure, "Gossip Girl," Blake Lively is firm about the show's supposed influence on its target audience.

"It's silly to think that we're trying to tell anyone how to live their life," she says of the racy, teen must-see TV. "We're just showing you fun, juicy storylines with amazing wardrobes."

The fashion-forward show has not only boosted the CW's fortunes but also advanced the 21-year-old actress into a hot property and a designer favorite.

During New York's Fashion Week, she was greeted warmly by Vogue's Anna Wintour and sought after by designers such as Michael Kors and Zac Posen (her Ralph Lauren custom-fitted couture gown worn to the Met's annual Costume Gala got rave reviews). Lively has even witnessed her character Serena van der Woodsen's impact on the streets of Gotham: "I've seen girls wearing Serena outfits; they're really very specific."

Lively's other roles include "Accepted," the "Sisterhood of the

Traveling Pants" films (producer Debra Martin Chase lauds "her touch of innocence, intelligence — a lovely young woman") and Rebecca Miller's upcoming "The Private Lives of Pippa Lee." Of the latter, Lively enthuses, "That kind of project is impossible to find, and the fact that I could work it in my four-week break was a miracle."

Because of the protracted production sked of "Gossip Girl," Lively won't have a break long enough for a new feature role until February (though she might guest host "Saturday Night Live" later this season). She is carefully considering other offers, with an emphasis on quality.

At the same time, Lively, who completed high school and graduated with her friends after production wrapped on the "Traveling Pants" sequel, continues to value life outside of acting and remaining grounded.

"I have a terrific family and a small group of friends who wouldn't let me get crazy even if I wanted to," she says.

—Kathy A. McDonald

Recent breakthrough: The 21-year-old actress has become an overnight cover-girl, thanks to her lead role on the CW's hit "Gossip Girl."

Role model: "I love Martha Stewart, her cookbooks, everything that she does. I would love to open a restaurant and interior design company."

What's next: Rebecca Miller's "The Private Lives of Pippa Lee." Lively plays the teenage Lee; Robin Wright Penn is the elder.

MEGAN FOX

Fantasy girl

Long before she became the reigning pinup queen for lad mags like Maxim and FHM, Megan Fox made her film debut opposite Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen as a spoiled teenage heiress in the twins' 2001 romp "Holiday in the Sun." She was 15.

"I wanted to act since I was a toddler, and I was just so happy to get out of school," she recalls of the Bahamas-based shoot. As for any savvy career advice from the seasoned child stars, "there was none," she says. "We were all so young. But watching them, I saw how terrified they were of the crowds of fans, and I never understood it." Today, she does. "There's definitely a price — you can't go anywhere without people staring, you can't eat without people taking pictures, and you become introverted," she notes. "It's nothing like what they go through, but I do feel like I'm in petting zoo sometimes."

The Tennessee native, an avid dancer since she was 5, went on to star opposite Lindsay Lohan in "Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen." "I'd just

Recent breakthrough: The former child star had all the boys drooling with a shallow role in "Transformers." Now she gets her revenge in Diablo Cody's "Jennifer's Body."

Role model: "My mom. She has an amazing attitude and energy."

Next: "How to Lose Friends and Alienate People" opens today. Fox plays "a very manipulative, very dumb actress called Sophie. She's basically a stereotype of a Hollywood starlet — and so much fun to play."

left high school, and I was so green," Fox recalls. Again, there was little in the way of help or inspiration. "We weren't the best of friends," she admits bluntly. "But 16- and 17-year-old girls generally don't get along with each other."

Now Fox, whose credits include ABC's popular comedy series "Hope and Faith," seems poised to outstrip her former child co-stars, thanks in large part to her breakout role opposite Shia LaBeouf in "Transformers."

The in-demand actress returns for the sequel, "which picks up two years later," she says. "I've read the script like 18 times, but I honestly don't understand it."

And she landed the lead role in the Diablo Cody-penned supernatural thriller "Jennifer's Body." "It's a very dark, sexy, inappropriate comedy, and the first time I've ever been excited about the work I've done and haven't been horrified by the choices I made," she says.

—Iain Blair



Vera Anderson/WireImage.com

Things are still looking up for 2007's impact list candidates. Here's how they spent the last year.

ALUMINI UPDATE

BIGSCREEN KIDS

Nikki Blonsky — Golden Globes nom and acclaim for "Hairspray" led to roles in this summer's "Harold" and "Waiting for Forever," an indie romantic comedy now shooting.

Abigail Breslin — Headlined three 2008 pics: "Definitely, Maybe," "Nim's Island" and "Kit Kittredge: An American Girl." Next up is "My Sister's Keeper," from director Nick Casavetes, now in post.



Breslin

Michael Cera — Gets the girl in "Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist," opening today, with "Youth in Revolt" and Harold Ramis-helmed "Year One" set for 2009 release.

Freddie Highmore — Earned accolades for "August Rush." Played twins in "The Spiderwick Chronicles." Starring in two "Arthur and the Invisibles" sequels, with animated "Astro Boy" to follow.

Josh Hutcherson — Played lead in Walden Media's "Journey to the Center of the Earth," which has earned just a whisker shy of \$100 million domestically. Indie "Winged Creatures" is making the fest circuit.



Gabriel Bouys/Cathy Images

Page

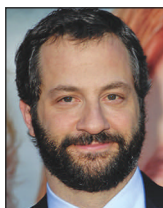
Ellen Page — Snagged best actress noms from the Academy, HFPA and SAG (and took home a Spirit Award) for "Juno." Stars opposite Cillian Murphy and Susan Sarandon in "Peacock," followed by Drew Barrymore's directorial debut "Whip It!"

AnnaSophia Robb — Starring in Disney's "Race to Witch Mountain." Admirers have started a grassroots Oscar campaign to get her nominated for her impressive turn in Overture release "Sleepwalking."

Saoirse Ronan — Earned a supporting actress Oscar nomination for her role in "Atonement." Stars opposite Bill Murray in "City of Ember," opening next Friday, followed by "The Lovely Bones."

BIGSCREEN CHAPERONES

Judd Apatow — Had a busy year, producing "Walk Hard," "Drillbit Taylor," "Forgetting Sarah Marshall," "Step Brothers" and "Pineapple Express." Currently directing "Funny People" and scouting new talent (like Bo Burnham, page A35).



Apatow

Cary Granat — The Walden prexy oversaw six films in the past 12 months; three landed

among the top five PG-rated films of 2008 thus far: "Journey to the Center of the Earth," "Prince Caspian" and "Nim's Island."

David Heyman — Produced "The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas," a Holocaust drama seen from a German kid's point of view, which opens Nov. 14. "Harry Potter" 6 slipped to next summer.

Gus Van Sant — "Paranoid Park" earned the director a Film Independent Spirit Award nomination. He cast "High School Musical's" Lucas Grabeel and several other young thespians in "Milk."

CHANNELING TALENT (KIDS)

Zac Efron — "Hairspray" led to more bigscreen opportunities, including "High School Musical 3." See page A5.

Vanessa Hudgens: Her second album, "Identified," was a top seller in June. Returns in "High School Musical 3," with "Bandslam" to follow next spring.

Angus T. Jones — Keeping busy between hit skein "Two and a Half Men" and school.

Hayden Panettiere — Returns in "Heroes" third season. Released single "Wake Up Call" with Hollywood Records in August. Stars in Fox Atomic's "I Love You, Beth Cooper."

Emma Roberts — Plans to attend college in fall 2009. Starred in "Lymelife," which won the Fipresci Prize at Toronto, followed by indie "Wild Child" and "Hotel for Dogs" next year.

Dylan and Cole Sprouse — TV spin-off "Suite Life on Deck" premiered last Friday. In features, "Kings of Appletown" wrapped, and the twins will now lend their voices to "Kung Fu Magoo."

CHANNELING TALENT (ADULTS)

Alexa Fogel — After casting HBO's Iraq miniseries "Generation Kill," found more young male talent for Lucasfilm's World War II feature "Red Tails," about the Tuskegee Airman.

Paula Kaplan — Viewership for the Nickelodeon Kids' Choice Awards increased 22% since 2007. Also helped bring together holiday special "Merry Christmas, Drake and Josh!"

Tom Lynch — Survived the writers strike to see "The Assistants" debut on the N this past July. His skein "South of Nowhere" is now entering its fourth season.

Kenny Ortega — Took "High School Musical" to the bigscreen for its third installment. See page A41.

Michael Ouweleen — The Cartoon Network exec switched back from development to on-air promotions, but not before seeing live-action "Ben 10: The Race Against Time" become the most-watched telecast in the net's history.

Dan Schneider — The Nick exec producer's "iCarly" is a hit. The final season of "Zoey 101" weathered Jamie Lynn Spears' pregnancy. Developing a show for Victoria Justice now.

Judy Taylor — The Disney VP of casting and talent relations discovered Kelly Blatz for new live-action skein "Aaron Stone," which debuts on Disney XD next year.



Steve Grantz/WireImage.com

Rihanna

YOUNG AT CHART (KIDS)

Miley Cyrus — Her "Best of Both Worlds" concert whisked her to the bigscreen. See page A5.

Chris Brown — Starred in the holiday comedy "This Christmas." Has been working on his third album and plans to release it in 2009.

Hilary Duff — Turned 21 last week. Her satire "War, Inc." debuted at the Tribeca Film Festival, with indies "Greta," "Safety Glass" and "Stay Cool" in the pipeline.

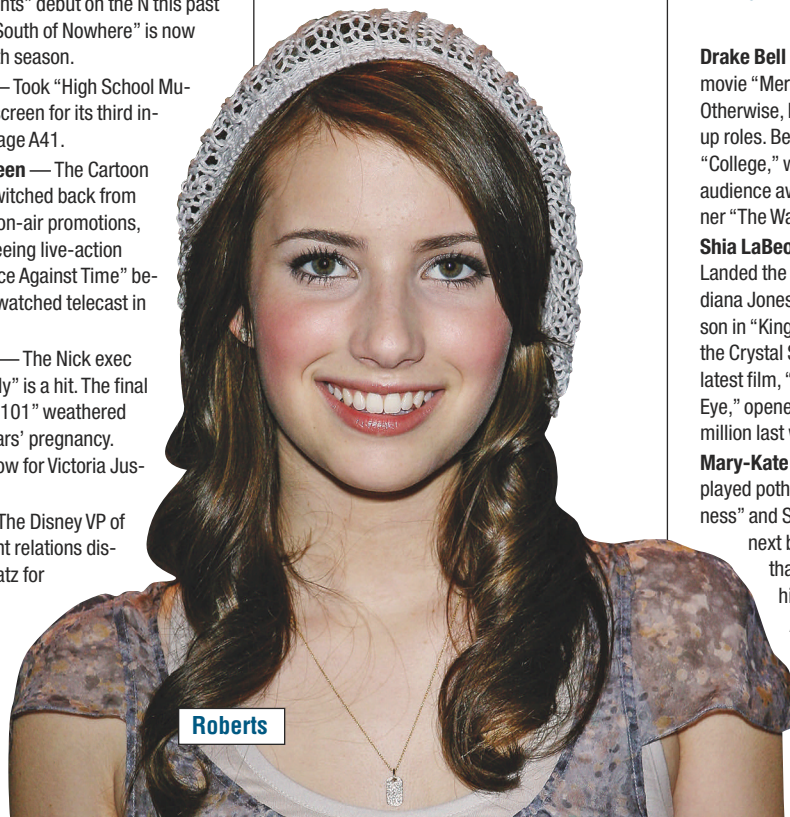
Rihanna — Shared a Grammy with Jay-Z for their "Umbrella" collaboration, then launched her hit album "Good Girl Gone Bad: Reloaded" in June.

Joss Stone: Holds onto her head as Anne of Cleves in "The Tudors." Turned 21 this year. Preparing follow-up album to "Introducing Joss Stone."

YOUNG AT CHART (ADULTS)

Jill Casagrande — Left her post as senior VP and general manager for Radio Disney and returned to Cincinnati for personal reasons in March.

Bob Cavallo — The Disney Music Group chairman helped launch hit albums for Miley Cyrus and the Jonas Brothers. Cyrus' "Breakout," her first true solo album, has sold more than 900,000 copies so far.



Roberts

Jeff Frasco — The CAA arena maven's tours for Carrie Underwood, Daughtry, "American Idol," "So You Think You Can Dance" and "America's Best Dance Crew" are thriving.

PRIMO PERCENTERS

Meredith Fine — Haley Joel Osment makes his Broadway debut in "American Buffalo" this fall. Kay Panabaker landed the lead in "Fame" remake. Placed kids in pilots for Fox, TBS and Disney Channel.

Mitchell Gossett — Left Cunningham Escott Slevin Doherty to join UTA, bringing top client Miley Cyrus along. Put together Nicholas Sparks deal for Cyrus. Booked Madison Dav-

enport in "Kit Kittredge" and Chelsea Staub in "J.O.N.A.S.!"

Bonnie Liedtke — Filled two of the three new "High School Musical" roles, and placed two kids in the "Fame" cast. Corbin Bleu has "Free Style" in January, and Aaron Johnson booked "Kick-Ass" opposite Nicolas Cage.

Cindy Osbrink — Reps both kids in Adam Sandler's "Bedtime Stories," along with "Hannah Montana" love interest Lucas Till, "Orphan" star Isabelle Fuhrman and three of the kids in Robert Rodriguez's "Shorts."

Sarah Shyn — Client Jessica Stroup stars in "90210," Olivia Thirlby had "The Wackness," Scout Taylor Compton appears in "Love Ranch" and Haley Bennett booked the lead in "The Haunting of Molly Hartley."

BRAND BOYS

Robert Thorne and Greg Redlitz — The former DualStar pair are spinning plates for client Quincy Jones with a branded line of consumer products, two book publishing deals, a Vegas nightclub and more.

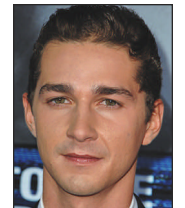
WEB WIZARDS

Miles Beckett and Greg Goodfried — Followed up the "Lonelygirl15" viral phenom with London-based Web series "KateModern" and "LG15: The Resistance" under the pair's Equal banner.

STRAIGHT OUTTA KIDHOOD

Drake Bell and Josh Peck — Reunite in TV movie "Merry Christmas, Drake & Josh." Otherwise, looking forward to more grown-up roles. Bell led "Superhero Movie" and "College," while Peck starred in Sundance audience award winner "The Wackness."

Shia LaBeouf — Landed the role of Indiana Jones' long-lost son in "Kingdom of the Crystal Skull." His latest film, "Eagle Eye," opened to \$29 million last weekend.



LaBeouf

Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen — Mary-Kate played potheads in Sundance hit "The Wackness" and Showtime's "Weeds," and will next be seen this season on "Samantha Who?" Ashley is focused on her high-end fashion line the Row.

Ashley Tisdale — Returns for "High School Musical 3: Senior Year" later this month. Also working on a follow-up to her 2007 album "Headstrong."

FRANCHISE PLAYER

FROM HOOFER TO HELMER

Kenny Ortega has choreographed everyone from rock stars to Olympians, but now he's directing his own vision

By CYNTHIA LITTLETON

A few years ago, Kenny Ortega had his agent hunt around for a cable telepic for him to direct.

He wasn't looking for anything too high profile, just a good script that would let him show off his chops as a longform helmer.

Ortega had spent the better part of 10 years concentrating on series television, where his versatility allowed him to move easily among dramas, dramedies and sitcoms.

But his helmer's eye was on the bigscreen. For all of his accomplishments as director and choreographer — from designing stage moves for such megastars as Cher, Madonna and Bette Midler to directing the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics — Ortega still felt there was a hole in his resume. He'd directed two movies for Disney earlier in his career, 1992's "Newsies" and 1993's "Hocus Pocus," but hadn't been completely satisfied with the results.

A good cable movie, Ortega figured, could be his calling card for a feature assignment. He was jazzed when his agent turned up a project at Disney Channel that combined all of his strengths in working with music and dance to tell a sweet love story. Although Ortega knew nothing about Disney Channel, a project with the working title "High School Musical" sounded right up his alley.

Nearly four years and three "High School Musical" pics later, Ortega's master plan has worked fabulously, but not exactly in the way that he'd plotted.

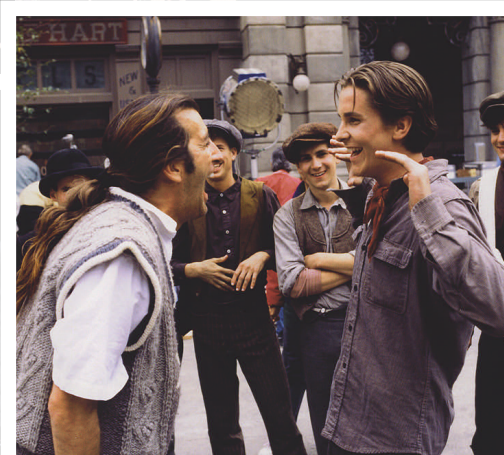
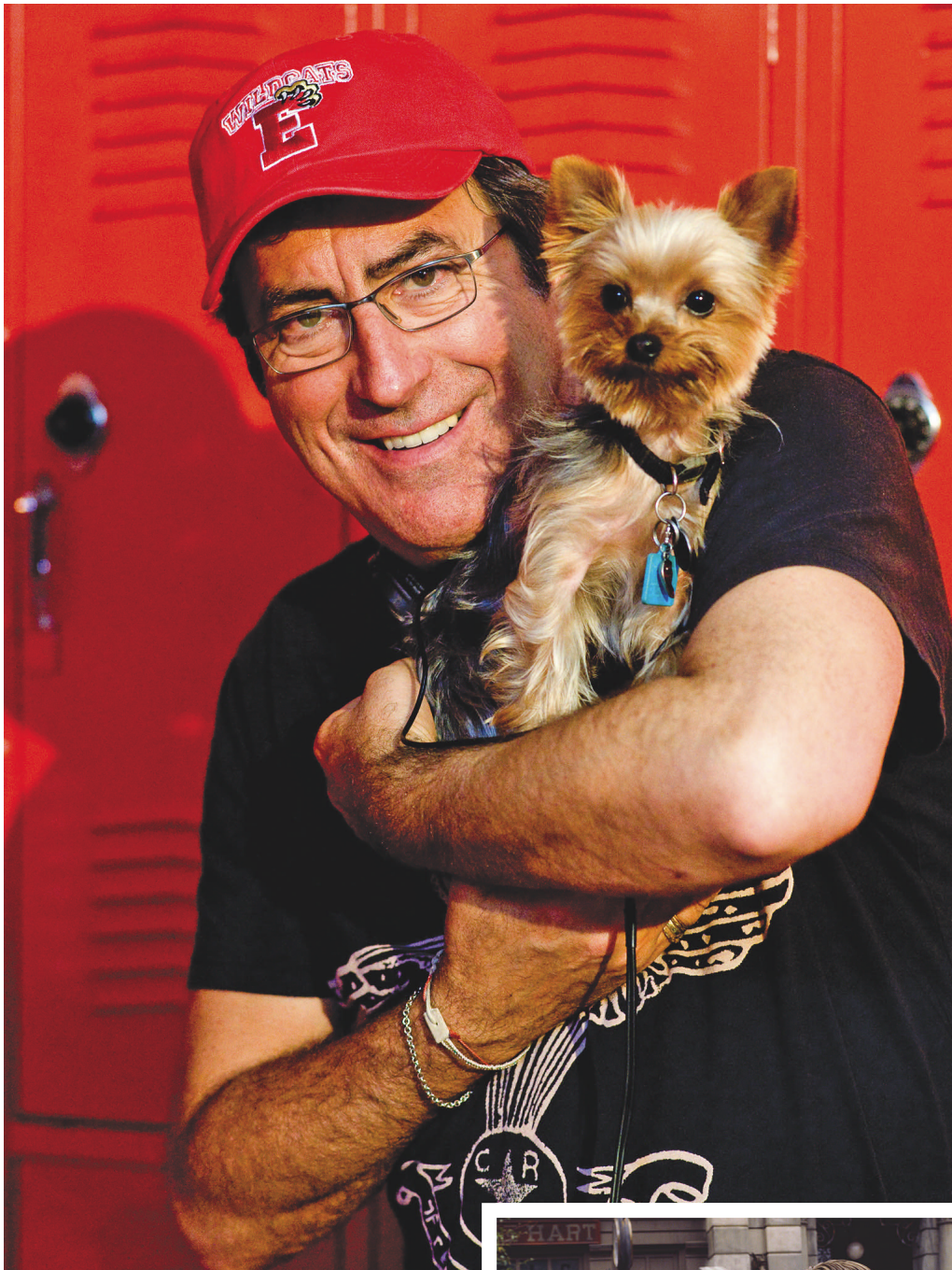
"After I read ('High School Musical'), I said, 'I love this.' It was so perfect for everything that I am. My high school drama class was such a huge part of my life. Musical theater was my first love and still my greatest love," Ortega says.

After the two "High School Musical" telepics exploded into pop-culture and record-setting cable-ratings phenomena, Disney opted to do a third installment as a theatrical release. Ortega is so intertwined with the franchise that there was never any doubt that he would helm the "High School Musical 3: Senior Year" feature, set to bow Oct. 24.

The Disney Channel had a draft script for "HSM" at the time Ortega was recruited, but none of the music had been developed, nor had any of the dance numbers been conceived. That was Ortega's department, and he took to the assignment as if he were a high school senior looking to land a full scholarship to Juilliard.

Ortega worked closely with "HSM" exec producers Bill Borden and Barry Rosenbush, scribe Peter Barsocchini and Disney Channel execs to find the right tunesmiths for the various songs. In developing the dance numbers, Ortega sought to

See **HELMER** page A47



MULTIFACTED: Ortega, top, on the "High School Musical" set with his dog Manly, who also plays Sharpay's pooch in the pics; directing Christian Bale in "Newsies," above; showing Jennifer Grey how to perform that iconic last dance in "Dirty Dancing."

ORTEGA TOUCH: SCREEN GRAB

BROADWAY EYE MEETS
ROCK 'N' ROLL HEART

The hoopla surrounding the "High School Musical" phenomenon has focused on the hard-working onscreen performers, often overlooking the talents of the series' director, Kenny Ortega, in the process. So, when the third installment hits theaters this month, will the helmer's signature touches be recognized? With help from some of his collaborators, here are five ways the "HSM" series simply wouldn't be the same in the hands of any other helmer:

CUSHIONING THE
BREAK-INTO-SONG STYLE

For young crowds, the biggest obstacle to accepting a musical is getting past the moment the characters first open their mouths to sing. "The strength of Kenny as a director is the transitions of scenes into songs, the seamlessness with which that occurs," observes Peter Barsocchini, who wrote all three films. Consider the first movie: Troy (Zac Efron) and Gabriella (Vanessa Hudgens) meet at a resort party where kids are doing karaoke. Embarrassed, they are thrust onto the stage together to sing "Start of Something New." "Halfway through the song, the way Kenny staged and imagined it, it was like nobody knew they were watching a musical," Barsocchini says.



THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

"He has the Broadway discipline to understand how the songs have to be woven into the arc of the story, but he has the heart of a wild rock 'n' roller, which connects with kids and what they want to listen to," says Barsocchini. Ortega has even been known to identify a key dramatic sequence and reinvent it as a dance scene. That's what happened with "Stick to the Status Quo" in the original movie: Ortega took the cafeteria standoff between rival cliques and transformed it into the film's centerpiece musical number.

KNOWS WHAT HE WANTS,
BUT STILL OPEN TO
SUGGESTIONS

Another Ortega signature: listening to his cast's ideas. "Half the stuff in 'High School Musical' comes from improvising," says Ashley Tisdale, who plays Sharpay. "In the first movie, Sharpay hears Gabriella singing, so she goes in the bathroom to find her, and I asked Kenny, 'Can I karate chop the door like I'm a secret agent?' It's fun because we create the backstory of each character."



A CERTAIN THEATRICALITY

Ortega's influence can best be seen in campy little touches throughout — a gesture here, a bit of clever staging there — that amplify the underlying dramatics. "Generally speaking, I think Kenny adds a kind of life that's slightly bigger than real to things and makes it feel completely organic to the piece," producer Bill Borden says. The actors tend to telegraph their inner thoughts, as fresh-face Jemma McKenzie-Brown does in "HSM 3": "When people walk off (a scene), Kenny always says, 'Look at them in such a way that says Tiara's conniving mind is working,'" the thesp explains.

— Peter Debruge

REAL-WORLD INSPIRATIONS

"HSM" regular Corbin Bleu remembers how warm-up exercises at a rehearsal session inspired Ortega: "We had a massage train going on, everybody sitting down and massaging each other in a row. He walked into the room, scratched his head a little bit, then put his hands up as if he was looking through a camera," Bleu says. Ortega invented "the roller coaster" on the spot, incorporating the rippling hands-on-shoulders wave into "HSM 2" opening song "What Time Is It?"

LICENSE TO
DRIVE SALES

"HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL"
by the numbers
(all figures are approximates)

Concerts

The Americas
775,000
tickets sold in 2006-2007

Books

50 million
sold worldwide
(65 titles in 47 countries)

HSM Magazine

7 million
copies sold (31 territories)

Videogames

4.8 million
sold worldwide

Consumer products

2007
\$400 million
in retail sales*

2008
\$2.7 billion
in retail sales expected*

*Numbers are combined sales of both "HSM" and Hannah Montana products, as Disney does not break out individual properties.

— Compiled by Brian Sheehan

TV

"High School Musical"
255 million*
viewers

"High School Musical 2"
286 million*

"HSM: Get in the Picture!"
29 million

*Numbers include 100+ countries presented in 20+ languages

CDs

"HSM" soundtrack
8.4 million
Top-selling album
worldwide 2006

"HSM2" soundtrack
6.5 million
Top-selling album
worldwide 2007

Stage

"HSM on Tour!"
1.5 million
audience members worldwide (81 venues)

"HSM: The Ice Tour"
4 million
tickets sold in 2007-2008:
3 troupes, 130 venues

DVD
20 million
sold worldwide



WHAT'S NEXT: NEW CROP

Can't stop the 'Musical'

By SHAWNA MALCOM

Wherever Kenny Ortega goes — be it a soccer stadium in Buenos Aires, an orphanage in Kenya or just to visit his 3-year-old goddaughter in Northern California — he encounters kids and parents who are stricken with "High School Musical" fever. Sometimes, they say things like, "I wish I could jump into that world and live there." But more often, they just thank the franchise's director and choreographer before adding, fervently, "Please don't stop."

"High School Musical 3: Senior Year" — the first movie in the Disney Channel's series of made-fors to get a bigscreen release — opens Oct. 24, and a fourth installment is in the works. According to Rich Ross, the president of Disney Channels Worldwide, "HSM 4" is being written, though whether it will be seen in theaters or on TV screens is still "yet to be determined."

Another question mark: Which members of the original cast — including stars Zac Efron and Vanessa Hudgens — would be willing

See STOP page A49



Ross

Songs in the key of 'High School' life

Ortega works closely with franchise's tunesmiths in creating music that rocks and rolls with the plot

By ADAM SANDLER

When Kenny Ortega got his first look at the script for "High School Musical," there was only one song — a karaoke bit — and the cafeteria scene was five pages of dialogue. Ortega then poured through the script and identified scenes that could become musical numbers.

"It was then a matter of suggesting songwriters who would have the right voice for each of those moments," recalls Steven Vincent, Disney Channel music and soundtrack veep who worked with Ortega in developing the musical end of the cabler's original telefilm.



Gerrard

Ortega and Vincent put together songwriters and composers who would constitute a musical dream team — scribes expert in different creative areas, such as pop-song crafting, Broadway and even comedy.

Among them were veteran pop hit-makers Jamie Houston and Matthew Gerrard, who had deals with Disney music publishing; and writers Randy Pe-



TEAMWORK: "High School Musical" franchise players Olesya Rulin, Monique Coleman, Lucas Grabeel, Ashley Tisdale and Vanessa Hudgens in the recording studio

terson and Kevin Quinn, who came from the animation side and also has comedy chops. Composer David Lawrence and his partner Faye Greenberg tapped their Broadway experience to create the pivotal "Stick to the Status Quo."

"We were trying to create music that felt like our audience's lives," Vincent says. "The goal was always to try to make music that sounds as legit as any-

thing else on pop radio."

Despite having less than nine weeks — a nanosecond by comparison to typical production schedules — the writers delivered 10 tracks that would propel the first "HSM" soundtrack to sales reaching nearly 5 million discs domestically and become the bestselling album of 2006, according to Nielsen SoundScan

Though it would eventually evolve

into a worldwide phenomenon, the soundtrack debut was far from auspicious: It landed a dismal first-week sales tally in January 2006 of less than 6,500 copies (compared with the first-week tally of 615,000 units for "HSM 2" in August 2007).

The debut "HSM" eventually would top the album sales charts in March — twice — thanks in part to the multiple reruns of the telefilm.

"The first ("HSM") was such a success that it was amazing how many more people got involved in the minutiae of the second and third," recalls Houston, whose works are heard on all three "HSM" discs and through acts as diverse as Kid Rock, Santana, Jessica Simpson and the Cheetah Girls.

By all accounts, the success of the "HSM" franchise is in large part due to Ortega's ability to effectively communicate to the writers exactly what he is looking for in a tune to aid the storytelling.

"We've found the best thing is to let him talk and talk, and sort of egg him on

See **SONGS** page A49



Houston

CONGRATULATIONS KENNY

You deserve it.
It's been great working with you.

Jamie Houston

MUSICAL MUSES

"Without question, the movie musical that inspired me as a young man to want to dance and work in film was 'West Side Story,'" Kenny Ortega says. After seeing the 1961 pic at a drive-in theater in his hometown of Redwood City, Calif., Ortega wanted to be George Chakiris. He got himself a pair of black drainpipe trousers and dyed one of his father's white shirts purple. Other film and stage musicals that rank high on Ortega's list of favorites:



■ **"SINGIN' IN THE RAIN":** "The effortlessness in the design of that key scene (in the living room and kitchen) with Gene Kelly, Debbie (Reynolds) and Donald (O'Connor) — the choreography, the camera, the lighting, the scenery — it's incredible."

■ Anything by **FRED ASTAIRE**

■ **ANGELA LANSBURY** in "Mame" on Broadway: "She brought me to my knees. Her voice, her presence."

■ **"ALL THAT JAZZ":** "Bob Fosse is a great hero of mine."

■ **ROB MARSHALL'S** Broadway revival of "Cabaret"

■ **"HAIR":** "Gerome Ragni and James Rado really created a future for the musical with that show."

■ **"GREY GARDENS"** on Broadway: "Some of the most powerful theater that I remember in a long time."

■ **"STRICTLY BALLROOM":** "I think Baz Luhrmann is the coolest."

■ **"MAN OF LA MANCHA":** "I've always wanted to play Don Quixote. I might come out of actor retirement some day to play that role."

— Cynthia Littleton

STAGING SPECTACULARS

Ortega translates talent to everything from Olympics to Las Vegas

By DAVID MERMELSTEIN

Tweens, teens and their parents may find it hard to believe, but there is more to Kenny Ortega than the "High School Musical" franchise and Miley Cyrus' recent Hannah Montana concert triumph. In fact, Ortega has over the years grafted his talent onto all manner of spectacle, from Olympic opening ceremonies to Super Bowl half-time shows to Las Vegas dancing fountains.

What all these ventures have in common, though, is an appreciation of movement and its integration with music, which became even more refined after Ortega struck up a strong friendship with the great Gene Kelly. Their initial contact came during the filming of the camp classic "Xanadu" (1980), which starred Kelly and was choreographed by Ortega. But it didn't end there.

"Gene took Kenny under his wing and taught him the intricacies of shooting dance on film," recalls Patricia Ward Kelly, the dancer's widow. "He gave Kenny a viewfinder and a stopwatch and explained the unique demands of choreographing numbers for the screen. It really was an old-fashioned mentor/protege relationship, with an immense amount of re-



MASTER CLASS: Kenny Ortega with his friend and mentor the late Gene Kelly

spect and affection on both sides."

Respect for his talents and affection for the man himself seem to be constants in Ortega's life, and he has pleased and endeared himself to some extremely exacting folks, including hotel impresario Steve Wynn.

"When we have something theatrical, something particularly delicious, we go to Kenny," says

See **STAGING** page A49

FOR ALL HIS HARD WORK & SUCCESS
WE WOULD LIKE TO HONOR AND CONGRATULATE
THE "BILLION DOLLAR MAESTRO"

KENNY ORTEGA

John Rigney, Matt Lichtenberg, Mark D. Friedman, Charles B. Clancy
and everyone at Level Four Business Management, LLC



LEVEL FOUR
BUSINESS MANAGEMENT LLC

HELMER

Continued from page A41

get inside the head of contemporary high schoolers for the inspiration and the settings, but he also wanted the musical storytelling to reflect classic Hollywood and Broadway tuners.

"It's like an old idea in new clothing," Ortega says of the franchise's spectacular success. "It's the same sentiment (as classic movie musicals) but with a different beat, a different sort of musical vibe. ... In 'High School Musical 3' especially you'll feel the presence of motion picture musicals. Sometimes we're just winking at them. Sometimes we throw them in the middle of the soup."

Whatever the recipe, it's all pure Kenny Ortega, says Disney Channel entertainment prexy Gary Marsh.

Marsh had the gut instinct that young viewers would respond to a contempo take on a traditional boy-gets-the-girl musical. But it was Ortega who steered the team that executed the idea in a way that surpassed Marsh's highest expectations.

"Kenny juxtaposes the expected and the unexpected — the storyline you expect with the visuals you don't expect," Marsh says. "He surprises people, and it's really hard to surprise viewers. ... What really defines 'High School Musical' is that it has one foot in the reality of high school and teenagers and angst and one foot in the fantasy of a musical. That's the straddle that Kenny created."

Ortega's other great gift is his ability to work with performers, particularly young performers. That comes in part from the many years he spent onstage, starting in his preteen years, and in part from his natural joie de vivre.

Those qualities have made him an invaluable resource to Disney Channel. He's become a key figure in the professional lives of the channel's brightest stars — not only the "HSM" troupe but also Miley Cyrus (Ortega is seen in action as a choreographer in the "Miley Cyrus/Hannah Montana: Best of Both Worlds" concert pic) and the Jonas Brothers.

"There's three parts of Kenny: He's part father, part entertainer and part friend. And he pulls different levers depending on what he needs from his talent," Marsh says. "He can be their best friend; he can be their harshest critic; he can be extraordinarily demanding. It's not a walk in the park to be on a Kenny Ortega set, but they come away from it having done their best work ever."

Ortega has an innate understanding of where his triple-threat proteges are coming



EARLY DAYS: Kenny Ortega, second from right, shines in an early cowboy-themed production.

from because he's been there, sung it and danced that. He lived the "High School Musical" fairy tale as a kid growing up in Redwood City, Calif., a smallish city about 25 miles southeast of San Francisco.

Ortega began working an actor and hooper in local theater productions as a preteen, and by the time he was 13, he landed a role in the touring production of "Oliver!"

When Ortega arrived at

Redwood City's Sequoia High School, his passion for theater was encouraged and refined by drama teacher Ray Doherty, who remains a local legend for his mentoring and tutoring of Ortega and others.

"Ray Doherty was an amazing teacher," Ortega says. "He not only taught us style and technique and the mechanics of plays and production, but we studied the classics. We did Greek tragedies. He did everything he could to give us a real education in theater."

Ortega's innate love of music and dance was instilled by his parents, Octavio and Madeline Ortega. Music was a constant in the Ortega home when Kenny and his brother, Mark, and sister, singer-actress Debra Lee Ortega, were growing up.

"When I was a little boy, I remember watching my mother

and father dance in the living room. They would jitterbug and mambo. Before we had TV, we had radio and records, and my mom and dad were always dancing," Ortega recalls. "I remember her laughing, my dad dipping her, and the joy that was in the room when they were dancing. That was exciting and thrilling to me."

Ortega had no trouble finding steady work as an actor after high school: He appeared in the San Francisco and touring productions of "Hair" (he played hippie George Berger), among other shows.

After 3½ years of letting the sun shine in, Ortega was back in San Francisco going through a series of auditions for his next gig. He was about to land a leading role in a production of "Jesus Christ Superstar" when his career took an unexpected turn

See **HELMER** page A48

CONGRATULATIONS

TO THE

BILLION DOLLAR MAESTRO

KENNY ORTEGA



NEDERLANDER PRODUCING COMPANY OF AMERICA, INC.

JAMES M. NEDERLANDER CHAIRMAN **JAMES L. NEDERLANDER** PRESIDENT

NICK SCANDALIOS
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

HELMER

Continued from page A47

thanks to an offer he received on the dance floor of a hot San Francisco nightspot.

The two men who approached him were members of Bay Area rock band the Tubes. They told Ortega they'd been admiring his moves and that they were in dire need of a choreographer to guide their stage show as they embarked on their first national tour. The Tubes wanted their live show to be rock 'n' roll performance art, except that none of them knew anything about choreography.

Ortega wasn't completely sold until the Tubes put on a performance just for him in their warehouse rehearsal space in S.F.

"It was one of the most extraordinary things I'd ever laid my eyes on. It was experimental



'SCHOOL' DAYS: Kenny Ortega, here with "HSM" stars Zac Efron and Vanessa Hudgens, critique a scene on the set.

multimedia," he says.

Ortega turned down the better-paying gig with "Jesus Christ Superstar" to become the Tubes' artistic director and unofficial eighth member. He would spend the better part of

the next 10 years touring the world with the Tubes, and it was during this time that he got his first taste of working with film.

"It was such a great learning experience. It was a great period of time and a great group of peo-

ple," Ortega says. "I feel like much of what I do and who I am was defined by that experience."

Ortega's work with the Tubes eventually caught the eye of Cher, who hired him to choreograph a TV special and concert tour. From there, he became one of the music biz's most sought-after choreographers for concerts and musicvids.

Another turning point came in 1980, when he was hired as one of two choreographers on the pic "Xanadu." The movie was a commercial flop, but not for Ortega. It gave him the opportunity to work with, and befriend, one of his idols, Gene Kelly.

Kelly had signed to do the pic with the stipulation that he would not dance, but he still wanted to sign off on the choreographer.

"I remember him saying, 'I'm not going to say that I'm dancing in this movie, but if I were to, what would you have

me do?'" Ortega recalls. "I got up and showed him some stuff. From that day we stayed great friends for 20 years."

Kelly taught Ortega how to design choreography for the camera rather than the stage and, most important, how to shoot it for maximum effect. "He enlightened me to so many things," Ortega says.

Ortega's apprenticeship with Kelly is evident in the choreography he did in such 1980s movie hits as "St. Elmo's Fire," "Pretty in Pink," "Ferris Bueller's Day Off" and "Dirty Dancing."

Ortega credits helmer John Hughes with helping him to broaden his palette as a director. Hughes had Ortega serve as second unit director on "Ferris Bueller," which greatly expanded his horizons.

In addition to numerous specials and live events, Ortega's smallscreen work includes episodes of "Chicago Hope," "Ally McBeal," "Gilmore Girls" and "Grounded for Life." Ortega likes to work in a range of genres, but more often than not, he's drawn to projects where music is a key element of the storytelling. His credits even include the choreography for the famed "dancing fountains" outside the Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas.

"If it isn't there (in the script), I'll find it. In the quietest moments, I feel rhythm. It's just who I am," Ortega says.

With "High School Musical 3" now under his belt, Ortega will devote much of his energy to launching a touring stage show devoted to the history of dance in America. He's also in talks with Paramount to direct Zac Efron in the studio's remake of "Footloose."

Although he's got no shortage of movie offers, Ortega wants to remain connected to the "High School Musical" franchise. A fourth pic for Disney Channel is in the works with a new batch of stars, including three kids featured in "HSM 3," Jemma McKenzie-Brown, Matt Prokop and Justin Martin.

Disney Channel's Marsh jokes that Ortega may now be out of the channel's price range, but Ortega sure sounds like a proud papa as he sings the praises of his graduating class of stars and the newcomers. He's also excited because his nephew Kyle Robert Ortega has a role in "HSM 3," and the pic even has a few choice scenes for his beloved Yorkshire terrier, Manly.

"I'm very proud of this movie. It's big and bold," Ortega says. "My heart is up there all over it. And I'm proud to say that."

Norman Lear once told me that he's never met a greater visionary than Kenny Ortega. Mr. Lear certainly knew what he was talking about, and now, so does the entire world!

Congratulations
To Our Wonderful Friend
You are the
GREATEST MAESTRO!

Much Love-
Kelly and Lou

Congratulations Kenny!

"Imagination Creates Reality"

- Todd Snyder & James Phares

SONGS

Continued from page A44

to talk more because you want him to say every thought or visual he's got in his head for the song," says Gerrard, who, with co-writer Robbie Nevil, has several hits for all three "HSM" soundtracks, including four of the first five singles on "HSM 3."

"Kids don't listen to albums the way I did when I was younger. Kids create their own playlists," says "HSM" series writer Peter Barsocchini. "Kenny really understood that and helped Disney Channel invent this form of musical. When Kenny gets the playlist in his mind, he works from there.... In 'High School Musical 3,' 'Scream' could be a concert song for a rock 'n' roller, while 'I Want It All' has a very theatrical, funny 'Forbidden Broadway' sensibility. Kenny Ortega is the one person who could link those two songs in the same musical."

"He gives you incredible amounts of information, but he still wants our instincts from a musical standpoint," Gerrard adds.

Indeed, those involved in the process note that the ritual Ortega uses to describe to the writers his vision for a song is nothing short of theatrical. They call it being "Ortegrified."

"Kenny will not only articulate verbal direction, but he'll also dance around the room and act out specific gestures, which passes along a critical glimpse of the passion, emotion, lyrical necessity and true energy of how he envisions the moment," observes Mitchell Leib, president of music and soundtracks for Disney.

"What he says is going to be on the screen, actually is," Nevil says. "I've done videos, and sometimes ... on paper a scene looks one way, and then on the screen it's not what you expected. But what Kenny says it's going to be, it is, and then some. It's genius."



FRESHMEN CLASS: Jemma McKenzie-Brown, Matt Prokop and Justin Martin co-star in "High School Musical 3" and look to take the franchise to a new semester.

STOP

Continued from page A42

to return? While Ross hopes to "have one or more of the cast members back," the next sequel will certainly include a slew of new faces since Troy, Gabriella and the rest of the gang graduate in "HSM 3."

Three of those new characters, all sophomores, are introduced to audiences in "HSM 3": Jimmy "The Rocket Man" Zara (Matt Prokop), a rocker who hopes to fill Troy Bolton's musical shoes; the impressionable and enthusiastic Donny Deion (Justin Martin); and Tiara Gold (Jemma McKenzie-Brown, a British actress who was selected after an intensive search across Great Britain and the U.S.).

"Tiara is an exchange student who presents herself as desiring to help Sharpay out in any way possible," says Ortega, who adds that he is open to participating in future installments. "She's a little 'All About Eve.'"

"To introduce each of the kids, we created a special gag. With

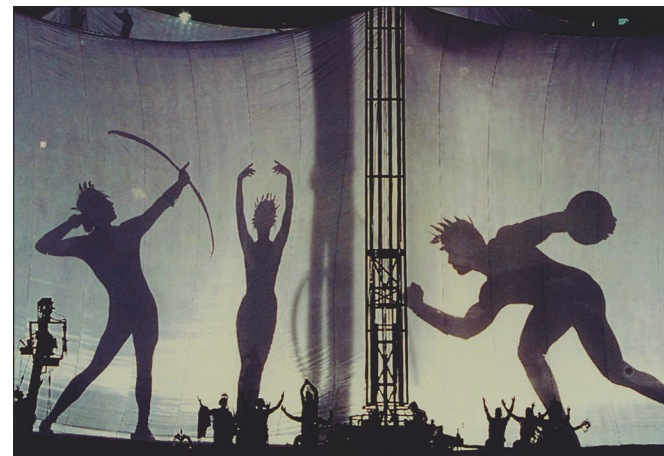
Matt Prokop, he's on the basketball team, it's the most critical moment in the game, and you realize Zac Efron has recognized his athletic ability. So you add dimension to your main character, Zac, who doesn't have to be the star. He can really use teamwork," explains producer Bill Borden. "We're not trying to set up a new Zac Efron. We're creating new characters, not people to step into the shoes of existing characters. It's more of a handoff."

An instant hit when it premiered on Disney Channel in January 2006, theatrical versions have already been released in Argentina and Mexico; a Brazilian adaptation is about to go into production; and Chinese and Russian versions are being written. "It's been exciting to see how the 'High School Musical' DNA can be interpreted and expanded in many ways," Ross says. "And certainly, the passion consumers have for the property is seemingly limitless."

Which begs the question: Just how long can the beat go on? "I like to compare it to how fertile J.K. Rowling found the

Harry Potter world," Ross says of the franchise that encompasses seven books and, ultimately, eight films. "'High School Musical' is very much on our radar for many years to come."

Ortega harbors even grander ambitions. "How long has Mickey Mouse been around?" he says with a laugh.



GAMES SHOW: Working with producer Don Mischer, Kenny Ortega choreographed the opening ceremonies of the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympics, above, and the 2002 Winter Games in Salt Lake City.

STAGING

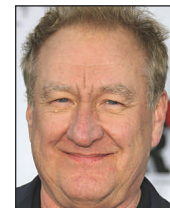
Continued from page A46

Wynn. "The opening of the Bellagio was one of those things, and he's now working on the opening of Encore, my latest hotel."

Ortega is also crafting a new three-minute show for the Lake of Dreams at the Wynn in Las Vegas. Inspired by Albert Lamorisse's "The Red Balloon" (1956), the installation — Wynn calls it "the most fanciful we've done together" — involves two floating globes interacting with music by "Ratatouille's" Michael Giacchino. "They'll dance on the water as if blown by a breeze, change color and paint the lake," Wynn says, adding, "Kenny and I will be working on another project, but I'm not prepared to announce it yet."

None of this should surprise anyone who recalls Ortega's work with Don Mischer, who for 30 years has produced some of this country's greatest extravaganzas. Together, Mischer and Ortega produced the opening ceremonies of the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta and the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City as well as Barbra Streisand's celebrated "Millennium" concert on New Year's Eve 1999.

"His mind constantly works to come up with something new and different," says Mischer, who first worked with Ortega in 1982 and last did so in 2005, on Super Bowl XXXIX. "He has innate talent. You might use the word gifted. He doesn't settle. He never says, 'That's good enough.' You want someone to push, to make it look better and sound better, and that's his approach. He really cares about everything he does. It's never been just a job for him; it's always been a passion. I have higher expectations when he's involved. We may have to compromise, but in the end it's going to be worthy, every part of it."



Mischer

KENNY,

THE PUBLIC SUPPLIES THE TIMING

THE BUSINESS SUPPLIES THE OPPORTUNITY

BUT ONLY YOU SUPPLY THE INSPIRATION!

*CONGRATULATIONS TO
MY FRIEND AND PARTNER*

*WITH ADMIRATION, RESPECT
AND MOST OF ALL LOVE,*

PAUL





Pete Metzger/Variety

DRAMA MAMA

DECADES OF NURTURING KNOW-HOW

How parenthood taught Judy Savage to groom showbiz kids

By DAVID MERMELSTEIN

Judy Savage has been representing child actors for 30 years, heading up the Savage Agency, the longest-running youth-focused talent agency to withstand being gobbled up by one of the major firms. But if you turned the clock back and asked a younger Judy what she wanted to be when she grew up, you'd get a very different answer.

Like a real-life Juno McGuff, Savage faced an unanticipated pregnancy at age 16. She finished high school by correspondence, then earned a college degree in biology while raising three kids. In a sense, it was her eldest son, Mark, who chose Savage's current career for her with his desire to perform onstage at a young age.

A natural entertainer, Mark landed a part in the road company of "Mame," starring Celeste Holm in the role originated by Angela Lans-

See **DECADES** Page A56



ALL MY CHILDREN: Savage is surrounded by 23 of her clients in the 1980s, including Jodie Sweetin, center, and Elizabeth Berkley, top right.

LESSONS LEARNED

Acting guru gave Judy's kids the edge in auditions

By IAIN BLAIR

Showbiz is full of successful double acts — Abbott & Costello, Laurel & Hardy, Martin & Lewis — but behind the scenes, few partnerships have been as long-lived or effective as the 30-year collaboration between child agent Judy Savage and acting coach Diane

Hardin. Together, the duo virtually rewrote the book on how to develop young talent to be camera-ready before sending them out on auditions.

Hardin, who has greasepaint in her blood (her parents met at a play, her husband is an actor and daughter Melora plays Jan in "The Office"), started as an actress. "I was also teaching classes for

the Gifted Program in the L.A. schools because I loved kids, and I loved acting. So I thought, I'll put those two together and teach children," she recalls. When a friend suggested teaching professional children, she began with a class of 10 in a friend's den. "It was all word of mouth and just grew," she says.

See **GURU** Page A55



Hardin



The Savage Agency

Ryan Malgarini

Gary Unmarried
How to Eat Fried Worms
Freaky Friday



Perry Mattfeld

The Norton Avenue
All-Stars
Alex in Wonderland



Aldrin Mrazek

October Road
Prison Break
Pushing Daisies



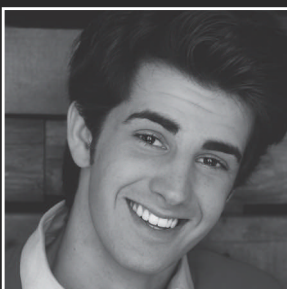
Paul Orrantia

La Linea
The Nail



Cameron Palatas

October Road
iCarly



Nick Palatas

The Scooby Doo:
The Beginning



Stephanie Patton

Medium
ER
Cold Case



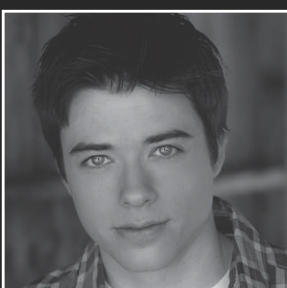
Trenton Rogers

He's Just Not That
Into You
The No-sit List
The Starter Wife



Sami Sandzimier

All Grown Up



Matt Smith

Wizards of Waverly Place
Zoey 101
Drake and Josh



Sophia Linkletter

Kids Say the
Darndest Things
Joseph and the Amazing
Technicolor Dreamcoat



ANOTHER HELPING: An activity as simple as feeding the homeless at L.A.'s Union Rescue Mission let actors Raymond McElroy, Tyler Goucher and Blake Neitzel bond with other kids their age.

PREP SQUAD

SCREEN KIDS LEARN TO ACT NORMAL

Young performers sample real life via Looking Ahead program

By YVONNE PUIG

You know all those cute, well-adjusted kids you see on TV? Don't forget, they're *acting*. When the cameras aren't rolling, those seemingly perfect youngsters may actually be more susceptible to depression, anxiety, body image issues, the temptations of drugs and alcohol and so on — consider Lindsay Lohan or Jamie Lynn Spears. Growing up on set among adults, they don't necessarily have access to the school dances, football games or everyday peer support groups that other kids take for granted.

"Working as a child can be a very isolating experience," says Keith McNutt, who oversees the Actors Fund's West Coast operations. "They often spend long hours commuting between auditions or jobs, and many are homeschooled and new to L.A., all of which can add to challenges of meeting friends and building a social network."

Kids agent Judy Savage noticed it, too, which is why she got involved with the Actors Fund's Looking Forward program. (She's no relation to Fred Savage, though the former child

star chairs the same advisory board on which Judy serves.) Launched in 2003, Looking Forward aims to give young performers some semblance of a normal childhood and ease their transition into adulthood.

"The general idea is, how do we help kids become responsible adults?" McNutt explains. "We teach them about giving back. We help them figure out where their own leadership qualities are. And we help them learn how to interact with each other in a positive way that's not about competing for jobs."

Group-oriented activities include everything from field trips and sporting events to community service and volunteer opportunities, all of which encourage young actors to focus beyond themselves and interact with other kids their age. One week, a group might go out to the Motion Picture Home for bingo and ice cream with retired performers; the next, they're invited to come together for a Halloween costume party with their 18-and-under peers.

For someone like 17-year-old Philomena Bankston, who'd been acting in New Orleans until Hurricane Katrina hit and who then relocated to L.A., Looking For-

ward has been a life-changer. "This program sees so many kids through hard times," she says. "It's like being part of a huge family" — a supportive peer group nearly 300 members strong.

"I know that within this group I have a few people I can count on and really call my friends," agrees 18-year-old Brittney Lee Harvey.

Membership is open to anyone in the union with an agent, as well as those who've earned money working in the industry for at least two years, though Looking Forward also does outreach to parents and newcomers living in Oakwood short-term housing.

Even though its members all share an interest in performing, Looking Forward encourages its young charges to leave showbiz at the door, instead giving them a chance to "just be kids," McNutt says.

Career panels and mentorship sessions focus on other fields the kids might like to pursue down the road.

"We don't do any professional training on acting," he explains. "The educational piece of the program is all about planning for what you want to do as an adult. There's a big emphasis on college."

GROWING STRONG

Judy Savage prides herself in cultivating a well-adjusted brood. Variety catches up with half a dozen of her alums.

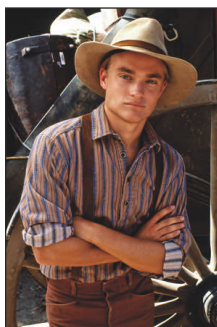


CHAD ALLEN

Matthew Cooper, "Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman"

Now: Playing leading roles in such films as "End of the Spear" and Sundance selection "Save Me," plus regular appearances on TV and stage.

Then: "I was one of Judy's first clients. Judy was and still is like a second mom to me. She



really helped when I was deciding to come out of the closet by taking me out to lunch and telling me, 'Whatever you are dealing with, it's OK,' and, 'No matter what, you are a perfect person.'"

KELLIE MARTIN

Rebecca Thacher, "Life Goes On"

Now: She still does some acting, appearing in "ER" and the "Mystery Woman" series, but says she now focuses her abilities on writing, directing and raising her daughter.

Then: "The thing I love so much about Judy is her enthusiasm and this infectious energy she gives off. I am still her friend today, even though she is no longer my agent."



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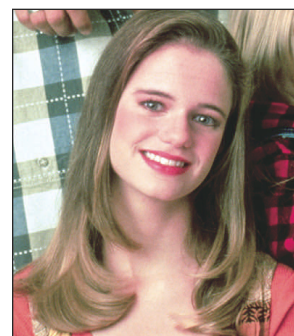


ANDREA BARBER

Kimberly Gibbler, "Full House"

Now: Stopped acting after "Full House" and dedicates much of her energy toward being a mom and wife.

Then: "She knew how to put the client first. I can remember when I told her I was going to take a break from acting, she became so supportive. She is much more than my agent; she was more like a close aunt."

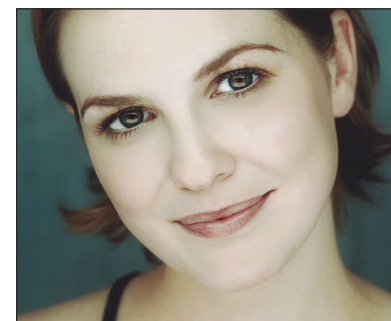


LARISA OLEJNIK

Alex Mack, "The Secret World of Alex Mack"

Now: Took a break from acting to pursue an education at Sarah Lawrence College before returning to the screen.

Then: "The funny thing is, Judy didn't sign me at first. She told me I had no eye contact and to lose the chipmunk voice and come back when those problems were solved. So I lowered my voice a little, worked on eye contact, went back in, got signed, and I am still her client today."



Judy,

Congratulations on 30 successful years! We are proud of you and we love you very much!

Philip Kal, Mark Savage, Tracie Savage Booras, Michael Booras, Michael Tate Booras, Brad Savage, Bronwen Savage, Keaton Savage, Trevyn Savage, George Savage, Eileen Savage, Taylor Savage, Nicole Savage, Kristeen Sydney Sanders, Terry Sanders, Kelsey Sanders, Tarayn Sanders, Kyler Sanders, Debbie Thompson, Dr. Robert Thompson, Rob Thompson, Trent Thompson, Chad Thompson, The "Queen Mother" Betty Peterhans



Gustavo Caballero/Getty Images

DANICA MCKELLAR

Winnie Cooper, "The Wonder Years"

Now: Did a season-long stint on "The West Wing," but her real passion comes from writing math books for middle and high school kids. She followed up bestselling "Math Doesn't Suck" with "Kiss My Math," which is designed for kids to see it isn't uncool to have fun with math.

Then: "She let us be kids. I bet most of her kids ended up being some of the most normal and happiest adults." — Justin Kroll

GURU

Continued from page A51

The team was born soon after Savage started her long-running talent agency.

"I saw how hard it was for some child stars to make that transition to adulthood, and I thought, if adults get trained, why not children?" says Savage, who investigated various acting coaches and was unimpressed by the techniques they used, convinced that training kids was about more than teaching them to cry on cue.

"Back then, the word in the

'I LIKE HER APPROACH, THAT KIDS NEED TO BE KIDS FIRST AND ACTORS SECOND. SHE WAS INCREDIBLY SUPPORTIVE OF ALL THAT.'

DIANE HARDIN, ACTING COACH

business was: Don't train your children, they won't be natural," Hardin explains. "But Judy came and watched a class, liked what I was doing, and we hit it off. I liked her approach, that kids need to be kids first and actors second, because she always encouraged kids if they wanted to go to camp or book out for a

while. She was incredibly supportive of all that."

Soon Savage was sending all her clients to Hardin. "I'd watch their growth and progress and tell her when I felt they were ready to compete in the business," Hardin reports. "I remember when Nicholle Tom ("The Nanny") had this amazing break-

through in class one night. I immediately called Judy and told her she'd really become an actor. Judy sent her out the next day for 'Beethoven,' and she got the part — on her very first audition."

Although she sold her Young Actors' Space school in 2004, Hardin is far from retired and now teaches in New York four times a year. "Judy and I changed the whole way people thought about training kids," she says proudly.

"I could never find another Diane," Savage laments, "although I've tried. She's like the Pied Piper with kids. She has that magic touch."



AARON LOHR

Dean Portman, "The Mighty Ducks" sequels

Now: Moved on to theater work in New York. Did "Marko the Prince" at the Immigrants' Theater in June.

Then: Says the best advice Judy ever gave him was, "An audition is like a bus at a bus stop. Sometimes you miss it, but another will come along soon enough."



Thank you Judy Savage

For being there for us for 30 years.

-From your friends

CHAD ALLEN	HANK HARRIS
ANDREA BARBER	HARRIS KAL
DARIN BARBER	NILS LARSEN
DON BARBER	FREDERICK LEVY
JUSTIN BARBER	AARON LOHR
SHERRY BARBER	JOE LORENZO
MARNIE COOPER	AL ONORATO
AUSTIN COYLER	JEAN PAGE
PATRICK DAY	RON PATTERSON
JIMMY ENCAO	ALMANIQUE JACQUET SOMERS
JEFF FRANKLIN	JOY STEVENSON
LUCAS GRABEEL	CHRISTOPHER THOMAS
HARRIET GREENSPAN	CONSTANCE TILLOTSON
HUNTER GOMEZ	DAVID TOM
DIANE HARDIN	HEATHER TOM
MICHAEL HARRAH	NICHOLLE TOM

DECADES

Continued from page A51

bury. When the young actor was called to Los Angeles to appear in the show opposite Lansbury herself, the move prompted Savage to recast her family's destiny and focus on showbiz.

"I realized we were all having so much fun," Savage recalls from behind a large desk in her cozy Hollywood office. "So we sold our house in Detroit and moved to L.A. We had no jobs, but I had written ahead to agents, and after the first day, we had one. Three days later, the kids had jobs."

What followed, besides divorce from the father of her children, was a whirligig life of casting calls, rehearsals and shoots, with all three of Savage's children — not just Mark, but also Tracie and Brad — variously involved in stage shows, commercials and movies.

Mark, who today writes musicals and runs IT at the Savage Agency, continued performing through his teens, taking his final bow in a Florida production of "Hello, Dolly." Brad, currently a marketing veep at NBC Universal, appeared in nine movies and 167 commercials by the time he was 11, pulling the plug on his acting career after 1984's "Red Dawn." Tracie made numerous guest appearances on TV series before becoming a news reporter, now at KFWB radio, but she still enjoys the occasional TV cameo.



EXTENDED FAMILY: Judy Savage launched her agency on Valentine's Day, 1978. The 1980s and '90s were particularly good to her clients. "Every sitcom on the air had one or two kids," she says.

"Tracie's competition was fierce," Savage says. "This is a much harder business for young girls because there are so many more of them trying out. There are twice as many things for boys and only half as many of them."

Although Savage built her

agency on the experience that came from being mother to three child actors, she initially met resistance from the very pros she already knew, rather than finding open doors. "Trying to get these casting directors who knew me as a mother,

not as an agent, to see me as a professional wasn't easy," she recalls.

She persevered, though, buying a small bungalow on a side street in Hollywood for \$40,000 and then setting up shop there in early 1978 — it remains the Savage Agency's home to this day. "The first four or five years were horrible," she acknowledges. "But each year, I'd do a little bit better."

Early on, she made ends meet by flipping houses in the then-flush real estate market. She was also lucky enough to be solidly positioned for what she calls "the best years for children" in network TV — the 1980s and the '90s. "Think about all those ABC shows that featured kids, and those shows lasted for eight years each," says Savage, who always puts kids' interests first when signing new clients — which is more than can be said for many stage moms.

"I interview the parents and the kids very closely to make sure (acting) is a passion for the kids," she says. "If the parents want it and the kids don't, we don't want them. If baseball's your passion, play baseball. They need the passion *and* the look."

Her protective, mother-hen quality comes across immediately in person — a plaque in her photograph-filled office proclaims, "Nothing you do for children is ever wasted," and she backs up such sentiments by noting of her clients, "I've only had two kids who got into trou-

'I INTERVIEW THE PARENTS AND THE KIDS TO MAKE SURE (ACTING) IS A PASSION FOR THE KIDS.'

JUDY SAVAGE,
FOUNDER, THE SAVAGE AGENCY

ble. All the rest were clean and went to college."

Her biggest foe seems to be the aging process — not just because her clients grow up and leave the business when they reach young adulthood, but also because those who continue acting tend to defect to larger agencies with more diverse portfolios.

"These big agents shower these kids with gifts and promises," she says. "Lucas Grabeel (of "High School Musical" fame) is the exception."

Yet even in her own niche, business can be cutthroat. "When I started, people didn't poach," she says. "We were all friends. We even informed each other when we were approached by one another's clients. It's much more competitive now."

She attributes these changes largely to economic woes. "Because of the strikes, almost half our commercial business went away. And because California doesn't give tax credits, we're losing shows every year," she explains.

Yet the news is far from all bad. Lately, Savage has been involved in what appears to be a mutually beneficial relationship with Paradigm, the large, Beverly Hills-based talent agency. "Paradigm didn't want the hassles of a children's department, so they came to us," she says. "When I think somebody's about to jump ship, they take a look, and if they take them on, we split the fees 50-50. Right now, we're sharing Zach Mills."

After 30 years of looking after others, Savage is finally thinking about looking after herself a bit more. She's taken on a partner, Stella Alex, to whom she's ultimately selling the Savage Agency.

"I'll always be here if they need me," Savage says. But she also is making time for things that her 30-year, full-time job didn't always permit: gardening, seeing more of her grandchildren and teaching weekend seminars on the subject she knows best.

"I'm even thinking of starting a clothing line for older folks," she adds. "You know, the population is aging."

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BROWN

Continued from page A26

year. (Coming full circle, a related YA novel — “13: A Novel” — was recently released, penned by Brown and Dan Elish, who co-writes the book of the tuner with Robert Horn.)

Though the show, about a young New Yorker who finds himself uprooted to Indiana, was originally Brown's creation, don't look for any real-life tidbits from his youth.

“Autobiographically, I'm nowhere near this,” Brown insists. “But emotionally, I'm all over it.”

He writes squarely in a rock idiom, a far cry from, for instance, the more traditional tuner mode of “Parade.” “I'm writing for character,” he explains.

The show features an all young-adult cast, with kids filling its 13 lead roles as well as the five band positions (counting understudies and backups, the show employs 25 kids in all).

“A bunch of 13-year-olds in contemporary America will sound like contemporary music,” he explains.

According to Brown, the process of finding the show's cast of “astonishingly talented” teens was tough, in large part because often even gifted young performers haven't yet cultivated strong audition skills.

He adds, though, that he's learned as much from his young cast as they have from him.

“I have to open myself to these kids and give them all this love and joy and room to explore,” he says. “And the kids give that back to me so much.”

— Gordon Cox



CLASS ACT: Tony winner Jason Robert Brown's latest tuner features an all-kid cast and band.

RUDIN

Continued from page A26

Shulman (ditto at Fox). “It was a fascinating education,” she recalls. “After a day in a casting office, you see up close how tough the business is — and I realized I was no longer an actress.”

After “slaving away” for a few years, Rudin got her big break in 2002 casting the Ensemble Studio Theater's prestigious one-act play marathon in New York, then spent five years as head of casting for Walt Disney Animation Studios, where she worked on “Chicken Little” and “The Incredibles.”

Rudin's recent discoveries include Cypress Smith, 10, and Jerome Stephens Jr., 9, who came from open calls and are now starring in “The Lion King” on Broadway. And Disney has been known to turn its stage prodigies into superstars (long before “Camp Rock,” Nick Jonas played Chip in “Beauty and the Beast”).

“I look for natural charisma and personality in kids,” Rudin says. “I do not like kids who are all cutesy and coiffed. We like kids with lisps, braces and freckles, and who also have real lives outside acting.”

— Iain Blair

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MENU

Continued from page A1

9 to 14 — grow more archaic by the hour. Titles such as Disney's "High School Musical" and "Hannah Montana" or Nick's "iCarly" and "Naked Brothers Band" manage to pull in mass auds, but internally, a lot of kid-focused networks target sub-demos.

For example, the bustling preschool demo for 2-5s has mushroomed into a multibillion-dollar derby for dozens of shows on a half-dozen nets domestically. Tween fare has also experienced a boom, especially since Disney made an aggressive move a few years ago to reclaim ground ceded to Nick in the '90s.

How Disney does it

If anyone can claim to still be aiming for the masses, it's the Mouse House.

"Do we slice and dice? No," says Richard Loomis, senior VP of marketing and creative for Disney Channel. "Do we try to be smart and focused and target people based on their media habits? Yes, that's something we look at. We don't ever look to exclude a demo."

Loomis cites "Phineas and Ferb," which launched last January. The toon was intended to balance out the female-skewing net's offering, though it still needed to get everybody into the tent.

"It's a mosaic approach," the exec says. "You have the foundation of mass media to get kids interested, but then you complement that with print, digital and grassroots efforts. We had a



AGING UP: "Drake & Josh" star Josh Peck has strategically chosen edgy roles — including "Spun," "Mean Creek" and "The Wackness," above — to expand his following beyond the Nick crowd.

big presence on the Winter X Games for example, which delivered boys."

Other players aren't as interested in completing the whole mosaic — content to pursue certain tiles.

"People who try to be all things to all people wind up being nothing to nobody," says Cheryl Gotthelf, senior VP at Chorion, the U.K. company behind Nick's upcoming "Olivia" and Cartoon Network's "The Mr. Men Show."

"Mr. Men," based on the 37-year-old line of books depicting characters defined by their emotions (source of the original "Little Miss Sunshine"), straddles the 2-5 and 6-11 demos. Built on

today's multiplatform model, the show has robust ancillary components — from online games to consumer products — that relieve pressure from the TV show to dominate the entire demo. For some ages, the T-shirts and games are the entry point. Adults who themselves grew up on the books are also fueling sales, as is the case with other new series, like Nick's "Banana Splitz"-endeavored "Yo Gabba Gabba."

"We have this very elastic program," Gotthelf says. "Self-expression has hit at the heart-beat of this generation. Today's consumers, from a very early age, are about personalization and customization."

As if marketing weren't anx-

iety-provoking enough, there are also plenty of pitfalls for programmers and development execs. Now that the larger age headings are breaking into smaller units, the temptation is to micro-target and build a portfolio of programs that, taken together, reaches everybody.

Such is the case with preschool nets, which appeal at various times of the day to 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds but seldom to all of them at once. Tweens, similarly, are a compressed demo, and while some properties "age down" to draw 5- and 6-year-olds, the sweet spot tends to be 8-11. That narrow range can drive a vast array of revenue-producing extensions, from Broadway shows to sound-

tracks, but it also can be a strait-jacket for actors. Witness the flap over Vanity Fair's racy Miley Cyrus photo shoot, or Josh Peck's stoner role in "The Wackness."

Boys vs. girls

Gender also plays an increasingly prominent role. "Shows have become much more deliberately aimed at boys or girls because they can more easily get traction that way," notes Alice Wilder, who spent a decade as chief researcher on "Blue's Clues" and now produces PBS' "Super Why!"

As the cross-currents continue, some vets caution against too much calculation by those on the creative side.

"It's always problematic when show creators try to take the age of the audience into consideration," says Josh Selig, founder and head of Little Airplane, the New York animation boutique known for Nick's "Wonder Pets!" The company, which employs about 70 people, has just announced plans to expand into the feature film arena with family offerings.

How will Little Airplane define the family audience? Based on material, Selig maintains. "Time and time again, I've seen people try to make a show more aspirational and then they lose the younger kids, or they've tried to go younger and the older ones lose interest. And before they know it, they've diluted the original idea."

Assistant managing editor Dade Hayes is the author of "Anytime Playdate: Inside the Preschool Entertainment Boom."

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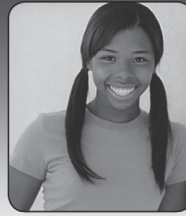
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These bright young things are poised to break through in the coming year.

**UP
NEXT**

ELLE FANNING

Genetic advantage

Hollywood is littered with talented young actors stuck in the shadows of successful older siblings, but Elle Fanning's shaping up to be a formidable young thesp in her own right.

The 10-year-old first appeared onscreen playing younger versions of big sis Dakota's character in "I Am Sam" and "Taken," but started catching critics' attention soon enough after appearing on her own in such dramas as "The Door in the Floor," "Reservation Road" and "Babel" (in which she played Cate Blanchett and Brad Pitt's daughter).

Now, at roughly the same age that Dakota broke out, Elle has prominent roles in two major features. First, she delivered a talked-about performance as an autistic girl in 2008 Sundance selection "Phoebe in Wonderland," opposite Felicity Huffman and Patricia Clarkson. Next, she appears as a young Blanchett opposite a reverse-aging Pitt in David Fincher's "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button."

It's enough to make a big sis proud: "Her character in 'Phoebe,' just the way she feels for other people — that is my sister," Dakota beams. "She has such compassion for others. I love watching her so much."

— Gregory Ellwood



Amy Graves/WireImage.com



Henny Garfunkel

WILLA HOLLAND

Discovered by Spielberg

Both mom and dad were dead-set against letting Willa Holland pursue acting, but it's hard to argue when two legendary directors insist otherwise.

"I was playing over at Steven Spielberg's house" — next door to stepfather Brian De Palma's place in the Hamptons — "and he was filming little wedding scenes and doing homevideos," she says.

When her parents came to pick her up, Spielberg insisted, "You've got to put her in front of a camera." De Palma was for it, too.

So Holland took their opinions to heart, starting off as a teen model, before graduating to a steady acting gig on "The OC." The show's producers loved working with her so much, they invited her to do three episodes on "Gossip Girl" this fall.

The 17-year-old agreed, though she insists the bigscreen is her focus going forward. Holland played a teen wannabe-actress wasting away on the fringes of Hollywood in "Garden Party" and co-stars in two indies at the Toronto Film Fest last month: "Middle of Nowhere" and "Genova." Next up is doomsday fantasy "Legion."

— Peter Debruge

VICTORIA JUSTICE

Nick's new face

Born and raised in Hollywood (Florida, that is), Victoria Justice realized her calling at age 8, when she saw a kid the same age in a potato-chip commercial. She simply couldn't resist the siren song of Hollywood (California, of course).

Since her debut in an Ovaltine spot, Justice has added more than 30 commercials to her resume, though it's her three-season co-starring role on Nickelodeon's hit "Zoey 101" that launched her to the big time.

Justice's stint as Lola Martinez impressed not only tween auds but also the execs at Nickelodeon, who are developing a new star vehicle for her through a partnership with Sony BMG. They tapped "iCarly" creator Dan Schneider to concoct the show, complete with original music to feature Justice's vocal talents.

The network also encouraged her to flaunt her pipes in TV movie "Spectacular!" (if all goes according to plan, the Nick original could do for competitive show choirs what Disney's "High School Musical" did for drama students). That took little convincing for Justice, who counts classics like Sinatra and top-40 stars like Alicia Keys as her inspirations.

— Brian Sheehan



Corbis

DEMI LOVATO

Disney darling

There's only one Miley Cyrus, but that doesn't stop Disney from trying to make more. And after starring in this summer's top-rated "Camp Rock," 16-year-old Demi Lovato is well-poised to take off.

The Texas native started acting at the age of 6 in "Barney & Friends," which led to Disney Channel's interstitial short series "As the Bell Rings." Lovato, who has played guitar since the age of 11, is equally comfortable acting and singing. She opened for "Camp Rock" co-stars the Jonas Brothers on tour this summer, which helped make Lovato's debut, "Don't Forget," the most downloaded album on iTunes the week it was released in September.

Next up, she'll star in Disney Channel sitcom "Sonny With a Chance" as a Midwestern girl who comes to L.A. to act in a TV show after being discovered on the Internet. Also set for early 2009 is Disney Channel TV movie "Princess Protection Program," in which she co-stars with good friend Selena Gomez, followed by "Camp Rock 2" next summer.

"She reminded us all of a young Mary Tyler Moore," says Disney Channel senior VP of original programming Adam Bonnett. "She was fearless with the comedy."

— Pat Saperstein

CHRIS MASSOGLIA

From geek to 'Freak'

Few people can say they live in Minneapolis and work in Hollywood, although Chris Massoglia is starting to get used to it.

He began auditioning for commercials after "falling into" acting through workshops at a local dance school, and he's been sending audition tapes from home nonstop ever since.

First he landed a few modest TV roles, followed by the lead in "A Plumm Summer," a family adventure-comedy released last spring. Though early credits list him as Chris Kelly, the 16-year-old thesp recently decided to reclaim his family's

last name, Massoglia.

The thesp will soon be taking his farthest trip away from home for "Cirque du Freak," based on Darren Shan's fantasy series. Directed by Paul Weitz and in the company of John C. Reilly and Salma Hayek, Massoglia plays a boy who recognizes a vampire at a traveling freak show and unwittingly breaks a truce between warring factions.

Massoglia thought of himself as a student on set, absorbing lessons not just of acting, but filmmaking as well. The eager learner also has "The Hole" on the horizon.

— Brian Sheehan





Associated Press

HUNTER PARRISH

A heartthrob awakens

At 21, Hunter Parrish is a little old to be coping with the kind of overnight growth spurt that sometimes hits younger stars. But after playing Mary-Louise Parker's apathetic, semi-scrawny teen son for three seasons on "Weeds," Parrish showed up this summer suddenly buff — and the producers were more than happy to exploit the upgrade.

In one of the show's more memorable scenes, Parker catches Parrish in a compromising position with a blonde twice his age. "This season, I think it was a goal of ours to actually have me be shirtless in at least every episode," Parrish quipped on E!'s "Chelsea Lately."

Broadway has similar designs on the actor, who strips down onstage as Melchior in the sexually charged "Spring Awakening."

"I never conventionally thought of myself as good-looking growing up," he says, adding, "I'm comfortable with who I am. There's an adaptive essence to me, and I can change my look just by parting my hair. I love pulling myself out of the character and adding something that doesn't exist."

— Anthony D'Alessandro

JORDAN PRUITT

No ordinary girl

All that Disney marketing aside, much of pop star Jordan Pruitt's success can be attributed to sheer dedication. The Georgia gal has been performing publicly since she was 4 everywhere from coffeehouses to amusement parks. Hollywood Records signed her at age 13 after she gave an impromptu a cappella performance in the top execs' offices, putting her on tour with the Chee-tah Girls, Vanessa Hudgens and the Jonas Brothers.

"My mom says that each venue builds different types of fans. If you build one or two every night, you're doing a great job," she says. Sure enough, her first single, "Outside Looking In," tallied more than a million plays on her MySpace page last year.

Sophomore album "Permission to Fly" may be a nod to Christina Aguilera, she admits, but the songstress stands apart from her predecessors for her upbeat dance sound and good-girl aura. Pruitt sidestepped the usual vampy teen idol album cover, opting for a natural closeup reminiscent of the poses Linda Ronstadt and Carly Simon struck for their albums in the '70s instead.

"I got a good feeling when I chose the photo," Pruitt says. "The emotion was coming out from my eyes."

— Anthony D'Alessandro



John Shearer/WireImage.com

DEV PATEL

'Millionaire' in the making

Many parents try to discourage their children from pursuing fanciful dreams in the entertainment world. In Dev Patel's case, had his dear old mum not insisted he attend a key audition a couple years ago, he would surely be just another charismatic Brit attending college today.

As Patel tells it, "We had a big row about it really. I was like, 'Mom, you can't be doing this. I'm not gonna get it. Drop it.' She's stubborn, which is a godsend really, and she dragged me down."

With only a few school productions under his belt, Patel landed the role of a Muslim desperate to get laid in Channel 4's edgy ensemble drama "Skins." The show brought him to the attention of Danny Boyle's casting director for "Slumdog Millionaire."

After a much longer audition process — try eight or nine callbacks — Patel got the lead role of Jamal, a Mumbai street kid who has a wild run on the Indian version of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire."

Audiences went crazy for the film at Telluride and Toronto, and Patel is trying to catch his breath as Fox Searchlight plans a major publicity push for the film.

— Gregory Ellwood



Getty Images

KODI SMIT-MCPHEE

'Road' scholar

Kodi Smit-McPhee wasn't on the shortlist when director John Hillcoat started searching for a young boy who could hold his own opposite Viggo Mortensen in the postapocalyptic Cormac McCarthy parable "The Road."

But according to the director, there was little, if any, doubt that the young Australian was absolutely the right choice for the extremely demanding role. "It came down to one kid, and then Kodi came in the room," Hillcoat recalls. "In the middle of his audition, I knew he was the one."

The only reason Hillcoat was even aware of Kodi, who just turned 12, was the trailer for "Romulus, My Father," a family drama that won the Australian Film Institute's best picture prize and earned Kodi the org's Young Actor's Award.

Hillcoat wanted an actor with a sense of independence, someone auds could imagine standing up to Mortensen on their hellacious journey. "He makes it more of a proper two-hander instead of just a father and poor little fella," Hillcoat says. "If Viggo had to carry it all, it just wouldn't work."

Smit-McPhee's older sister Sianoa is also an actress, appearing in HBO's "Hung."

— Stuart Levine



Getty Images

TRISTAN WILDS

From Baltimore to Beverly Hills

Tristan Wilds traveled the crack-addled streets of Baltimore only to end up on Rodeo Drive.

After watching Wilds gangbanging on HBO's "The Wire," "90210" creators Jeff Judah and Gabe Sachs knew he was the guy they wanted to navigate the cliques of West Beverly High School.

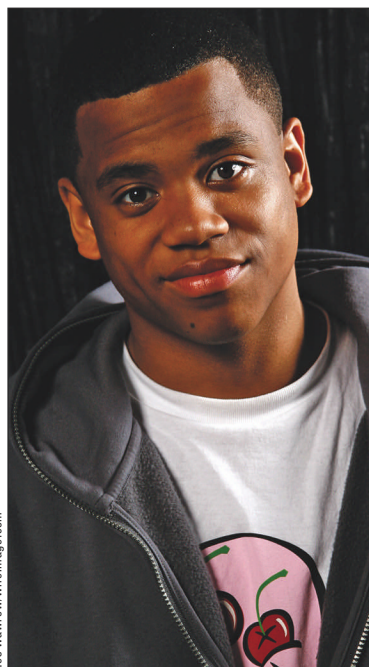
He also landed a feature role in Fox Searchlight's "The Secret Life of Bees," playing a young man in 1960s South Carolina who grows sweet on Dakota Fanning.

"The Wire' did way more than I expected," says Wilds on a day off from shooting. "After I did the fourth season, everyone kept coming up to me from all walks of life — from Wall Street people to people on the street."

All that recognition is still new for Wilds, who moved to L.A. a few months ago from Staten Island, N.Y., for the "90210" gig. But the 19-year-old actor maintains a firm handle on his priorities.

"It's not about fame and fortune," he says. "What gets me going is doing great work and making sure my characters feel real."

— Stuart Levine



Les Wawrow/WireImage.com



Kid biz leaders' conscious party

In October 2007, the best and brightest of Hollywood's young talent — including Power of Youth ambassadors Miley Cyrus, Vanessa Hudgens, Angus T. Jones and Emma Roberts — came together in a massive event on the Universal backlot to support St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. This year, L.A. Live hosts the Target Presents *Variety's* Power of Youth spectacular, which aims to harness the enthusiasm and activism of the young Hollywood community to help encourage their peers and audiences to get involved in humanitarian causes.



UNIVERSAL FUN: Clockwise from top: Dylan and Cole Sprouse channeled their inner guitar heroes on *Variety's* Power of Youth red carpet; Keke Palmer, who sang last year at the event, chatted with *Variety* associate publisher Brian Gott; "Hairspray" star Elijah Kelley performed on the Universal lot; Disney's teen queens Vanessa Hudgens and Miley Cyrus; Marlo Thomas continues work her father started on behalf of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, which is again the centerpiece of the charity event Saturday.

