

Ratner on Col's laff track

By NICOLE LaPORTE

Brett Ratner is attached to direct an untitled comedy pitch at Columbia from writing team David Diamond and David Weissman.



Ratner

Duo will immediately begin writing the project, whose subject is being kept under wraps.

Neal Moritz and Ori Marmor will produce through Moritz's Sony-based Original shingle.

Ratner and his partner Jay Stern also will produce.

Matt Tolmach and Jonathan Kadin are overseeing the project at the studio.

Ratner, Diamond and Weissman previously teamed on Universal's "Family Man."

Besides "Family Man," Diamond and Weissman, both

Turn to page 12

THE HARRY & HOBBIT SHOW

Fantasy pics conjure profits for TW unit

By MICHAEL LEARMONTH

Time Warner rode the small shoulders of a teen magician and a hobbit to double-digit revenue growth in a quarter marked by the strong performance of its film unit.

The theatrical release of "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban" and homevideo release of Oscar winner "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King" helped Time Warner to a 10% increase in revenue and 17% increase in operating income in the second quarter.



Because of the convergence of "Azkaban," "King" and "Troy" and the fact that "King" had its theatrical release in the third quarter of last year, comparisons will be difficult in the second half of the year. "Nevertheless, our growth will meaningfully exceed last year," chairman Richard Parsons said.

"Azkaban" and "Troy" have returned \$1.2 billion in box office receipts so far, with two-thirds coming from outside the U.S.

Time Warner recorded operating income of \$2.6 billion in the quarter on revenue

of \$10.9 billion. Earnings dipped 27% to \$777 million from a year ago, when profits were boosted by a \$760 million settlement with Microsoft and a gain from the sale of its stake in Comedy Central.

Company expects full-year operating income to increase in the low-teen range from \$8.7 billion in 2003.

The quarter marks the continuation of a turnaround for the world's largest media conglomerate, which saw contributions from every business unit. AOL is still hemorrhaging subscribers but recorded its first quarter of year-over-year advertising growth since late 2001.

Turn to page 12

Auds resist charms of Dem stars

By JONATHAN BING and PAMELA McCLINTOCK

BOSTON — For all the choreographed pageantry of the Democratic National Convention, the general public remained indifferent after two days of impassioned party rhetoric.

About 9.1 million people watched the DNC on Tuesday, based on numbers for the various nets offering convention news. The viewership for the first two nights of the convention represent only about half the audience tuning in to regularly scheduled summer programming the week before.

Far from indifferent, however, was the aud for Tuesday's convention edition of Comedy Central's "The Daily Show With Jon Stewart."

Turn to page 13



Senate candidate Barack Obama emerged as one of the week's standouts with his rousing speech.

Hyde grabs Brass ring

By DANA HARRIS



Amritraj

Ashok Amritraj's Hyde Park Entertainment has teamed with U.K. funds manager the Brass Hat Group in an exclusive partnership that will bring the producer of "Bringing Down the House" about \$400 million in production funds over the next five years.

Headed by CEO Nick Hamson, the Brass Hat Group has raised more than \$200 million over the last five years for films such as Warner Bros. Pictures' "The Phantom of the

Turn to page 14

HE'S POISED FOR 'NOISE'

By DANA HARRIS and DAVID ROONEY

Barry Sonnenfeld has teamed with Cherry Road Films for his longtime passion project, Don DeLillo's "White Noise," which he will direct and produce.

Also for Cherry Road, he will direct Donald Westlake's "Money for Nothing," with "Taxi" scribe Jim Kouf aboard to adapt.

Sonnenfeld first optioned "White Noise" — winner of the 1985 National Book Award — in 1999, while still based at Disney with then-partner Barry Josephson. Stephen Schiff adapted the script.

After the option lapsed, Scott Rudin optioned the book for Sonnenfeld. When that term ended, the filmmaker teamed with Cherry Road.

Turn to page 13



Sonnenfeld

No Spidey swing for Sony...yet

By MEREDITH AMDUR

NEW YORK — Sony will have to wait another quarter before "Spider-Man 2" swings to its rescue.

Despite a string of recent box office successes — including "13 Going Music merger on 30" and "OK'd, page 5" "Hellboy"

— revenues at Sony Pictures Entertainment slipped 1.9% to \$1.3 billion for three-month period ended June 30, the day of Spidey 2's U.S. debut.

Company said a strong yen and weaker TV sales numbers thwarted an otherwise steady showing. (On a dollar basis, company said film and sales were up 6% over the year-earlier quarter.)

Turn to page 12

Fierce fight for WGA post

By DAVE McNARY

The gloves have come off in the contest for the WGA West presidency between Daniel Petrie Jr. and Eric Hughes.

The battle pits Hughes, a challenger to the status quo, against veteran guild insider Petrie, who was president in 1997-99, VP in 1999-2001 and was tapped again as prexy by the board in March after Charles Holland resigned.

Campaigning has kicked into high gear, with both candidates pressing hot-button issues such as screenwriting credits, the long-running dispute with the WGA East and how the guild has handled now-stalled contract negotiations, leaving writers working under an expired contract for the past two months.

Turn to page 14

INSIDE

4 Scare tactic

"The Village" is certainly creepy enough but doesn't quite make an indelible mark.

5 Familiar feel

Imagine all makeover shows rolled into one. Now imagine that show on Fox.

6 Safety first

The FCC launches an inquiry into whether it can regulate violence on television.

REVELERS SEE RED AT BOW

Adrien Brody, M. Night Shyamalan and Joaquin Phoenix enjoy the party.



By ZACHARY PINCUS-ROTH

NEW YORK — It was no accident that the carpet wasn't red at Monday's world preem of "The Village" — revelers entered Brooklyn's Prospect Park via golden turf. Disney also told invitees not to wear the color that in the film attracts the villainous "those we do not speak of." **Sigourney Weaver** just barely steered clear of danger in a salmon dress and shawl with lipstick to match, but



Above, Scott Rudin and Sam Mercer; left, pic's Jayne Atkinson, Sigourney Weaver and William Hurt

Adrien Brody broke the code altogether by sporting a red tie.

"Cause I have a sense of humor," he explained. "Red makes you kind of agitated," said scribe-helmer **M. Night Shyamalan**, who also toys with the color in "The Sixth Sense." "It's a physical reaction."

The golden path led preemgoers to a faux 1897 hamlet, where revelers enjoyed pot roast and fruit cobbler before ambling down a woodsy trail lit only by the lanterns of yellow cloaked guides. In the clearing, a screen marked with a giant streak of blood awaited.

"Popcorn and soda to your right!" shouted one worker to break the mood.

Other shlepping to the outer borough included newly minted film star **Bryce Dallas Howard**, returning to Flatbush Avenue after living there while at NYU, plus Disney's **Michael Eisner**, **Dick Cook** and **Oren Aviv**.



Left, Cherry Jones and Patricia Clarkson chat; below right, Judy Greer and Bryce Dallas Howard

Opera fans sing diva's praises

Now that the Lakers season is over, the Hollywood Bowl is **Jack Nicholson's** new hangout. Or at least it was on Tuesday night when opera singer **Renee Fleming** performed.

At the industry-heavy after-bash, Nicholson confessed his love for opera. "I've seen a lot of it," he said. "It's very exotic."

Benicio Del Toro admitted that his knowledge of opera is minimal, but he nevertheless rose to the occasion when Nicholson called.

"This is the first time I have been to the opera, and I have the honor to say that I was invited by Jack Nicholson," Del Toro said.

Even Fleming, the night's star, couldn't believe the crowd she drew in.

"Tonight was absolutely surreal," Fleming said, expressing surprise that Nicholson and pal **Warren Beatty** are so knowledgeable about opera.

— Addie Morfoot



Top, Benicio Del Toro and Jack Nicholson with Renee Fleming. Above, Warren Beatty, Annette Bening and Ron Meyer

Helmer circles 'round shorts

Helmer **Kevin Smith** was honored with an Ovation Award — in the form of a giant metal "O" — at Group 101's bash Monday evening at the Egyptian Theater.

"I can't thank you enough for this," Smith said. "It kinda brings me full circle in my career."

Event featured the screening of 16 new shorts from Group 101 filmmakers. Members are challenged to produce a new pic every 30 days, leading Smith to term them "Weight Watchers for filmmakers."

— Debra Kamin



Brian Grazer, Tom Freston and Joel Silver



Above, helmer Danny Leiner greets pic's John Cho, center, and Kal Penn; right, Cheryl Hines chows down.

Preem sates munchies

Everyone got high on laughs at Tuesday's Chinese Theater preem of New Line's stoner comedy "Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle."

At the Annex after-bash, cravings were satiated with onion rings, fries and burgers, courtesy of the titular fast-food restaurant.

Kal Penn said he did do some research to get into his character, but nothing involving munchies. "I don't smoke weed or eat red meat, but for the scene where I perform surgery, I spent two days at the UCLA library researching gunshot" wounds, he said.

Neil Patrick Harris did even less preparation to play a spoof version of himself. "It was surprisingly easy," he quipped. "No method acting required."

Also on hand were New Line's **Russell Schwartz**, **Rolf Mittweg** and **Toby Emmerich**. Guests included **Drew Carey** and **Robert Downey Jr.** — Emily Pauker



Above, producer Greg Shapiro and pic's Paula Garces; right, Brooke D'Orsay and Christopher Meloni flank Kate Kelton



'Stander' digs deep at bash

At Tuesday's after-bow bash for "Stander," **Thomas Jane** told *Daily Variety* that he'd turned down the role twice, reluctant to master **Andre Stander's** South African accent and dig to extreme emotional depths required. But, Jane said at the Hollywood & Vine restaurant, "I wrestled with Andre and lost."

Helmer **Bronwen Hughes** expressed no such reluctance.

"I waited a long time to find a project I could sink my teeth into this deep," said Hughes about the intense political drama-cum-bank-heist actioner set in 1970-'80s South Africa.

Joining Jane at the preem were Newmarket's **Bob Berney**, scribe **Bima Stagg**, producer **Julia Verdin**, Seven Arts topper **Peter Hoffman**, and guests including **Patricia Arquette**, **Stewart Copeland**, **Seymour Cassel**, **Isaiah Washington** and "The Punisher" helmer **Jonathan Hensleigh**. — Sharon Swart



Deborah Kara Unger and co-star Thomas Jane



Col hosted a preem for Revolution Studios' "Little Black Book" last week at the Ziegfeld. From left, Kathy Bates, Elaine Goldsmith-Thomas and star Brittany Murphy cozy up.