

Casting for stars with a Hollywood r

Right roles will make, break a film

CASTING FROM 11

They did. And three call-backs later, Pitt got the role — which has garnered him glowing reviews and a numerous film offers.

"He's going to be the biggest actor of his age group, there's no doubt about it," says DiGiomo proudly.

Welcome to the world of casting, arguably the most important and underrated of the filmic art forms.

Direction gives a movie or television show its aim, power and subtlety. Producing takes care of the budget; production design takes care of the look. And then there's casting, a marriage of chemistry and prescience and, in the right hands, a testimony to clout. Casting can virtually create a motion picture, as it did in *Robin Hood*, or make a star from scratch, as it did for Julia Roberts, an unknown who caught the eye of the casting director of a little film called *Mystic Pizza* — and then someone else's eye in what was supposed to be a Richard Gere comeback film, *Pretty Woman*.

Casting — or not being cast or failing to recognize the Big Role — also has the power to derail a promising career.

Peter Boyle was offered the role of Popeye Doyle in *The French Connection* but turned it down. Enter second choice Gene Hackman, who went on to win a "Best Actor" Academy Award and superstar status.

Enigmatic players

For all their power and muscle, casting directors are an enigmatic lot. While moviegoers may be somewhat familiar with the names of A-list casting directors like Juliet Taylor (who casts Woody Allen's pictures), Ellen Chenoweth (Barry Levinson's), Mike Fenton (Steven Spielberg's) and Billy Hopkins and Risa Bramon (Oliver Stone's), most are probably unaware of how these folks ultimately shape the product they just plunked down \$6 to see.

"I am pained that casting is such an integral part of the artistic process, and yet we are barely appreciated or understood," says Fenton, who has cast over 250 films, including *E.T.* (it was he who found Henry Thomas), *Shampoo* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. (Danny De Vito and Christopher Lloyd — two of the zombies in the *Nest* ward — were Fenton film discoveries.)

"The public, and even actors, don't understand our purpose," Fenton continues. "Actors are convinced agents get them the jobs, but casting directors are the ones who go to bat for them, who often make their careers."

Take Hopkins and Bramon, for example, the casting directors who noticed Madonna when she was still basically just a New York ragamuffin, cast her in *Desperately Seeking Susan* and helped create a legend.

Their biggest claim to fame, however, was taking Glenn Close out of her corset and putting her into lacy undies. Before *Fatal Attraction*, in which she played the villainous Alex, Close was routinely typecast as either a good girl (*The Natural*) or a mother figure (*The Big Chill*, *The World According to Garp*). When casting the Alex role, Hopkins and Bramon hit on a brainstorm: Glenn Close as a bad girl! The film's producers and director Adrian Lyne balked at the idea. Glenn Close as a sexpot? No, she's perfect, insisted Hopkins and Bramon. And she was.

Bankable names

Casting directors: wielding anonymous power behind the

By RYAN MURPHY
Herald Entertainment Writer

"There's no Oscar for casting because most people who aren't informed feel that directors and producers come up with all the good ideas," says Marion Dougherty. "Ha! Without good casting, there would be no good pictures."

Dougherty, now a 60ish vice president of talent at Warner Bros., is the person who formed and shaped the casting system into what it is today. Before Dougherty's flex of muscle in the late 50s, motion picture and television casting was identical to the theatrical "cattle call," where hundreds of actors are herded into a room, eyed by the director and most of the time dismissed (because of union rules, such "open casting calls" still persist in the stage world but seldom in Hollywood).

Dougherty, who got her start in

HER 'DISCOVERIES'

- Al Pacino
- Robert De Niro
- James Dean
- Dustin Hoffman
- Richard Dreyfuss
- Warren Beatty
- Robert Duvall

New York casting television dramas like *Playhouse 90*, saw that this was not only humiliating for actors but a waste of time for directors. And so she pioneered the system, still in use today, in which a casting director interviews the masses and then goes to the director with the top five to 10 choices for a role. The director almost always makes his selection based on the advice of the casting

director.

Dougherty gave casting directors their power and clout and also made several discoveries that changed the motion picture landscape for the second half of the 20th Century. It was Dougherty, not Francis Ford Coppola, who "discovered" Al Pacino. She caught a stage performance of his in New York in the mid-'60s and insisted that he be cast in *The Panic in Needle Park*, which gave him his entree into Hollywood and made him a star.

It was Dougherty, not Martin Scorsese, who plucked Robert De Niro from obscurity. When Pacino was too busy to star in *The Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight*, Dougherty lined up De Niro for the part. She is also credited with giving James Dean his first big break (in a *Playhouse 90* episode), first casting unknown Dustin Hoffman,

back when no Hollywood types would touch this strange, intense talent, in a TV cop show called *Naked City*. Dougherty also handed Richard Dreyfuss, Warren Beatty and Robert Duvall their first big parts in that gritty TV classic as well.

But do these stars write? Do they call? "No!" laughs Dougherty. "They send you post cards before they get the jobs, and then when they get them, they forget you. Warren was the exception. He's sweet. He takes me out to lunch once in while."

Although still active in the casting of motion pictures, Dougherty laments the current casting process: "It's a whole new can of worms. Now, to get a picture made, you need a big star for insurance purposes — it's a game of dollars and cents, which, when you have a \$40 million budget, I can

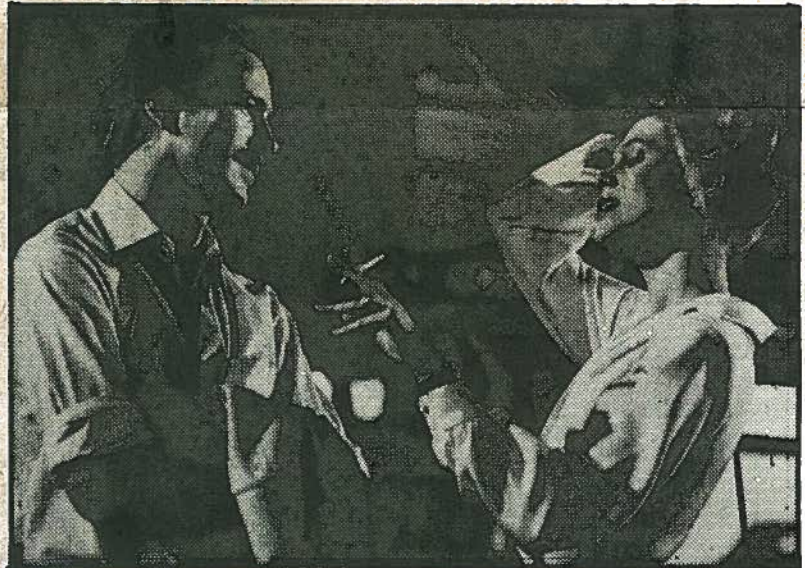
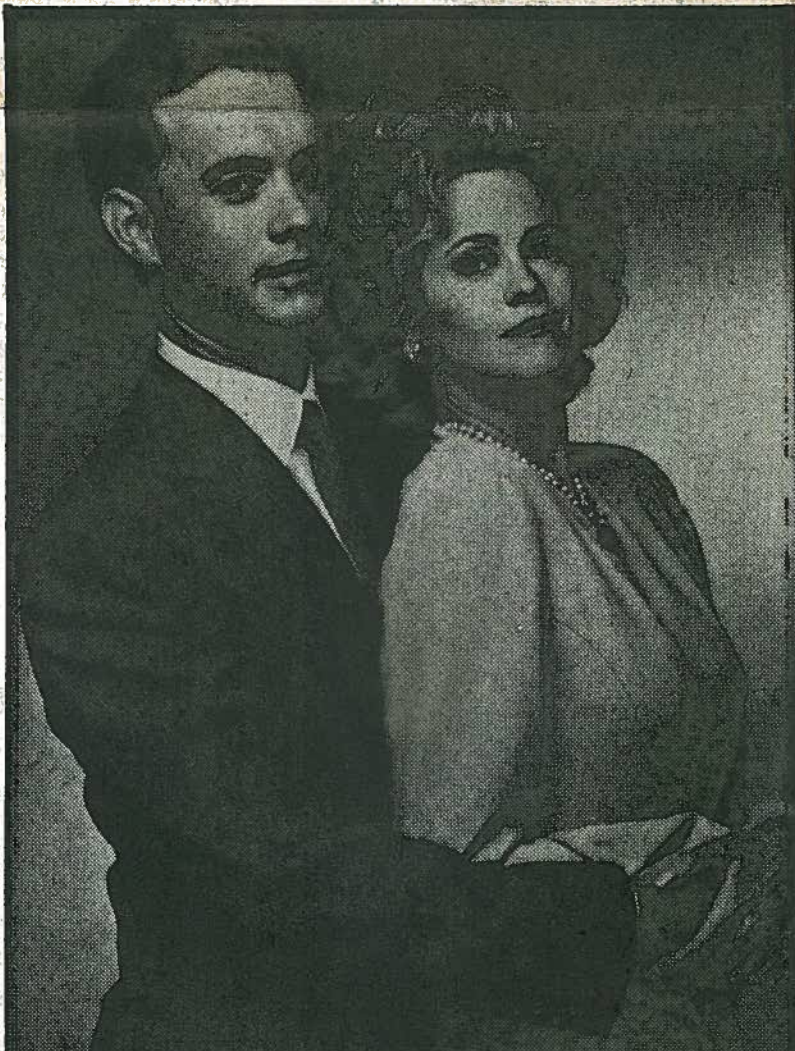
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"It's just continue: aren't w people - parts. He proven o thing. Fo one of the why he is to me. W box-office

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DESPERATELY SOUGHT: The casting directors who put Madonna in 1985's *Desperately Seeking Susan* helped create a legend.



A GOOD EYE: Kathleen Turner was cast opposite William Hurt in *Body Heat*, and her career took off.

SEXY HITCHHIKER: Brad Pitt won the role in *Thelma & Louise* after Billy Baldwin

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