

Casting is a meticulous process that can take up to three months of preproduction time.

After receiving the script, the casting director attends a meeting with the film's director to see what "types" he or she is interested in. The two then create an "idea list" that includes every actor or actress who could possibly be right for the part.

Next, the casting director sends out a "break-down list" to agents, describing in detail the characters to be cast. Good casting directors list everything, from the character's age to their eccentricities, to give agents an idea of what they are looking for.

The agent, in turn, submits his ideas in the casting director, and the meeting process begins.

Before making the first cut, casting directors look through piles of actors' photos. (New York actors have the best, most natural looking publicity shots, casting directors say, while L.A. actors have the most gimmicky pictures imaginable. A current "gag" shot making the rounds in Hollywood is one of Linda Blair, smiling, atop a splashing dolphin.)

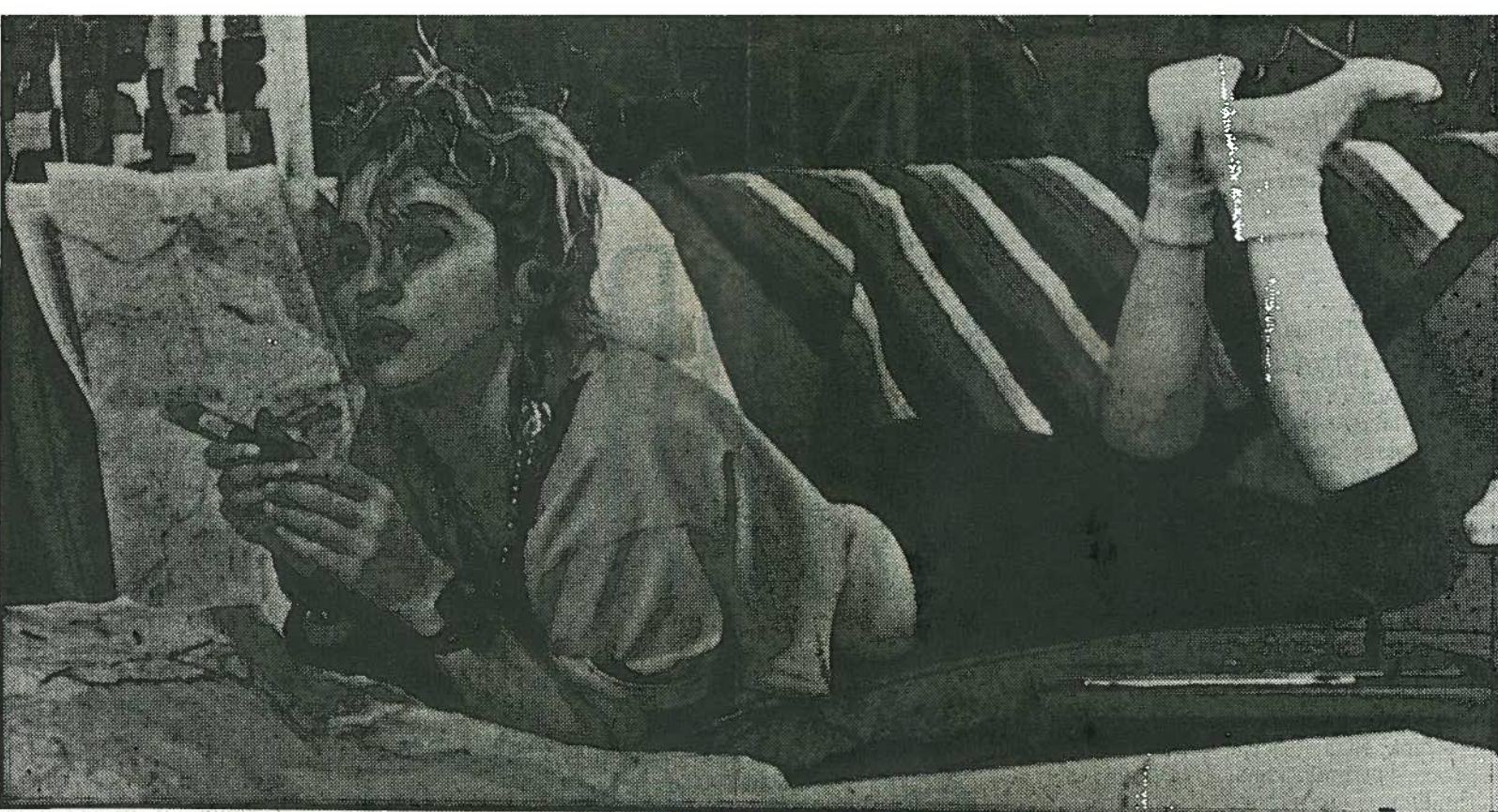
The casting director invites the top choices in to read for a role. He coaches them, directs their movements and delivery and then puts the best performances on videotape. He shows the best tapes to the director, who asks his favorites to come in for a person-to-person chat.

Then, it's sweat time. Oliver Stone, for instance, is notorious in these casting meetings for looking at everything in the room but the actor; Steven Spielberg and Barry Levinson often wear sunglasses during this stage of elimination.

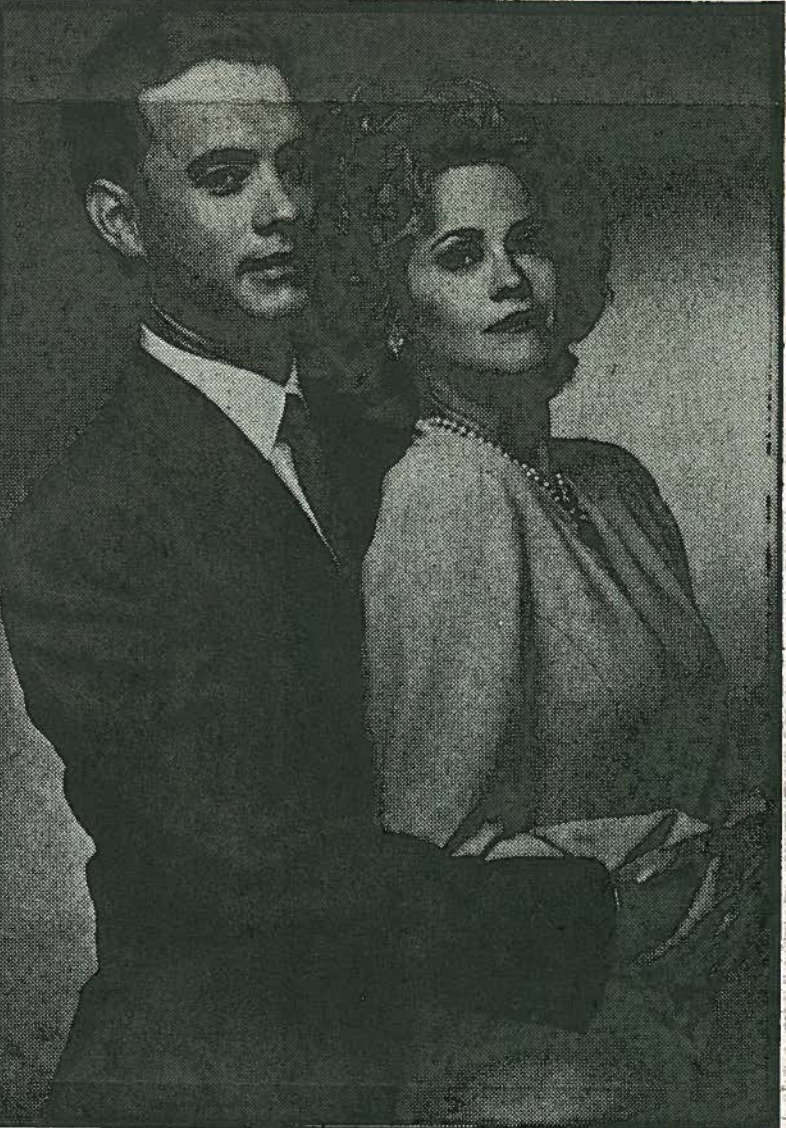
The casting director and director then whittle down the choices and cast the part. "Then comes the roughest part of the job, which is to call the actor who was so close and tell him he didn't get it," says DiGiomo.

Contracts are signed, billing determined and then the casting director is off to the next job, although occasionally a director will ask them to stick around for the whole shoot to cast last-minute essentials like extras.

RYAN MURPHY



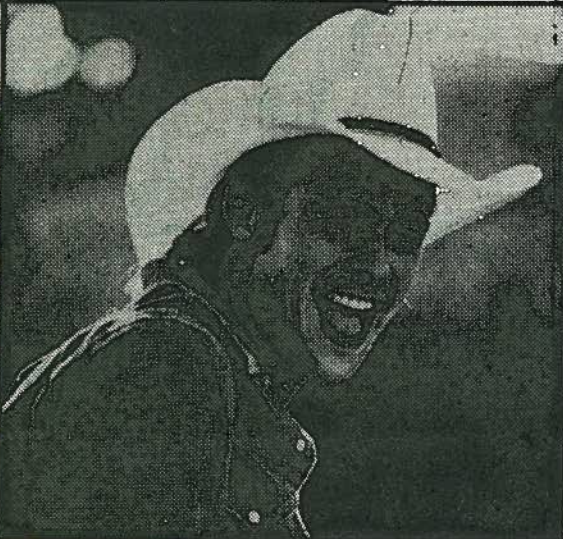
DESPERATELY SOUGHT: The casting directors who put Madonna in 1985's *Desperately Seeking Susan* helped create a legend.



CASTING FIASCO: Putting Tom Hanks (here, with Melanie Griffith), in *Bonfire of the Vanities* helped sink the film, casting directors say.



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 dropped out — and 400 other actors had auditioned.

of a little — and what was hard Gere man.

g cast or g Role — ul a prom-

d the role ench Con- wn. Enter man, who or' Acad- status.

l muscle, enigmatic be some- names of ke Juliet y Allen's h (Barry (Steven skins and 's), most ow these : product to see.

g is such istic pro- appreci- Fenton, s, includ- io found and One 's Nest. istopher es in the film dis-

l actors, urpose," are con- jobs, but nes who en make

mon, for tors who was still ragamuf- Seeking legend. ne, how- se out of into lacy ction, in ous Alex, ecast as 'ural) or 'hill, The). When kins and n: Glenn m's pro- an Lyne lose as a insisted he was.

g direc-

ucer, for ave big ankable s when agnitude

bodies, color it, give it its hue and voices. "We are the ones who are responsible for the guy who walks in and says, 'Hi, Mr. Jones, here is your pizza,' and the one who often convinces a director that a star they had overlooked would be perfect in the lead," says Fenton. "We take an idea that's just on paper, put a face on it and bring it to life," explains DiGiomo.

Night work There's a lot of hard, bags-under-the-eyes work, as well. Routinely putting in 10-hour days, casting directors often then will trudge into the night as well, feeling the need to catch obscure stage plays and Actors Studio one-acts in the quest to find that next new face.

For their efforts, in the hyperinflated world of the Hollywood pay scale, they are among the poorest paid worker bees. "We get killed financially," says Fenton of casting directors, who make between \$15,000 and \$75,000 per project, while directors usually make triple that and stars 10

times that fee. Still, obviously, they're not poor. And "it's an ego-gratifying thing, to see your name up on the screen next to the director's," admits Fenton. (Casting directors started receiving screen credit about 20 years ago.) "Why do I toil for no money and no credit?" said one powerful female casting agent who never gives interviews because she's afraid of offending ego-meisters like directors and producers. "Quite simply, I dig actors. I am in awe of what they can do. And I want to help them any way I can."

Credit grabbers Sadly, if an actor clicks in a part, the credit is usually grabbed by the director or producer. Take Julia Phillips, for example. In her recent Hollywood memoir *You'll Never Eat Lunch In This Town Again*, Phillips, who won an Oscar for producing *The Sting*, took credit for giving Robert Shaw the role of the villain in that movie, a casting coup most critics at the time singled out in their reviews. "But we were responsible for

that, no doubt about it," says Marion Dougherty, vice president of talent at Warner Bros. and a longtime casting maven. Dougherty is regarded as one of the true innovators in the business. (See accompanying story.) And it was she who cast *The Sting*. "Julia Phillips didn't even know who Robert Shaw was," she says. "What a crock." Because they can transform a nobody into a star with one deft wave of a videotape, casting directors are often courted, in the early phases, by eager talent in the most unusual of ways. One casting director, working on a civil rights picture in Atlanta, marveled that he recently received a nude photograph of an actor with a caption that said simply, "Cast me — you won't be disappointed." (The actor did not get the role.) DiGiomo remembers how, when casting *The Natural*, he received bats in the mail; when working on *The Godfather* (which many believe to be the most perfectly cast movie of all time), he was plied with dead fish.

nice, don't get an actor a role. It's all about talent." And a good eye. Mega-stars Kathleen Turner and Mickey Rourke owe their careers to the wise eye who cast them as the vixen and the eccentric bomber in *Body Heat* when they were but mere blips on the horizon. Of course, just as good casting can make a star or a picture or even help earn a film a label as a "classic" (note Jack Nicholson's career-making contribution to *Easy Rider*; and can you imagine *The Graduate* without Dustin Hoffman's break-out debut), bad casting can derail, even destroy, a movie. Every casting director interviewed for this story pointed to the recent bomb *Bonfire of the Vanities* as a perfect example of a casting fiasco. Even though director Brian De Palma's approach — heavy-handed slapstick mixed with cheap yuks galore — probably did the film in, most agree that better casting could have lessened the blow. "I would have cast William Hurt in the Tom Hanks role and John

Hurt in the Bruce Willis part," says Daugherty. "I liked Melanie Griffith as the mistress, she was OK, but I would have cast a Hispanic tramp in that role because that's how the part was written." A major drawback of being a casting agent, say those in the know, is that your work is never done. Even when you're relaxing, checking out a film with your better half, you find your mind wondering, running over your own personal casting list and applying it to the entertainment at hand. Mike Fenton, for instance, remembers with a laugh that he was watching *Gone With The Wind* with his wife not too long ago, when he turned to her and said, "You know, this wasn't very well cast. "Leslie Howard was an Englishman," he observed, "and Ashley definitely should have been played by an American. Today, who would I pick to play Scarlett? Hmmmm... Well, Julia Roberts would be good. She is from the South and could definitely do the accent properly. As Rhett, I see Tom Cruise maybe. Yeah, he'd be good. And as..."