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Billy Hopkins, standing, a casting director for Oliver Stone's next movie, "The Doors," as Alan Manson reacts to lines. Seated at left is Charles Chessler, an auditions reader, who reads with the actors.

For Casting, Countless Auditions And One Couch, Never Used

By GLENN COLLINS

Outside the rehearsal room, in a stark Manhattan hallway under bare bulbs, four nervous young actors sat on metal folding chairs, clutching scripts and muttering their lines. Inside the room behind the big gray doors, an actress named Jessica was pacing the oak floor before a video camera as Billy Hopkins smiled at her encouragingly, going about the business of casting a role for the director Oliver Stone's next movie.

"Let's just try it once," Mr. Hopkins said. "And it's O.K. to make her a little spacey." He focused the camera as the actress tossed her long hair, assumed a dreamy expression and said:

"It's really boring here tonight. You want to go downtown to a new club with us?"

Jessica tried a few more lines until Mr. Hopkins said, "And cut." He jumped up enthusiastically. "That's good. That's great! Just: have a little more fun with it this time, will you?"

And so Jessica said her lines again — and again — and then one actor after another left the hallway and came into the room to audition for a speaking part in Mr. Stone's new movie about the rock icon Jim Morrison of the Doors, who died in 1971.

And on the West Coast . . .

The videotapes of the actors, with Mr. Hopkins's comments, would be sent by air express to the director in Los Angeles, where — on the very same afternoon — Risa Bramon, Mr. Hopkins's partner, was auditioning West Coast actors for parts in the film, whose working title is "The Doors." It begins shooting this spring.

These days, the 31-year-old Mr. Hopkins and the 33-year-old Ms. Bramon are much in demand. While

working on "The Doors," they have also been casting "Jacob's Ladder," a film by Adrian Lyne, and they are working on another movie, "Mr. Destiny," a Walt Disney production. Mr. Hopkins is also casting "A Kiss Before Dying," a thriller starring Matt Dillon.

The two casting directors — they call their firm simply Risa Bramon and Billy Hopkins, and everyone else calls it Bramon-Hopkins — have cast 22 films in the last six years. It is an eclectic list that includes Mr. Stone's last three movies ("Born on the

industry. "Until 20 years ago, casting directors never even got billing."

'A Step Up'

These days, increasing numbers of casting directors are being prominently featured in movie credits. Some casting directors are also getting credits in paid advertising movies. "That's a step up, since paid advertising credit is an important deal point for actors," said Risa Bramon, interviewed by telephone from Los Angeles.

The names of casting directors, current and former, are already familiar in a mysterious, subliminal sort of way to any movie buff who has ever pondered film credits as they roll by on the screen. The roster includes Ellen Chenoweth, Mary Colhoun, Cis Cormann, Marion Dougherty, Howard Feuer, Mary Goldblatt, Alixe Gordin, Wallis Nicita, Gretchen Rennell, Fred Roos, David Rubin, Margery Simkin, Juliet Taylor, Vickie Thomas and Bonnie Timmermann.

But why are they necessary? "The casting director's role is to turn an idea into flesh," said John Amiel, a director whose credits include "Queen of Hearts" and the acclaimed six-part television series "The Sing Detective." He worked with Hopkins in casting "Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter," a feature-length adaptation of the Mario Vargas Llosa novel that is to be released this year.

"But no director working in Hollywood has a chance to pound the pavement to go to all the fringe theaters, study the cast lists, or go to the actors' schools' end-of-year shows," Amiel added.

Casting directors are hired by theatrical or television producers to fill anywhere from several to 200 or more roles in a play, fea-

How two partners put actors to work.

Fourth of July," "Talk Radio" and "Wall Street"); Mr. Lyne's megahit "Fatal Attraction" with Glenn Close; "Uncle Buck" with John Candy, "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation" with Chevy Chase, "Angel Heart" with Robert De Niro and Mickey Rourke, and "Desperately Seeking Susan" with Madonna. They also find actors for stage productions and commercials, and did the casting for the ABC show "Roseanne," which made one of their regulars, John Goodman, a star.

Despite their track record, and a job that can keep them busy round the clock seven days a week, not everyone is clear about what it is that they do.

"I say casting director to some people, and they think I work in an iron foundry," said Mr. Hopkins, laughing and adding that this benighted state once also afflicted the entertainment

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