

Posted: Mon., Sep. 5, 2005, 2:58pm PT

Perfs rule rockies

High-profile pics dominate Telluride

By **TODD MCCARTHY**

TELLURIDE, Colo. -- At a director-oriented international film festival such as Telluride, it's unusual to come away thinking foremost of performances, but so it was at the 32nd edition of this Colorado mountain event.

High-profile English-language fare dominated this year to a notable degree, and it was the acting in some of these pics that stirred the greatest excitement -- the uncanny biographical turns by Philip Seymour Hoffman and Catherine Keener in Bennett Miller's "Capote" and Reese Witherspoon and Joaquin Phoenix in James Mangold's "Walk the Line," as well as Heath Ledger in Ang Lee's "Brokeback Mountain" and William H. Macy in "Edmond," Stuart Gordon's film of David Mamet's first play.

Then there was the surprise Saturday screening of Martin Scorsese's 225-minute Bob Dylan docu-bio "No Direction Home." It was difficult for most festgoers to readjust their crowded schedules to accommodate such a lengthy work, but those who did found it staggering, whetting appetites for its imminent PBS airings and DVD release.

Among other pictures receiving their world preems here, to more diverse aud reactions, were "Breakfast on Pluto," Neil Jordan's look at a cross-dressing Irish Candide; Liev Schreiber's Holocaust-related directorial debut, "Everything Is Illuminated;" Scott McGehee and David Siegel's adaptation of another literary favorite, "Bee Season," starring Richard Gere and Juliette Binoche; Andy Garcia's sweeping, music-dominated take on the Cuban revolution, "The Lost City"; and newcomer Hans Canosa's split-screen two-hander, "Conversations With Other Women," with Helena Bonham Carter and Aaron Eckhart.

Also bowing was Patrick Stanbury and Kevin Brownlow's docu about the peripatetic Merian C. Cooper, "I'm King Kong," to air soon on TCM.

Directors on parade

As always, the major international films were accompanied by their makers, and the intimacy of Telluride provided steady sightings and conversation opportunities with Michael Haneke, here with "Cache" (Hidden); the Dardenne brothers ("The Child"); Lajos Koltai ("Fateless"); Erik Khoo ("Be With Me"); Hany Abu-Assad ("Paradise Now"), Im Sang-soo ("The President's Last Bang"); Mohammed Rasoulof ("Iron Island"); Radu Mihaileanu ("Live and Become"); and Kim Longinotto ("Sisters in Law").

The American-born French "baroque" stage director Eugene Green, previously unknown here, began developing a Stateside following on the basis of his three distinctive features, "Toutes les nuits," "Le Monde vivant" and "Les Ponts des Arts."

Also very much in evidence was Mickey Rooney, almost 85, who received a fest tribute and surprised a Sunday audience by showing up for a special matinee of "Babes on Broadway" and fielding impromptu questions for several minutes when the film broke midway.

Charlotte Rampling was on hand for her tribute, and Peter Bogdanovich returned for a smash second edition of his one-man show "Sacred Monsters," prompting renewed calls for him to take this unique synthesis of first-hand Hollywood anecdotes and mimicry on the road.

Rediscovered classics

Always revered for its revivals of rare and lost films, Telluride scored this year with the Pordenone Silent Film Festival discovery "A Cottage on Dartmoor," Anthony Asquith's often striking 1929 silent, and with Jean-Pierre Melville's 1969 look at the French Resistance during WWII, "Army of Strangers," which will be released in the U.S. for the first time by Rialto early next year.

Also going down very well were the six-minutes-longer Euro cut of Michelangelo Antonioni's "The Passenger," which Sony Classics will release, and "The Comedian," a 1957 TV drama starring Rooney as a nasty performer, directed by John Frankenheimer and adapted by Rod Serling from an Ernest Lehman novelette.

Novelist Don DeLillo was this year's guest director. A rare corporate special medallion was presented to the Criterion Collection and Janus Films for their pioneering and exemplary continuing work in the specialized distribution and DVD fields.