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Sundancing to distrib'n

By [MONICA ROMAN](#)

PARK CITY, Utah -- As the 1997 Sundance Film Festival heads into the home stretch, three more titles have pulled into the lead in the acquisitions derby. On Thursday, Neil LaBute's dramatic competition film "In the Company of Men," Julie Davis' "I Love You ... Don't Touch Me" and Stephen Kay's "The Last Time I Committed Suicide" all made crucial steps toward theatrical release.

Alliance Communications Corp. has purchased worldwide rights excluding the U.S. and Canada to LaBute's caus-tic profile of a psychological love triangle set in the corporate jungle of the 1990s. The worldwide rights to Davis' comedy about a hopelessly romantic woman trying to lose her virginity sold to the Goldwyn Entertainment Co., and Roxie Releasing acquired the domestic theatrical rights to Kay's meditation on Beat figure Neal Cassady.

"Company" is the feature directorial debut of LaBute, who was represented by New York attorney Donna Bascom. A graduate of New York U.'s dramatic writing program, LaBute has written such plays as "Filthy Talk for Troubled Times," "Rounder" and "Bash." The film stars Aaron Eckhart, Stacy Edwards and Matt Malloy. It was pro-duced by Mark Archer of Atlantis Entertainment and Steven Pevner, who runs a New York-based literary agency specializing in emerging authors, playwrights and filmmakers.

Alliance picked up worldwide rights for "Company" through its Alliance Independent Films unit, which has repre-sented foreign rights for such award-winning titles as "Welcome to the Dollhouse," "Denise Calls Up" and "The Daytrippers."

'Hard-hitting' pic

"Alliance is tremendously excited about the acquisition of 'In the Company of Men,' " said Charlotte Mickie, senior vice president of Alliance Independent Films. "It is a sharp, controversial and hard-hitting black comedy that will provoke audiences worldwide with its dramatic portrayal of psychological warfare between the sexes."

Pevner said that it was unlikely that the domestic rights for "In the Company of Men" would be sold at Sundance. "We want to let the film find its audience first,"

he said. While some U.S. distributors were impressed by the scathing portrait of two yuppies who prop up their egos by preying on a vulnerable secretary, they were daunted by the challenge of marketing the pic.

"I Love You ... Don't Touch Me" and "The Last Time I Committed Suicide" are both unspooling in the American Spectrum sidebar. "I Love You," which is being hyped as the work of a nascent Woody Allen-like talent, will be distributed through Metromedia Entertainment Group. Goldwyn's head of worldwide production and acquisitions John Manulis and VP of acquisitions Roseanne Korenberg nabbed the film, which was sold here by producers' reps Elizabeth Avellan and Rana Joy Glickman. As part of the deal, Goldwyn signed writer-director Davis to a first-look deal.

A time to kvell

"I just can't wait to pay back my cast and crew," said Davis. "My parents are kvelling! Sundance! Goldwyn! What more could I want?"

Davis is represented by International Creative Management's Patty Detroit and Kristen Jones.

"The Last Time I Committed Suicide," writer-director Kay's portrait of Cassady, was sold by producers Kushner-Locke and Tapestry Films to Roxie Releasing for an undisclosed sum. The first feature stars Thomas Jane and Keanu Reeves with Tom Bower, Adrien Brody, John Doe, Claire Forlani and Marg Helgenberger rounding out the cast.

The pic, inspired by an eight-page letter from Cassady to Jack Kerouac, was in negotiations prior to the fest after Roxie's CEO Bill Banning screened the movie at the celebrated San Francisco theater that serves as base camp for the independent distributor. Roxie's previous Sundance pickups include Matthew Bright's "Freeway." It also distributed such notable titles as John Dahl's "Red Rock West" and "Nico-Icon."

"As someone who has hitchhiked across the country many times, I really related to this film and how it captured the spirit of the Beats," said Banning of the acquisition.

Added executive producer Peter Locke, "This is a film that appeals to a select niche and will be review-driven, so we wanted a distributor that could coddle it during the release. And Roxie did exactly that last year for us with 'Freeway.' "

In addition to Locke, Donald Kushner, Peter Abrams, Robert J. Levy and J.P. Guerin were the exec producers. Edward Bates and Louise Rosner were producers with Tapestry Films handling co-producing chores.

'Suicide' to platform

"The Last Time I Committed Suicide" is scheduled for a platform release in the top 10 markets this May, and the pic, which was financed by Kushner-Locke, marks another example of that company's foray into the "artsploitation" market. Last year at Sundance, the company served up three titles: "Freeway," Dan Ireland's "The Whole Wide World" and the Pate brothers' horror tale "The Grave." Other companies known for genre fare like Nu Image partially financed this year's competition pic "Santa Fe."

"We have always been interested in being in business with young up-and-coming artists so that as they mature we can maintain relationships and work with them again," said Locke in explaining his company's interest in the specialized marketplace.

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