

The Executive Life/Anne Thompson

Where Partnership Thrives in Filmdom

SINCE the dawn of the silent era, success in the movie industry has belonged to those special talents able to merge their creative instincts with canny business sense.

Because it is rare for one person to boast both strong suits, entertainment companies founded on executive partnerships go back to the time of the Warner brothers (Harry, Sam, Jack and Albert) and the "united artists" (Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks and D. W. Griffith).

Today, it's the independent distributors that have embraced group leadership, shared responsibilities and equal remuneration. Miramax, Sony Classics and October Films lead the list, and they have a string of successes to ratify their strategy.

• At Miramax Films "we're each other's best consultant," said Bob Weinstein, 40, of his relationship with his brother and co-chairman, Harvey, 42, "because we each have our total interest involved."

When the two New Yorkers founded Miramax in 1979 in Manhattan, "each of us did everything," Harvey Weinstein recalled. But one always served "as a check on the other," he said. Eventually, Harvey took over marketing, acquisitions and production, while Bob took on finances, distribution and ancillary markets like video, television and foreign territories.

The company came to be known for its breakout films in the 80's, like "Sex, Lies

Like the early studios, independent distributors nurture executive equality.

evil at every company. I play hockey; I'm team-oriented. The playing field is ours to take as a team."

Mr. Barker, who is 41, and Mr. Bernard, 42, had team experience when they formed Orion Classics in 1983 with Donna Gigliotti. But when she left six years later, the two men invited Ms. Bloom, then at PMK in New York in charge of publicity for their films, to be a full and equal co-president.

"It was presented that way," Ms. Bloom recalled. "I didn't have to fight for it."

In January 1992, after the parent company, Orion Pictures, declared bankruptcy, the team recreated its 15-employee operation in New York with Sony Pictures Entertainment. Today, Ms. Bloom, who is 37, focuses on acquisitions and business operations, while Mr. Bernard and Mr. Barker share marketing and distribution.

Their hits range from the Oscar winner "Howards End" to the foreign-film Oscar winners "Indochine" and "Belle Epoque." This year's Oscar nominee, "Farinelli," was championed by Ms. Bloom in script form, but rejected by Mr. Barker and Mr. Bernard as too expensive for a Belgian movie about a castrated singer. But when they all saw the compelling ads at the Cannes Film Festival last May, they immediately bought the film, still unseen. It later won the Golden Globe for best foreign film.

"Whether a film is a success or a failure," Ms. Bloom said, "it's united we stand, united we fall."

• October Films is young company is run by two former distribution heads, Jeff Lipsky and Bingham Ray; the ex-president of Cinecom, Amir Malin, and Miramax's ex-chief financial officer, John Schmidt. The four came together in New York as equal investor-partners, with the backing of Allen & Company, the investment banker, after Mr. Lipsky and Mr. Ray acquired Mike Leigh's "Life Is Sweet" in 1991.

"Equal partners means everything," Mr. Lipsky said, "from salaries to responsibilities to board participation."

The company, with 17 employees, has had some small-scale hits, including "The War Room," "Un Coeur en Hiver" and "Kika." But the four managing partners decided a year ago that they needed to better focus their acquisition efforts. Mr. Lipsky, 40, now runs marketing and distribution while Mr. Ray, 40, looks for movies worldwide; Mr. Malin, 41, handles production, business operations and ancillary markets, and Mr. Schmidt, 42, handles finances. The partners are buoyed by their most profitable film to date, "The Last Seduction."

Mr. Malin likes the equality of a partnership. "When you're a C.E.O., there's a tremendous amount of weight on your shoulders," he said. "One of the appealing things about October is we share responsibility for day-to-day operations."

Recalling the start of their association, Mr. Schmidt said: "We all looked across the table at each other and decided our talents would be complementary, and it would be a great adventure to pool them. Sometimes it's chaotic and unpredictable when you have more than one person running a company. You have to learn to live with that. It's been difficult, but very rewarding."

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and Videotape" and "My Left Foot." In 1992, the Weinsteins bought out their three-year equity investor, Midland Montagu, and then sold the company to Disney for \$80 million. There, under their continued joint direction, the autonomous distributor of modest-budget films has grown from 110 employees to 160. Last year, Miramax had 28 releases grossing \$199.2 million.

This year, Miramax grabbed 22 Oscar nominations — a record for an independent distributor and more than any studio. There were seven each for Quentin Tarantino's "Pulp Fiction" and Woody Allen's "Bullets Over Broadway."

• At Sony Pictures Classics, Michael Barker, Tom Bernard and Marcie Bloom firmly believe in their triumvirate.

"In observing the history of Hollywood," Mr. Bernard said, "it was a new chairman of the board every six months, and new companies coming and going. From my point of view, the animosity and angst among the people at the top was the greatest

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