

'Bridesmaids' Duo to Try For Another Blockbuster

From First Arts Page

the world needs right now," he said.

Ms. Wiig and Ms. Mumolo were nominated for an original screenplay Oscar for the raunchy "Bridesmaids," their first movie script. Produced at a cost of \$32.5 million by Universal Pictures, the film took in \$288.4 million at the box office and elevated Ms. Wiig to a celebrity status beyond her "Saturday Night Live" fame. It was also a best seller on DVD.

By being a feminine answer to "The Hangover" and other male-oriented comedies, "Bridesmaids" was also credited with starting a new female empowerment movement in pop culture and breaking down barriers for women in Hollywood. Studios followed up with other atypical female-driven comedies like "The Heat," "Pitch Perfect" and "The To Do List." But predicted gender changes behind the camera have not materialized. Of the 129 films scheduled for wide release in 2014, only four come from female filmmakers. "That makes no sense," Mr. Rothman said. "Everybody talks about it needing to change, but Kristen actually wants to do something about it."

The Wiig-Mumolo movie is the latest in a string of coups for TriStar, a long-dormant division of Sony Pictures Entertainment that Mr. Rothman has been working in recent months to revive. "We're pursuing original stories told with distinctive voices," he said. "In today's Hollywood, that is zigging while others zag."

TriStar, for instance, won a bidding war in April against 20th Century Fox, Universal Pictures and the Weinstein Company for "Ricki and the Flash," which Mr. Rothman said at the time would star Meryl Streep as "a guitar-wielding, hard rockin' mama by night and grocery store checkout lady by day." "Ricki and the Flash" was written by Da-

Not making a sequel, but hoping for similar success at the box office.

blo Cody and will be directed by Jonathan Demme. It is scheduled for release next June.

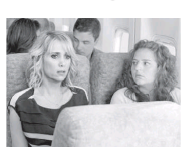
Other new TriStar projects include "The Lady in the Van," an adaptation of the hit London play which was itself based on a best-selling memoir that will star Maggie Smith. Robert Zemeckis is making a 3-D movie for TriStar that stars Joseph Gordon-Levitt as Philippe Petit, the high-wire artist who successfully walked a tightrope between the World Trade Center towers in 1974. Mr. Zemeckis's movie is based on Mr. Petit's memoir, "To Reach the Clouds." TriStar had been tracking the hush-hush Wiig-Mumolo project for months. Ms. Wiig sent studio antennas skyward in 2012 when she said that she was not interested in a "Bridesmaids" sequel. "We are writing something else," she said at the time.

The hyperkinetic Mr. Rothman, who resigned under pressure as chairman of Fox Filmed Entertainment in 2012, seems to be on a mission to send a message to his old employer: So you think you're better off without me, do you? But he dismissed that notion. "I love this job, and approach it with a lot of verve," he said. "That's all."

Ms. Wiig, who starred on "Saturday Night Live" for seven full seasons, most recently appeared on screen in "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty," a film Mr. Rothman initiated while he was at Fox. She has lately been focused on independent films like "The Skeleton Twins," a drama set for September release from Roadside Attractions.

Ms. Mumolo has acted in movies like "This 40" and television comedies like "Modern Family." She also does extensive voice work ("Handy Manny") and wrote "Joy," an coming drama directed by David O. Russell and starring Jennifer Lawrence.

Why did Ms. Wiig and Ms. Mumolo wait to return to the screen? "We wanted it to be the right time and the right idea," they wrote in an email response to the question, "and both of those elements have come together."



Kristen Wiig, left, and Annie Mumolo



Kudirat Abiola in "The Supreme Price," a documentary on the democracy movement in Nigeria, part of the Human Rights Watch Film Festival.

A World of Hurt, And Films Still Able To Share Its Pain

Images of the horrors of war are so ubiquitous in the age of the camera phone that they threaten to overwhelm and desensitize us. For movie critics who are exposed more than many people to this barrage of carnage, the impulse after a while is to withdraw into a protective shell of world-weary cynicism.

STEPHEN HOLDEN

But the Human Rights Watch Film Festival refuses to avert its gaze from war, injustice and oppression. This essential series, presented by the Film Society of Lincoln Center and the IFC Center, begins its 25th season on Thursday at the Walter Reade Theater with a fund-raising benefit, to be followed over the next 10 days by 22 films of conscience from around the world. Although this edition isn't as strong as those of the previous two years — there's no "The Act of Killing" or "The Invisible War" — it's as honorable and necessary as ever.

A paradox of this year's festival is its revelation of the special power of political theater to distill harsh truths with an emotional force that can surpass the graphic images of cinéma vérité and photojournalism. Take, for example, Madeleine Sackler's documentary "Dangerous Acts Starring the Unstable Elements of Belarus." The film is an outcry against the dictatorship of Aleksandr Lukashenko, the country's president since 1994, that focuses on the politically risky work of the Belarus Free Theater company.

The most stinging moments are not graphic scenes of war but excerpts from stark, stripped-down theatrical pieces developed by the company and performed both abroad and in Minsk, the country's capital and the troupe's home city. In a searing image from its show "Being Harold Pinter," which was produced three years ago in New York at La Mama, actors tangled in a clear plastic sheet struggle to break free.

A scene from another production, "Minsk 2011," pantomimes the police crackdown on a peaceful protest that followed an economic crisis. At a mass demonstration that infuriated the government, there were no placards or rabble-rousing speeches. Thousands of people crowded the streets and snarled around clapping their hands. In the company's re-creation of that protest, actors playing policemen rush from the wings, surround the demonstrators and lustily drag them away.

Three years ago, some members of the company, founded in 2005, fled Belarus. The scenes of protest and police

The Human Rights Watch Film Festival runs through June 22 at Lincoln Center and the IFC Center; ifhrw.org.



Abdul Basset Saroot in "Return to Homs," directed by Talal Derki, which examines the struggles of rebel forces in Syria's civil war.



"Dangerous Acts Starring the Unstable Elements of Belarus," by Madeleine Sackler, chronicles a politically bold theater company.

brutality include footage gleaned from hundreds of hours filmed in collaboration with a cinematographer in Belarus (whom Ms. Sackler directed over Skype) and then smuggled out of the country. The Belarus Free Theater, whose members are as articulate as they are talented, continue to spread the message of determined resistance to oppression.

Of the films that visit war zones like Syria, Talal Derki's "Return to Homs" examines a handful of fighters struggling against the government of President Bashar al-Assad in Homs, a city

now mostly abandoned. Much of the footage is shot inside a ruined, nearly deserted neighborhood, which the rebels reach through narrow tunnels they dug themselves. The film focuses on two rebels, Abdul Basset Saroot, a soccer star, and Ossama al Homs, a cinematographer who disappears from the movie after being detained by the government. What makes "Return to Homs," which was filmed over two years, heart-rending is its change of mood from celebratory euphoria at the beginning to near-despair at the end. Remarkably, 16 of the 22 features this

year are directed by women. Taking a long historical view of a troubled country struggling to emerge from a military dictatorship is Joanna Lipper's documentary "The Supreme Price," about Nigeria's female-directed democracy movement. In 1994, a military coup imprisoned Moshood K. O. Abiola, a pro-democracy leader who was considered the victor in aborted 1993 presidential elections but never took office. Four years later he died under suspicious circumstances.

After his imprisonment, his fearless, eloquent wife, Kudirat, took over the movement's leadership, but she was as-

ONLINE: SLIDE SHOW

More images from films in the festival: nytimes.com/movies

assinated in 1996. The history is told through the eyes of their daughter Hafsat Abiola, a Harvard-educated crusader for human rights and democracy who now leads a movement to dismantle the country's patriarchal structure.

The festival's emphasis on women is measured not only by the number of female directors but also by the tone of their films. The opening-night selection, "Private Violence," Cynthia Hill's documentary about domestic violence in the United States, tells the stories of Deanna Walters, trying to escape her abusive husband in North Carolina, and Kit Gruelle, a dedicated advocate for battered women who championed her cause after Ms. Walters was kidnapped and brutalized by her husband. Although the pictures of Ms. Walters's injuries are appalling, a prosecutor decided that the beatings warranted only a state misdemeanor charge. The sole hope for long-term incarceration involved filing federal kidnapping charges, which Ms. Walters, with Ms. Gruelle's encouragement, agreed to. The husband was convicted and sentenced to more than 20 years in prison.

The closing-night selection, "Scheherazade's Diary," a Lebanese film directed by Zeina Daccache, follows a 10-month therapeutic theater project she set up in a women's prison outside Beirut. The inmates' personal horror stories of lethal retaliation against husbands they were forced to marry when many had hardly entered puberty and had no basic knowledge about sex and reproduction are as nightmarish as the desperate crimes they committed.

The films by Ms. Hill and Ms. Daccache may be set in different civilizations in different parts of the world, but their visions of institutionalized female oppression aren't all that dissimilar.

Film in Review

Where We Started

Opens on Thursday in Manhattan. Directed by Chris Hansen. 1 hour 45 minutes; not rated.

The premise of "Where We Started" seems torn from an indie-script textbook: Will (Matthew Brumlow) and Nora (Cori Vander Broek), two lonely strangers locked in unhappy marriages, happen to run into each other on a night that might change their lives.

It's one thing when Will, a frustrated actor, and Nora, a frustrated housewife, find themselves in adjacent rooms at a nameless West Texas motel. It's another when they share cigarettes, then a late-night meal at a diner. But only when they discover they both love John Hughes films — trading quotes from "Ferris Bueller's Day Off," "The Breakfast Club" and "Some Kind of Wonderful" — do they bond. (The characters, in their early 30s, are too young to have seen those

movies in theaters, but let that pass.)

Before long, the two are smitten, the one-night stand a foregone conclusion, all hemming and hawing aside. The true leap of faith comes afterward, when they talk seriously of leaving their lives for each other and what that would entail. No divorce is simple, but for Nora, a hard-eyed realist, it would be further complicated by the custody battle over her 4-year-old son.

Written and directed by Chris Hansen, this romance has its authentic moments. As it happens, Mr. Brumlow and Ms. Vander Broek are married, but their familiarity hurts as much as it helps. They are good together in later, more intimate scenes. Early on, though, their rapport feels all too glib, a beat out of sync.

And, sadly, the Hughes homage — the two repeatedly return to his lines — winds up swamping the film plays out in the only way possible. What would Duckie do?

DANIEL M. GOLD



Cori Vander Broek and Matthew Brumlow in "Where We Started," directed by Chris Hansen.

Breakthrough Weekend

Opens on Thursday in Manhattan. Directed by Sujewa Ekanayake. 1 hour 20 minutes; not rated.

The closing credits of "Breakthrough Weekend" list a technical crew of five. That figure doesn't count the producing team, which consists of two of the actors and the director, or the composer, whose personal website is advertised below his name. This New York shaggy-dog story from Sujewa Ekanayake is an example of extreme-makeshift filmmaking — but not, unfortunately,

The plot concerns a detective, Sal (Damien Bosco), with a vaguely New Age bent, who's less interested in solving mysteries than in improving his clients' lives. Along with a protégé, Yevgeny (Sean Bempong), he takes on three increasingly bizarre cases. These involve a two-timed real estate agent (Jennifer Blakemore), incestuous siblings (Clara Schmidt and Matthew Ryan) and a wizard (David A. Steinberg) who hexes his writing partner (Matt Saxton) after their argument over minibeatle escalators.

The material may sound offbeat, but the presentation never transcends amateurishness. The jumbled

scenes suggests that potentially fluid footage was never filmed. The actors visibly struggle with their lines, including a few howlers worthy of Ed Wood. (Yevgeny, an aspiring author, wonders aloud, "Do people really need another book?")

Perhaps to pad the running time, every scene is followed by a skyline view or streetscape. Pans of the Brooklyn Bridge recall the infamous shots of the Golden Gate Bridge from the midnight movie "The Room." The final credits optimistically trumpet "Breakthrough Weekend" as "No. 1 of 60" in a series, promising "Breakthrough Weekend 2: The Rise of Yevgeny"

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFFREY M. HARRIS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES. STYLING BY JESSICA WATSON. HAIR BY JESSICA WATSON. MAKEUP BY JESSICA WATSON. PROP STYLING BY JESSICA WATSON. SET DESIGNER BY JESSICA WATSON. COSTUME DESIGNER BY JESSICA WATSON. EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS BY JESSICA WATSON. PRODUCED BY JESSICA WATSON. WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY CHRIS HANSEN.