

Morning Report

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT REPORTS FROM THE TIMES, NEWS SERVICES AND THE NATIONAL PRESS.

TV & FILM

'Bully' Pulled From Method Fest

The film "Bully," a disturbing look at youth culture from director Larry Clark ("Kids"), was pulled from the Method Fest in Pasadena, where it had been scheduled to be the festival's opening-night headliner to-night. Last week, Lions Gate, the film's distributor, notified festival director Don Franken that "Bully" would not be available for screening. On Wednesday, Franken sought an injunction in Pasadena Superior Court that

would have forced the studio to deliver a print to Method Fest producers. The judge denied the request after hearing Lions Gate's explanation: Producers had not yet delivered a final print with musical clearances and completed credits. The film stars Brad Renfro as a Florida teenager who helps murder the neighborhood bully. At press time, Method Fest organizers had not yet decided on a replacement.

Humanitas Finalists Announced

"Traffic," "Billy Elliot" and episodes of "Once and Again" and "Malcolm in the Middle" were among the nominees announced this week for Humanitas Prizes, given to writers of movies and TV shows that "communicate human values." Thirty-four writers were named finalists in eight categories, vying for cash awards totaling \$130,000. Among the nominees, chosen from more than 400 sub-

missions: "Billy Elliot," "Traffic" and "You Can Count on Me" for feature film script (a \$25,000 prize); episodes of "Frasier," "Everybody Loves Raymond" and "Malcolm in the Middle" in the 30-minute TV category (\$10,000); episodes of "ER," "Gideon's Crossing," "Once and Again" and "Third Watch" in the 60-minute TV category (\$15,000). The winners will be announced June 28.

Fall Programming Notes

CBS has purchased the rights to **"American Horror: Timothy McVeigh and the Oklahoma City Bombing,"** according to Thursday's Daily Variety. The miniseries will be based on the best-selling book by reporter Lou Michel and Dan Herbeck, who conducted extensive prison interviews with McVeigh. **Rose McGowan** ("ScREAM") will join the WB's witch series **"Charmed"** this fall as another of the sisters. She replaces Shannen

Doherty, who left the series at the end of last season. . . . Episodes of **"thirtysomething"** will begin running on Bravo July 16. Author Candace Bushnell ("Sex and the City") will host the presentation, the first in Bravo's "Art of Television" series. Bravo taped a reunion last week with the cast and creators of the series at the Museum of Radio and Television in Beverly Hills for a special, "Inside thirtysomething," also set to air July 16.

POP / ROCK

Roll Over, Chuck Berry

A St. Louis federal judge has ruled that pianist Johnnie Johnson can proceed with his lawsuit against rock legend Chuck Berry. Johnson sued Berry in November, seeking millions of dollars in past royalties for songs Johnson claims he co-wrote with Berry, including "Roll Over Beethoven" and "Sweet Little Sixteen." Berry's attorneys were seeking a dismissal of the case and cited a three-year statute of limitations on copyright claims. Judge Donald J. Stohr ruled Monday that Johnson may attempt to show why the statute of limitations should not apply. Stohr also ordered Berry to turn over all of his financial records showing the royalties he has received. Johnson alleges he often com-



Chuck Berry

posed the music on piano, then Berry converted it to guitar and wrote the lyrics. Berry wrote the classic "Johnny B. Goode" as a tribute to Johnson. In March, Johnson was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame's "sideman" category.

THE ARTS

Exiting the Bolshoi

The Bolshoi Theatre's artistic director has handed in his resignation, only nine months after being brought in to revamp the declining company. Gennady Rozhdestvensky announced he was leaving after critics mauled the Bolshoi's production of Sergei Prokofiev's opera "The Player." The veteran conductor,

70, was appointed artistic director to help resurrect the Bolshoi's reputation after President Putin fired his predecessor and brought the theater under the control of the Ministry of Culture. Previously, Rozhdestvensky directed the Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra and the BBC Symphony.

QUICK TAKES

Lea Salonga, best known for her Tony Award-winning performance as Kim in "Miss Saigon," has been cast in the leading role of Mei Li in the revival of **"Flower Drum Song,"** opening Oct. 14 at the Mark Taper Forum. . . . **Valerie Harper** is replacing **Linda Lavin** as Marjorie Taub in the Tony Award-nominated comedy "The Tale of the Allergist's Wife" beginning July 31 at the Barrymore Theatre.

Lavin's final performance is going to be July 27. . . . Walt Disney Pictures' new animated film **"Atlantis: The Lost Empire"** will debut in digital format in 13 specially equipped venues across the country today. The film's local digital engagements include the El Capitan Theatre in Hollywood, AMC Burbank Media Center North and Edwards Irvine Spectrum. —LISA BOONE

Liz Smith

Mum's the Word on His Mum

"You tangoed with my mother, but did you kiss her? Was she a good kisser?" Actor **Sean Astin** put this unusual question to fellow actor **Joe Spano**. Astin was speaking of his mother, actress Patty Duke. He knew that Spano and Duke starred together on the 1995 TV series "Amazing Grace." Spano refused to answer.



Sean Astin

This sparring took place at the friendly poker table of former music agent **Norby Walters** in his elegant West Hollywood condo. Also on hand were **Michael Blehn**, **James Farentino**, **George Dzundza** and **Charles Durning**. For 10 years, Walters has hosted a nondrinking, non-smoking card game once a week for so many stars that he has to rotate his players from a roster of 100.

Astin is fresh from filming "Lord of the Rings," and he has signed for the sequels, along with all the other cast members. He and his wife, Christine, and their 4-year-old daughter lived in New Zealand during the making of the movie and then toured Europe. Astin said nobody goes to Walters' games for the money: "I was down \$4, but I ate \$15 worth of his food, so I'm OK."



Kerry Washington, with Ray Anthony Thomas in "Our Song."



Melissa Martinez, with D'Monroe, plays a teenager with few aspirations.

A Pitch-Perfect Portrayal of Teen Life in 'Our Song'

Movie Review

By KENNETH TURAN
TIMES FILM CRITIC

"Our Song" will surprise you. Like the quiet stranger who turns out to have something to say, this modest film has virtues that come out of nowhere. It takes familiar material and develops it with such tact and skill that we find ourselves moved and sort of amazed at the same time.

Written and directed by Jim McKay, "Our Song" does not inspire confidence with its premise, one that echoes any number of low-budget efforts: Come spend the summer with three 15-year-old young women of color in Brooklyn's Crown Heights neighborhood. Truly, this would be a better world if members of Congress paid as much attention as independent filmmakers to what was happening with teenagers in distressed urban areas.

The first thing "Our Song" gets right is the tightly circumscribed nature of this environment. These girls may technically live in the great metropolis that is New York, but their world is largely contained in the village-sized few blocks where they live, shop, shoplift and go to school.

Another of the film's advantages

is making the trio members of the real-life Jackie Robinson Steppers marching band, a snappy 60-piece Brooklyn aggregation whose presence adds energy and pizzazz to a story that is by definition low-key.

Lanisha (Kerry Washington), Joy (Anna Simpson) and Maria (Melissa Martinez) are best friends, always hanging out together, always there for each other. This particular summer, however, turns out to be a pivotal one. Young as they are, they're going to have to make critical choices about where their futures are headed.

To state "Our Song's" thesis that baldly, however, goes against the way this film is put together. Director McKay (who did the much less successful "Girls Town") has utilized a subtler but still simple approach. Using Jim Denault's intimate camera work and a relaxed style, McKay makes it possible for us to hang out with the three as they live their lives, interacting with each other, their friends and families and their boyfriends, if and when they have them.

Joy is the dreamer of the group, fantasizing about a glamorous rock career, while Maria has few aspirations aside from learning Spanish from the more motivated Lanisha, whose Latino mother and black father are divorced but still on better

terms than anyone else's parents.

The normal teenage trinity of clothes, boyfriends and school weighs heavily on these kids' minds but gradually we start to see what's different. Unlike their more comfortable peers elsewhere, there is no safety net for these girls, no easy way to deal with stresses they are too young to be prepared for, nothing to be said to them when they discover that life can be both hard and unforgiving.

Gradually, almost without our knowing it or sensing that the film is forcing our attention, we find ourselves sharing in all the emotions of these girls' lives. They become so real to us that we completely understand why they make the choices they do even as we wish it could be otherwise.

This is especially the case when they have to deal with the lure of pregnancy. Yes, lure, for one of the things "Our Song" is able to effectively dramatize is why this choice can have an appeal to girls who see nothing else hopeful in their lives.

Although the film has the authenticity of reality, it has been tightly scripted and wonderfully acted across the board, with a special nod going to Kerry Washington, who was also excellent as the star of "Lift," one of last year's



Anna Simpson as a dreamer who fantasizes about a rock career.

more interesting Sundance films. McKay made "Our Song" on a tiny budget with a skeleton crew, but that hasn't stopped it from reaching us emotionally. This is a film that doesn't go in expected directions and develops so gradually you don't even notice its developing at all. In theory, those could be drawbacks, but in these hands it creates something close to magic.

● **M.P.A.A. rating: R, for language and some teen drug use. Times guide lines: Suitable for older teens with relatively mild language and talk of sexuality.**

'Our Song'

Kerry Washington . . . Lanisha Brown
Anna Simpson . . . Joycelyn Clifton
Melissa Martinez . . . Maria Hernandez
Pilar Brown . . . Pilar Brown
Ray Anthony Thomas . . . Carl Brown
Rosalynd Coleman . . . Dawn Clifton
Independent Film Channel Productions presents, in association with Beach Hill Films and Janneman Pictures, a Channel Film Corp. movie, released by IFC Films. Director Jim McKay. Producers Jim McKay, Paul Mezey, Diana E. Williams. Executive producers Caroline Kaplan, Jonathan Schrag, Michael Stupe. Screenplay Jim McKay. Cinematographer Jim Denault. Editor Alex Hall. Costumes Ivel Roman. Music supervisor Julie Panebianco. Running time: 1 hour, 36 minutes.
Exclusively at the Landmark NuWiltshire, 1314 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica, (310) 394-8099, and the Edwards University Cinemas, 4245 Campus Drive, Irvine, (949) 854-8811.

Awakening to an Obscure Painter's Gifts

Art • Ruled Monday that the late artist Tom Field, part of the San Francisco Renaissance of the '50s and '60s, includes a solo show in Orange County.

By VIVIAN LETRAN
TIMES STAFF WRITER

In the beginning, every career move Tom Field made seemed right.

The young painter, born and raised in Fort Wayne, Ind., mingled with some of the world's premiere 20th century artists, including Robert Rauschenberg, Willem de Kooning, Josef Albers, Franz Kline and Joseph Fiore—all of whom he knew in the 1950s at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. At 26, he emerged in a vibrant San Francisco art scene as a noteworthy Abstract Expressionist.

Then the worst thing happened: nothing. Field fell short of his famed friends' successes, remaining relatively anonymous until his death at 65 in 1995.

In a tribute to a career that was prolific if not famed, an exhibition titled "Tom Field, Pausing to See: Abstract Expressionist Paintings, Black Mountain College to the San Francisco Bay" has been put together at the Orange County Center for Contemporary Art, where it continues through June 30. The 36-work retrospective of 22 oils and 14 watercolors is the largest solo show the artist has ever had.

Center curator Denise Di Salvo of Irvine was a close friend of Field's in the 1980s when they were neighbors in San Francisco. She is also the executor of his estate.

"When I first met Tom and saw his work, I was moved by it in a profound way," said Di Salvo, 44, who bought Field's 1981 "Irish Wars" for 12 monthly payments of \$5 each. She recalled Field painting on cheap cotton fabric at times because he couldn't afford canvas, and working in the most unfavorable conditions, whether on a tiny porch or in a basement.

Although Field didn't leave a will, he requested that his friends, to whom he loaned paintings for safekeeping, give his works the recognition they didn't receive in his lifetime.

The show marks a growing interest in his work. Collectors of his paintings include private patrons and the State University of New York Anderson Gallery in Buffalo.

"I think it's a coup for us to have one of Tom Field's paintings," said



Curator Denise Di Salvo with Tom Field's painting "Deep Blues" (1955).

Robert J. Berthoff, curator of the Anderson Gallery's art and literary collection, which documents the San Francisco Renaissance of the 1950s and '60s and contains Field's 1961 "Portrait of Ebbe," a 5-foot-high oil painting of a man defined by heavy, black paint strokes.

Berthoff compares Field's best works to better-known Bay Area painters of the period, less, David Park and Elmer Bischoff. "Tom was a first-rate painter," Berthoff said.

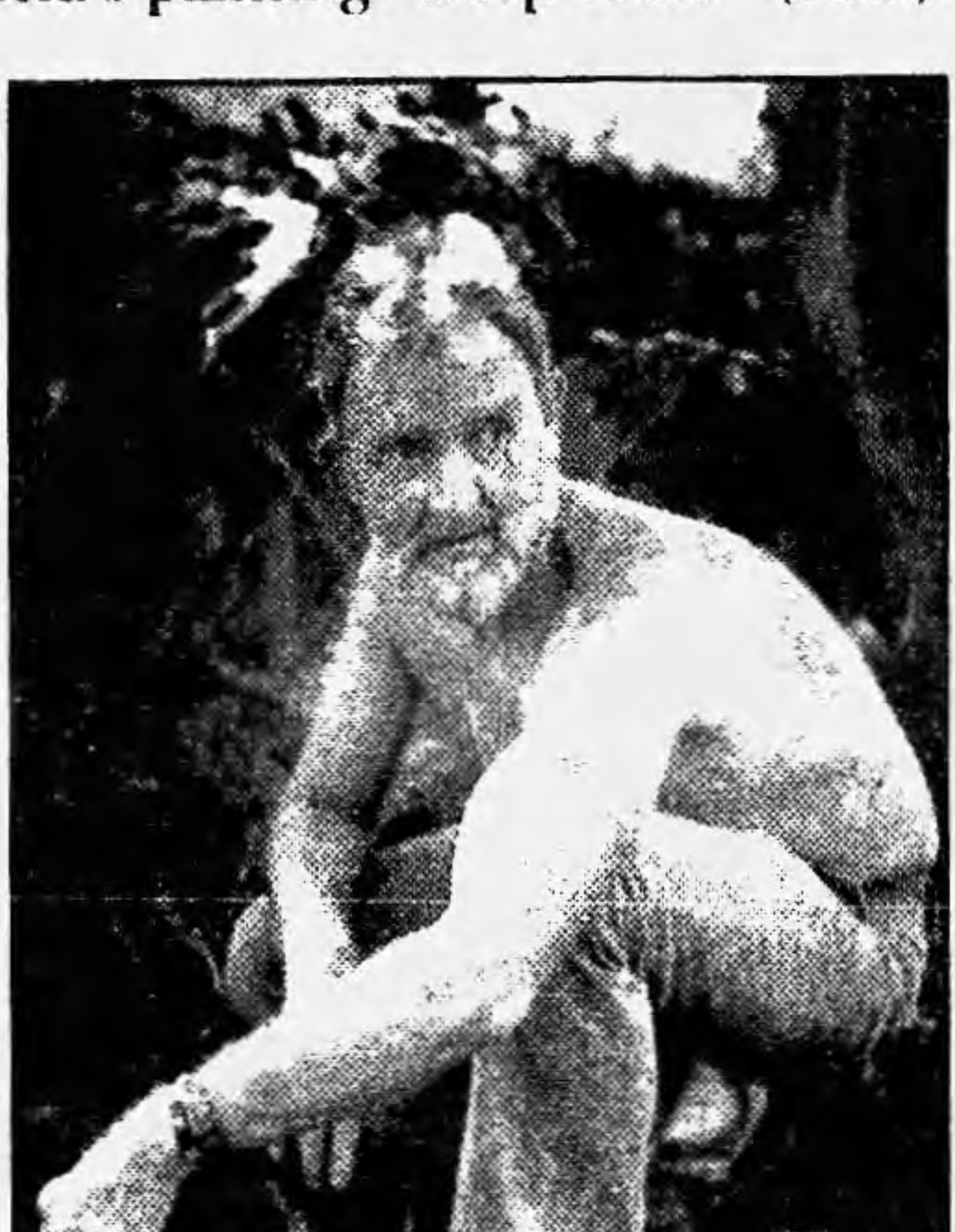
Early oil paintings displayed in the show, including the 1954 "Bird in Flight" and 1955 "Deep Blues," are among his quintessential, representative Abstract Expressionist works. His later paintings became more figurative and included watercolors.

Field showed a knack for painting at an early age. He told friends that at age 5, he took a petunia and smashed it on paper to experiment with color. Encouraged by his aunt, Field attended Central Catholic High School in Fort Wayne, Ind., and graduated in 1948, winning a scholarship to the privately funded Fort Wayne Art School (now the Fort Wayne Art Museum).

Field left school to serve in the Korean War for two years as an Army surgery assistant. He returned to the United States in 1953 and was urged by his art teacher to continue his studies. He used most of his GI Bill money, a stipend of about \$110 monthly, for tuition.

From 1953 to 1956, he attended Black Mountain College—a small liberal arts school with an emphasis on the arts and experimentation. His instructors included New York painter Fiore, sculptor John Chamberlain and Rauschenberg.

Field's time at Black Mountain is documented in Mary Harris' 1987 book "The Arts at Black Mountain College" and Martin Duberman's 1972 "Black Mountain: An Exploration in Com-



Abstract Expressionist Tom Field remained relatively unknown until after his 1995 death at 65.

munity." With a short temper and an affinity for alcohol, Field didn't take negative criticism well. In the books there are anecdotes about his wild side. One night he returned from a party with friends and rammed his dark-blue Buick sedan into the side of his school dorm, he was on crutches for months.

Field's studies were cut short when the college shut down in 1956 for lack of funding.

Then 26, he moved to San Francisco to find work, ultimately becoming a merchant seaman. His job afforded him wages to buy materials and large chunks of time he spent months to paint while waiting to ship out again.

During that time in San Francisco, the Beats were on the rise and Abstract Expressionism dominated the art scene, as it had at Black Mountain College. Clifford Still, Richard Diebenkorn and others led the way at the San Francisco Art Institute (then the California School of Fine Arts).

Field became part of the San Francisco Renaissance, a group that grew up outside formal settings like the art institute. He made

some early strides with group exhibitions at a number of local galleries in the '60s. And he was part of a group show at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Annual in 1962, where his work won the top award. He also was invited to participate in the San Francisco Art Institute annual in 1964. In 1978, he was featured in "Seven From Black Mountain" at the Top Floor Gallery.

But his career never took off, in terms of recognition or sales. In fact, his first solo show in the Bay Area was a memorial exhibition organized in 1997 by close friends and colleagues at the now-defunct 871 Fine Arts Gallery.

"He was a terrible self-promoter and just wasn't interested in the commercial end of the art business," Berthoff said.

After the '60s, museum invitations were few and far between. Field's heavy drinking became crippling. His health had deteriorated and he joined Synanon, a rehab center for alcoholics, between 1974 and 1977. He lived out his life in near poverty, a minor figure in art.

"Tom was not alone in his anonymity. We were all being ignored by the art establishment at the time," said grade school pal and painter Paul Alexander, 70, of Mendocino, Calif.

Alexander attended Black Mountain College and moved to San Francisco with Field. "Most artists from San Francisco who made a reputation made it outside the area, either in Los Angeles or in New York."

Still, Field continued to paint, undiscouraged. He loved cooking, gardening and listening to jazz and classical music.

"He was an 'underground' and remained so," said longtime friend Robin Blaser, 76, a Vancouver, Canada, collector who owns an early Field work, "as if fulfilling Jack Pollock's recommendation that 'the underground is where the work is.'"

"He was a lively person, and it shows in his paintings, which are remarkably vivid," Alexander said. "Tom never worried about next week or last week. Whatever he was doing at the moment was the most important thing in his life. And throughout his entire life, he never gave up on painting."

● **Tom Field, Pausing to See: Abstract Expressionist Paintings, Black Mountain College to the San Francisco Bay, Orange County Center for Contemporary Art, 11 N. Scenic Ave., Santa Ana. Ends June 30, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.**