



Slamdance '05

January 21 – 28, Park City, Utah

At Slamdance, Paramount Classics Wins “Mad Hot” Doc

by Eugene Hernandez/indieWIRE

Marilyn Agrelo's "**Mad Hot Ballroom**," the opening night film at **Slamdance** this year, was acquired in a rare deal to close during the alternative festival. **Paramount Classics** excitedly announced the pact on Thursday after making a play for the movie following a packed Tuesday afternoon showing of the film at The Treasure Mountain Inn on Main St.

"It was the first Slamdance screening I've seen," said Paramount Classics co-president **David Dinerstein** in a conversation with indieWIRE on Thursday. The Indiewood exec proudly called "Mad Hot Ballroom" the best documentary screening anywhere in Park City this year. Paramount Classics announced that it would release the movie in conjunction with **Nick Movies**, the film arm of the popular kids cable network, Nickelodeon, its corporate sibling at **Viacom**.

"Welcome to the new improved Paramount!" exclaimed co-president **Ruth Vitale** during the speakerphone conversation from a Deer Valley condo. While the company and its execs faced speculation about the future prior to **Brad Grey** being appointed the new head of Paramount Pictures, the division now seems on solid footing with its second deal this week. Over the weekend, Vitale and Dinerstein led the acquisition of the hit Sundance film "Hustle & Flow," acquired by Paramount in a major \$16 million pact with the film's producer, John Singleton.

"Mad Hot Ballroom," the story of New York City public school kids who journey into the world of ballroom dancing, was passed over by Sundance according to insiders, giving Slamdance organizers an opportunity to present the movie in a high-profile slot.

The benefit of being part of a huge corporation is the ability to create synergistic opportunities," explained Vitale, adding, "We have been given a mandate that we can promote across company lines within the corporation." Dinerstein added that while Paramount's offers for both "Mad Hot" and "Hustle" may have been lower than their competitors bids, he feels that the promotion that the Viacom brands can offer puts Paramount at a distinct advantage and sends an important message to sellers. Vitale and Dinerstein added that they have already felt truly supported by new studio chief Brad Grey.

Cinetic Media orchestrated the deal, with John Sloss and Micah Green selling the film to Vitale, Dinerstein, Paramount SVP of Business Affairs Jeff Freedman, and Nickelodeon Movies SVP Julia Pistor.

Kathleen McInnis, Slamdance's new director following her work at the Seattle International Film Festival, told indieWIRE that Cinetic tipped her off to the project after her submission deadline had closed, but once she watched the movie she realized that she had to bend the rules and give it the opening night spot.

"I was just so charmed by it," she told indieWIRE on Thursday, "So much shit has been going on in the world lately and then I sat in front of this (film) and I was rooting for these kids, I was happy, I was happy to have watched the human condition for 90 minutes, this is what a Slamdance film is supposed to do to you -- touch you and have a voice that is fresh and unique."

Tuesday afternoon's Treasure Mountain Inn screening of "Mad Hot Ballroom" will no doubt become one of those legendary Park City showings that people talk about for years. Large groups of buyers from major companies packed into the makeshift Slamdance screening room for the doc's final screening, with many journalists turned away in favor of buyers and festival ticket holders. Shortly before the showing, a mother and daughter who held general tickets to the screening arrived, but would face sitting on the floor in front of the distributors. McInnis quickly jumped to the front of the venue, asking an insider to give up a seat so that the 7 year old could watch the movie properly. Buyers leapt to their feet to hand over a chair and the successful showing commenced.

"It means great things for our filmmakers and for the festival," said McInnis, reflecting on the impact of the deal, "It means we have profile and we have game." But she cautioned, "It is not always just about one film, its certainly not about who sells for the highest dollar."

Par Classics waltzes away with 'Ballroom'

By [DANA HARRIS, CATHY DUNKLEY](#), Thurs., Jan. 27, 2005, 7:53pm PT

PARK CITY -- As the Sundance Film Festival came to a close, Paramount Pictures wielded its corporate clout for the second time in Park City as Par Classics paid around \$2 million for worldwide rights outside Australia and New Zealand to "Mad Hot Ballroom."

Lions Gate Films also made bids to waltz away with the pic, a documentary about preteen competitive ballroom dancers. "Mad Hot" served as the opening night film of the Slamdance Film Festival.

Par's buy was only one of four that wrapped Thursday, with many more expected to close in the days and weeks ahead.

'Mad' love

Directed by Marilyn Agrelo and written by Amy Sewell, "Mad Hot Ballroom" follows a group of 11-year-old New York City public school kids who journey into the world of ballroom dancing and into a citywide competition. Sewell and Agrelo produced the film, which was also repped by Cinetic.

Par Classics, the studio's autonomous specialized division, acquired "Mad Hot Ballroom" in association with Nickelodeon Movies. Last week, Paramount Pictures acquired the Sundance Film Festival's dramatic competition entry "Hustle & Flow" in association with MTV Films.

Par Classics co-prexies Ruth Vitale and David Dinerstein bought the pic from Cinetic Media. Also repping the studio were senior VP business affairs Jeff Freedman and Julia Pistor, senior VP Nickelodeon Movies.

In a statement, Vitale and Dinerstein compared "Mad Hot Ballroom" to hit indie pics like "Spellbound" and "Strictly Ballroom." Cinetic previously worked with Paramount on "Napoleon Dynamite," which held international rights on that film and, through MTV, added marketing muscle to the pic's domestic Fox Searchlight release. Nickelodeon's expected to serve a similar role for "Mad Hot Ballroom."



*Par Classics paid \$2 million for worldwide rights, excepting Australia and New Zealand, to **Mad Hot Ballroom**, Slamdance's opening night pic.*