

25 Most Influential People

Compiled by our editors and arranged in a very specific order sure to spur debate, these are the people you must know in the small world of independent film.

Too often power is associated with a "title." President, Producer, Director, Critic, VP, Head of this and that. There are thousands in the world of independent film who hold these official titles. There is, however, a very short list of people who have *influence*. With a phone call, they get things done. With a speech, their leadership can provide direction. With the signing of a deal their power can change the face of the industry. For this elite list of dedicated individuals, titles are meaningless. Their passion for the business transcends their official capacities. Even without their titles, these tireless champions still wield a strong voice in the industry.

And if you don't know them, it doesn't matter, since you've already felt their influence in some way or other. Now we present to you Film Festival Today's list of 2003's 25 Most Influential People in Independent Film.

1 | Robert Redford Father of Independent Film

Redford took over the fledgling USA Film Festival in the late 1980s and turned it into the brand name known as *Sundance*, making the dreams and careers of countless aspiring filmmakers. This brilliant film actor may be more remembered, at least in the industry, for what he did in that sleepy little town in Utah. Add to Redford the top-notch programming team that runs the show at the Sundance Film Festival – Geoff Gilmore, John Cooper, Trevor Groth, Caroline Libresco, among others – and you have a veritable super team of indie film. Sundance sets the tone for the rest of the film festivals in the United States and their programming choices have made stars of its filmmaking alum. And to top it off, the Sundance Kid is still a heartthrob even in his 60s.

2 | Bob & Harvey Weinstein Miramax

Undeniably the most powerful brothers in the business, the Weinstains started their art house distribution

company in 1979 buying the *SECRET POLICEMAN'S OTHER BALL* for \$180,000 and nurturing the release as they saw it gross \$6 million. In 1988, British Midland Bank invested \$5 million and extended them a \$25 million credit enabling them to buy *SEX, LIES, AND VIDEOTAPE*, the film that put independent film on the map in terms of mainstream moviegoers. Infamous industry penny pinchers, they never spend more than they have to, which is why they are so successful. Do we even need to mention the pile of Oscars littering their offices?

3 | Bingham Ray President, United Artist

As co-founder of October Films in 1991, Ray had a keen eye for independent films with crossover appeal. He released *SECRETS & LIES*, *BREAKING THE WAVES* and *THE LAST SEDUCTION*, through October. In 1997, October was acquired by Universal for an estimated \$60 million. An in demand executive, Ray became president of United Artist and is responsible for buying Michael Moore's controversial *BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE* and the upcoming Jim



1 | Robert Redford



2 | Bob & Harvey Weinstein



3 | Bingham Ray



4 | Roger Ebert



5 | John Sloss

Jarmusch film, *CIGARETTES AND COFFEE*. He's also known for his dry wit and brutal sense of humor.

4 | Roger Ebert Critic/Champion

Ebert's notable thumb has the power to bring attention to indies, which he does often. The Pulitzer Prize winning film critic is a must read and his passion is made clear as he treks to festivals around the world despite recent health problems. Less widely known is his contribution to the formation of the Sundance Institute in the early 80s. At Robert Redford's invitation, Ebert joined in a meeting of the minds where he famously uttered, "We have collectively got to find a way to make these independent films fashionable like foreign films were when we were going to college." Mission accomplished, due in no small part to all the independent films Ebert has championed.

5 | John Sloss Entertainment Lawyer

Former Detroit native, Sloss has made it big in indie film. It helps that the tall and intimidating attorney can disarm anyone with his smile. His friendship with Sundance Festival Director Geoff Gilmore has resulted in more than a few Sundance premieres for films he represents. There's no conspiracy here. Sloss just has excellent taste in the projects he chooses to represent, and, lucky for him, that taste is shared by Gilmore. Sloss has brokered some of the best deals for independent films in history and is

co-owner of InDigEnt, producers of **PERSONAL VELOCITY** and **TADPOLE**, which sold at Sundance for millions. In fact, in some years, Sundance was jokingly referred to as "Slossfest" for the sheer number of projects he had screening in Park City.



6 | Ira Deutchman

into a valuable industry news resource. Its daily e-newsletter goes out to over 40,000 subscribers. IndieWIRE's penchant to report top industry news is unparalleled and wherever news happens, Hernandez can be found.

moved to Los Angeles where publishing mogul Larry Flynt acquired the publication. Now purely a website, FilmThreat.com attracts the largest audience of indie fans on the web as well as a 100,000 strong e-mail newsletter. Gore's book, *The Ultimate*

le in Independent Film

6 | Ira Deutchman Executive

Founder of Fine Line Features, Deutchman began his career as a marketing executive and later entered production. In 1995, he founded Redeemable Pictures, producing **LULU ON A BRIDGE**, **KISS ME GUIDO** and **24 HOUR WOMAN**. His most recent venture, Emerging Pictures, keeps its focus on digital exhibition and marketing. Deutchman's forward thinking views on the digital medium are applauded by filmmakers everywhere.

7 | Ed Pressman Producer

Founder of Content Films, Pressman began as an indie producer for filmmakers Oliver Stone, Brian DePalma and Terrence Malick. He helped produce Rainer Werner Fassbinder's first English language film, **DESPAIR**, in 1979. Recently, Pressman has produced films with partner John Schmidt, which included three Sundance entries from 2003, **THE COOLER**, **HEBREW HAMMER** and **PARTY MONSTER**. Never afraid of taking risks and tenacious in his approach, Pressman pursued William H. Macy for six months before Macy said "Yes" to taking the lead in **THE COOLER**.

8 | Eugene Hernandez IndieWire

Founder of the Internet daily indieWire, Hernandez seemed to build a career out of thin air. IndieWire started primarily as a chat room in 1995 for film geeks and slowly grew



7 | Ed Pressman



8 | Eugene Hernandez



9 | Jonathan Sehring



10 | Cassian Elwes



11 | Chris Gore

9 | Jonathan Sehring President of IFC Entertainment

If Sehring, as President only acquired films for the Independent Film Channel, he already would have a lot of weight. But Sehring's vision also has led to the development of original programming for the network, including the documentary on 1970s filmmaking, **DECADE UNDER THE INFLUENCE**. Through IFC Films and the IFC Channel, Sehring's support of indies rings loud and clear. It should come as no surprise that the IFC party is one of the hottest tickets at Sundance.

10 | Cassian Elwes William Morris Agent

In a business of relationships, Senior VP and Co-Head of William Morris Independent, Elwes has cornered the market on *all* the relationships in the indie film world. As producer and agent he has helped arthouse films cross over into the mainstream, resulting in the success of a slew indie films. Quiet and unassuming, he has an eye for talent and great films. As head of WMA Independent, Elwes has been directly involved with the making and financing of over 100 films, including a few you might have heard of such as **PULP FICTION**, **SLING BLADE** and **THE GOOD GIRL**. Elwes combines all the elements to create the total package and more often than not, that package leads to success.

11 | Chris Gore Writer/Filmmaker

Detroit, Michigan native Gore became a leading voice of the independent scene when he created the infamous *Film Threat* magazine in 1985. He

Film Festival Survival Guide, has become *the Bible* for filmmakers and required reading at film schools. Strangely, he's also a TV personality, hosting *Festival Pass* for Starz and the upcoming *Ultimate Film Fanatic* for IFC. Crossing over from film critic to filmmaker, he just produced and co-wrote a comedy feature titled **MY BIG FAT INDEPENDENT MOVIE**. Gore's outspoken voice and tireless film festival travel have made him legendary.

12 | Kelly Devine IFC

Acquisitions guru for the Independent Film Channel for the

Acquisitions Executives

You have to know them...

- » **Udy Epstein**, 7th Art Releasing
- » **Patrick Gunn**, Artisan Entertainment
- » **John Vanco**, Cowboy Pictures
- » **Jason Resnick**, Focus Features
- » **Sarah Lash**, IFC Films
- » **Jason Constantine**, Lions Gate Films
- » **Eamonn Bowles**, Magnolia Pictures
- » **Matt Brodlie**, Miramax
- » **Bob Berney**, Newmarket Films
- » **David Koh** and **Ryan Werner**, Palm Pictures
- » **Ruth Vitale** and **David Dinerstein**, Paramount Classics
- » **Doug Witkins**, Picture This! Entertainment
- » **Tom Quinn**, Samuel Goldwyn Films
- » **Dylan Leiner**, Sony Pictures Classics
- » **Marcus Hu**, Strand Releasing
- » **Daniel Katz**, ThinkFilm
- » **Jack Turner**, United Artists
- » **Paul Federbush**, Warner Independent Pictures
- » **Marie Therese Guirgis** and **Rob Williams**, Wellspring Media
- » **Emily Russo**, Zeitgeist Films



Festival Directors/ Programmers

You need to know them...

- » **Geoff Gilmore**, Sundance
- » **Christian Gaines**, AFI Fest LA
- » **Jason Redmond**, Boston
- » **Trevor Groth**, CineVegas/Sundance
- » **Britta Erickson**, Denver
- » **Michael Cain**, Deep Ellum
- » **Matthew Curtis**, Florida
- » **Rich Raddon**, Los Angeles
- » **Matt Dentler**, SXSW
- » **Chris Clark**, St. Louis
- » **Tom Luddy**, Telluride
- » **Noah Cowan**, Toronto
- » **Jane Rosenthal**, Tribeca

past five years, approachable Devine has a profound knowledge of independent films. Starting as an assistant to IFC President Jonathan Sehring, she became an acquisition executive within 18 months. Devine has a passion for short films and often champions unlikely films and filmmakers.

13 | **Jeremy Walker** Public Relations

For the last 15 years, preeminent New York PR guru Walker has been a critical source for filmmakers seeking attention in the media. He has handled some of the most important films to come out of Sundance, including **THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT**. Walker usually takes on films at Sundance and handles them right through their theatrical release. His press releases become news and his affable nature makes him one of the most likable publicists in the business.

14 | **Shelia Nevins** HBO Executive VP

Nevins is Executive Vice President for Original Programming, Documentaries and Family for HBO and Cinemax. But she is much more than that. Nevins is one of the most prominent authorities on documentary film, overseeing HBO's Award Winning doc series *America Undercover*. Nevins unyielding support of docs and indies through her post at HBO goes far beyond her job description. Charming and accessible, her leadership has changed the way documentaries are perceived. Once thought by moviegoers as the "eat your broccoli" of film genres, now docs are hip, and better yet, profitable. And who do we have to thank? You guessed it, Nevins.

15 | **Michelle Byrd** IFP NY

Former book editor, Byrd began her film career with the IFP in 1991. In 1997, she took over the executive director position from Catherine Tait. Since then, she has moved the IFP in a new direction, cutting back its market to five days from its customary ten, and eliminating finished features for more works-in-progress. Most recently, the IFP filed suit against the MPAA in opposition to the screener ban – and won! It was a victory for indies and also a reaffirmation of the kind of influence both Byrd and the IFP have.

16 | **Peter Baxter & Dan Mirvish**, Festival Directors

Founders of the alternative festival in Park City, Slamdance, Baxter and Mirvish have turned their renegade film showcase into an extremely vital festival on the circuit. In the mid-90s, the Sundance Film Festival rejected Mirvish's feature opus, **OMAHA THE MOVIE**. Rebelling against the establishment, Mirvish and friends started Slamdance as a way to screen films rejected by Sundance. Slamdance, now celebrating its 10 year anniversary, has since grown to enormous importance and helped launched many careers, including that of **MEMENTO** director Christopher Nolan, whose first feature, **FOLLOWING** premiered at Slamdance. Add to that a

screenplay competition and worldwide screening showcases and the dedication displayed by Baxter and Mirvish becomes very clear.



12 | **Kelly Devine**



13 | **Jeremy Walker**



14 | **Shelia Nevins**



15 | **Michelle Byrd**



16 | **Peter Baxter**



16 | **Dan Mirvish**



17 | **Christine Vachon**

17 | **Christine Vachon**, Producer

Extraordinary producer and Brown University-educated Vachon cut her teeth on extremely low budget productions in New York in the 1980s. She helped establish the new gay film movement; producing films such as **SWOON** and **POISON**, and brought risk-taking in films to new levels. Vachon has a love of difficult and highly controversial subject, such as Larry Clark's utterly ruthless portrayal of NY's inner-city **KIDS**. Her mantra is quality first and her impressive filmography provides proof of her convictions.

18 | **Spike Lee** Writer/Director

NYU film school graduate and Brooklyn, NY native, Lee launched a career with his grandmother's money. Little did he know that his debut feature, **SHE'S GOTTA HAVE IT**, would inspire a generation of African-American filmmakers, most notably John **BOYZ IN THE HOOD** Singleton. When he ran out of funding for his epic **MALCOLM X**, he received donations from Oprah Winfrey, Michael Jordan among others. Always outspoken, his unapologetic *tell-it-like-it-is* approach has forced both audiences and the industry to listen and take notice of issues confronting society today.

19 | **Kevin Smith** Writer/ Director/Action Figure

This portly self-deprecating filmmaker excels as much at penis jokes as directing. Smith's debut feature **CLERKS** was discovered by producer's rep Bob Hawk at the IFP in 1994. An overnight sensation, Smith has gone on to write and direct a slew of successful indies featuring his creations, Jay and Silent

Bob. His fanatical following can't get enough of Smith in his films or on his own web site *MoviePoopShoot.com* where one can read about all things Kevin Smith, film and pop culture. He's also not afraid to cry foul and tell the truth even when it hurts his own career.

20 | Richard Linklater Filmmaker

Linklater is legendary in Austin, Texas as a maverick filmmaker who pushes the boundaries of the medium. Chief catalyst of the Austin film movement, he formed the Austin Film Society in 1987. Linklater hit the mark with the indie film milestone *SLACKER* in 1991, a movie that traveled to over 100 film festivals and was eventually picked up for distribution by Orion Pictures. He continued the "Slacker mentality" in subsequent films such as *DAZED AND CONFUSED*, *SUBURBIA* and his most recent milestone, *WAKING LIFE*. He even found success in mainstream Hollywood teaming up with Jack Black for the comedy *SCHOOL OF ROCK*.

21 | Amy Taubin, Critic

Filmmaker/writer/actress, Taubin has seen most of her success as a film critic. She has been writing for the *Village Voice* since 1987, and has been a profound influence in the New York film community. Like Pauline Kael, she offers a unique blend of humor and cynicism in her reviews. Taubin is respected by filmmakers and recently provided an exceptional running commentary on the *RESERVOIR DOGS* DVD.

22 | Lloyd Kaufman, Director/Studio Head

Kaufman is truly a misunderstood genius of independent filmmaking. His book, *All I Need to Know About Filmmaking I Learned from the Toxic Avenger: The Shocking True Story of Troma Studios*, is a must read dispensing no-nonsense advice and inspirational stories about indie film struggles. Kaufman runs one of the oldest independent film studios in the world, without interference. He makes a spectacle of his compa-



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23 | Gary Winnick



24 | Mark Litwak



25 | Ellen Kuras

ny Troma everywhere it travels, usually at the expense of other hungry aspiring filmmakers. Kaufman continues to stand by his formula for success – spend as little as possible, get everything you can for free. Troma is a freestanding film freak show, complete with midgets and big-breasted women. Kaufman is like an action hero from a Hollywood blockbuster or a cold sore, no matter what happens, he just will not go away. We love him for that.

23 | Gary Winnick Producer/Writer/Director

Winnick Co-founded of InDigEnt (Independent Digital Entertainment) in 1999, a New York-based production company that offers a unique profit sharing strategy. (It's rumored that production assistants made money from the sale of *TADPOLE*.) Spearheaded by Winnick and John Sloss, InDigEnt has made over 12 films, all digital, working with such filmmakers as Rebecca Miller (*PERSONAL VELOCITY*, at Sundance 2001), Peter Hedges (*PIECES OF APRIL*, at Sundance 2003) and Greg Harrison (*NOVEMBER* At Sundance 2004).

24 | Mark Litwak Lawyer/Author

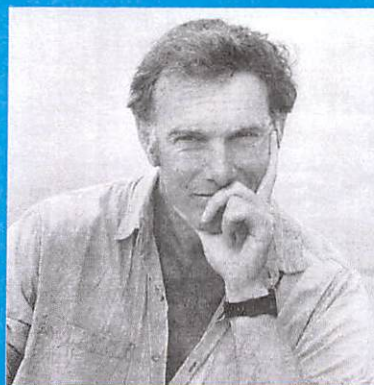
Extremely diverse entertainment lawyer Litwak has done everything from write books to create software (Movie Magic, contracts). He also functions as a producer's rep, and his website, *marklitwak.com*, offers a wealth of free legal advice for filmmakers. Perhaps indie film's most friendly lawyer, Litwak is less interested in the bottom line and more interested in furthering filmmaker's interests.

25 | Ellen Kuras, Cinematographer

Talented cinematographer, Kuras first gained recognition shooting Tom Kalin's *SWOON* in 1992. She's worked with Spike Lee four times and director Rebecca Miller twice. Kuras more than holds her own in a field dominated by men. She's also one of the only cinematographers to win two awards at Sundance. *FFF*

Filmmakers

You better know them...



- » John Sayles, *SUNSHINE STATE*, *LONE STAR*
- » Allison Anders, *SUGAR TOWN*, *Sex and the City*
- » Darren Aronofsky, *REQUIEM FOR A DREAM*, *PI*
- » Quentin Tarantino, *KILL BILL*, *PULP FICTION*
- » Jim Jarmusch, *COFFEE AND CIGARETTES*
- » Paul Thomas Anderson, *BOOGIE NIGHTS*
- » Paul Schrader, *AUTO FOCUS*, *AFFLICTION*
- » Robert Rodriguez, *SPY KIDS*, *DESPERADO*
- » Joel and Ethan Coen, *INTOLERABLE CRUELTY*
- » Steven Soderbergh, *TRAFFIC*, *OCEAN'S 11 & 12*

Indie Film Supporters

It helps to know them...

- » Jeff Dowd, Producer's Rep
- » Bob Hawk, Producer's Rep
- » Greg Kahn, Marketing Consultant, FilmBUZZ
- » David Linde, Co-President, Focus Features
- » Peter Broderick, President, Next Wave Films
- » Steven C. Beer, Producer's Rep
- » Michael Roban, Business Affairs, Content Film
- » Jonathan Dana, Producer's Rep
- » Harris Tulchin, Producer's Rep
- » Linda Lichter, Producer's Rep

Media & Critics

It's good to know them...

- » Elvis Mitchell, *New York Times*
- » Leonard Maltin, *Playboy*/*Entertainment Tonight*
- » Peter Bart, *Variety*
- » Harry Knowles, *Ain't It Cool News*
- » Eric Campos, *FilmThreat.com*
- » Scott Macaulay, *Filmmaker Magazine*
- » Kirk Honeycutt, *Hollywood Reporter*
- » Kenneth Turan, *Los Angeles Times*
- » Tim Rhys, *MovieMaker Magazine*
- » Jeff Wells, *MoviePoopShoot.com*
- » Jeremy Taylor, *Film Festival Today*