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'THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT'

Two Moms and a Hot Movie

A Bening-Moore vehicle gets a big boost at Sundance

By LAUREN A. E. SCHUKER

The biggest bidding war of this year's Sundance Film Festival focused on a movie about two kids with two mommies—and their sperm donor.

"The Kids Are All Right," which stars Annette Bening and Julianne Moore as two mothers raising their teenage children in California, sold this week to Focus Features, part of Universal. Reports put the sale price at about \$5 million. Focus wouldn't comment.

In "Kids," the eldest daughter of the two women contacts their sperm donor (Mark Ruffalo). His entrance into their lives enhances but also unravels their conventional family existence. Finding the humor in that narrative was central to making the film successful, says writer-director Lisa Cholodenko.

Several years ago, Ms. Cholodenko, and her producer, Jeffrey Levy-Hinte, visited every studio in Hollywood with the film project—in vain. The studios didn't believe the movie, with its lesbian couple, "would reach a wide audience," he says.

So they raised the roughly \$4 million to make the movie from individuals who contributed small equity amounts. Ms. Bening came on board as one of the mothers, a high-achieving doctor. "Annette and I live in the same neighborhood, we frequent the same coffee shops," says Ms. Cholodenko. "The more I ran into her, I found myself thinking about her and how she really felt like the character I had written."

The small-scale budget created some challenges. The director wanted to use a pet dog to underline that the two-mother family nevertheless embodies the idea of a nuclear, suburban American household. With hiring a trained dog too costly, Ms. Cholodenko asked the entire crew for spare dogs. Ten showed up on the set, and she picked one. "We start rolling the cameras, and all the dog had to do was run to the door and greet Nic," Ms. Bening's character, says Mr. Levy-Hinte. "But the dog immediately ran to the craft-services table—and wouldn't leave. We quickly nixed that idea. This really is low-budget filmmaking."

—Lauren A.E. Schuker

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