



Lesbian family film "Kids" elbows into Oscar race

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By Christine Kearney

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(Reuters) - A low-budget movie about a lesbian couple raising two children might have once seemed a long shot for packing theaters and claiming Oscar glory.

But "The Kids Are All Right," a modern take on the comic family drama starring Annette Bening and Julianne Moore, has sparked a lot of talk heading into Hollywood's awards season and is widely being mentioned as an Oscar contender.

The film, which hits DVD shelves this week in the United States and is about to open in theaters in [Germany](#), Brazil, Austria, Portugal, South Africa and the Netherlands, currently averages a 94 percent positive rating among the top critics on review website [rottentomatoes.com](#).

Bening is hearing the loudest Oscar buzz in the best actress category playing a caring, but at times acerbic, mother trying to maintain control of her unraveling household after her and her lesbian partner's (Moore) teenage kids meet their sperm donor dad, portrayed by Mark Ruffalo.

"Kids" also is gathering steam as a possible best film Oscar contender, while Moore, Ruffalo and director Lisa Cholodenko are considered in the running for supporting actor and director categories, respectively.

Cholodenko, 46, who in real life shares a child from a sperm donor with her female partner, said it was "a long haul" from starting the script in 2004 to seeing it premiere at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival. But after "Kids" first screened, she knew it had the potential to please audiences.

"It was one of those astonishing moments when I thought, 'Wow, this is working,'" she recalled of the initial reaction. "I don't know if I ever went, 'Wow, this is going to win an Oscar, but I did go, 'Wow this translated. I am so relieved!'"

ACTORS PROVE CRUCIAL

Shot in roughly three weeks with only a few days rehearsal, the actors' skills were crucial, said

Cholodenko. Both the teenagers, played by Josh Hutcherson and Mia Wasikowska ("Alice in Wonderland"), have won breakthrough acting awards.

Moore, 49, championed the film for several years after reading an initial script, while Cholodenko chased after Bening for her "great command of comedy drama," combined with being "sexy and smart and having real acting chops."

Bening, 52, was interested but juggling other movies, plays and being a mother of four, so Cholodenko "kept on her and everybody else in my world kept on her. I made it clear there wasn't anybody else who I wanted to consider."

The film, which cost \$4 million to make and has so far grossed \$20 million worldwide deliberately avoids being a pigeonholed as exclusively a lesbian film.

Instead it portrays a well-adjusted gay family, struggling with some unusual circumstances, no doubt, but also with many of the same issues faced by anyone bringing up teens.

"It's things that people can relate to in their own lives, with this added twist of a family that is unusual and a situation that is presented in a not very unusual way," she said. "I wanted to do it in a more mainstream accessible way."

Cholodenko noted that if "Kids" received some Oscar nods, as did gay romance "Brokeback Mountain," it could bring depictions of lesbians further into mainstream Hollywood.

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"It wasn't interesting to us, writing a political film or dissecting lesbian culture or whatever, lesbian identity ... choosing the normalcy of it as a point of departure was really our objective," she said, "If it gets recognized, that's an amazing thing, that's a first, that's novel."

But the fact that mainstream audiences are even discussing "Kids" is a career breakthrough for the indie director of 1998's "High Art," as well as episodes of the "The L Word."

"It's definitely helped me transition from the smaller arthouse world into a more commercial world," she said. "There are so many more roads I can travel."

(editing by Bob Tourtellotte)

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