

COME TO 'MAMMA'

ABBA tuner to bigscreen

By MICHAEL FLEMING

Dancing Queens all over the world will no doubt rejoice.

"Mamma Mia!" — the tuner that made theater snobs cringe but that worldwide auds embraced — has fueled the bigscreen interest of Playtone partners Tom Hanks and Gary Goetzman.

They closed a deal with Littlestar — the company run by the show's producer, Judy Craymer — and ABBA songwriters Benny Andersson and Bjorn Ulvaeus, and they are in talks with Universal to finance and distribute.

New Line is all about 'Me'

By DAVE McNARY

New Line is into "Me, Me, Me," snapping up Johnny Rosenthal's comedy pitch for high six figures and setting it up with Shawn Levy and Tom McNulty to produce through their 21 Laps Entertainment shingle.

The mini-major, which closed the deal late Monday, is developing the project as a potential directing vehicle for Levy, whose credits include "The Pink Panther," "Cheaper by the Dozen" and Fox's "Night at the Museum," currently in production.

Story centers on the world's most obnoxious narcissist, who wishes people could be more like him and

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"Mamma Mia!" which mixes love, laughs and the ABBA song catalog, is being prepped for a feature adaptation by Playtone.

The filmmakers are eyeing release by late 2007. The show's book writer, Catherine Johnson, is penning the screenplay, which will stick closely to the crowd-pleasing musical's plot. Raised on a Greek island by a formerly rebellious mom who never disclosed the identity of her father, a bride-to-be locates three men who might be her father and invites them

to her wedding. The resulting conflict triggers 22 ABBA hits like "Dancing Queen," "Take a Chance on Me" and "The Winner Takes It All."

Craymer, who has opened the jukebox musical in 130 cities around the globe, will produce with Goetzman. Hanks, Rita Wilson, Andersson and Ulvaeus executive produce.

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Col hooping it up with pic

By MICHAEL FLEMING

Columbia Pictures is driving to the hoop.

Studio has landed rights to make a film about Jason McElwain, the autistic high schooler who saw his first action in his basketball team's last game and scored 20 points.

Laura Ziskin will produce.

The deal comes days after McElwain, his family and his coach, Jim Johnson, signed with the William Morris Agency.



Jason McElwain's story won widespread media attention.

Suitors began calling right after the teen's exploits captured media attention. The youth had a photo opportunity with President Bush, attended the NCAA Final Four and recently taped an appearance on "Oprah."

Sony won out over competitive bids made by Universal with Imagine; New Line with producers Jon Shiestack and Janet Grillo; and the Weinstein Co.

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BLAME IT ON THE BABY

By KATHY LYFORD and DAVE McNARY

Tom Cruise's newborn daughter is already changing his plans.

The thesp, whose child with Katie Holmes was born Tuesday, was to begin a worldwide publicity blitz today for Paramount's upcoming "Mission: Impossible III."

He has canceled a junket scheduled for today in Los Angeles, a Par spokesman confirmed.

Pic is skedded for preems in Rome Monday, in London Tuesday, in Paris April 26 and Mexico City May 1. Actioner will make its U.S. bow at the Tribeca Film Festival May 3 and open wide domestically May 5.

Decision as to which events Cruise will attend will be made on a day-to-day basis, the spokesman said.



Cruise

Lion laughs at 'Death'

By IAN MOHR and PAMELA McCLINTOCK



Oz

MGM has added Sidney Kimmel Entertainment's indie comedy "Death at a Funeral" to its slate as the Lion continues to ramp up its distribution activities.

Pic — to be helmed by Frank Oz from a screenplay by Dean Craig — will star Matthew Macfadyen,

Peter Dinklage and Ewen Bremner.

Pic marks the first for Oz since 2004's "The Stepford Wives." He's also slated to helm dark comedy "Horrible Bosses" for New Line.

"Funeral" revolves around a dysfunctional Brit family as they gather to mourn the passing of their patriarch. But a sober, heartfelt goodbye turns into calamity.

Pic will be produced by Kimmel, Share Stallings, Laurence Malkin and Diana Phillips. Bill Horberg and Bruce Toll will exec produce.

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'Kidnapped' captures exec

By JOSEF ADALIAN

"Angel" co-creator David Greenwalt has nabbed a deal for "Kidnapped," inking with Sony Pictures Television to come aboard as showrunner and executive producer of the NBC fall drama.

Michael Dinner-helmed "Kidnapped," which stars Jeremy Sisto and Dana Delany, snagged an unusually early greenlight from the Peacock last month. Net has ordered 13 episodes of the skein created by Jason Smilovic.

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Playtone dabbles in ABBA

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Craymer had rebuffed film offers for years but liked the Playtone pitch and what Hanks, Goetzman and Wilson had done to turn Nia Vardalos' one-woman stage show into "My Big Fat Greek Wedding." Craymer will be as closely involved in the film as she is in the 11 productions of the show currently playing worldwide.

Craymer and Johnson were broke when they first tried to put the show together and were even snubbed by the Swedish pop group whose music formed the basis for the show. They are now two of the wealthiest women in England.

Craymer's marriage of plot and ABBA tunes is a global juggernaut that has grossed \$1.6 billion since its London opening in 1999. It has been steadily among Broadway's

top five grossing shows since opening five years ago and averages over \$1 million a week in ticket sales.

"The time felt right. The partnership with Gary and Tom helped everything to fall into place," Craymer said. "We've never had stars in the show, the music has always been the star, but we are certainly thinking about names as we take this from the stage to the screen."

Times investor withholds votes

A high-profile investor in the New York Times Co. withheld votes for directors at the company's annual meeting Tuesday in protest of the Times' dual-class share structure.

Like several other publicly held newspaper publishers, the Times is still effectively controlled by descendants of its founding family — in its case, the Sulzbergers — through special shares of stock.

Morgan Stanley Investment Management Ltd., which owns about 5.6% of the company's stock, said it withheld its votes for the four directors that are elected by the company's Class A shares.

Morgan Stanley Investment Management said it was calling for the elimination of the two-class structure, which it says disfavors public shareholders even though they own 99% of the company. A Times spokeswoman didn't return calls seeking comment.

Fund noted that despite a 52% tumble in the company's share price since its peak in June 2002, compensation for the Times' managers has "increased considerably."

— Associated Press

Carl Beverly of Sony-based 25 C Prods.



Greenwalt

As part of his deal to join "Kidnapped," Greenwalt has landed a premium blind script commitment from Sony for future development.

"Kidnapped" features Sisto as a kidnapping expert who works outside the legal system to retrieve those who've been snatched. Each season of the show will feature a different victim.

In addition to co-creating "Angel" with Joss Whedon, Greenwalt — repped by Kaplan-Stahler-Gumer-Braun — was an original writer-producer on Whedon's "Buffy the Vampire Slayer."

More recently, Greenwalt developed Showtime pilot "The Bastard" and was showrunner for the UPN drama "Jake 2.0" and ABC's "Miracles." He's currently working as a consulting producer for Sci Fi Channel's upcoming skein "Eureka."

NEW LINE IN BIZ WITH 'ME'

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then enters a living hell when his dream becomes a reality. Rosenthal developed the project with 21 Laps president McNulty, who originated the concept.

"We all know people who think the world revolves around them," Levy said. "The idea of literalizing that wish, and all the unexpected consequences attached to it, feels like rich comic ground."

Levy and McNulty set up 21 Laps last fall with a first-look deal at Fox. The banner's producing credits include "Cheaper by the

will be available on May releases "The Bourne Supremacy," from Universal, and Warner's "The Dukes of Hazzard," "Batman Begins" and "Constantine."

U plans to begin releasing new films day-and-date on HD DVD this fall, with hybrid discs also in the offing.

(Daniel Frankel, Jennifer Netherby and Susanne Ault contributed to this report.)

Lion plans 'Funeral'

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along with Andreas Grosch and Philip Elway.

SKE recently completed a non-exclusive distribution deal at MGM.

The Lion also inked Dean Devlin's Electric Entertainment to a non-exclusive distrib deal earlier this month and is rolling out various pics from the Weinstein Co. and Bauer Martinez.

Kimmel Intl. will handle foreign sales and foreign distribution on "Funeral" and will offer the pic in Cannes.

SKE's slate also includes Universal's "Breach"; "Trust the Man," which Fox Searchlight will distribute; and writer-director Nick Cassavetes' "Alpha Dog," which New Line will release later this year.

In association with Universal, SKE financed 9/11 drama "United 93."

Col takes hoops tale to basket

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Magic Johnson and Mary Martin are aboard as exec producers and family lawyer John Nitti as a consultant. Johnson and Martin were the conduits of information between each bidder and the McElwain family.

"We've got a great central character who's truly inspiring. There's a universal appeal to his story, because we've all had obstacles to overcome," Ziskin said. The agency is also expected to broker a book deal for the youth.



Levy



Rosenthal

Dozen 2" and "Night at the Museum."

Paramount is developing Rosenthal's airline comedy pitch "Friendly Skies" with Foursight Entertainment and Broadway Video producing.

Inside Tuning In

CAA will rep Matt Leinart on and off the field, melding sports and entertainment.

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