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Slamdance may have blockbuster sleepers

by Tracie Fails, of the Record staff

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The midweek festival buzz has begun for the first wave of movie premiers, revealing early distribution deals, hidden gems and crowd favorites. And while Sundance has maintained its traditional grasp on the spotlight, with the documentary "Roman Polanski: Wanted and Desired" securing the fest's first distribution deal (Weinstein Co. bought the rights on Friday, according to Variety magazine), and more distribution talk surrounding "The Wackness," not all films on the forefront have screened the largest indie festival in town. Three of the most talked-about films this week "Real Time," "**Dear Zachary**" and "Trailer Park of Terror" premiered at Slamdance, the 14-year-old guerilla offshoot that has become a consistent and complementary companion to Sundance.

"I feel like this year is a turning point," said director Drea Clark, who began working with the festival eight years ago as an intern. "There's been a parenthetical 'ever-growing' or 'always-increasing' in a lot of the mentions in the media this year, which is great to hear. People are slowly starting to identify us as part of the festival that's here to stay."

Slamdance grabbed mentions this week from Current TV, the Hollywood Reporter, Variety magazine and CNN, which ran an online interview with "Real Time" star Randy Quaid. Online reporters have speculated about distribution deals for "Real Time," including a bid from Universal Home Entertainment.

Clark says it's difficult to tell whether increased attention has contributed to higher ticket sales, however.

"We haven't added venues [to Treasure Mountain Inn] or increased the number of features in the festival, so about the same number of shows have sold out this year as in recent years," she said.

About half the Slamdance screenings have sold out each day, judging by a board showing each day's screenings. The premier for "Trailer Park of Terror," a horror film about zombie rednecks based on the Imperium Comics series, sold out Monday afternoon, prompting a second screening at midnight to accommodate late night horror fans.

"**Dear Zachary**" a documentary about the murder of director Kurt Kuenne's childhood friend Andrew Bagby, has struck a chord among filmmakers. Buzz grew at a Fireside Chat on Sunday about independent marketing as filmmakers discussed its secretive storyline.

"It's been a hard movie for reporters to write about because it's better the less you know going into it, and there are so many surprise twists, but I think it's going to end up one of the best in the festival," Clark said. "I remember watching it by myself when it was submitted for consideration and just crying for an hour afterward."

Slamdance will continue screening films through Friday at the Treasure Mountain Inn at 255 Main Street. Tickets are available at the venue. Filmgoers can attend free short films at the \$99 Special screening on Friday at 9:30 a.m. and the Current TV "Chance at Slamdance" block at 11 a.m. For more information, visit www.slamdance.com.

Photo: Filmmakers have praised Slamdance film **Dear Zachary** one of the week s best.