



TRADES

Friday, May 21, 2010

Chris Lowell eyes 'The Help'

"Private Practice" star Chris Lowell is in negotiations to join the cast of DreamWorks' "The Help," based on Kathryn Stockett's novel. The project begins shooting in the summer in Mississippi with Tate Taylor making his feature directorial debut. He also adapted the screenplay. "Help" stars Emma Stone as Skeeter, an aspiring writer in 1960s Mississippi. Uncomfortable with the social norms around her, she sets out to write a book chronicling the way black maids are being treated by society. Viola Davis and Bryce Dallas Howard also star. Lowell will play Skeeter's boyfriend, Stuart Whitworth, a senator's son who eventually breaks up with her because of the book. Michael Barnathan, Chris Columbus and Mark Radcliffe of 1492 Pictures will produce with Taylor and his producing partner Brunson Green of Harbinger Pictures. Lowell, repped by WME and ThruLine Entertainment, most recently appeared in "Up in the Air." A regular on ABC's "Private Practice" since it premiered in 2007, Lowell's character, William "Dell" Parker, died on the operating table last week.

Chris Lowell eyes 'The Help.' Feature stars Emma Stone, based on Kathryn Stockett's book

James Franco to play 'Ricky Stanicky'

Summit is picking up "Ricky Stanicky," a comedy spec from "Beverly Hills Chihuahua" writer Jeff Bushell with James Franco attached to play the title character. The story, which aims to be R-rated, is described as an ensemble comedy in the vein of "The Hangover," and begins when three teens pull a prank and burn down a house in their neighborhood. They create a fake person to take the blame -- Ricky Stanicky did it! Twenty years later, we see that the three guys have been using this alibi to get out of every uncomfortable situation in life. When their wives force them to set up a meeting with Stanicky, they hire an actor (Franco). Michael De Luca, currently working on the new "Fright Night" movie, is producing with Smart Entertainment's John Jacobs, who produced "Chihuahua" as well as "Blades of Glory. Zac Unterman of Smart is exec producing with Bushell. Franco, coming off a comedic turn in "Date Night" and a stint on "General Hospital," has the Universal comedy "Your Highness" on deck, followed by the Julia Roberts romantic drama "Eat Pray Love." He is repped by WME and James/Levy Entertainment. Bushell is repped by WME.

Romola Garai circling 'One Day'

Romola Garai is in negotiations to join the cast of Focus Features' romantic comedy "One Day" for director Lone Scherfig. Production begins in the summer in London. "Day" stars Anne Hathaway and Jim Sturgess as people who meet during their 1988 graduation and proceed to meet one day a year for the next 20 years. In "When Harry Met Sally ..." fashion, the story tracks their lives and loves until they realize they were meant for each other. The British-born Garai will play the woman Sturgess' character marries then ultimately divorces during those years. The project is based on a novel by British author David Nicholls, who adapted the screenplay. Nina Jacobson is producing via her Color Force banner with Random House Films. Garai, repped by UTA and ARG in the U.K., most recently played the title role in the BBC miniseries "Emma." Other film credits include "Atonement" and "Dirty Dancing: Havana Nights."

Bret Michaels hospitalized

Bret Michaels is back in the hospital. The rocker and reality TV star's website reports that Michaels suffered what doctors call a "warning stroke" and has been diagnosed with a patent forum ovale, or hole in the heart. Michaels' publicist, Joann Mignano, confirmed the report. The condition is operable and treatable but likely unrelated to the brain hemorrhage the 47-year-old suffered last month. The website says Michaels is "up, walking, talking, continuing his daily rehab and very happy to be alive," and hopes to make a full recovery. The Poison frontman was expected to appear at Sunday's finale of "The Celebrity Apprentice" in New York.

Analysts weigh in on upfronts

Broadcast networks will likely seek up to 10%-12% advertising rate increases in the upfront market, "but may ultimately settle for rates in the 6%-9% range," Janney Montgomery Scott analyst Tony Wible suggested Thursday. In a report following most big fall TV schedule presentations, he also highlighted the increase in new scripted shows as a positive for big content producers like Time Warner. Discussing ad pricing trends, Wible said this year's upfront selling season "should prove to be a seller's market based on the rebound in the economy." But he also cautioned: "While reports of large improvements in scatter rates are a positive harbinger, we believe some of these growth rates may be outliers that skew network positioning as they go into negotiations." Wible argued that the increase in new show pick-ups bodes well for big content producers. NBC added 13 new shows, followed by ABC with 10, Fox with 7 and CBS with 6. Only two of the 38 new shows are unscripted, while about 40% rely on outside production.

