

"When these new technological magicians begin to strut in the marketplace in 18 months, two years—that's where we have the problem."

Valenti is working on anti-camcording legislation that would make camcording a felony. He urges exhibitors to call the police when illegal camcording is taking place in order to bring the problem to light with law enforcement.

Another issue requiring the industry's attention, according to Valenti, is the spiraling cost of making a movie, which has reached an astonishing per-film average of \$102.9 million. "The cost tapeworm is eating away at the fiscal molecules of our business," declared Valenti in the trademark florid metaphor we will all deeply miss at future ShoWest.

At a press conference at which Valenti announced he would be stepping down as president and COO of the MPAA, NATO president John Fithian remarked solemnly. "This is a sad day for NATO because Jack Valenti has been the consummate leader for 38 years, and we don't know what we'll do without him." Later, addressing ShoWest conventioners, Valenti said, "A long time ago in a galaxy far away in the Mesozoic era, I began my relationship with exhibition. [If I were to] sum up in two words my greatest accomplishment, they would be, 'I survived.' We have had some controversies that gave me a couple of Maalox moments. I still wince when I hear the phrase 'blind bidding.' [But] all these years have been suffused with warmth and affection."

As saddened as all regular attendees of ShoWest and anyone with a stake in the industry will be to lose such a skilled orator, passionate advocate and charismatic character, the show must go on—and it looks as though it will go on in digital.

"Digital cinema is almost upon us," says John Fithian, who notes that the quality has dramatically improved; "tremendous progress" has been made on uniform technical standards; security concerns are being addressed; and a business plan is being developed that "is going a way exhibitors might support." In his talk on digital cinema, Digital Cinema Initiatives CEO Charles Goldwater remarked that "This looks like a watershed year for digital cinema" and that while "no conclusions or agreements have been reached, contribution from studios and exhibitors should be relatively proportionate to the benefits [received]." Please see Tech Talk on page 27 for more on the subject, and watch this space for future developments.

Stars Illuminate ShoWest 2004

I'm just really amazed they're letting riff-raff like me into a nice place like this, let alone giving me something to take home," aw-shucked Male Star of Tomorrow Ryan Gosling. But if he was truly awe-struck, it was with good reason: The cavalcade of A-list stars was a blinding enough bedazzlement to conventioners all the way at the back of the Paris Hotel Ballroom, so the scene from the stage must have been even more overwhelming.



Male Star of the Year
Jude Law.

Present were award winners Jude Law (Male Star of the Year); Gwyneth Paltrow (Distinguished Decade of Achievement), Djimon Hounsou (Supporting Actor of the Year), Jennifer Garner (Female Star of the Year) and Jack Black (Comedy Star of the Year). (Female Star of the Year Halle Berry was taken ill.) Meanwhile, the studios brought in the big guns, including but in no way limited to Nicole Kidman, Jim Carrey, Tobey Maguire, Kirsten Dunst, Ben Stiller, Will Smith, Nicolas Cage, Denzel Washington, Michael Caine, Meryl Streep, Lindsay Lohan and Tom Kenny (aka the voice of Spongebob Squarepants, arguably the biggest star of them all).



Distinguished Decade of Achievement
recipient Gwyneth Paltrow.

There's no stopping a raucous talent like Jack Black," observed Mike White, scripter of and co-star in "School of Rock." "And who would want to try?"

Black cracked more than jokes when he somersaulted onstage to receive his Comedy Star of the Year award, revealing a seeming absence of undergarments. "Maybe it's because you think I'm the funniest. Maybe it's because your kids were like, 'Pick Jack Black, he's my favorite!' Maybe you thought if we were here tonight in the same room, we would party." Whatever the reason, Black graciously (save for the quarter-moon) accepted his award, while giving props to emcee Fred Willard ("Best in Show," "A Mighty Wind"): "I want to name Fred Willard funniest host of the year. That dude brings it. He brings it time and time again."

Among the acceptance speeches that didn't involve acrobatics or unintentional nudity were Djimon Hounsou's thoughtful recollection, "I grew up in a place where we used to run to the theatre barefoot. To be here today, it's a blessing," and producer Lawrence Gordon, who told exhibitors, "I've had two 'Fields of Dreams'—one in Iowa, and one in your theatres." He also was not shy about bringing up a less sterling credential: "I remember looking at dailies of 'Predator' and saying, 'Arnold and Jesse Ventura are definitely going to be governors someday.'"

"There's no stopping a raucous talent like Jack Black. And who would want to try?"

—Mike White

It's a strange business indeed, but would we have it any other way?



Comedy star of the year
Jack Black.