



Excerpt from article:

High Art

Glenn Kenny reviews the festival's hits and misses.

The documentary **Tom Dowd & the Language of Music** was a far more gratifying meld of song and cinema. It's an inspired and inspiring chronicle of the rich life and multiform achievements of the legendary recording engineer and producer whose name can be found on great records ranging from Ornette Coleman's *Free Jazz* to Derek and the Dominos' *Layla*, and many, many more. It features revealing interviews with many musical titans, but its most lively presence is Dowd himself, who gives a guided tour of his early years and is still spiritedly making and capturing music in the Florida studio he made his second home for many years. Sadly, Dowd passed away just as this picture was being completed; though it wasn't meant as such, it makes a very fitting testament.

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Whether it's becoming attendees of the Sundance Film Festival in the festival's catalog, founder Robert Redford waxes poetic, as he is wont to do: "It is a festival held in the cold and the snow, at the top of the mountains. But that's why we like it. It brings good people in."

A morning TV chat show host at a local Park City station offered a slightly different perspective early on in the first weekend of Sundance: "I guess the festival has reached the level to attract celebrities like Britney Spears."

Given the hezka that Spears and other what-are-they-doing-here types generated, Redford was eventually compelled to remark that the media has an unfairly binary take on Sundance—that it's either dead or it's gone too Hollywood—and Sundance festival director Geoffrey Gilmore interjected that he would be taking steps to make the next fest less of a celeb circus. But one could, in fact, navigate the festival without

movers may remember as the dw who turns up in the hysterical dir of *Living on O'Connell* is a frequent screen presence—ruggedly handsome, he conveys not only his character's self-willed alienation (it also is funny, slyly intelligent). This year's Sundance queen Patti Clarkson (who was in four films shown there) and the bawdier Bobby Cannavale (TV's *Kings*) provide engaging support in this crowd-pleaser.

Another favorite with audience was Peter Hedges's directorial debut, *Pieces of April*, a finely wrought miniature, shot on digital video, in which difficult daughter April (Katie Holmes)—who at first comes off as self-absorbed, inconsiderate, and just—tries to mend family fences by inviting them over for Thanksgiving dinner. "Dear," however, means a hotel Manhattan's Lower East Side—a hotel where this open class?) was April's comic desperation to find neighbor with viable cooking equipment is intercut with her family's fraught drive into the city a trip made more fraught by the fact that the mother (another fine turn Clarkson) has cancer and probably won't be around for another week day. Hedges, who aside from screen writing also has a solid rep as a novelist (*What's Eating Gilbert Grape* was his first book), is definitely working from his novel's sensibility here—I can't imagine dyed in the wool Hollywood

the great *24 Hour Party People* as well, in spite of the grooves of Pekar's existence, the movie has an amiable bounciness to it, not unlike the music of jazzman Jay McShann, which Pekar listens to in the film.

Less jaunty but nevertheless pretty winning, *The Station Agent*, a first feature written and directed by actor Tom McCarthy (Met the Parents), also boasts a terrific lead performance, this one by Peter Dinklage, as an extremely taciturn dwarf who inherits an out-of-service train depot and winds up making a bunch of friends he never really asked for. Dinklage (whom indie



THE HEROES THAT AREN'T: Giamatti, Conroy, Pekar, and Emily Robison in *American Splendor*