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BENTEN FILMS and WATCHMAKER FILMS Announce International Partnership

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[New York/London - March 11, 2009] – US-based distributor **Benten Films**, the first label run by film critics, and UK-based **Watchmaker Films** have entered into a strategic and financial partnership. Effective immediately, Benten President and CEO **Andrew Grant** will head up Production and Acquisitions for Watchmaker. Benten VP and Art Director **Aaron Hillis** will assume a greater role in the day-to-day operations of Benten while simultaneously looking to expand the organization.

Watchmaker, the brainchild of **Mark Rance**, shares Benten's commitment to curation and quality, and extends it beyond distribution into restoration, preservation and remastering services. Watchmaker's in-house capabilities include HD-4K and higher scans, full picture and audio restoration, color timing, audio/video remastering, DVD and Blu-ray authoring, and the ability to encode for digital cinema and online delivery systems. As a result, both companies can now seek out older titles that previously didn't have satisfactory digital elements, bringing them to viewers via the many consumer-ready digital formats.

Rance, who has 20 years of industry-related experience as a filmmaker, DVD producer, and director of Los Angeles Filmforum, recently issued Watchmaker's first DVD release in the U.S.—a critically acclaimed restoration of **Eagle Pennell's** lost independent classic, *The Whole Shootin' Match*. "We're excited about partnering with Mark, who has worked for Criterion and every major studio, and has produced such stellar DVDs as the special editions of *Boogie Nights*, *Magnolia*, and *Se7en*," said Grant.

Both companies will continue to support new and underrepresented filmmakers from around the world. Benten is currently working on their first 2009 release, **Azazel Jacobs' The**

GoodTimesKid, which will be fully remastered from a 2K scan of the original negative, and preserved in an archival 4K scan. "It's important to expand on the standard canon of great films and support up-and-coming filmmakers with state-of-the-art presentations in every format, from cinemas to DVD and beyond," says Rance.

The Watchmaker/Benten alliance seeks to advance the role of distributors in today's rapidly evolving industry. "The distribution world is in the midst of a crisis, both financial and technological," said Grant. "Sales are down across the board for smaller companies, long-established distributors are closing up shop, and everybody is waiting to see which of the next-gen distribution mechanisms will dominate. Producers and sales agents haven't understood how the landscape has changed, and they're still looking for advances that made sense five years ago, but are unreasonable today."

Rance adds: "Together, we will work directly with filmmakers, archivists and rights holders to help bring their films into the digital era. If we can distribute those films, that's great. But we can also simply offer our services, even to other distributors. It's time that film preservation and digital remastering became the responsibility of distributors and every company that loves film."

On the distribution side, Watchmaker and Benten plan to expand their distribution network into the European and Asian markets. The two companies have been busy acquiring titles, and are currently planning releases by such noted filmmakers as **Tobe Hooper, John Gianvito, Danny Lyon, Fred Kelemen, and Peter Wollen/Laura Mulvey.**

"We're still going to pursue American and foreign indies, but we're excited to be balancing our library with works from such established filmmakers," said Hillis. On the restoration side, Watchmaker is currently preserving 50 years of student work for the London Film School, while Benten is driving a project to restore the works of several long-neglected filmmakers.

The companies will maintain both the Watchmaker and Benten imprimaturs, and are currently in talks to add additional sub-labels, specializing in political and independent Asian cinema. Negotiations for online distribution of their titles are also in the works.

Watchmaker/Benten titles are distributed in the US by **E1 Entertainment** (formerly Koch Home Entertainment) and in the United Kingdom and Eire by **PIAS UK.**

About Benten Films

Benten Films is passionate about bringing the best in independent and world cinema to the DVD, VOD and digital download markets. Founded by Andrew Grant (best known in the New York scene as "Filmbrain," online editor of *Like Anna Karina's Sweater*) in collaboration with Aaron Hillis (a freelance journalist for *The Village Voice, LA Weekly, IFC* and *Spin*), Benten is a specialty label designed for cinephiles to uncover lost masterpieces and future classics, with an eye on overlooked gems that deserve greater recognition. All Benten releases are of the highest technical quality, each supplemented with enhanced features and artful packaging. For more information, please visit www.bentenfilms.com.

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