

REVIEW: THE JAZZ SINGER



CULTURE : LIFESTYLE

# Big Hopes for Hollywood Net Film

Michael Stroud 03.23.00

VALENCIA, California -- Coming May 5 to a computer near you: a serious stab by mainstream Hollywood at producing a film specifically for the Internet.

And, unlike the wobbly, streaming shorts that pass for film these days on the Net, *Quantum Project* will be designed to download and view on a monitor or a TV screen, theoretically giving viewers the same quality experience as a DVD.

The \$3 million, 40-minute drama about a young physicist's journey into alternate realities stars John Cleese, Fay Masterson, and Stephen Dorff and is directed by Academy Award-winning director Eugenio Zanetti.

"This so far exceeds what anyone else has thought of doing before that we really see ourselves in the same way as the gutsy people who developed and made [Hollywood's first serious sound-dubbed film] *The Jazz Singer*," said *Quantum Project* co-executive producer Stephen Simon. "Those people didn't view what they were doing as an experiment, and neither do we."

Still, *Quantum* clearly is an experiment for Scott Sander, whose company Sightsound.com is bankrolling the film. In *Quantum*, Sander sees an opportunity to position his company at the center of a new market for downloadable film on the Net. It's also a way to bypass the traditional studio-to-theater distribution system.

"The studio system is all about carefully controlling [the buzz] for an upcoming movie," Sander said. "We're opening the vault and passing around all that stuff normally controlled by the studios: the footage, the trailers and the electronic press kits."

Viewers will pay to download the movie -- how much, Sander won't say. They're free to pass it on to their friends, but the movie's encrypted digital format will require successive viewers to pay, too.

They will be able to do as they please with the promotional material. "They could create the world's most kick-ass Fay Masterson site," Sander said.

Downloading the film will take up to half an hour over a broadband connection; with a 56K modem, it could easily take eight hours. The resulting file will eat up at least 150 megabytes of hard-disk space.

Still, there's evidence that Net movie buffs are willing to take the plunge. An estimated 18.8 million movie fans scan the Web for their favorite film material, according to a recent survey by online market researcher Cyber Dialogue. Of 1,000 adults sampled from that group, 63 percent said they'd be "very interested" in downloading movies to their TV set, while 36 percent said they'd be interested in downloading to their PC.

That number will skyrocket over the next two to three years as broadband takes off, predicted Cyber Dialogue analyst Peter Clemente.

"We need a launch pad for downloading film on the Net and this film could be it," Clemente said.

Much, of course, will depend upon whether viewers actually like the material they download. That's why Simon and producing partner Barnet Bain are treating their project just like a mainstream Hollywood production -- albeit one on an accelerated shooting schedule and shot in digital tape.

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