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Let 'em shine

Here's our annual roundup of 10 young actors who have a shot at making it big

BY NANCY MILLS

HOLLYWOOD — Talent, looks, ambition, tenacity, luck.

The movie actors most likely to break out in 2006 will need all the above qualities and, especially, the last one if they are to pull away from the pack of young hopefuls seeking success in the coming years.

Some of our "hot faces" from previous years had their fair share:

Keira Knightley is a current Golden Globe nominee for "Pride & Prejudice." Rachel McAdams has starred in three moneymakers — "Mean Girls," "The Notebook" and "Wedding Crashers." Orlando Bloom went from "The Lord of the Rings" to "Pirates of the Caribbean." Kerry Washington, Kate Bosworth, Ryan Reynolds and Paul Bettany have all had starring roles in well-regarded films.

So here's the next crop. Keep your eyes out for them.

Arielle Kebbel

A veteran of commercials, Kebbel, 20, drove from Winter Park, Fla., to Hollywood in two days, got her first gig ("Gilmore Girls") within a week and landed a photo shoot in Maxim before she hit 19. Refusing to be pigeonholed as a sexpot, she's found roles as a meanie and as a brainiac. Her biggest challenge: Will people accept her as the girl next door?

What she needs to learn: "How to stay grounded and focused and do what I feel is right in my heart, not what someone else guides me into. I've already learned that I don't need to be in a bathing suit or underwear to look hot."

What's unique about her: "Ever since I was little, I've loved smiling and making other people smile. I feel better about myself when I treat people kindly."

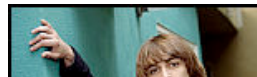
Upcoming: "Aquamarine" (April 14), "John Tucker Must Die," "Day Dreamer," "The Outlaw Trail"



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Arielle Kebbel

Ryan Donowho



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An indie movie guy who spent part of his childhood in a Texas trailer park, Donowho, 24, briefly went mainstream as an L.A. surfer on "The O.C."



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"I couldn't pay my rent," he explains. His 11-episode salary will allow him to tour with his band, Pagoda, next month. Discovered for a Levi's ad while drumming on a New York street, he had a silent but key part in "Broken Flowers" as Bill Murray's possible son. His goal: "To play someone who's extremely chemically imbalanced and socially inept. I've been there and know that."

What he needs to learn: "How to pace myself. Sometimes I let myself get wrapped up in something and don't allow time to breathe."

What's unique about him: "I'm content with getting by. That's why I live in Brooklyn."

Upcoming: "Flakes," "The Favor," "The Pacific and Eddy"

Kate Mara

Instead of officially joining her family's business — the New York Giants — 23-year-old Mara just sings the national anthem at home games. But she's been too busy recently, having played the daughter of the Heath Ledger character in "Brokeback Mountain," a teen who gets an abortion on "Everwood" and a lesbian on "Nip/Tuck."



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Her troubled characters are unlike those she knew growing up in Westchester — that's why she plays them. Now she wants a singing-acting role like Sissy Spacek's in "Coal Miner's Daughter."

What she needs to learn: "How to get over rejection quickly and not take it so personally. Sometimes I do because I still have doubts about myself."

What's unique about her: "I think I'm so normal. I try to make all the roles I do feel as normal as possible so people believe them. People relate to the regular-looking person."

Upcoming: "The Return of Zoom" with Tim Allen (Aug. 11), "Full of It"

Paul James

Hollywood connections do help. During James' first audition ("Cry Wolf"), the camera operator, a fellow Syracuse University grad, spoke up for him. That job brought him an agent and acting jobs as a gay teenager in the Chicago projects and a college student caught up in a racial incident.



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Teen comedies have no appeal for 24-year-old James. "I like movies that make you think and feel," he says. His mom, a teacher who once wanted to act herself, would be proud.

What he needs to learn: "I'm still navigating acting in film versus acting on stage. Mykelti Williamson [Bubba in 'Forrest Gump'] has taught me so much, including how to cry in a scene."

What's unique about him: "My mother told me I have a very expressive face. I tell the truth pretty well."

Upcoming: "All Fall Down" with Anthony LaPaglia and Isabella Rossellini; "Spinning Into Butter" with Sarah Jessica Parker

Eddie Redmayne

Eton College and Cambridge University aren't the usual stepping stones to Hollywood. But 23-year-old Redmayne, who won a Best Newcomer award for his work in the British production of Edward Albee's "The Goat," found a patron in Robert De Niro. After nine months of flying himself to New York and sleeping on a friend's floor, he convinced De Niro to cast him in "The Good Shepherd." Not quite the career in finance his parents expected but possibly more lucrative.



What he needs to learn: "How to turn emotions off and on. In the theater, you have 40 minutes to build up to the climax. In movies, you may have an emotional scene that takes two days to shoot, and you have to keep yourself at that place and not be exhausted."

What's unique about him: "I'm a pale Brit with freckles and slightly quirky features [including pouty lips]. Seldom do I go to an audition and find anyone who looks like me."

Upcoming: "The Good Shepherd" as the son of characters played by Matt Damon and Angelina Jolie (Dec. 22, 2006), "Like Minds" with Toni Collette, "Golden Age" with Cate Blanchett

Amanda Seyfried

Seyfried, 20, started performing in her living room in Allentown, Pa., at 6 and began modeling at 11. Ten months on "All My Children" — as "super-strict religious brat" Joni Stafford — provided her with a crash course in acting. Her big break was playing the dumb blond in "Mean Girls."



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"That role was so like me," she says. "My Spanish teacher called me Astronautica because I was so spacey. She thought I was dumb." But directors like Nick Cassavetes and Rodrigo Garcia have spotted her talent.

What she needs to learn: "How to be comfortable being independent. I feel confident when I'm acting, but I don't trust myself when it comes to other things. People can pretty much walk all over me."

What's unique about her: "I can sing opera. I trained with an opera coach for three years."

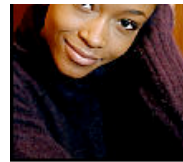
Upcoming: "Alpha Dog" (playing at the Sundance Film Festival), HBO's polygamy series "Big Love" (March), ABC Family series "Wildfire"

Yaya DaCosta

DaCosta, 23, came second in "America's Next Top Model" two



years ago and has modeled since then for Radio Shack and Sephora. Although she always wanted to act and dance, she turned down LaGuardia School of Performing Arts for an academic boarding school (Northfield Mount Hermon) because her parents are educators. But the pull of the arts was too strong. After graduating from Brown, she resumed lessons with her acting coach. Her first name means "wise old spirit" in Yoruba, a language spoken in Nigeria.



McAlpin for NEWS

What she needs to learn: "To let go completely and treat my audience more like the audience I grew up with — my family. That way I'll be comfortable and free to explore different parts of myself."

What's unique about her: "I speak French, Spanish and Portuguese. And I'm very observant. As a kid, I always got in trouble on the subway for staring."

Upcoming: "Take the Lead" with Antonio Banderas

Channing Tatum

A former Mississippi football star who got tired of the game, Tatum first tried dancing, then modeling. Ricky Martin's "She Bangs" music video and splashy Pepsi and Mountain Dew commercials led him to acting. In his movies this year, the 25-year-old goes "from Shakespearean comedy to killing people and going to jail to dancing." But can he live down his barely clothed modeling days?



What he needs to learn: "Everything. I have no time to play."

What's unique about him: "I'm 35-40% Native American. If you put hair on me, I look white. Without hair, I look ethnic."

Upcoming: "She's the Man" with Amanda Bynes (March 17), "A Guide to Recognizing Your Saints" with Robert Downey Jr. (playing at the Sundance Film Festival), "Untitled Music High Project"

Ashton Holmes

Holmes, 23, is nervous about doing comedy, instead preferring films like "A History of Violence" (in which he was the son) and "What We Do Is Secret," the story of the Germs punk band ("I play the equivalent of Yoko Ono"). An actor from age 6, he studied at SUNY



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Albany and spent time in the West Village before starring in the national tour of "Rent." Now he's in Hollywood, making directors forget about that other Ashton, Demi Moore's new husband.

What he needs to learn: "More about love. I've had a lot of success recently in my career but not much in love. I don't do relationships gracefully."

What's unique about him: "I get goosebumps on stage. The best version of me is when I'm acting. I always want to be someone else."

Upcoming: "Peaceful Warrior" with Nick Nolte, "What We Do Is Secret"

Ellen Page

Page was plucked out of her elementary school in Halifax, Nova Scotia, at age 10 to appear in a movie, which then turned into a Canadian TV series. She instantly became obsessed with acting. Now 18, she likes playing tough girls and, if the role calls for it, will shave her head, simulate sex with a man twice her age or investigate pedophilia.







She seems perfectly cast as Kitty Pryde/Shadowcat in "X-Men 3." "Kitty is intelligent, brave and speaks for herself," she says. "She's a bit more of a smart-ass than I am."

What she needs to learn: "To make sure I listen to myself and trust myself. The industry is so full of b.s. that I'm already neurotic."

What's unique about her: "I'm a total shrimp [5 feet], which makes me look younger. I'll be able to stay in that area longer, which is good, because there's more competition in your 20s."

Upcoming: "Hard Candy" (April 14), "X-Men 3" (May 26)

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