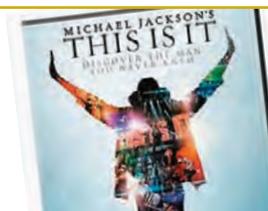


SUN SHOWBIZ



Tomorrow in your Sun ...

Bruce Kirkland writes about the DVD release of Michael Jackson's *This Is It*.



MARIO ANZUONI/REUTERS

Ben Affleck fields questions at the premiere of *The Company Men* — a new drama about corporate downsizing a la *Up in the Air* — during the Sundance Film Festival.

In good Company

After years of lousy movies, Ben Affleck has found peace directing and acting in films he cares about

PARK CITY, Utah — Moviegoers have been trying to fire Ben Affleck for years. Or is there another message to be taken from the dismal fortunes of *Surviving Christmas*, *Jersey Girl*, *Man About Town*, *Paycheck* and *Gigli*?

Yet, like Milton, the mumbling desk drone with the red Swingline stapler in *Office Space*, Affleck just kept showing up to work. More significantly, he started working for himself. The resulting directorial debut, *Gone Baby Gone*, may not have shattered box-office records in 2007, but it deservedly captivated critics and signalled Affleck's much-belated return to *Good Will Hunting* territory (an area his



KEVIN WILLIAMSON
at Sundance

co-star Matt Damon never really left).

"Directing is very satisfying because, at the end of the day, it's what I want it to be," Affleck tells journalists in a shop along historic, snow-covered Main Street. "If it doesn't work, it's on me. I like that. I have the satisfaction of seeing it through."

No surprise then that he's wrapped his directorial followup, *The Town*, in which he co-stars with Jeremy Renner (*The Hurt Locker*),

Blake Lively (*Gossip Girl*), Rebecca Hall (*Vicky Cristina Barcelona*) and Jon Hamm (*Mad Men*); it will be out this fall.

Moreover Affleck's personal life, which once overshadowed his career choices, has long since settled comfortably under the radar (mostly). He and wife Jennifer Garner have two daughters, ages four and one.

"I have less time to waste — I have children now. I don't work when my wife's working. And I have less time because directing takes a year. I'm less interested in doing movies just for some idea of advancing a career.

"I want to do movies I can be proud of, that I can

look back on and say, 'That meant something.' So I'm not interested in doing some random action movie or whatever. But by the same token, people still do superhero movies and some of them are good. That one wasn't good," he says, referring to 2003's *Daredevil*.

"I wish it was. I tried to make it good. It just happened that it wasn't. Sometimes you do movies and they work and sometimes they don't work. You work really hard on both. I'm a different person than when I was 24 or 25. All I can do is pick projects that I think are really good from the opportunities that I get and hope people like them and not sweat it too much."

Projects, presumably, such as *The Company Men*, a drama about corporate downsizing that debuted this weekend at the Sundance film festival. In addition to Affleck, it stars Tommy Lee Jones, Kevin Costner and Chris Cooper, and was directed by John Wells, the veteran producer responsible for *ER*.

Affleck, despite his professional ups and downs, acknowledges he's fortunate enough to "be isolated from (the recession) and our business is isolated from that, by and large."

As was the case with *Up in the Air*, *The Company Men* — which was inspired by the dot-com bust of a decade earlier — was already well underway

when the financial markets collapsed. Suddenly, the film was eerie in its timeliness.

But will audiences sympathize with or relate to wealthy white collar executives faced with losing their mansions, Porsches and toys? Affleck believes so.

"Not a lot of people understand the world of emergency surgeons. Not a lot of people understand the world of blue avatars, but they went to that movie. The whole point of movies is that you're introduced to worlds that aren't necessarily part of your everyday life. Certainly people connect to feelings of fear and anxiety."

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