

## Building Success at the Art House

**A**mong independent movie companies just now, no one—not even Miramax—is having a better run than **Sony Pictures Classics**. It has distributed the Oscar winner for Best Foreign Film three years in a row, and is behind *Farinelli*, *Amateur*, the high-grossing 3-D Imax movie *Wings of Courage*, and the well-received *Crumb*. Even SPC's labor-of-love retrospective of films by Indian director Satyajit Ray is turning into a surprising commercial success. To top it off, just last week, Michael Barker, Tom Bernard, and Marcie Bloom—the troika that runs SPC—arrived at the Cannes Film Festival, where their Christmas movie *The City of Lost Children* was chosen for the opening-night slot. The team's sudden ascension can be credited, its members say, to their ability to change. "We've broadened our horizons," says Michael Barker, referring to the edgier, Miramaxier pictures SPC has been acquiring lately. And it's clear the last year has marked a dramatic shift for a company traditionally known for specializing in stereotypically old-school foreign films like *Germinal* and *Howards End*. They've also imitated Miramax's studiolike aggressiveness by acquiring properties earlier and earlier. "Forty percent of our slate is acquired at the script stage," Barker says. "A few years ago, that wasn't the case." But they also credit the ways in which they *haven't* changed. SPC sticks to releasing around fourteen films a year and quietly strives to make each one profitable. Still, it's a whole new world out there, and the folks at SPC have taken note of it. "We have hordes of people going to see Ray, *Crumb*, and *Wings of Courage*, and the audiences are all different," says Barker. "It's not the same as it used to be fifteen years ago, where you had your classic art film, and that was it."



'A Pure Formality,' SPC's latest release, opens May 26.