

ABFF from p. 9

A key to the ABFF's success has been its relationships with sponsors. Time Warner and HBO have both been involved since the inception. Says HBO affiliate marketing head Olivia Smashum, "Once I got an opportunity to experience firsthand what the festival is all about, [I saw] it was a natural fit for HBO to continue developing the event."

HBO's Short Film Competition, which awards \$20,000 to the winner, is one of the fest's highlights, but the cabler-turned-mini-film studio isn't just writing a check. It also puts on events, such as last year's panel on *Lackawanna Blues* (coming to DVD Aug. 23).

Smashum hopes HBO's entrench-

ment at ABFF will make the cabler the first choice for the young black filmmaking community. "Our commitment is evidenced by the fact that we've been there from the beginning."

All this, of course, helps further legitimize the festival. With ABFF already firmly cemented as a stop on DVD acquisition execs' itineraries, Friday and other insiders still see room for growth, especially when it comes to theatrical buyers.

"I don't think the studios are as interested in the ABFF as we

would all like to think," says Lee, whose *Undercover Brother* was released theatrically and on DVD by Universal. "But there are some amazing executives and agents who have made it their business to push the studios to become more interested." ●



Undercover Brother producer Damon Lee is among those who have seen success at the ABFF.



The ABFF is looking for a breakout theatrical hit like *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (above), but it has served as a proving ground for such filmmakers as Greg Carter, whose *Treasure N Tha Hood* (below) was just released on DVD.