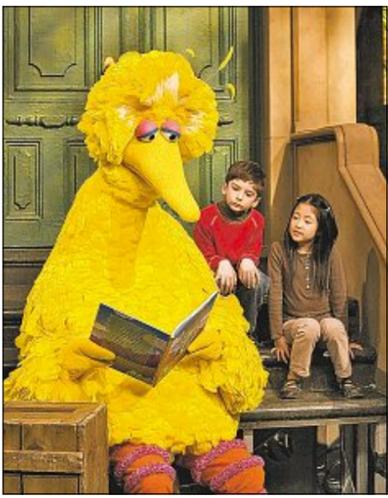


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MARK LENNIHAN ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE PHOTO

Big Bird reads to children during a taping of "Sesame Street" in New York. The new book "Street Gang: The Complete History of Sesame Street," provides insight into the show's creation.

## Author: Open 'Sesame' on show's past

BY FRAZIER MOORE  
The Associated Press

How to get to "Sesame Street" is child's play, as the chirpy theme song has assured kids daily for 39 years.

But first it had to be created. In the new book "Street Gang: The Complete History of Sesame Street," journalist Michael Davis takes us on the journey with thoroughness and obvious affection.

While this history travels some familiar ground, the story in its fullness should cause readers to marvel at what a charmed alignment "Sesame Street" represents: Here, an era of social activism coincided with a strategy for channeling TV to help underprivileged youngsters, which all led to this newfangled show, along with an institution (now called Sesame Workshop) to cradle it.

An early outline for the show had already identified the essentials: It would be a daily hourlong program for 3- to 5-year-olds, shot on tape, with music, puppets and stories. The goal: to help kids learn their ABCs and count from one to 10.

Other details weren't so quickly nailed down, like who might air it. According to "Street Gang," CBS and NBC had a chance, but each rejected the project.

"All the applause, all the gratitude from parents, all the awards and recognition," plus millions from licensing and merchandising — this was for the taking by either network. As Davis writes, "Turning down 'Sesame Street' was a billion-dollar blunder."

It debuted instead on PBS on Nov. 10, 1969, and from its first day, the show made everything look easy — including itself.

But the four years before that had been jammed with brainstorming, fundraising, meticulous research and remarkable invention. One major "aha" moment: the decision to teach numbers and letters with parody commercials. It was a revolutionary idea then and an educational hallmark ever since.

A few decisions were made on the fly. Casting of actors was somehow put off until shortly before its test shows had to be taped.

Then came another vexing issue. "We were just frantic for a title," recalled series mastermind Joan Ganz Cooney. No one much liked the word "sesame," which seemed to imply opening something up, but also

Please see **SESAME, D4**

## 'Open Call' star takes lead in Sundance film

Sara Swain, one of the most successful performers from the McCallum Theatre Institute "Open Call" competitions, will soon be seen at the Sundance International Film Festival.

Swain plays a lead role in "Boutonniere," one of 47 U.S. short films selected from a record 3,267 submissions to the prestigious Park City, Utah, festival founded by Robert Redford.

The film is a dark comedy about a simple teenage girl trying to survive her overbearing mother's exuberant plans for a prom she'd rather not attend.

Swain, 19, graduated from Horizon Alternative School in La Quinta in 2007. She began attending its independent study program in the seventh grade so she could go out of town for auditions and film and television work.

She appeared in the film "Stargate" in 2004.

Swain exhibited her singing and acting skills in the 2001 and 2002 "Open Call" talent competitions at the McCallum Theatre, winning first place in her category both years.

— BRUCE FESSIER

# DESERT TODAY

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# MAKING SCENES

Local director shoots latest film in valley



angie franzer  
metromix.com

Dusk is just beginning to set on the Coachella Valley while the Colony Palms Hotel in Palm Springs buzzes with action.

Actors scurry to the makeup room where they will be powdered, hair sprayed and tweaked before their big scenes. The production staff — recognizable by their secret-service like earpieces — make final lighting adjustments. Lines are memorized, the scene is set, and it will only be moments before local director Christian Sesma says the magic word: "Action."

What looks like an ordinary hotel on the outside has been transformed into a full-fledged movie set for Sesma's third full-length feature, "Shoot the Hero."

La Quinta actress and entrepreneur Denise DuBarry Hay is serving as executive producer of the film that features her daughter, Samantha Lockwood, Palm Springs-based actor Fred "The Hammer" Williamson and former CBS 2 reporter Mike Hatton. While other movies have shot a scene or two in the desert, "Shoot the Hero" is filming almost entirely in the Coachella Valley.

"It's the realization of a long-standing dream, to film in our home," said Sesma, a



MARILYN CHUNG THE DESERT SUN

Judy Twine styles Mike Hatton's hair on the set of "Shoot the Hero" at the Colony Palms Hotel.



MARILYN CHUNG THE DESERT SUN

Cameramen (from left) Justin Rhoads, Jacob Fleming, Richard Amador, and E. Gunnar Mortensen work on the set of "Shoot the Hero," now filming in Palm Springs.

Palm Springs High School graduate who decided to try his hand at filmmaking after being hospitalized for a burst appendix in 2003.

Palm Springs' close proximity to Los Angeles has allowed Sesma to compile a cast of local and Hollywood talent, including Jason Mewes ("Clerks"), Katie Morgan ("Zack and Miri Make A Porno"), Danny Trejo ("Desperado") and

Nick Turturro ("NYPD Blue").

"People who live in L.A. and all these big cities, it's easier for them to get to Palm Springs rather than to fly to Germany or Hamburg. It's so convenient," said Lockwood.

Trejo, appearing in his second Sesma film, agrees, calling Palm Springs "a great, film-friendly place to shoot."

Exceeding initial expectations may not be difficult, considering the project's production value.

Klemens Becker, who has helped the lens for box office hits like "Gladiator," "The Bourne Supremacy" and "The Bourne Ultimatum," is serving as the director of photography. At his disposal are two RED ONES, the hard-to-find camera of choice for directors Ron Howard and Peter Jackson.

Hatton says the project has been more fun than work.

"I don't even feel like I'm acting," he says with a laugh.

"It's a mission we've had for several years," said Hay. "We've wanted to bring more of a film industry here, and Christian and I are on a mission to do that."



MARILYN CHUNG THE DESERT SUN

Actors Katie Morgan, Danny Trejo and Samantha Lockwood take a break from the set of "Shoot the Hero."

## Famous faces

Actors appearing in director Christian Sesma's latest movie "Shoot the Hero," now filming in Palm Springs.

### JASON MEWES

What you've seen him in: Kevin Smith's "Clerks," "Mallrats" and "Jay & Silent Bob Strike Back," "Zack and Miri Make a Porno"



Mewes

### DANNY TREJO

What you've seen him in: Nearly 200 films, including Quentin Tarantino's "From Dusk Till Dawn," "Spy Kids" and the upcoming "Machete."



Trejo

### NICK TURTURRO

What you've seen him in: Oliver Stone's "World Trade Center," "I Now Pronounce You Chuck & Larry," "NYPD Blue"



Turturro

### KATIE MORGAN

What you've seen her in: "Zack and Miri Make a Porno," two HBO specials and numerous adult films.



Morgan

Go to **palm Springs. metromix.com** for an exclusive Q&A with actor Danny Trejo



## 'Tis the weather for sweaters

A basic sweater is timeless. This season's knits are chic and versatile and come in unexpected styles. Think about printed scarves, cable-knit dresses, edgy vests and oversize handbags, as well as the classic pullover.



Sleek Calvin Klein sweater dress, \$39.99 at T.J. Maxx.



Cable-knit sweater bracelets stack neatly on your wrist and might even keep you warm in the bargain. \$3.50 apiece at Old Navy.



Wear this cropped Mi Scusi sweater over a button-down or long-sleeved T-shirt. \$110 for this and other knitted items at <http://miscusi.etsy.com>.

GANNETT NEWS SERVICE PHOTOS



Watson & Pastor's lightweight Royal Baby Alpaca sweaters come in a range of rich and sophisticated colors. \$240 to \$350 at Chapman's, 73740 El Paseo, Palm Desert.



Apt. 9 wrap sweater, \$50 at Kohl's.