



Friday, December 4, 2009

NBR's best: 'Up in the Air'

It's only helmer Jason Reitman's third pic, but the National Board of Review gave his George Clooney starrer "Up in the Air" multiple awards on Thursday, including best film of the year. Adapted from Walter Kirn's novel, Paramount's recession-centric dramedy also nabbed prizes for Clooney (best actor, which he shares with Morgan Freeman for "Invictus"), thesp Anna Kendrick (supporting actress) and scribes Reitman and Sheldon Turner (adapted screenplay). Major awards also went to Clint Eastwood, who took the director nod for "Invictus"; to thesp Carey Mulligan for her turn in "An Education"; to Woody Harrelson, for his supporting role in "The Messenger"; and the Coen brothers for their "A Serious Man" original screenplay. Steve Martin-Meryl Streep-Alec Baldwin comedy "It's Complicated" won the best ensemble prize. This is Eastwood's second consecutive NBR award -- the multihyphenate took the actor prize last year for "Gran Torino." In a strong year for animated pics, the board named "Up" for animated feature kudos -- and resurrected a special filmmaking achievement award for Wes Anderson's stop-motion pic "Fantastic Mr. Fox."

'Flash Forward' sets winter hiatus

ABC will flash forward longer than expected, as "Flash Forward" takes a three-month hiatus this winter. Alphabet announced, via promos Thursday night, that "Flash Forward" won't be back until March 4. As previously planned, "Flash Forward" aired its fall finale on Thursday. But show was originally scheduled to be back in January. Network insiders said the move will allow "Flash Forward" to air straight through the rest of the year without going into repeats. Hiatus will also keep "Flash Forward" out of the Winter Olympics line of fire this February. But the extended vacation may also allow producers a chance to continue giving "Flash Forward" a bit of an overhaul. While the show opened decently, ratings have dropped -- and critics, initially fans of the show, have also voiced their concerns over the series' direction. Earlier this fall, co-showrunner Marc Guggenheim was let go from "Flash Forward" (David Goyer remains). And in November, production was halted for several days on the show as producers took time to make some tweaks.

Johnny Depp eyes Pancho Villa role

ROME -- Serbian helmer Emir Kusturica is in advanced negotiations for Johnny Depp to star as Mexican revolutionary hero Pancho Villa in his upcoming biopic titled "Seven Friends of Pancho Villa and the Woman With Six Fingers." Kusturica said the script, written with regular collaborator Gordan Mihic ("Time of the Gypsies," "Black Cat, White Cat"), is completed, although lensing is not set to start until 2011 due to Depp's prior commitments. The Spanish-language biopic will be shot partly in Mexico. Salma Hayek is in advanced talks to co-star in the pic. Depp and Kusturica collaborated previously on "Arizona Dream" in 1993. Script is based on biographical novel "The Friends of Pancho Villa," in which author James Carlos Blake recounts how Villa and his compadres had a great time fighting and robbing the rich, but also dancing, partying and making love. Biopic is being set up by French shingle Fidelite, which also produced Kusturica's

"Maradona" docu. Villa has previously been played onscreen by Antonio Banderas, Telly Savalas and even Villa himself in the 1914 pic "The Life of General Villa," which was produced by D.W. Griffith.

Burnett signs onto new 'Design Star'

Mark Burnett, the veteran "Survivor," "The Apprentice" and "Shark Tank" producer, has signed on to produce the fifth season of "HGTV Design Star." Burnett will jump fairly rapidly into "Design Star," which provides a competition for architects, artists, interior designers and decorators, and other design enthusiasts to win their own show on HGTV. "We expect (Burnett and his team) will infuse 'HGTV Design Star' with fresh perspectives and innovative ideas," said Freddy James, HGTV senior veep of programming development and production. A deadline of Jan. 19 has been set for applications to appear on season five, tentatively scheduled to premiere June 20. Burnett will also be producing the People's Choice Awards broadcast for CBS in January. Season-four "Design Star" champ Antonio Ballatore has a March launch date for his new series, "The Antonio Treatment." SallyAnn Salsano of 495 Prods., which previously produced "Design Star," will exec produce "Antonio."

Fox hunting werewolves

Never mind vampires -- the Fox network is looking to get back into the werewolf business, developing "Howl," from DreamWorks TV. Project is being written by Joshua Miller and M.A. Fortin. DreamWorks TV toppers Justin Falvey and Darryl Frank would exec produce. "Howl" is described as an epic family saga about warring families of werewolves in a small Alaskan town. "Alaska is a place where people disappear and now you know why," Miller said. The script reflects the changes that are going on in the country, and "metamorphosis and constant change is the basis of werewolf mythology," he added. "Howl" is about "the psychology of living with change." One of the Fox network's first series, 1987's "Werewolf," also revolved around the mythic creatures. More recently, CBS aired the short-lived "Wolf Lake," while MTV is currently developing a new take on the 1980s movie "Teen Wolf."