



Monday, December 28, 2009

Holiday box office breaks records

There was enough Christmas cheer for nearly everyone at the domestic B.O., which tallied its biggest weekend in history as a number of films -- led by 20th Century's 3D juggernaut "Avatar" -- benefited from moviegoers stuffing themselves silly. Revenues for the frame reached an estimated \$280 million, overtaking the \$260 million earned the weekend "The Dark Knight" opened in July 2008. In another milestone, domestic ticket sales for 2009 jumped the \$10 billion mark for the first time ever, capping a record-breaking year that is running 12% ahead of last year. Attendance is up more than 5%. "Avatar" dipped only 3% in its second sesh to an estimated \$75 million from 3,456 runs for a cume of \$212.3 million. Overseas, the James Cameron-directed pic fell 12% to an estimated \$145 million from 14,844 playdates in 108 markets for a foreign total of \$405 million and dazzling worldwide haul of \$617.3 million in its first 10 days. Placing No. 2 domestically was Warner Bros.' Robert Downey Jr.-Jude Law topliner "Sherlock Holmes," opening to \$65.4 million from 3,626 to easily secure the top bow ever for a Christmas weekend. Previous record-holder was "Meet the Fockers" (\$46.2 million). Fox is ending the year on a high note, between "Avatar" and "Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel," which posted a five-day Christmas bow of \$77.1 million from 3,700 runs. That included a weekend haul of \$50.2 million, which put the kiddie pic at No. 3 and bested the \$44.2 million debut of the first "Alvin" on Dec. 14, 2007. Overseas, "Squeakquel" debuted to a strong \$36.5 million from 5,492 screens in 42 markets for a worldwide debut of \$113.6 million. International number was 215% ahead of "Alvin's" opening in the same territories. Stateside, coming in No. 4 was Universal's female-skewing romantic comedy "It's Complicated," grossing an estimated \$22.1 million from 2,886 runs to score Nancy Meyers her second-best bow after "What Women Want" (\$33.6 million). "It's Complicated" stars Meryl Streep, Alec Baldwin and Steve Martin. Expanding wide over the frame were Paramount's George Clooney starrer "Up in the Air" and the Weinstein Co.'s Rob Marshall-directed musical "Nine." "Up in the Air" came in No. 5 for the weekend, grossing an estimated \$11.8 million from 1,895 theaters for a cume of \$24.5 million and location average of 6,203. "Nine" placed No. 8, grossing a softer \$5.5 million from 1,412 screens for a cume of \$5.9 million and per location average of 3,926. Distributors said it box office gained with Dec. 25 falling on a Friday, since Christmas afternoon and evening are a busy time for theaters, combined with the fact that Friday is itself a big moviegoing day. Most films saw substantial gains from Friday to Saturday, particularly family pics. "Alvin" was up 41%; "Avatar," 21%; "Up in the Air," 19%; and "It's Complicated," 16%. The only two movies on the top 10 chart seeing Friday to Saturday declines were "Sherlock" (-11%) and "Nine" (-8%). It is routine for films doing business on opening day to see a Saturday drop, however, as in the case of "Sherlock," which grossed a record-breaking \$24.9 million on Christmas Day. That put "Sherlock" ahead of "Avatar's" \$23.5 million to win the day. Previous best Christmas Day gross for a new pic was "Marley and Me" (\$14.4 million). "I'm thrilled that we blew away all the expectations," Warner Bros. prexy of domestic distribution Dan Fellman said. "Sherlock" skewed slightly male at 54%. Audience was fairly evenly divided among auds over and under 30. Warners is hoping the pic, which recieved a B CinemaScore, will launch a franchise. As of three weeks ago, many box office observers believed "Sherlock" had a shot at beating "Avatar" over Christmas weekend. Based on an iconic character, "Sherlock" directed by Guy Ritchie and also starring Rachel McAdams, has become a known brand. Despite the challenge of introducing tentpoles based on original stories, "Avatar" is benefiting from incredible

word-of-mouth, as evidenced by the fact that the film nearly grossed as much in its second frame as in its first \$77 million frame. Fox senior VP of distribution Bert Livingston said it wasn't a surprise that "Sherlock" beat "Avatar" on Christmas Day, but that "Avatar" ruled overall. "It was our second Friday, and I think they had a great campaign. People wanted to see the movie ['Sherlock']," Livingston said. Livingston said the studio couldn't have been more delighted with the opening of "Squeakquel." When Alvin did \$18.8 million on the first day, I thought that every family had gone to see it opening day, and wondered whether it would be the biggest day of the weekend. I didn't think we could beat that number, but we did and the film grossed \$20.4 million on Saturday," Livingston said. Squeakquel's audience was 70% families. Sequel overperformed among Latinos, who helped to drive the B.O. success of the first "Alvin," which cumed \$217.3 million domestically and \$143.3 million overseas for a worldwide total of \$360.6 million. The weekdays between Christmas and New Year's weekend see Saturday-like business, and with such a strong Christmas weekend, distribs are hoping that this year, the trend is even more pronounced. Avatar," for instance, could hit \$300 million by the end of New Year's weekend. Universal prexy of domestic distribution Nikki Rocco said "It's Complicated" is poised to have lasting playability as older women become freed up from holiday activities. The rom com received an A- CinemaScore, with moviegoers overwhelmingly female and over 30. Relativity Media co-financed "It's Complicated." Among limited releases, Terry Gilliam's "The Imaginarium of Dr. Parnassus," Heath Ledger's final film, scored the top per location average of the frame at \$32,495. The Sony Pictures Classics release opened to an estimated \$129,980 from four locations in New York and Los Angeles. Fox Searchlight's Jeff Bridges topline "Crazy Heart" grossed an estimated \$156,000 from 12 theaters in its second frame for a location average of \$13,000 and cume of \$320,578. Peter Jackson's "The Lovely Bones" grossed an estimated \$38,000 from three runs in its third frame for a location average of \$12,667 and cume of \$273,000. Tom Ford's "A Single Man," from the Weinstein Co., grossed an estimated \$323,000 from 46 theaters in its third sesh for a locaiton average of \$7,022 and cume of \$891,000. SPC's Pedro Almodovar pic "Broken Embraces" grossed an estimated \$360,385 from 71 runs for a theater average of \$5,076 and cume of \$1.3 million in its sixth weekend. Apparition's Emily Blunt pic "The Young Victoria" grossed an estimated \$603,866 from 163 runs for an average of \$3,705 and cume of \$886,514. Prestige pics vying for awards attention at the end of the year face a tough road as they have to compete with bigger releases. The challenge is to hold on and play into January and February. Distribs decided to take a different approach with "Up in the Air" and "Nine," expanding nationwide over Christmas. Up in the Air" continued to play most strongly on the East and West coasts. Its per screen average of \$6,023 was as strong, if not stronger, than "Slumdog Millionaire's" average last Christmas. "Slumdog," playing on far fewer screens, grossed \$4.3 million from 614 locations on the same weekend for a location average of \$7,006. Nine," with an ensemble cast that includes Daniel Day-Lewis and Marion Cotillard, had a tougher time and saw declines in holdover theaters in New York. However, musicals can have strong legs.

Perry takes 'Madea' on the road

Movie producer and actor Tyler Perry said he is taking his sharp-tongued character Madea back on tour. Perry posted a message on his website Saturday in which he said that he'd taken some time off in the past few months "so I could spend my mother's final days at her side." His mother, Willie Maxine Perry, died Dec. 8 at age 64. Perry said he will begin touring with his new play, "Madea's Big Happy Family." Tyler will once again use a wig and padded suit to portray Madea, the central character of many of his films, including "Tyler Perry's Madea Goes to Jail." The actor said he is eager to have Madea onstage for the first time in five years. The first leg of the tour begins Jan. 4 in El Paso, Texas, then goes on to Phoenix, San Diego, Seattle and Portland, Ore.

Lawmakers ask MTV to cancel 'Shore'

MTV is getting more pressure to cancel its "Jersey Shore" reality show. The latest criticism comes from the New Jersey Italian American Legislative Caucus, which says the show promotes derogatory ethnic stereotypes and is "wildly offensive." In a letter sent Tuesday to the president of Viacom, MTV's parent company, caucus chairman Joseph Vitale asks that the show be

immediately taken off the air. The state lawmakers also have asked advertisers to boycott the show, which focuses on eight tanned 20-somethings and their escapades in Seaside Heights, a popular New Jersey beach town. On Wednesday, a Viacom spokesman referred a request for comment to an MTV spokesperson, who did not immediately respond. MTV has said its intention is not to stereotype or offend.

Kevin Smith's 'Dicks' becomes 'Cop Out'

Warner Bros.' cop comedy "A Couple of Dicks" has become "Cop Out." Director Kevin Smith revealed the name change last week before the "Cop Out" trailer began showing in front of Warner's "Sherlock Holmes" on Christmas Day. He told Entertainment Weekly the key reason for the switch was that the studio wanted to advertise "Cop Out" on sports programs but the major networks indicated they couldn't run ads prior 9 p.m. if the film was titled "A Couple of Dicks." "Cop Out," due to open in February, is toplined by Bruce Willis and Tracy Morgan. Seann William Scott, Adam Brody, Jason Lee and Michelle Trachtenberg also star. Marc Platt's producing the project with Polly Johnsen and Michael Tadross. The scripting team of Robb and Marc Cullen penned the screenplay, centered on a pair of cops who track down a stolen baseball card, rescue a Mexican beauty and deal with gangsters and laundered drug money. Warner picked up the project in turnaround from Gold Circle, where Robin Williams and James Gandolfini had been attached to star.

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