



TRADES

Monday, March 22, 2010

Conan-Fox talks resume amid 'Idol' offer

After a two-week stall, Fox and Conan O'Brien have resumed talks about a potential late-night talk show fronted by the former "Tonight Show" host. But a wrinkle in the courtship has emerged that involves the biggest show on television: O'Brien has been approached to take part in Fox's "Idol Gives Back" special April 21. Sources close to both camps stress that the offer is not related to the ongoing late-night discussions and in no way means the two sides expect to have a deal by April 21. In fact, the invitation to O'Brien came not from Fox but from "American Idol" producer 19 Entertainment, which is reaching out to several celebrities for the charity special. Still, the prospect of O'Brien appearing on the top show of the network that is looking to bring him into the fold is intriguing. The "Idol Gives Back" invitation was taken to NBC to determine whether that network would allow it under its settlement with the talk show host. The answer was no, as the moratorium on any TV appearances by O'Brien doesn't expire until May 1. He can, however, launch a show as early as September.

'Alice' three-peats weekend win

Disney's "Alice in Wonderland" pulled off an impressive three-peat win at the weekend boxoffice, with the 3D fantasy ringing up an estimated \$34.5 million in its third domestic session. The Johnny Depp starrer posted a modest 45% dip from its previous session for a 17-day tally of \$265.8 million. Launched simultaneously in many foreign markets, "Alice" has fetched \$565.8 million in worldwide coin to date. Fox's family comedy "Diary of a Wimpy Kid" flexed its muscles most notably of the weekend's three wide openers. Its \$21.8 million performance outpaced pre-release projections to nail down the weekend's silver medal position. Sony's action comedy "The Bounty Hunter," starring Gerard Butler and Jennifer Aniston, also bowed strongly with \$21 million. That was good for third place on the frame and roughly in line with expectations.

Rosie O'Donnell plots daytime return

Rosie O'Donnell is plotting a return to daytime. O'Donnell, who hosted the syndicated "The Rosie O'Donnell Show" and did a stint on ABC's "The View," has teamed with syndication veterans Dick Robertson and Scott Carlin for another syndicated talk show. The show, hosted by O'Donnell, is eyed for fall 2011 launch, which would coincide with the exit of "The Oprah Winfrey Show." The news was first reported on Showbiz411.com. The show will be produced independently by a company formed by O'Donnell, Robertson and Carlin. As president of Warner Bros. Domestic TV Distribution, a post he held for 17 years until segueing into an adviser position in 2006, Robertson shepherded the sales of the Telepictures-produced "Rosie O'Donnell Show," which ran for six years and won a truckload of Emmys, including five consecutive best talk show statuettes.

Starz greenlights contemporary 'Camelot'

Chris Albrecht is building "Camelot" at Starz. In its first series order since Albrecht took the reins as president and CEO, the pay cabler has greenlighted a contemporary retelling of the Arthurian legend

from a producing team that encompasses four countries -- the U.S., U.K., Ireland and Canada -- and is led by Oscar-winning producer Graham King and "The Tudors" masterminds Morgan O'Sullivan and Michael Hirst. The 10-episode "Camelot," slated to premiere in first-half 2011, marks the first project from King's recently launched GK-TV. It uses Thomas Malory's 15th century compilation, "Le Morte d'Arthur," often considered the definitive work on the legend of King Arthur, as a starting point for a take on the tale that looks to weave authenticity into a narrative relatable to contemporary audiences. "The story of Arthur isn't history, it's mythology, and Camelot isn't a place but an idea of hope that has resonated at different times throughout history," Albrecht said. He called "Camelot" "a highly entertaining and distinctly original TV program that fits in perfectly with our lineup." That includes the breakout original hit "Spartacus: Blood and Sand," the returning comedy "Party Down" and the recently acquired eight-part miniseries based on Ken Follett's "The Pillars of the Earth."

Jessica Chastain joins Sam Worthington film

Jessica Chastain has booked the female lead opposite Sam Worthington in "The Fields," a thriller being directed by Ami Canaan Mann. Jeffrey Dean Morgan is also in the project, which is being produced and financed by QED. Written by Don Ferrarone, the story is set in an area of coastal Texas dotted with oil refineries known to locals as "The Fields." There, a homicide detective (Worthington) fights two sets of fierce killers to save the life of a street kid named Little Anne.

Central Talent Booking