

Box Office: “Romantics” and “Heartbreaker” Lead Debuts; Phoenix Doc Fair

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by Peter Knegt (Updated 7 hours, 22 minutes ago)

Two indie romantic comedies led this very busy weekend of debuts at the specialty box office. According to estimates provided by Rentrak earlier today, Galt Niederhoffer's "The Romantics" and Pascal Chaumeil's "Heartbreaker" found excellent numbers in very limited openings, while Magnolia's release of anticipated Joaquin Phoenix exploration, "I'm Still Here," grossed somewhat below expectations.

"The Romantics," which debuted at Sundance earlier this year and stars Katie Holmes, Anna Paquin and Josh Duhamel, grossed \$44,400 on 2 screens. That made for a \$22,200 average and was the very first film released through Paramount Famous Productions - a new indie label for studio Paramount Pictures. The feature edged out IFC Films' release of French hit "Heartbreaker" (which has already grossed over \$40 million in France), which debuted on 3 screens and grossed \$54,300, averaging \$18,100. The two per-theater-averages were by far the highest of any film in release.



A scene from Pascal Chaumeil's "Heartbreaker." Image courtesy of IFC Films.

Perhaps the most high-profile specialty release of the weekend was Casey Affleck's Joaquin Phoenix "documentary," "I'm Still Here." Released just days after its Venice Film Festival debut, Magnolia Pictures put the film on 19 screens in 18 different markets. The result was a respectable \$104,500 gross and a \$5,500 per-theater-average - certainly not disastrous numbers but nevertheless below expectations for the much discussed film.

Other debuts that reported grosses included Variance Films' release of the Vietnamese romantic comedy import, "De Mai Tinh" (Fool For Love), which took in \$52,800 on eight screens, for a decent per-theater-average of \$6,600; IDP/Samuel Goldwyn's release of Mel Damski's "Legendary," which grossed \$135,210 and averaged only \$764 from its aggressively wide 177 screen debut; and Freestyle's release of Australian musical "Bran Nue Dae," which took in only \$26,900 from 16 screens, averaging \$1,681.

Kino Lorber released two new documentaries to New York screens: "The Canadian Genius Within: the Inner Life of Glenn Gould," by Peter Raymont and Michelle Hozer, which delivered \$18,000 on three screens, averaging \$6,000, and "Who is Harry Nilsson...?," a long-gestating portrait of the late singer songwriter by John Scheinfeld, which grossed \$7,000 at Cinema Village. Both films will be released in LA later this month and will expand around the country this fall.

Notable holdovers included Lixin Fan's critically acclaimed doc "Last Train Home," which expanded from 1 to 2 screens in its second frame and grossed \$13,698. That gave the film a \$6,849 average and a new total of \$43,765.

Also in its second weekend was Sony Pictures Classics' release of Zhang Yimou's Chinese "Blood Simple" remake, "A Woman, a Gun and a Noodle Shop," which went from 5 to 13 screens and grossed \$30,454, averaging \$2,343 and taking its cumulative total to \$73,160.

Amir Bar-Lev's doc "The Tillman Story," which spotlights Pat Tillman, a former NFL star-turned-soldier who died in Afghanistan in 2004, continued to perform decently in its fourth frame. The Weinstein Company release took in another \$89,630 from 25 screens, averaging \$3,585 and taking its total to \$427,935.

Also having a good fourth weekend was Bruce Beresford's "Mao's Last Dancer," which expanded from 95 to 102 screens. The story of a Chinese ballet dancer who defects to the US, "Dancer" grossed \$361,138 over the four-day weekend, averaging a strong \$3,540. Including its Canadian release earlier this year, the Samuel Goldwyn release has now topped \$2,244,254.

Meanwhile, Sony Pictures Classics had two holdover-related reasons to be happy this weekend. Aaron Schneider's "Get Low" dropped from 560 to 529 screens in its sixth weekend and held on very nicely, taking in another \$1,006,398. That gave the film, which follows Felix Bush (Robert Duvall), a hermit who decides he wants to throw himself a "funeral party" before he actually passes, a \$1,902 average and a shiny new total of \$7,054,501. That made "Low" Sony Classics' highest grossing film of 2010, and it should easily pass the \$10 million in coming weeks - a feat only 3 specialty films have done so far this year.

The distributor also saw good numbers from David Michôd's "Animal Kingdom," which expanded from 53 to 57 screens in the U.S. in its fourth frame. The result was a respectable \$114,145 gross over the weekend, giving it a \$2,003 average. "Kingdom," a crime drama set in the underground of Melbourne, Australia, also played on 4 screens in Canada (via E1 Entertainment), where it took in \$8,184 for a

\$2,046 average. In total, the film grossed \$122,329 in North America, finding a new total of \$731,031. The \$1 million mark is all but assured at this point.

Finally, IFC Films had good news care of Ruba Nadda's Patricia Clarkson-starring romance "Cairo Time." On 67 screens, the film grossed \$168,840 and thus pass the \$1 million mark, taking its total to \$1,118,840.

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