

'Noah' Rains Down on 'Divergent', 'Muppets' to Win US Box Office

Noah, starring Russell Crowe as the biblical figure who built an ark to save his family and specimens of every animal from the great flood, collected \$44 million in U.S. and Canadian ticket sales to lead the weekend box office.

It sailed past last weekend's winner, *Divergent*, based on the novel by Veronica Roth about a dystopian world divided into factions. *Divergent* collected \$26.5 million and a total of \$95 million since its March 21 release.

Muppets Most Wanted, starring Ty Burrell and Tina Fey with Jim Henson's furry puppets, was third with \$11.4 million in ticket sales from Friday through Sunday, according to estimates provided by Rentrak.

The road for *Noah* to theaters was bumpy. To counter reports in trade newspapers that Christians disapproved of the film, Paramount Pictures, the film's distributor, commissioned a survey by Nielsen that found 83 percent of "very religious" moviegoers were anxious to see the film.

That helped push the film well beyond box office experts' forecast of an opening weekend of about \$36 million.

The film, directed by *Black Swan* and *The Wrestler* director Darren Aronofsky, was banned from theaters in Pakistan, Indonesia and other countries because it was seen by their governments as critical of Islam.

Paramount inserted an "explanatory message" before the movie that said "the film is inspired by the story of Noah. While artistic license has been taken, we believe that this film is

true to the essence, values and integrity that is a cornerstone of faith for millions of people worldwide.”

“This is really a spectacular result,” said Don Harris, president of domestic theatrical distribution for Paramount, a unit of Viacom Inc., who said the studio had anticipated an opening of around \$32 million or \$33 million going into the weekend.

Looking at tickets buyers, Harris noted that *Noah*, which cost about \$125 million to make, performed well across the board, “with African-American communities, with Latino communities, in the suburbs and in the central cities.”

As to the controversy that built up around the film, Harris said “it probably was helpful. Anything that causes people to talk about a movie is good for a movie.”

“But ultimately, the movie succeeded because it works as a movie,” he added, noting its strong reviews with a 76 percent “fresh” rating from the site .

And its strong performance at IMAX theaters, which cost more and added another \$6.2 million to the take, “tells you people view the movie as an epic and want to see it in its biggest and best version,” Harris said.

In fourth place for the weekend, the animated film *Mr. Peabody & Sherman* collected \$9.5 million in ticket sales, pushing its take in domestic theaters to \$95 million. The film features the voices of Ty Burrell, Ariel Winter and Mel Brooks.

Rounding out the top five, *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, director Wes Anderson’s offbeat look at a rundown hotel and its scheming concierge, expanded its run to nearly 1,000 theaters from 300 last week and generated \$8.8 million in ticket sales.

The weekend’s other widely distributed new film, *Sabotage*, sold just \$5.3 million worth of tickets for the No. 7 spot,

another disappointment for a film starring one-time box office superstar Arnold Schwarzenegger. The 66-year old former California governor plays the head of an elite Drug Enforcement Agency task force that finds itself at risk of being taken down themselves.

Cesar Chavez, starring Michael Pena as the labor leader who organized U.S. farm workers in the 1970s, sold \$3 million and was in 12th place, despite playing in fewer than 700 theaters, according to the site Box Office Mojo.

Captain America: The Winter Soldier took in an estimated \$75.2 million in its first weekend of overseas release from 32 territories, Disney said. The film opens in the United States and Canada next weekend.

Muppets Most Wanted was distributed by Walt Disney.. Lionsgate released *Divergent* and *Cesar Chavez*. *Sabotage* was distributed by Open Road Films, a joint venture of AMC Entertainment and Regal Entertainment.