

'Idol' returns to Ruben's backyard

That sound you hear is the collective sigh of relief from the programmers for five networks as 'American Idol' (8 p.m., Fox, TV-PG) pulls back from two hours to one.



Kevin McDonough

As expected, the talent spectacle has set the ratings standard for the young year, crushing everything in its path. Last Wednesday's two-hour 'Idol' attracted a bigger audience than its rivals CBS, ABC, NBC, CW and MY Network, combined.

Early winter is a good time to attract huge numbers of viewers. Of the top 30 most-watched TV events of all time, all but two aired between November and February.

The Super Bowl is a giant exclamation point on this argument. It makes sense. It's time to hibernate. Even with global warming (still just a crazy theory to some, or at least to Glen Beck), it's a time when vast parts of the United States are threatened with ice and snow and cold weather.

Fox has been smart to launch many of its series during this time of year. I find it comforting sitting in my darkened winter TV cave watching Jack Bauer start a new day on '24.'

I seem to remember watching 'Joe Millionaire' beginning in the dead of a very cold winter. In retrospect, maybe it required subzero temperatures to make 'Joe Millionaire' seem like must viewing.

Tonight's 'Idol' auditions take place in Birmingham, Ala., home to 'Idol' champ Ruben Studdard, who briefly turned that city's telephone area code, 205, into a pop-culture buzzword.

Another dividend of the truncated 'Idol' schedule is the return of 'House' (9 p.m., Fox, TV-14). The troubled medical wizard returns from a short stint in rehab to treat a rape victim who asks him to unravel a different kind of medical mystery.

MTV offers a new Tuesday-night lineup that can be appreciated only with the volume cranked up all the way. 'Road Rules' (9 p.m., MTV) returns featuring six veterans of the series.

This season, viewers are invited to log onto roadrules.mtv.com and vote to determine what two players enter an elimination round. And there's another catch: The fateful round can be seen only on MTV.com.

'Bam's Unholy Union' (9:30 p.m.) documents the lives of skateboard pros as well as 'Jackass' star Bam Margera and his fiancée, Missy, as they plan their wedding.

The documentary series 'Two-a-Days' (10 p.m.) returns for a new season. 'Two' follows the

true-life drama of a small-town Alabama football team with a tradition of gridiron excellence.

Like the town in 'Friday Night Lights,' this show focuses on the pressure on coaches and kids in a place where football isn't everything, it's the only thing. 'Wrestling Society X' (10:30 p.m.) profiles some of the best and most unique practitioners of the spectacle in front of hundreds of enthusiastic fans.

Tonight's other highlights

- Scheduled on 'Dateline' (8 p.m., NBC): predators in Long Beach, Calif.
Sookie sulks and Luke fights for custody of April on 'Gilmore Girls' (8 p.m., CW, TV-PG).
Denny takes on animal-rights zealots on 'Boston Legal' (10 p.m., ABC, TV-14).

Cult choice

Alan Ladd stars in director George Stevens' legendary 1953 Western 'Shane' (10:15 p.m., TCM).

Series notes

Murder on the black market on 'NCIS' (8 p.m., CBS, TV-PG, V) ... Tom Bergeron hosts 'America's Funniest Home Videos' (8 p.m., ABC) ... Car trouble on 'Big Day' (9 p.m., ABC, TV-PG) ... Veronica hunts down the one that got away from Max on 'Veronica Mars' (9 p.m., CW, TV-14, D, L, V) ... The tough get going on 'The Knights of Prosperity' (9:30 p.m., ABC, TV-14).

Late night

Matt Damon and Barbara Walters appear on 'Late Show with David Letterman' (11:35 p.m., CBS) ... Jay Leno hosts Diane Keaton, Ivanka Trump and the Soweto Gospel choir on 'The Tonight Show' (11:35 p.m., NBC) ... Christina Applegate and Patton Oswalt appear on 'Jimmy Kimmel Live' (12:05 a.m., ABC).

Kristin Davis, Bob Saget and Paolo Nutini are booked on 'Late Night with Conan O'Brien' (12:35 a.m., NBC) ... Craig Ferguson hosts Thandie Newton and John Cena on 'The Late, Late Show' (12:37 a.m., CBS).

Kevin McDonough is a TV columnist for United Features Syndicate.

TUESDAY EVENING JANUARY 30, 2007

Table listing TV programs by time slot (7 PM, 7:30, 8 PM, 8:30, 9 PM, 9:30, 10 PM, 10:30, 11 PM, 11:30) across various channels (WTTV, WRV, WISH, WTHR, WFYI, WNDY, WTIU, WHMB, WCLJ, WXIN, WIPX, WDTI, A&E, AMC, AP, BET, BRAVO, CNBC, CMT, CNN, COM, DISC, EI, ESPN, ESPN2, FAM, FNC, FOOD, FOXMV, FOXSM, FX, HALL, HDTV, HIST, LIFE, MSNBC, MTV, NICK, OXY, SCIFI, SPIKE, TBS, TCM, TLC, TNT, TOON, TVL, USA, VH1, WE, WGN, DISN, ENC, HBO, SHOW, MAX, TMC, STARZ).

ACCENT ON PEOPLE

The Associated Press

Will Smith honored at film festival

Will Smith was honored with the Modern Master Award — an honor that says he is a master of his craft — at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival.

Smith is nominated for a best-actor Oscar for his performance in 'The Pursuit of Happiness' as a struggling single father in San Francisco who beats the odds and goes from rags to riches.

Asked what it takes to be a good father, Smith said patience, compassion and commitment. He's the father of three in real life, including 7-year-old Jaden, who co-stars in the movie.

Winfrey adds book to list after yearlong hiatus

If her goal was to erase the memory of the disgraced James Frey, then Oprah Winfrey couldn't have made a better pick for her book club than a memoir by Sidney Poitier.

Winfrey ended a year-long hiatus in her club by announcing Friday that she had chosen 'The Measure of a Man,' a spiritual autobiography by one of Hollywood's most admired actors — for whom the word 'dignified' could practically be copyrighted — and a personal hero of Winfrey's.

Published in 2000, Poitier's book combines memories of such plays and films as 'A Raisin in the Sun' and 'The Defiant Ones' with observations about the Academy Award-winning actor's

childhood, his religious faith, his thoughts on racism and the influence of such world leaders as Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi.

'He writes really candidly and passionately about his childhood, his family, relationships and his extraordinary career,' Winfrey said on her show.

'Sunshine' improves Academy Award outlook

Another week, another awards show, and the Oscar situation looks as up in the air as ever. 'Little Miss Sunshine' took the Screen Actors Guild's ensemble prize Sunday night, the group's equivalent of a best picture award.

'Sunshine,' the low-budget, road-trip charmer, came out of the Sundance Film Festival and bested bigger studio competition in 'The Departed,' 'The Queen,' 'Babel' (which took the best-drama statue two weeks ago at the Golden Globes) and 'Dreamgirls' (which won the Globe for best musical or comedy).

The SAG win for 'Little Miss Sunshine,' coupled with its unexpected victory at the Producers Guild Awards, would seem to improve the film's prospects at the Oscars, where it's in the best-picture category with 'Babel,' 'The Departed,' 'Letters From Iwo Jima' and 'The Queen.'

Three out of the past four years, the SAG ensemble winner has won at the Academy Awards: 'Crash,' 'The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King' and 'Chicago.'

They don't usually line up, though, and they differed two years ago when SAG honored 'Sideways' and the Oscar went to 'Million Dollar Baby.'

Spoof 'Epic Movie' bumps Oscar contenders from top spots

By JEFF WILSON

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES

The comedy spoof 'Epic Movie' debuted atop the box office as Academy Award nominees got pushed down in the first weekend since the Oscar announcements, according to studio and industry estimates.

'Epic Movie,' which lampoons dozens of films, a few MTV shows and Paris Hilton, raked in \$19.2 million.

It was a cost-effective release for 20th Century Fox, which enjoyed a similar turnstile bonanza a year ago with the spoof 'Date Movie.'

'When you gross the first weekend almost what it costs to make, it is enormously successful. We're pleased,' Fox executive Bert Livingston said of the Regency Productions film distributed by Fox.

'It seems these teen audiences have just this insatiable appetite for these spoofs,' said Paul Dergarabedian, president of box-office tracker Media By Numbers.

'They are economically sensible,' Dergarabedian said. 'It's just a license to make money for the studio.'

Audiences also turned out for Universal Pictures' 'Smokin' Aces,' a violent, dark comedy about hit men converging on Lake Tahoe for the \$1 million prize to assassinate magician Buddy 'Aces' Israel.

It opened in second place with \$14.3 million.

'It's a very edgy, R-rated, hip and cool movie. It doesn't surprise me,' Dergarabedian said.

In third place was Fox's everlasting 'Night at the Museum,' which took in another \$9.5 million to boost its six-week total to \$217 million.

The new Jennifer Garner movie from Sony, 'Catch and Release,' was No. 4, and 'Stomp the Yard' from Sony/Screen Gems was fifth.



AP PHOTO

Chanchito (Rico Rodriguez) gives Edward (Kal Penn) a lesson in libre wrestling in 'Epic Movie.' The film earned \$19.2 million during the weekend.

Four Oscar nominated films followed: Paramount's 'Dreamgirls' was No. 6, Sony's 'The Pursuit of Happiness' was No. 7, 'Pan's Labyrinth' from Picturehouse was No. 8 and Mira-

max's 'The Queen' was No. 9. Oscar aspirant 'The Departed,' which added 1,326

TOP MOVIES

- 1. 'Epic Movie,' \$19.2 million
2. 'Smokin' Aces,' \$14.3 million
3. 'Night at the Museum,' \$9.5 million
4. 'Catch and Release,' \$8 million
5. 'Stomp the Yard,' \$7.8 million
6. 'Dreamgirls,' \$6.6 million
7. 'The Pursuit of Happiness,' \$5 million
8. 'Pan's Labyrinth,' \$4.5 million
9. 'The Queen,' \$4 million
10. 'The Hitcher,' \$3.6 million

screens Friday, jumped from No. 35 last weekend to No. 12 with a \$3 million take.

'Babel,' another Academy Award nominee and Golden Globe winner, was 13th with \$2.6 million, a 25 percent hike over the previous weekend.

'Obviously we're very enthused about the impact of the seven Academy Award nominations,' Paramount Vantage executive Rob Schulze said of the 'Babel' showing.

Canary Creek Cinemas S
1/8 Mile West of Applebee's on Mallory Parkway
Showtimes for Monday-Thursday
EPIC MOVIE (PG-13) 12:30 5:00 7:15
DREAM GIRLS (PG-13) 12:30 7:00
FREEDOM WRITERS (PG-13) 12:30 7:00
BABEL (R) 12:30 7:00
THE DEPARTED (R) 12:30 7:15
THE HITCHER (R) 12:30 5:00 7:00
STOMP THE YARD (PG-13) 12:30 7:00
NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM (PG) 12:30 5:00 7:30
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GREENWOOD PARK 14
BLOOD AND CHOCOLATE (PG13) / 2:40, 5:15, 7:45
CATCH AND RELEASE (PG13) / 3:00, 5:40, 8:15
THE DEPARTED (R) 1:40, 8:00
EPIC MOVIE (PG13) / 3:20, 5:30, 7:40
SMOKIN' ACES (R) / 2:20, 5:20, 8:20
THE HITCHER (R) 2:50, 5:10, 7:30
FREEDOM WRITERS (PG13) 2:10, 5:00, 8:10
STOMP THE YARD (PG13) 3:10, 5:30, 7:40
NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM (PG) 2:00, 5:00, 8:00
THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS (PG13) 1:50, 4:40, 7:50
AMC SELECT
VOLVER (R) 1:30, 4:20, 7:15
BABEL (R) 4:50
PAN'S LABYRINTH (R) 2:30, 5:45, 8:30
DREAMGIRLS (PG13) 1:30, 4:30, 7:20
THE QUEEN (PG13) 1:45, 4:10, 7:10
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BLOOD AND CHOCOLATE (PG-13) 2:20 4:40 7:10 9:30
CATCH AND RELEASE (PG-13) 1:10 3:50 7:00 9:40
THE DEPARTED (R) 2:50 6:30 9:50
EPIC MOVIE (PG-13) 1:00 3:40 6:50 9:20
NOTES ON A SCANDAL (R) 1:50 4:10 6:40 9:00
PAN'S LABYRINTH (R) 2:05 5:10 7:40 10:20
SMOKIN' ACES (R) 1:40 4:30 7:30 10:10
THE HITCHER (R) 2:10 4:15 6:20 8:45
THE QUEEN (PG-13) 1:20 3:45 6:45 9:15
STOMP THE YARD (PG-13) 2:30 5:15 8:00
FREEDOM WRITERS (PG-13) 2:15 5:00 7:50 10:40
DREAMGIRLS (PG-13) 1:15 4:50 7:45 10:35
NIGHT AT THE MUSEUM (PG) 1:45 4:45 7:20 10:00
WE ARE MARSHALL (PG) 2:40 6:10 9:10
THE PURSUIT OF HAPPYNESS (PG-13) 1:30 4:20 7:15 10:15