

Oscar Gives Box Office a Mild Boost

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■ **Movies:** Nominations double 'Bugsy's' take and cause 'Silence of the Lambs' rentals to surge. 'Wayne's World' is still No. 1.

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All five movies nominated for best picture of 1991 last week got sales lifts over the weekend from the publicity surrounding the Academy Awards announcements, but the results were not as great as industry insiders were expecting.

Meanwhile, a world away from the Oscar hoopla, it was "Wayne's World," the wacky spinoff from the "Saturday Night Live" TV series, that stayed in first place for the second week in a row. The comedy did an impressive \$11.8 million in ticket sales. In second place was the new Sylvester Stallone comedy, "Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot," followed by the nostalgic, Deep South period piece "Fried Green Tomatoes."

"Beauty and the Beast" led the Oscar nominees for best picture at the box office, ranking seventh for the weekend. In its 15th weekend, and with a slight drop in the number of screens, "Beauty's" ticket sales for the Friday, Saturday and Sunday period were steady with the previous four-day weekend that included the Presidents' Day holiday. Typically in the movie business, box-office tallies are considered acceptable if business falls after the first weekend by as much as 20%.

Business for "Beauty," the first animated movie ever nominated for best picture, was enough to move it up two notches to seventh place, from ninth the previous weekend.

"The nominations had to help all the nominees," said John Krier of Exhibitor Relations Co., a firm that monitors box-office grosses. "There's a certain amount of curiosity among the public to see what all the fuss is about."

But others said the curiosity wasn't as strong a lure as it has been in the past. Some speculated that it was because four of the five nominees have already performed strongly at the box office. "Beauty and the Beast" and "The Silence of the Lambs"

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have both topped the \$100-million mark, while "JFK" and "The Prince of Tides" have passed \$60 million.

The fifth nominee, "Bugsy," was seen as the film that stood the most to benefit from nominations, since it had lagged behind other holiday season films, accumulating about \$40 million since its Christmastime debut.

Business was so slow lately for "Bugsy," the biographical picture about mobster Benjamin (Bugsy) Siegel, starring Warren Beatty, that distributor TriStar Pictures was having trouble holding on to screens.

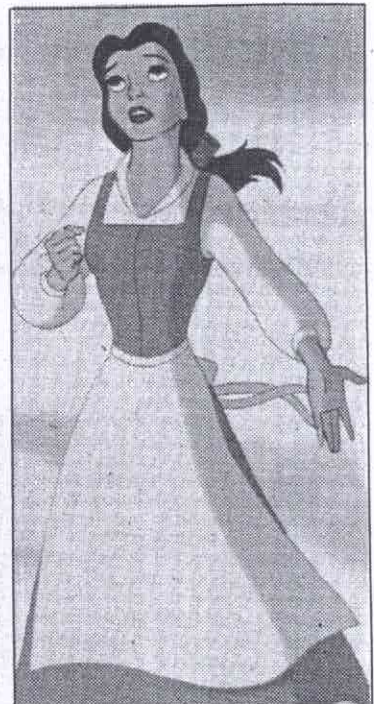
But in anticipation of the nominations—the movie received 10 in all—TriStar booked it into 500 additional theaters. And the movie paid off, as business leaped from \$618,000 from the preceding weekend to \$1.9 million in the weekend just concluded. The improved business was enough to put the film in 10th place.

Weekend grosses were \$1.7 million for "JFK" and nearly \$1.8 million for "Prince of Tides," both off only by small percentages from the previous week.

In a spot check of video rental outlets around the country, all indicated that "The Silence of the Lambs" experienced a sharp increase in rental business just after the nominations were announced.

"Silence" has been in the home video marketplace since October, and was once one of the nation's top five rentals. As of last week, the murder thriller starring Oscar nominee Jodie Foster and Anthony Hopkins was well past its peak.

However, Brad Burnside, who runs the Video Adventure chain in the Chicago suburbs, reported: "There's been a huge surge in 'Silence' rentals since midweek. It has a whole new life. It will be booked solid up to the time of the



Oscar nominee "Beauty and the Beast" moves up two notches.

Oscar ceremonies [March 30]."

Lou Berg of Houston's Audio Video Plus noted: "It had stopped being a hot rental a long time ago. All of sudden, it's renting like a hot new title."

Anticipating a post-Oscar demand, Orion Video is planning to introduce "The Silence of the Lambs" into the sales market on May 20, dropping the price to \$20.

It was harder to gauge the impact of Oscar nominations on "Thelma & Louise," which received best-actress nods for stars Susan Sarandon and Geena Davis, as well as for director Ridley Scott. Going into the nominations, the movie had been at the top of the Billboard magazine rental chart for the past few weeks and, some video retailers predict, should stay there at least a few more.

Times staff writer Dennis Hunt contributed to this report.

Weekend Box Office

Movie (Studio)	Weekend Gross/ Total (millions)	Screens/ Average	Weeks in Release
1. "Wayne's World" (Paramount)	\$11.8 \$33.5	1,878 \$6,290	2
2. "Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot" (Universal)	\$7 \$7	1,958 \$3,605	1
3. "Fried Green Tomatoes" (Universal)	\$5 \$40.9	1,321 \$3,790	9
4. "Medicine Man" (Hollywood)	\$4.7 \$26	1,370 \$3,449	3
5. "Hand That Rocks the Cradle" (Hollywood)	\$4.1 \$65.1	1,721 \$2,369	7
6. "Final Analysis" (Warner Bros.)	\$3.6 \$19.4	1,549 \$2,338	3
7. "Beauty and the Beast" (Disney)	\$2.4 \$113.3	1,360 \$1,787	15
8. "Great Mouse Detective" (Disney)	\$2.1 \$7.1	1,420 \$1,491	2
9. "Radio Flyer" (Columbia)	\$1.93 \$1.93	940 \$2,056	1
10. "Bugsy" (TriStar)	\$1.9 \$42.5	1,231 \$1,525	11

SOURCE: Exhibitor Relations Co.