

VARIETY

Cannes 2013: 'Silence' On the Biz Front



May 20, 2013 | 11:17PM PT

Rachel Abrams Financial News Editor @RachelAbramsDV

Scorsese's 'Silence,' Ryan Reynold's 'self/less' among key titles as market slows

But, through Monday afternoon at least, there had not been a deluge of deals snapping them up.

One day before the pre-sales market wound down, with major distributors planning to pack their bags Tuesday, most major U.S. and European sales companies had little to crow about in contrast to previous years where by this time a flurry of activity would have already been announced.

A L.A. based buyers rep said there was both a lack of quality and “big mainstream commercial product with guaranteed wide USA theatrical release.”

“Sales are taking longer and have also been scattered: Many movies on the market have sold to most of Asia, Latin America, Germany, Scandinavia and the U.K. but that’s it.” added Constantin’s Martin Moszkowicz.

Reasons abound.

“There are too many sales companies around and too much product,” Moszkowicz suggested.

Speaking on a Film Finance TV panel Sunday, veteran producer Mark Damon said as the need for pre-sales of big budget movies increases, the pool of bankable stars to attract that financing is diminishing.

“We are all so dependent on pre-sales for financing that we all go for the same actors and directors who are considered salable for high-budget films. That list continues to shrink,” explained Damon.

Maybe because so many companies were chasing the same finite asset – salable talent – agents, producers and sales agents went down to the wire trying to package projects.

“This year, people got their material together very late,” submits Alex Walton, at Exclusive Media. “That’s led to the market being a little longer.” Walton said Exclusive had done “a significant amount of business” across its slate of movies.

As another consequence, many projects hit Cannes only semi-packaged, lacking finished screenplays or firmly attached talent.

“Germany, a real European powerhouse for film buying, is still buying heavily but they’re some pullback on pricing because major broadcasters are cutting back on film buying,” said IM Global’s Stuart Ford.

Broadcasters in Spain and Italy are also downscaling international movie buys.

Foreign markets may also be contracting. For Focus Feature Intl.’s Alison Thompson, “The market has somewhat polarized. People are looking once again for strong theatrical titles, not films driven by the appetite of TV companies.”

Some buyers also complained that escalating output deals struck by top market players – DreamWorks, Lionsgate, Relativity, EuropaCorp –were taking money out of the market.

Despite the slowdown, there were some sales concluded by Monday.

David Garrett’s Mr Smith Ent., which reps DreamWorks movies in Europe, unveiled new output agreements for DreamWorks in France (Metropolitan FilmExport) and the Ukraine (Inter-Film), and a multi-pic pact with MediaPro for Romania, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Hungary.

There were some spectacular single movie roll-outs: Glen Basner’s FilmNation sold out, for example on Ryan Reynold’s starrer “self/less”; Studiocanal virtually sold out on Sean Penn-starrer “The Gunman,” while closing multiple major territories on its first Aardman title, “Shaun the Sheep, in what Studiocanal’s Harold van Lier described as the Euro film-TV group’s strongest market ever.

Martin Scorsese’s “Silence” had closed France (Metropolitan, again), Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and Latin America by Sunday, but still hasn’t landed a U.S. distributor.

Sony acquired multiple territories on Focus Features Intl.'s' Jude Law starrer "Black Sea" — Germany, Austria, German-speaking Switzerland, Eastern Europe, Scandinavia and Latin America. FFI also closed deals with other distributors for France, China's and the CIS, with more deals expected by Tuesday.

Sony also bought rights in Latin America, Scandinavia and Eastern Europe, including Russia, Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, to Justin Timberlake's "Spinning Gold" from Damon's Foresight Unlimited.

Focus Features International's Thompson said her company will very shortly announce at least 15 territory deals on its Amy Winehouse doc with several bidding wars in play.

Among other titles with sales traction: Sierra/Affinity's "Heat" closed in 20-plus territories, including U.K., Germany and Japan; and "Pudsey: the Movie," starring the talking-dancing dog, winner of "Britain's Got Talent," closed 15 territories, according to Content's Jamie Carmichael.

Mister Smith screened a rough cut of "Mortal Instruments: City of Bones" at a private distributors-only event in Cannes. "Everybody who has the first movie wants the second movie: We're dealing with the details," producer Moszkowicz said.

Of foreign language titles, robust sales had been announced by Monday on MK2's Cannes Competition contender, "A Touch of Sin," EuropaCorp's "Yves Saint Laurent" and Gaumont's "Turning Tide."

In U.S. distribution deals, bucking slow trading, The Weinstein Co acquired Stephen Frear's Judy Dench-starrer "Philomena" from Pathe Intl., plus the TF1 Intl.-sold "Suite Francaise," on which eOne took Latin America, Australia, Russia and Germany.

Sony Pictures Classics acquired Asghar Farhadi's well-received Cannes Competition entry "The Past" from Memento Films Intl. for North America, Eastern Europe and CIS .

Magnolia ("Bone Tomahawk"), Sundance Selects ("Two Days, One Night"), Phase 4 ("Free Ride"), Anchor Bay ("Battle of the Damned"), Wrekin Hill ("Siberian Education") and "Open Road" (My Cross To Bear) were among other U.S buyers.

Maybe the most upbeat note, however, at this year's Cannes was the sturdy reaction to movies targeting mature audiences. "Philomena" sparked a reported U.S. rights bidding war; Scorsese's "Silence" conquered major international territories; and FFI saw upbeat sales on Mike Leigh's biopic of British painter JMW Turner.

"Those of us who are in the independent financing business on any prolific level are looking for [films] that can play a little more broadly, more female, skew older, play the 50-plus crowd," Ford said.

For Thompson, “Older cinema audiences are more loyal and reliable. You can stretch your P&A spend further if you’re able to precisely define the target audience.”

But maybe the market will turn, though it’s only got one day to do so. And brilliant sun has replaced Saturday rain downpour.

“The overall sales market this year appeared to have gotten off to a slow start but now that the weather has cleared everyone is focused on acquiring the product they need to fill their upcoming pipelines,” said Lionsgate’s Patrick Wachsberger.

“Fortunately when you have films that buyers really want, price points rise to the level of demand for the product,” says the veteran sales agent-producer.