

'Lakeview Terrace' rules box office with \$15.6M

By **DAVID GERMAIN**
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LOS ANGELES (AP) Moviegoers welcomed Samuel L. Jackson to the neighborhood, lifting his thriller "Lakeview Terrace" to the top spot at the weekend box office with \$15.6 million in sales, according to studio estimates Sunday.

Jackson's tale about a cop terrorizing his new neighbors, released by Sony's Screen Gems banner, led a rush of new wide releases that generally did only so-so business.

"Obviously, as compared to like the summer season, the bar has definitely been lowered in terms of what movies are making," said Paul Dergarabedian, president of box-office tracker Media By Numbers. "This definitely is a slowdown period, as is typical for this post-summer malaise we always seem to run up against."

Debuting at No. 3 with \$8.3 million was Lionsgate's romantic

comedy "My Best Friend's Girl," starring Kate Hudson as a woman who comes between best buddies played by Dane Cook and Jason Biggs.

Opening in fourth place with \$8 million was MGM's animated comedy "Igor," featuring the voices of John Cusack and Molly Shannon in a story of a hunchbacked lab gofer trying his hand at being a mad scientist.

The DreamWorks-Paramount supernatural romance "Ghost Town" premiered at No. 8 with \$5.2 million. The film stars Ricky Gervais as an anti-social dentist besieged by ghosts, including a philanderer (Greg Kinnear) scheming to prevent his widow (Tea Leoni) from remarrying.

After doing strong business last weekend, Hollywood slipped back into the slowdown that has persisted the last two months. Overall revenues came in at \$93 million, down 4 percent from the same weekend last year, according to Media By

Numbers.

A handful of films got off to good starts in limited release, among them Keira Knightley's historical pageant "The Duchess," which pulled in \$202,527 in seven theaters, averaging a strong \$28,932 a cinema. By comparison, "Lakeview Terrace" averaged \$6,331 in 2,464 theaters.

"The Duchess," released by Paramount Vantage, stars Knightley as an 18th century ancestor of Princess Diana who finds herself trapped in a loveless marriage to an cold-hearted duke played by Ralph Fiennes.

The Warner Bros. Western "Appaloosa" took in \$258,000 in 14 theaters, averaging \$18,429. It stars Ed Harris, who also directed, and Viggo Mortensen as lawmen trying to clean up a corrupt Wild West town.

1. "Lakeview Terrace"	\$15.6 million
2. "Burn After Reading"	\$11.3 million
3. "My Best Friend's Girl"	\$8.3 million
4. "Igor"	\$8 million
5. "Righteous Kill"	\$7.7 million
6. "Tyler Perry's the Family That Preys"	\$7.5 million
7. "The Women"	\$5.3 million
8. "Ghost Town"	\$5.2 million
9. "The Dark Knight"	\$3 million
10. "The House Bunny"	\$2.8 million

"Lakeview Terrace" overcame indifferent reviews to pack in solid crowds, with Jackson in full maniacal mode as a man riled by the interracial marriage of his new neighbors, played by Patrick Wilson and Kerry Washington.

"He's just so cool to watch, isn't he?" said Rory Bruer, head of distribution for Sony. "He always makes things interesting."

"Lakeview Terrace" bumped off the previous weekend's No.

1 movie, Focus Features' "Burn After Reading," which slipped to second place with \$11.3 million. The Coen brothers' "Burn After Reading," a spy comedy featuring Brad Pitt and George Clooney, raised its 10-day total to \$36.4 million.

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at U.S. and Canadian theaters, according to Media By Numbers LLC.

Tommy Chong's business goes up in smoke

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Before Dave Chappelle and Jim Brewer got "Half Baked", before Red Man and Method Man enrolled in "How High", and before Harold & Kumar went to White Castle, there was Cheech & Chong. The Mexican American and half-Chinese stoner duo became legends of their generation for their counter culture comedy in the 1970s and 80s, arguably invented the formula used by every drug-related buddy movie to this day.

Last summer, the boys rolled up to the Troubadour Club in West Hollywood to announce the start of their reunion tour, "Cheech And Chong Light Up America Tour 2008", their first time on stage together in over 25 years.

But that isn't the focus of my article, man.

In 2003, the DEA began a year-long, undercover sting operation, code named "Operation Pipe Dreams", designed to target distributors of drugs and drug paraphernalia. Tommy Chong was running a family owned glass pipe business around this time called Chong Glass, a perfectly legitimate, tax-paying business

that sold pipes with Tommy's face and/or autograph on them. The DEA made Tommy Chong their number one target and spent 12 million tax dollars to convict him.

Of all the things the government could do to make America



Photo courtesy of filmforum.org

safer and better, you'd think arresting a comedian from the 70s would be pretty low on the list.

I'm not blowing smoke when I say that "A/K/A Tommy Chong"

is an awesome documentary by Josh Gilbert. Seriously, Gilbert's production company is called Awesome Documentaries, and it is definitely worth a watch.

Instead of just documenting the story of Tommy Chong's SWAT team arrest and subsequent 9 months in federal prison, Gilbert expands the film's content to include the history of Cheech & Chong, Tommy's early life and his family, as well as making bluntly radical statements about the ridiculousness of marijuana laws.

"This is the story of a counter culture icon set against the background of the post 9/11 political stage in America today," said Gilbert.

A/K/A practically co-stars John Ashcroft. "Michael Moore saw the film and told me that everybody in America needs to see it," said Gilbert.

Josh Gilbert is an old friend of Tommy Chong, they've been friends for 20 years he said.

When Gilbert heard Chong was going to be arrested in what was essentially entrapment, he knew he had to tell the story. "Believing in your individual rights

as defined by the constitution and speaking out to protect those rights is something that both Tommy and I deeply believe in," said Gilbert.

The film is full of laughs, as Tommy Chong looks on the bright side and turns the incident into stand-up comedy material. Viewers may be surprised at the more serious parts, however.

We get to see the real Tommy Chong, not the waked-out hippie character from his movies. There is a touching scene of Tommy playing a bluesy prison song mashed with a scene tango dancing with his wife Shelby just days before going to jail. Seeing a beloved old man who believes in peace and love sitting in prison is sad to watch, as Tommy is interviewed in his jail cell.

One of the most amazing moments in the film, although it happens very quickly, happens on the day Tommy is freed. He and his wife stop by the side of the road on the way home to feed some goats. One goat got its head stuck in a wire fence, and Tommy helps the goat get free. Josh Gilbert commented on that amazing, unplanned moment as well, saying he was completely "slack jawed" as he filmed it.

We find out near the end

that Chong has decided to become more of an activist, supporting medical marijuana and encouraging people to vote.

The documentary premiered at the Toronto Film Festival in 2005 and has since been given a heaping Ziploc baggie full of awards and honorable mentions by everybody from High Times Magazine to HBO.

Many different perspectives about Tommy and his legal problem are offered, and not all of them are on one side. Bill Maher, Jay Leno, Eric Schlosser (author of Reefer Madness: Sex, Drugs, and Cheap Labor in the American Black Market), and, of course, Richard "Cheech" Marin, among others, are interviewed. "A/K/A Tommy Chong" is a must see, even if you're not a fan of Cheech & Chong. It is a sobering look at how the government can put anyone in jail, for any reason, anytime they want to.

If there's a happy ending to the film, it is that being imprisoned has only helped Tommy Chong's career and strengthened his resolve to continue making people laugh and question authority. More information is available on the film's official website, AKATommyChong.com.