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Ticket brokers try to catch a break

Secondary market prices drop amid recession

By GORDON COX

With legiters closely watching the box office for fallout of the economic downturn, what's to be gleaned from the performance of the secondary ticket market?

"Secondary market," of course, is just a fancy name for resellers, brokers and scalpers. And in their business model -- i.e., sell every ducat for as much as people are willing to pay -- pricetags are entirely determined by the ebb and flow of the market.

With producers hawking discounted tickets to boost wintertime traffic, it's no surprise that secondary market prices already have fallen.

"We've seen the average selling price go down drastically since September," says **Donald J. Vaccaro**, head of TicketNetwork, which is organizing the Ticket Summit 2009 conference of resellers.

According to StubHub, the online ticket auction site owned by eBay, average selling price for theater tickets in 2008 to date has been \$148, down from \$159 for 2007. In September alone, the average price paid hit \$142 -- a steep decline from the \$159 average logged for the same frame the prior year.

On the other hand, the number of tickets sold has gone up, with sinking prices encouraging ticketbuyers to open their wallets.

"The lower the prices, the more people in the market," says StubHub's **Sean Pate**. The company's figures indicate the number of tickets sold has gone up 25% this year.

For now, Pate foresees a market that's soft but not hopelessly mushy. "It's not any kind of fire sale, and the bottom hasn't dropped out," he says. "You're not seeing \$50 Broadway tickets, and people haven't stopped wanting to go to the theater."

Average ticket prices may in fact increase after the slew of January closings ("Hairspray," "Monty Python's Spamalot," "Spring Awakening," "13," etc.) -- because there'll suddenly be a reduced array of product available.

"Even though the economy's bad, you may see a dead-cat bounce in January," Vaccaro says.

Broadwaygoers who open the Playbill at the Rialto incarnation of arty clown offering "Slava's Snowshow" have been surprised to come across the name **Joseph Gordon-Levitt** -- and on the list of the show's producers, no less.

Turns out Gordon-Levitt, the thesp best known for work in film ("Mysterious Skin") and TV ("3rd Rock From the Sun"), has been a "Slava" supporter since he first saw the show in Chi, just before the production went to Gotham for its 2 1/2-year Off Broadway run in 2004.

Gordon-Levitt had gotten to know "Slava" producer **Jared Geller** during the 2001 Off Broadway production of "Uncle Bob," the play in which Gordon-Levitt appeared and Geller served as stage manager.

Having just finished shooting the 2005 pic "Brick," the actor was taken by an unexpected similarity between the high-school noir of the movie and the cirque escapades of "Slava."

"Neither one of them attempts to convince the audience that you're watching something realistic," he says. "It's about embracing that jump from reality. It just got me."

Since then he's followed the troupe to Moscow, and even donned the whiteface himself every now and then for intermission and post-show antics. He also edited a show reel and the TV commercial.

Legit producing is not necessarily one of his larger goals, although he'd welcome a stint onstage, noting that "3rd Rock" was taped in front of an aud -- and with a cast (**John Lithgow**, **Kristen Johnston**) comprised largely of theater folk.

First up after "Slava," though, is Sundance, where he'll tubthump for pic "500 Days of Summer" and a short film he directed, "Sparks."

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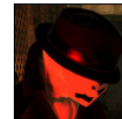
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