

Box office boost shows 3D is here to stay

November 4 2009, by Romain Raynaldy



Attendees are seen wearing 3D glasses to watch images during ShoWest, the official convention of the National Association of Theatre Owners, in Las Vegas, Nevada, in March. Once regarded as a quirky fad for nerds wearing cardboard spectacles, 3D films are enjoying a mainstream renaissance and this time the medium is here to stay, entertainment industry experts say.

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3D has come a long way since its 1950s golden age when films such as "The Creature from the Black Lagoon" thrilled audiences and these technological advances are fueling a box office boom.

From Pixar's hit animated movie "Up" to "Titanic" director James Cameron's upcoming science fiction epic "Avatar", 2009 has seen 3D [movies](#) return with a vengeance across North American cinema screens.

The bonanza has even led to talk of classic films -- such as Cameron's "Titanic" -- being reworked in 3D and re-released.

"I think that there has been a real resurgence in 3D because the technology of digital cinema has allowed 3D to be sharper and brighter on screen and a much better audience experience," Mark Zoradi, president of Walt Disney Motion Pictures Group, told AFP.

"It gives movie-goers just another reason to actually continue to go to the cinema. It's something you can't experience at home. It's here to stay and on many movies it has to be experienced."

Zoradi pointed to the rapid growth of theaters now capable of offering 3D as evidence of the format's durability.

"When we released our first 3D movie in 2005, 'Chicken Little', there were only 84 3D screens in the USA," he said.

Disney's latest 3D offering, "A Christmas Carol", will be available in 2,000 theaters in North America, Zoradi said.

Traditionally restricted to children's films, animation or horror, 3D is now branching into other genres. Next month sees the release of Cameron's "Avatar" while Tim Burton's "Alice in Wonderland" is scheduled for March 2010.

"I think that James Cameron is going to expand the definition of what a 3D movie can be," said Jason Constantine, president of acquisitions and co-productions at Lionsgate, whose properties include the "Saw" horror films.

"I think the experience of 3D is going to last for more than just a few years," Constantine told AFP. "I don't think it's just a moment in time."

Action, adventure, science fiction and suspense films were all prime genres for 3D to exploit, Constantine said, provided there was "something intrinsic about the story that 3D will enhance."

Lionsgate plan to unveil the seventh film in their "Saw" franchise in 2010 with the movie designed from "day one as a 3D experience," Constantine said.

"We want it to be the most definitive 3D horror movie that anyone has experienced yet," he said.

While the growth of 3D on its own is unlikely to solve all of the movie industry's challenges, Zoradi acknowledged that the format had been a welcome engine of growth in gloomy economic times.

"It's driving people to continue to go to the cinema," he said. "Cinema attendance, even in the recession we're experiencing, is actually going up and not down."

Zoradi predicted that around half of the tickets sold in North America for "A Christmas Carol", to be released in US theaters on Friday, would be for 3D screenings. "And then will come a time, in a not too distant future, where big releases will be only released in 3D," he said.

The final frontier would see 3D enter the home, offering another boost to DVD sales and rental earnings.

"The television sets are just now being manufactured, obviously people will have to learn about them, and buy them," Zoradi said. "In two to five years, that's going to roll out."

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