By Paul Bond

So many advertisers are abandoning Rush Limbaugh’s radio show that the talk host on Monday joked that he phoned to cancel ads for his own line of iced tea but he couldn’t get through.

“Yeah, I knew it was getting bad,” Limbaugh said at the top of his show, acknowledging that a campaign to punish him over his criticism of Georgetown University law student Sandra Fluke was gaining traction.

“You know what? I gotta call myself and cancel and suspend the Two If By Tea advertising,” Limbaugh told his estimated 20 million listeners on Monday. “So I called myself to cancel advertising. I got a busy signal, so I couldn’t cancel my own company’s advertising.”

More than a half-dozen sponsors have pulled their ads off of Rush Limbaugh’s show as of Monday.

Fluke rose to national prominence when she testified in support of government mandates that would require insurance companies engaged by religious institutions to cover contraception.

“Without insurance coverage, contraception, as you know, can cost a woman $3,000 during law school,” Fluke testified. “For a lot of students who, like me, are on public-interest scholarships, that’s practically an entire summer’s salary.”

Limbaugh joked about Fluke’s testimony on-and-off for three days, calling her a “slut” because she needs to spend so much on contraception and a “prostitute” because she wants her sexual activities subsidized.

Limbaugh eventually issued an apology, though Fluke said Monday on The View that it wasn’t sufficient.

“I don’t think a statement like this, issued saying that his choice of words was not the best, changes anything,”
Fluke was criticized by supporters being AOL and ProFlowers. As of Monday, the latest ads off of Limbaugh’s show sponsors have pulled their support from the show. “They are intentionally targeting schools like Georgetown to advance an agenda of ultimately forcing them to abandon their religious beliefs.”

MOVIEGOER SUES OVER HIGH COST OF FOOD, DRINKS

By Eriq Gardner
Six dollars for a box of gummy worms at the movie theater seems like highway robbery, but is it actually unlawful?

On behalf of all others who find the prices of movie theater concessions to be outrageous, Michigan resident Joshua Thompson has filed a class action lawsuit against his local AMC theater. He’s suing because the movie house denied him the ability to bring his own soda and candy into the local AMC in an alleged violation of Michigan’s Consumer Protection Act.

The plaintiff is a twenty-something security technician in Livonia, Mich., who, according to the Detroit Free Press, was tired of movie theaters taking advantage of him. So he’s suing.

Both AMC and the the National Association of Theatre Owners declined the paper’s request for comment.

Although Thompson’s lawsuit is winning sympathy from like-minded theatergoers who are being asked in a recession to pay big markups on wholesale prices, some legal experts doubt the plaintiffs stand much chance of buttering up a judge.

“It’s a loser,” said Gary Victor, an Eastern Michigan University business law professor, citing Supreme Court precedent that has given businesses an out from consumer protection liability in well-regulated industries.

If the plaintiffs manage to get around this, they’ll force AMC to face a law that prohibits “charging the consumer a price that is grossly in excess of the price at which similar property or services are sold.”

Exactly how much do movie theaters make on concessions? According to one Morningstar equity analyst, of every dollar spent on candy and soda in movie theaters, 85 percent is pure profit. Another review of the business of selling popcorn reveals that $30 worth of raw popcorn is worth as much as $3,000 to movie theaters.

Unfortunately, the economics of allowing consumers to bring their own gummy bears into the theater aren’t quite so simple. If this lawsuit ever did get to trial, AMC would certainly bring their own experts that could testify that charging high prices is actually in the consumers’ best interest.

As hard as that is to believe, researchers at the Stanford Graduate School of Business and the University of California, Santa Cruz, concluded in 2009 that “by charging high prices on concessions, exhibition houses are able to keep ticket prices lower, which allows more people to enjoy the silver-screen experience.”

Is that any comfort to a family of six who paid nearly $100 for seats to see Dr. Seuss’ The Lorax last weekend? Probably not. That’s not even counting the concessions.
Leaner *Ouija* Pic in Universal’s Future

By Borys Kit

Universal and Hasbro are back in business on *Ouija*.

The studio let go its adaptation of the board game in August due to budgetary concerns. But the project has been reconfigured and set up again at Universal, which has slated it for release in 2013.

Original producers Michael Bay, Brad Fuller and Andrew Form of Platinum Dunes are still on board, but the project now has Jason Blum of Blumhouse Productions as a producer as well.

Blum is the microbudget horror maven behind the *Paranormal Activity* franchise and *Insidious*, movies that scared audiences and generated huge box-office returns. The pics are hugely profitable because of their low overhead, suggesting *Ouija* has been re-conjured at a significantly lower price. In fact, one source suggested the budget might have been pared to the $5 million range.

That would be a huge drop, considering the project ran into trouble at Universal over a budget said to be just shy of $100 million, which insiders pegged to the big scope of a special effects-laden family adventure and the cost of having McG (*Charlie’s Angels, This Means War*) on board as a director.

Universal has not named a writer or director or revealed a revised logline, but sources said *Ouija* will follow Blum’s high-concept, lower-budget model. The movies Blumhouse has been making for Universal have been under $5 million and *Ouija* is expected to follow suit.

It is unlikely to be a found-footage movie, something that has been a popular trope of late for low-budget horror flicks.

Blumhouse and Platinum first partnered on *Vigilandia*, which is in production. After that good working partnership, Universal and Platinum approached Blumhouse about taking *Ouija* in a new direction.

Brian Goldner and Bennett Schneir of Hasbro will also produce.

**SCRIBE HOLMES TO ADAPT *EXPATS* FOR CBS FILMS**

By Jay A. Fernandez

Alex Holmes, who wrote 2008 HBO miniseries *House of Saddam*, has been hired to pen the adaptation of *The Expats* for CBS Films. The company picked up rights to the Chris Pavone novel in early February.

Pavone’s debut follows a wife and mother who, after moving with her family from Washington to Luxembourg, discovers intrigue around her husband’s work in cybersecurity and another newly arrived American couple who may not be what they seem.
seem. As she begins to dig into these mysteries while traveling around Europe, the truth threatens to drag her own CIA past into the open.

The book, published by Crown, is due out today.

The ICM-repped Holmes also has an adaptation of Jed Rubenfeld’s *The Interpretation of Murder* set up with producer Paula Weinstein at Warner Bros.

CBS Films most recently released horror movie *The Woman in Black*, which has grossed more than $88 million worldwide since its Feb. 3 opening. Forthcoming releases include *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen*, a 2011 Toronto International Film Festival pick-up that will hit theaters on Friday; *7500*, a horror thriller that opens in August; and drama *The Words*, a 2012 Sundance Film Festival acquisition.

**BELL SET TO STAR IN PIC ADAPTATION OF LABUTE’S GIRLS**

By Todd Gilchrist

Kristen Bell has been cast in *Some Girls*, director Jennifer Getzinger’s adaptation of Neil LaBute’s play. Adam Brody (*Damsels in Distress*) co-stars as a man who attempts to make amends with several ex-girlfriends on the eve of his wedding.

Bell plays Bobbi, a smart, articulate woman he bailed on years before without a word, leaving her without respect or love for him.

After making her name as the star of cult television series *Veronica Mars*, Bell starred opposite Jason Segel in 2008 comedy *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*. Currently starring opposite Don Cheadle on Showtime comedy *House of Lies*, Bell has lined up not one but two projects for the big screen. She also is set to provide the speaking and singing voice as the lead in Disney’s upcoming animated feature *Frozen*. Directed by Chris Buck (*Surf’s Up*), the movie is being produced by John Lasseter and Peter Del Vecho.

Bell is repped by CAA and Brookside Artist Management.

**CINEDIGM SIDES WITH NEW VIDEO FOR WAR RIGHTS**

By Jay A. Fernandez

Cinedigm Entertainment Group and New Video have jointly acquired North American distribution rights to *The Invisible War*. Directed by Kirby Dick, the movie won the U.S. documentary audience award at this year’s Sundance Film Festival in January. It will receive a theatrical release this summer.

Dick’s investigative documentary takes a devastating look at the rape epidemic in the U.S. military. Amy Ziering (*Outrage, Derrida*) produced the project.

*Invisible War* is the first acquisition under the new partnership between Cinedigm and New Video to distribute independent films theatrically, on demand, digitally and via DVD/Blu-ray.

“We are honored that our first New Video/Cinedigm acquisition is *The Invisible War*, ” said Cinedigm chairman and CEO Chris McGurk. “The film is incredibly powerful and deserves — in fact demands — to be seen by as many people as possible. We very much look forward to working with Kirby, Amy and their team to share this important film with audiences across the nation.”

Orly Ravid of The Film Collaborative and distribution advisor Jonathan Dana repped the sale for the filmmakers.

Ro*Co Films is handling educational distribution and international sales for the picture. Film Sprout is handling non-theatrical distribution and The Film Collaborative is handling worldwide festival distribution. Independent Lens is the broadcast partner and helped finance the film.

**WARNER BROS. BIG ON BOLIVAR**

By Borys Kit

Warner Bros. has acquired *Bolivar*, an upcoming graphic novel from publisher Archaia Entertainment, for Akiva Goldsman and Perry Foster to produce via their Weed Road banner. Archaia editor-in-chief Stephen Christy will also produce.

*Bolivar* comes with Irish filmmaker Kealan O’Rourke attached to write and helm the project, which is intended to be an animated pic.

Written and illustrated by Sean Rubin, the graphic novel centers on a young girl named Sybil who moves to New York and finds out her neighbor is Bolivar, the last living dinosaur. Despite Sybil’s persistent efforts, Bolivar refuses to befriend her.

The dinosaur is somewhat of a recluse, tucked away from the world Sybil so desperately wants him to explore with her. He soon realizes how much she means to him and that he would risk everything for her.

The graphic novel is due out in May 2013.

Archaia’s P.J. Bickett will executive produce.

O’Rourke won a best animation prize for *The Boy in the Bubble* at last year’s Irish Film and Television Awards. He is repped by Paradigm and 3 Arts Entertainment.

Archaia, repped by CAA, is an L.A.-based and Eisner-winning publisher slowly making in-roads into movies. An adaptation of its graphic novel *Rust* is set up at Fox with Simon Kinberg producing and Aline Brosh McKenna writing, while *Lucid* is being developed by Zachary Quinto’s Before the Door production company.

Weed Road is developing the adaptation of *Lone Survivor*, which just received financing from Emmett/Furla, and is in the casting stage for *A Winter’s Tale*, a supernatural romantic story that will serve as Goldsman’s directorial debut.
Report: Probe of News Corp. Turns to Russia

By Georg Szalai

NEW YORK — An FBI probe into Rupert Murdoch-led News Corp. has turned to a Russian billboard company that the media conglomerate used to own, opening another legal front for the company that has been embroiled in the phone-hacking scandal, the Wall Street Journal reported.

The investigation is looking into whether News Outdoor Russia paid bribes to local officials to approve sign placements, the paper, which is part of News Corp., reported, citing people familiar with the situation. The FBI is looking at whether any overseas units of News Corp. engaged in bribery and, if so, whether that behavior was part of a pattern of corruption that reached across countries, according to the Journal.

News Corp. sold its majority stake in the Russian firm in July.

Asked about possible corruption, a spokesman for the Russian company told the Journal: “This is not possible.” He added that “News Outdoor Russia was an investment project for News Corp. and [News Corp.] didn’t participate in the operations of the company.” A News Corp. spokeswoman declined to comment.

The Journal also said that U.S. authorities continue to closely monitor the U.K. probe into News Corp.’s newspapers there and have made their own inquiries into allegations of bribery there. But they have yet to reach any conclusions, it said.

Melancholia

NAMED BEST FILM AT BODIL AWARDS

By Scott Roxborough

COLOGNE, Germany — Lars von Trier’s end-of-the-world drama Melancholia on Saturday won best film at the Danish film critics association’s Bodil honors, one of Denmark’s leading film awards. The prize marks von Trier’s seventh Bodil and back-to-back top film wins, having taken the top prize for Antichrist last year. Melancholia last month swept Denmark’s film academy honors, taking ten trophies including best film.

The best cinematography trophy went to Melancholia’s cameraman Manuel Alberto Claro for his haunting images of Earth’s final days.

The only other multiple winner at this year’s awards was A Funny Man, the biopic of Danish comedian Dirch Passer, which earned a best actor nod for star Nikoaj Lie Kaas, best supporting actor for Lars Ranthe and best set design for Charlotte Bay Garnov and Peter Grant. Helmer Martin P. Zandvliet’s dramedy, which earned an astounding $5.8 million in tiny Denmark, also took home this year’s Blockbuster Audience Award.

Danish critics gave their best U.S. film honor to Debra Granik’s hillbilly noir Winter’s Bone starring Jennifer Lawrence, while Iranian Oscar-winner A Separation from Asghar Farhadi took the best non-U.S. film honor.

Best actress kudos went to Lene Maria Christensen for her starring role in Pernille Fischer Christensen’s drama A Family, while Paprika Steen won the best supporting actress prize playing a sports journalist who leaves her husband for a soccer star in Ole Christian Madsen’s Superclasico.

This year’s lifetime achievement honor went to Ghita Norby, a veteran actress of some 140 films, whose work includes 1987’s Babette’s Feast and 2003’s The Inheritance.
Housewives Creator
Cherry Testifies at Trial

By Alex Ben Block
Desperate Housewives executive producer and creator Marc Cherry took the stand Monday in the trial over claims brought against him and ABC by actress Nicolelette Sheridan.

When asked how long he has felt awful about hitting Sheridan in the head, he said, “going on three and a half years now.”

Despite his remorse, Cherry stood by his story under intense questioning from Sheridan’s attorney. He testified that when he struck the actress in 2008, he was demonstrating some physical humor he wanted her to inject into a scene that she had taken him aside to discuss.

Sheridan’s attorney asked repeatedly if Sheridan had given him permission to demonstrate on her in such a physical manner. “I didn’t think I needed to,” Cherry answered. “Permission was understood.”

When asked what part of his body hit her, Cherry said “my fingers.” When asked if he had not used his hand, Cherry said, “yes, my fingers are on my right hand.”

After the incident, Cherry said he discussed what had happened with his assistant, a Housewives producer and the director of the episode and decided he needed to apologize because it would be “better to get the scene filmed.”

Cherry said he was upset with himself for hitting any woman. He said he was concerned in particular about how it impacted Sheridan.

However, Cherry said later in 2008 he did tell some people he felt she was “lying” about what happened. He said he felt her allegations, as stated, were “outrageous.”

When an ABC human resources report cleared him, Cherry said he felt vindicated.

Cherry also was grilled over why he killed off the character of Edie Britt, which ended Sheridan’s role on the hit show after the fifth season. Sheridan claims she was fired in retaliation for complaining about being hit by Cherry on the set.

On the stand, Cherry said the decision to kill off Sheridan’s character was a creative choice that would cut costs as ratings for the show declined and that Sheridan’s “unprofessional behavior” was a factor in the decision. He said the actress’s behavior was not the “primary reason for my decision, but it was something I was aware of.”

He listed five things that he considered unprofessional: She was not punctual, she sometimes forgot her lines, he saw her being mean to a prop worker, she questioned him about the script and she raised issues about her co-stars.

Cherry said he did not actually see Sheridan be late for work and that she was always there when they actually shot the scene. But he said the incident with the prop man came during filming of a season five episode called “Connect.Connect” and occurred after he had hit Sheridan in the head.

Much of the session was spent discussing a May 2008 meeting Cherry had in a hallway with Mark Pedowitz, who was then head of Touchstone, the producing arm of ABC/Disney that’s responsible for the show. At that brief meeting, Cherry said he wanted to kill off the Edie Britt character for creative reasons and to save money, which had become an issue as ratings had softened.

Cherry said that during that meeting and at a subsequent meeting with ABC president Steve McPherson, he had been given permission to kill off the character at the end of season five.

He insisted it was mainly a creative decision to freshen up the show but added, “I did mention the money as an extra benefit in this decision.”

Sheridan’s lawyer pointed out that only 10 days later, ABC picked up Sheridan’s option for the entire following season (season five) at a cost of more than $4 million. But Cherry insisted that his talks with Pedowitz and others included a discussion of the timing. He said he told Pedowitz that he would do it in a way that would allow the network to promote the episode heavily, though he did not know until later how it would all be done. Cherry said the death would be “shocking,” and the net could promote it as “something major was going to happen.”

One of the big issues in the case is the timing of Cherry’s decision to kill off the Sheridan character. If he decided before he hit her in the head, as she claims, it would mean one thing; if he decided after that incident, as she claims, it would boost her case.

Sheridan’s attorney also probed how much input Cherry gets from his performers.

Cherry said he rarely allows an actor to come into the writers room and be part of the discussion of the story arc for a season, but he admitted he did discuss the scripts with the lead actresses and welcomed their suggestions.

The discussion about cost-cutting on Housewives brought about a chuckle in the courtroom. Cherry had been coughing and asked for water; when given a fresh bottle, he said something about not being sure whether he would get a fresh bottle because of the budget.

Judge Elizabeth Allen White joked: “We always provide water if you’re choking. ... We don’t want to kill them off.”

Click here for more trial coverage.
Current to Add Press, Miller to A.M. Lineup

By Marisa Guthrie

NEW YORK — Current TV will fashion a morning talk block around simulcasts of Bill Press and Stephanie Miller’s radio shows. Beginning in the next few months, The Bill Press Show will air from 6-9 a.m. ET followed by The Stephanie Miller Show from 9 a.m.-noon. The announcement was made Monday by Current TV chairman Al Gore and president David Bohrman.

Press, a former CNN and MSNBC contributor, has written numerous left-leaning books including The Obama Hate Machine. He’s also filled in on a handful of occasions for Keith Olbermann on the latter’s Current program Countdown. Press’ show is done out of Washington.

The Los Angeles-based Miller also has had stints on cable news networks. She hosted CNBC’s Equal Time with conservative counterweight Bay Buchanan. And her radio show was briefly simulcast on MSNBC in 2007 after the network pulled Don Imus’ radio show in the wake of incendiary remarks Imus made about the Rutgers women’s basketball team.

Though Miller’s television career has included everything from game shows to made-for-TV movies, she said radio has always been her “first love.”

“I love doing television, but it can be a mixed bag,” Miller told The Hollywood Reporter. “Radio is just kind of pure fun.”

The daughter of former Congressman and RNC chair William E. Miller (who was Barry Goldwater’s running mate in the 1964 presidential election), Miller said she’s been talking to Current executives about a role on the network for some time.

“David Bohrman came in and sat in the studio for a whole show,” said Miller. “And I happen to think he’s really brilliant, and you don’t say that often about television executives. His concept of the show is really more like a behind-the-scenes reality show of the radio show.”

In a statement, Gore said: “I’ve followed Stephanie and Bill for years. They provide the kind of smart, insightful news analysis that our viewers want to hear. Bill brings a vital perspective directly from the heart of the Beltway, and Stephanie’s fresh take on politics and news has a decidedly outsider flair. We’re really looking forward to bringing their voices to our viewers.”

Added Bohrman: “2012 is a crucial year in the history of our country, and we felt that morning cable television programming was simply not speaking to Americans with progressive viewpoints and ideas. This new block will be an alternative to the tired banter and light news that is found on the air today.”

“The conservative stranglehold on morning cable news television in America is over,” said Press. “Current TV and I share a common goal of cutting through the talking points and shouting heads to present sane, intelligent political commentary and analysis.”

3 NEW REALITY SERIES ON CW’S SUMMER SKED

By Lesley Goldberg

The CW’s summer schedule is starting to fill up.

The youth-skewing network has given series orders to three new reality series, including a singing competition program with Queen Latifah, Gloria Estefan and John Rich as it looks to keep the lights on during the lesser-rated months.

Competition series The Star Next Door, which hails from Dave Broome (The Biggest Loser), will feature mentors including Latifah, Estefan and Rich traveling across the country looking for the best and brightest to compete and represent their home towns when they face-off in Hollywood. Latifah will executive produce the series, alongside CBS’ Flavor Unit Entertainment. Additional mentors will be announced at a later date.

Next Door joins a crowded field of music-themed competition series, including NBC’s The Voice, Fox’s The X Factor and American Idol, the latter of which has seen its hold as the top-rated program this season in viewers and the coveted adults 18-49 demographic fade.

In addition, the network has ordered Breaking Points, a behind-the-stage look at one of the nation’s most competitive ballet companies, Salt Lake City’s Ballet West. Kate Shepherd (Big Brother: According to Russell Brand) and Bill Langworthy (The City) will executive produce alongside BBC Worldwide Productions’ Izzie Pick Ashcroft and Jane Tranter.

Lastly, The Catalina revolves around the staff of a hotel in Miami’s South Beach who form their own dysfunctional family. Confessions of a Teen Idol duo Eric Bischoff and Jason Hervey will executive produce.

The three series join musical chairs game show Oh Sit! on the net’s summer lineup.

“One of my first goals here at the CW was to increase the number of hours of original programming, both throughout the season and during the summer,” CW president Mark Pedowitz said in a statement announcing the news Monday.
Animal House Being Made Into Musical

By David Rooney

NEW YORK — It’s toga-party time on Broadway.

A classic of the gross-out comedy genre, the 1978 John Landis feature, National Lampoon’s Animal House, will have an opening on Monday.

The project, announced development of the stage musical, is part of Universal’s retooling of movies being made into stage properties.

The studio has had major success on Broadway and internationally with its properties Wicked and Billy Elliot: The Musical, and is producing the national tour of Bring It On: The Musical.

Universal has collaborated with producers Jeffrey Richards and Jerry Frankel, who are partnering on Animal House.

Also on board as producer is James L. Nederlander, president of theater group the Nederlander Organization. National Lampoon founding publisher Matty Simmons, who was a producer (with Ivan Reitman) of the 1978 feature, will serve as executive producer on the stage project.

In 1962, the Landis comedy chronicled the efforts of a college dean to expel the disreputable Delta House fraternity from his campus for repeat conduct violations and poor grades, using the squeaky-clean Omega boys to implement his plan. But the party animals proved no easy prey, responding with a counterattack that culminated in the sabotaging of the annual homecoming parade.

The movie starred John Belushi, Tom Hulce, Stephen Furst, Tim Matheson, Kevin Bacon, John Vernon and Donald Sutherland. It was budgeted at a mere $2.7 million and went on to gross $141.6 million domestically.

No cast or dates have yet been set for the developing musical.

RHIMES PREPS FOR ANATOMY FUNDRAISER

By Lesley Goldberg

The stars of ABC’s Grey’s Anatomy will revisit last year’s musical episode when they hit the stage at UCLA’s Royce Hall to perform songs from the Shonda Rhimes medical drama’s “Songs Beneath the Show” and other music as part of a benefit for The Actors Fund.

Set for Sunday, March 18, the fundraiser won’t be the first time the cast — including Tony winner Sara Ramirez, Jessica Capshaw, Sandra Oh, Kevin McKidd and more — has taken the stage together.

“We did a musical benefit during the writers’ strike that featured the casts of both Grey’s Anatomy and Private Practice,” Rhimes told The Hollywood Reporter. “All of us really enjoyed the experience and spoke about doing it again. Sara, Grey’s executive producer Tony Phelan and I discussed putting something together after the musical episode last season, and we’re just getting around to it now.”

Set to benefit The Actors Fund — a nonprofit organization that provides care and services to entertainment industry professionals — the event will feature cast members Eric Dane, Sarah Drew, James Pickens Jr., Kim Raver and Chandra Wilson as well as Capshaw, McKidd, Oh and Ramirez performing songs from last March’s musical episode as well as other songs from the series.

“There are so many people out of work right now, and it’s wonderful to know that The Actors Fund is trying to bridge the gap,” Rhimes said. “We’re fortunate to be able to help by throwing this concert.”

The March 2011 episode centered on Ramirez’s Callie Torres, who experiences her surgery following a near-death car crash through such songs as Brandi Carlile’s “The Story” and Snow Patrol’s “Chasing Cars.”

Ramirez, who won a Tony in 2005 for her role in Spamalot, was the first on board for the live performance. “She has an amazing voice and an incredible confidence that comes with that level of talent,” Rhimes said. “She’s been instrumental in the planning of this event.”

The showrunner, who will launch her third series this season with Kerry Washington political fixer drama Scandal on April 5, said that the Grey’s crew is looking to recapture the energy from “Songs Beneath the Show” with the live performance.

“The biggest thing we took away from doing that episode was how much fun everyone had — the actors, the crew, the writers … it was fun and inspiring to step out of our comfort zones,” said Rhimes, who penned the episode. “So we’re just going to try to have fun with this benefit concert and give the audience a good time.”
**SILENT HOUSE**

By Todd McCarthy

A certain technical virtuosity is the signal virtue of *Silent House*, a creaky haunted-house movie that, once the big twist is revealed, makes very little sense at all. Being promoted as consisting of a single camera take, which is not true, husband-and-wife writer-director Chris Kentis’ and Laura Lau’s follow-up to 2003 suspense sleeper *Open Water* has a few startling moments, though most of all it has Elizabeth Olsen in a revealing T-shirt as box-office bait. A quick and modest theatrical spin looks to be followed by solid returns in ancillary markets.

Based on director Gustavo Hernandez’s ultra-low-budget *La Casa Muda*, which was Uruguay’s submission to the Academy’s foreign-language film competition last year, *Silent House* reportedly has been significantly changed since its world premiere at Sundance in January 2011. According to the producers, the last 15 minutes were entirely re-shot (so much for the single-take claim), the opening was tightened, dialogue was changed, and the sound was completely remixed.

Like *Open Water* and innumerable other budget-challenged horror items, the new film places a limited number of characters in an isolated setting. Beauteous young Sarah (Olsen) has come to help her dad (Adam Trese) clean up and clear out a country summer house Sarah hasn’t visited in years (the picture was shot near New Rochelle, N.Y.).

An initial, graceful camera move that starts as an overhead shot observing Sarah on a rock overlooking a lake and subsequently cranes down to follow her over to a handsome house represents the initial tip-off as to the directors’ stylistic ambitions. The visual niceties persist in the many agile maneuvers from room to room (often in darkness or something close to it) and the impressive way cinematographer Igor Martinovic (*Man on Wire* and the second episode of the *Red Riding* trilogy for James Marsh) maintains a good perspective between Olsen and the frequently changing backdrops.

Other than that, it’s hokum increasingly drugged by tedium. Greeted by Uncle Peter (Eric Sheffer Stevens) at the house, where the electricity has conveniently gone out, and by a young woman who claims to have been her friend when they were young girls, Sarah hears suspicious sounds upstairs. And before long, something really bad happens to Papa.

More than many previous imperiled heroines in screen history, Olsen’s Sarah keeps her wits about her for a while, not entirely freaking out when phones don’t work and she realizes she’s effectively locked in. It’s quickly evident, however, that if someone really wanted to get at Sarah, it would be awfully easy, just as it’s plain that a cheap horror movie that is stylistically constrained from using shock cuts is going to have fewer jolts than usual. The most alarming effects Kentis and Lau come up with involve quick flashes of an old Polaroid camera that most often show nothing in otherwise dark rooms but occasionally reveal something pretty creepy.

Soon, Sarah’s long afternoon journeys into night, which soon renders her close to catatonically but, more seriously, for the movie, makes most of what’s come before seem unmotivated and/or unnecessary. Or perhaps silly is the right word for it.

Given that appearing in a horror film constitutes a rite of passage for many middling actresses of a certain age, Olsen comes through this relatively unscathed; she does, in fact, prove that she can withstand intense camera scrutiny for nearly an hour-and-a-half and leave one wanting to see her again, though perhaps in an ensemble piece next time.

One could say that the film provides the illusion of being shot in a single take; on close inspection, though, there are several spots where cuts could and no doubt do occur, notably when the camerawork becomes wildly shaky and when the image goes black.

Opens: Friday (Open Road/Liddell Entertainment).

Production: Elle Driver, Eye for an Eye Filmworks, Tazora Films.

Cast: Elizabeth Olsen, Adam Trese, Eric Sheffer Stevens, Julia Taylor Ross, Adam Barnett, Haley Murphy.

Directors: Chris Kentis, Laura Lau.


Producers: Agnes Mentre, Laura Lau.

Executive producers: Adeline Fontan Tessaur, Eve Diekerix, George Paaswell, Lynette Howell, Mickey Liddell, Jennifer Hilton Monroe, Danny Perkins.

Director of photography: Igor Martinovic.

Production designer: Roshelle Berliner.

Costume designer: Lynn Falconer.

Music: Nathan Larson.

Rated R, 83 minutes.
## The Top 40

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**Total:** $166,329,603