The Rolling Stones did make the biggest bang

Their concert tour kicked them up to the top-grossing pop act in 2005. Runner-up: U2.

By Randy Lewis, Times Staff Writer

Glorious Mariah Carey may have been queen at the record store in 2005, but she’s practically a handmaiden to the wrinkled old Rolling Stones in Calendar’s ninth annual Ultimate Top 10, which combines pop performers’ album sales and concert revenue.

Carey sold nearly 5 million copies in the U.S. of her career-rejuvenating “The Emancipation of Mimi” CD, which translates to $65 million in cash register sales, assuming an average of $13 per unit these days.

But that wasn’t enough for her to finish inside our Ultimate Top 10, which adds concert grosses tabulated by Pollstar magazine and album sales monitored by Nielsen SoundScan as a window into which acts pried the most money loose from fans during the year.

Top honors go for the second time to the Rolling Stones, who posted a combined gross of almost $168 million, the vast majority of which came at the concert box office. U2 wasn’t far behind with $150 million, and then Kenny Chesney at $109 million, the only other acts to top $100 million. Still, the Stones’ performance in 2005 is only fourth on the all-time list.

‘N Sync still holds the record: a combined $212.9 million in 2000.

The list:

1. The Rolling Stones. $168 million. Given the eye-and wallet-popping top face-value ticket price of $450 for the Stones’ “A Bigger Bang” tour, it’s not a big surprise that Mick, Keith and the boys shattered their own 12-year-old record (of $121.2 million in 1994) for highest-grossing concert tour of all time. That made up 96% of the band’s Ultimate Top 10 total this year, in keeping with the past in which album sales have been virtually irrelevant to the Stones’ total. Despite enthusiastic reviews, the group’s “A Bigger Bang” CD contributed only about $6 million to the total. One surprise the group did manage: its average ticket price of $133.98 wasn’t tops last year, or even second or third place. More on that later.

2. U2. $149.7 million. Despite finishing behind the Stones, the Irish band did a none-too-shabby job, also substantially topping the Stones’ previous record on the concert trail with $138.9 million in ticket sales. Bono et al. added about double what the Stones did at record stores with continued strong sales of their 2004 album “How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb,” adding nearly $11 million to its total. U2 sold more tickets in North America than any other act last year — 1.4 million, with the Dave Matthews Band in second place at 1.21 million tickets. The band has reported sales worldwide of 3.4 million tickets. U2’s average ticket price of $96.62 in the U.S. looks almost economical in the inflated concert market of recent years.

3. Kenny Chesney. $109.3 million. The country singer-songwriter had a tough year on the marital front with the annulment of his marriage to actress Renée Zellweger after only four months. But with his popular concerts and two albums that topped the pop charts in 2005, and a third that sold strongly, he vaunted over such classic rockers as Paul McCartney and the Eagles, even though both toured heavily last year. Chesney dropped one spot this year, after finishing at No. 2 on the Ultimate

Golden act

Boy bands draw grown-up paydays

The heady pinnacle of the teen-pop explosion five years ago casts a long shadow in the pop world. ‘N Sync, though long gone from the charts and arena stages, still holds the record for combined concert and album sales revenue since Calendar began compiling the list in 1997.

‘N Sync racked up a whopping $212.9 million in 2000 and finished in the Ultimate Top 10 for four consecutive years, taking No. 1 honors twice. So it’s no surprise that the youth-pop sensation has generated the most money on that list over its nine-year existence: $525.6 million.

Additionally, ‘N Sync’s peers landed two more spots on the overall Top 10 list. At No. 2: Backstreet Boys, with $252.5 million. Neither the group’s 2000 reunion tour nor its album (“Never Gone”) made a big impression on year-end rankings, but they added enough to the group’s 1998-2001 take to push it ahead of Céline Dion for runner-up honors.

Don’t $517.3 million makes her the only other act to crack $500 million. The rest of the Ultimate Top 10 finishers through the years: Dave Matthews Band ($408.5 million), U2 ($376.4 million), the Rolling Stones ($375.4 million), Britney Spears ($346.7 million), Eminem ($333.2 million), the Dixie Chicks ($283.6 million) and Shania Twain ($282.8 million).
4. Green Day, $84.7 million. The three Bay Area punk rockers who make up this outfit are anything but American idiots. The trio's 2004 album just keeps selling and selling, moving 3.8 million more copies to add just about $50 million to its on-the-road take of $34.8 million. Average ticket price: $38.07.

5. The Eagles, $84.4 million. The poster boys for '70s country rock did as well at the record store as the Rolling Stones last year without ever stepping foot in a recording studio. "The Very Best of the Eagles" sold 469,000 copies to put almost $6 million worth of icing on the veteran band's concert cake. er, take of $75.4 million. Average ticket price: $107.99.

6. Paul McCartney, $83.2 million. McCartney's "Chaos and Creation in the Backyard" album, like the Stones, generated some of the most enthusiastic reviews he's received in years but didn't quite sell enough copies to be certified gold: 450,000 copies. That resulted in revenue of $5.85 million. Still, the 63-year-old ex-Beatle found gold at the concert box office, racking up $77.3 million in ticket sales. His last appearance on the Ultimate Top 10 list was on his 2002 tour, when he finished second behind Eminem. Average ticket price: $135.46, topping the Stones but still not the highest average.

7. Céline Dion, $81.3 million. Want to talk perfect job? Here's a singer whose world tour consists of one stop — the Colosseum at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, within a cab ride of her home — yet she was able to draw enough fans and charge enough for tickets that she finished third (behind the Stones and U2) on Pollstar's ranking of the year's top concert attractions. All of her Ultimate Top 10 income was from ticket sales from her 155 shows, more than any other single act on Pollstar's list. Average ticket price: $136.04.

8. 50 Cent, $78.6 million. The New York rapper's album "The Massacre" was barely edged out at the end of the year by Carey's "Mimi" for the album sales crown in 2005, landing just shy of 5 million copies. That gave him $63.1 million in album revenue. His brief 15-date solo tour added just $4.7 million, not enough to make Pollstar's Top 100 tour grosses last year. But with the $10.8 million for which he gets credit as co-headliner with Eminem on last year's Anger Management Tour, it was enough to push him well ahead of Carey, who didn't tour during the year and had to rest on album sales alone. Average ticket price: $64.03 for Anger Management; $31.81 on his own.

9. Dave Matthews Band, $74.3 million. The relentlessly touring South African singer-songwriter's band doesn't grab the headlines but does add impressively to its cash flow each year. The group sold $57 million in tickets last year, piling on $17.3 million from sales of its "Stand Up" album. Along with Dion, the DMB is the only act to finish in the Ultimate Top 10 five times over the last nine years. Average ticket price: $47.09.

10. Elton John, $65.8 million. Like Dion, this British rocker didn't release an album last year, which meant all his income came from concert tickets, mostly from pricey shows in Las Vegas. John actually outdrew Dion on the road, with $42 million in tickets to her $37 million, but kept his average ticket price a bit lower than he has had in recent years, at $102.46.

Oh, last year's average ticket sales champ? Barry Manilow.

The man who sings about writing the songs hunkered down in Vegas, a la Dion, John and a growing number of others, for an even 100 shows, for which Sin City's high rollers shelled out an average of $153.93, a record. That, says Pollstar Editor Gary Bongiovanni, is because Manilow's cheapest ticket was $95, the priciest: $225. Dion, meanwhile, let fans into her shows for as little as $80, running up to $205 for prime seats.