

Oscars

- Alex Kerai

On February 24, all eyes will be on Hollywood to see who will go home with the Best Picture trophy at this year's 85th Annual Academy Awards. It has been an interesting year for movies this year with three films grossing over \$1 billion and thirteen films grossing over \$500 million. There were epics (*Lincoln*), comedies (*Ted*), adaptations (*Life of Pi*), sequels (*Skyfall*), remakes (*Anna Karenina*), fantasies (*The Hobbit*), westerns (*Django Unchained*) and musicals (*Les Misérables*). Although the films listed above are from radically different genres, they all are nominated for Oscars in a wide variety of categories (from costume design to best picture). On February 24 the Academy will culminate this impressive year of film by crowning a 'Best Picture' winner for the year 2012.

The awards season unofficially begins each year with the Cannes Film Festival in May. This year, Cannes opened with one of my favorite films of the year, and one that has been overlooked by the Academy (the organization that votes on and crowns the winners of the Academy Awards, aka the Oscars), *Moonrise Kingdom*. It is a brilliant independent film by Wes Anderson that is only nominated for Best Original Screenplay (Anderson and Roman Coppola) at this year's Oscars when it also deserves a nomination for Best Picture and Best Original Score (Alexandre Desplat). The film is a witty and funny tribute to young love on a New England island in 1965. *Moonrise Kingdom* started a trend of overlooked films at the Oscars which includes high profile snubs like Ben Affleck as director of *Argo*. I am personally astounded at the Academy's decision to not reward Affleck with a nomination, especially since his sophomore directorial effort, *The Town*, should have brought him a Best Director nomination! Luckily, the Academy, and every other group that gives awards for film, seems to be noticing they messed up. Another independent film that was overlooked is *Arbitrage* by writer-director Nicholas Jarecki and starring Richard Gere. Mr. Gere and Mr. Jarecki were both ignored for Best Actor (Gere) and Best Original Screenplay (Jarecki) in what was another one of my favorite films of the year. It combined suspense with the ever-present troubles on Wall Street. The popular James Bond film *Skyfall*, the 23rd James Bond film released in the franchise's fifty-year history, was kept out of the Best Picture, Director and Screenplay race and instead getting nominated in technical categories only even though it revived the fifty year old franchise with a clever, relevant script and brilliant artistic direction. Those were the three films that I have seen that I believed were brushed off by the Academy Awards in a few major categories.

For the films that were nominated this year, there were some interesting choices: *Amour*, a little-seen French film that earned Best Picture, Director, Actress, Original Screenplay and Foreign Language Film nods and *Beasts of the Southern Wild* which earned Best Picture, Director, Actress and Adapted Screenplay nods. I have not seen either of the films, so I cannot comment on whether they deserved nominations, but I believe that there were other worthy nominees that could have (and maybe *should* have) taken their place at the Academy Awards. For example, Ben Affleck deserves a Best Director nomination (*Argo*), Stephen Chbosky deserves a Best Adapted Screenplay nomination (*The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, based off his own novel, which is one of my favorite books), and *Skyfall* could have squeezed in a Best Picture nod. The

odd thing is that *Skyfall* could have been nominated for Best Picture even with *Beasts of the Southern Wild* and *Amour* nominated as well. There are nine Best Picture nominees when the Academy allows up to ten. That is another gripe that I have with the Academy this year: There were so many incredible movies released and could have earned the tenth spot on the Best Picture list, but none of them did!

The awards season this year has been very peculiar. Ever since the Oscar nominations were announced on January 10 (five weeks ago) all the other award shows have been announcing their winners, with almost one awards show per week! Three days after the Oscar nominations were announced, the Golden Globe awards were presented. The Golden Globes began to change the course of momentum for Oscar frontrunners *Argo* and *Lincoln*. With Ben Affleck having been snubbed by the Academy for the Best Director award, he managed an impressive win at the Golden Globes which I'm sure made Oscar voters doubtful of his exclusion but also made Steven Spielberg (*Lincoln*) the clear frontrunner since Affleck is out of the Best Director race. Affleck's film *Argo* also won the Best Picture Drama prize (with *Les Misérables* winning Best Picture Comedy or Musical) beating out frontrunner *Lincoln* and again returning to the spotlight. This win changed the Oscar race into a two-picture race between *Lincoln* and *Argo*, and ever since *Argo* has been taken the top prize every place it went. At the Producers Guild Awards *Argo* beat out nine other films (seven of them are the other nominees for Best Picture at the Oscars with *Moonrise Kingdom* and *Skyfall* replaced by *Amour* at the Oscars, which I believe was a bad decision on the part of the Academy) and at the Screen Actor's Guild (SAG) Awards *Argo* took home the prize for Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture. Daniel Day-Lewis continued his dominance over the Best Actor category, winning at the SAG Awards, the Golden Globes and the British Academy Film Awards (BAFTA). I have no doubt that he will win Best Actor at the Oscars, his only competitor thus far being Hugh Jackman who won Best Actor in a Motion Picture Comedy or Musical at the Golden Globes for his role as Jean Valjean in *Les Misérables*. However the surprise has been in the Best Actress category with Jessica Chastain and Jennifer Lawrence both winning the award at the Golden Globes (Best Actress in a Drama and Best Actress in a Comedy or Musical, respectively) while Jennifer Lawrence won the Best Actress award at the SAG Awards and Emmanuelle Riva won it at the BAFTA for her role in *Amour*. Anne Hathaway has won the award for Best Supporting Actress at every awards show she has gone to win at the SAG Awards, Golden Globe Awards and at the BAFTA) while Tommy Lee Jones and Christoph Waltz have been facing off against each other to win the Best Supporting Actor award (Mr. Jones won the SAG Award while Mr. Waltz won the Golden Globe and BAFTA). The Best Director race has so far only had one winner: Ben Affleck. However, that soon will change as Mr. Affleck was not nominated for Best Director at the Academy Awards. Instead, Steven Spielberg, Ang Lee (*Life of Pi*), David O. Russel (*Silver Linings Playbook*), Behn Zeitlin (*Beasts of the Southern Wild*), and Michael Haneke (*Amour*) were nominated for Best Director at the Oscars. Mr. Affleck, Kathryn Bigelow (*Zero Dark Thirty*), Tom Hooper (*Les Misérables*), Steven Spielberg and Ang Lee, were all nominated at the Director's Guild Awards (DGA) which is peculiar this year since Mr. Affleck, Ms. Bigelow and Mr. Hooper are not nominees for the Oscar. Ben Affleck won the DGA, making this the first time in seventeen years that a director won the DGA and was not nominated for an Academy

Award and the first time in ten years that a Director won the DGA and did not win the Academy Award (Mr. Affleck cannot win since he was not nominated). This will be the seventh time that the DGA has differed from the Academy Awards since the Directors Guild Awards started in 1948.

I now have predictions in a few choice categories: I believe that the Best Picture is between *Lincoln* and *Argo* (both of which were exceptionally well-done) but I think *Argo* might take the prize out of sympathy from Academy voters (on behalf of Ben Affleck not getting nominated as Best Director) and then Steven Spielberg will win Best Director for *Lincoln* (there is really no competition for him since Ben Affleck is out of the running). Daniel Day-Lewis will win for *Lincoln* because he immersed himself in the role and he's been winning every prize there is. I do not know who will Best Actress because I have yet to see any of the nominees in their respective films. Tommy Lee Jones will probably win for *Lincoln* just because he is (like all the other actors and actresses in the film) incredible, however I think Alan Arkin should win for *Argo* because he brought some much needed comic relief to this suspenseful film. From what I have seen from her breathtaking performance in *Les Misérables* (and from her awards show domination), Anne Hathaway will win Best Supporting Actress. Best Original Screenplay should go to Wes Anderson and Roman Coppola *Moonrise Kingdom* and Best Adapted Screenplay is a toss-up between Chris Terrio's script for *Argo* and Tony Kushner's for *Lincoln*. Both were well done with Terrio's have the perfect amount of drama and suspense while Kushner's was elaborate and extremely well written. Best Original Score should go to Thomas Newman for his excellent score for *Skyfall* however I would not be surprised to see John Williams win for *Lincoln*, Alexandre Desplat for *Argo* (although I stand by my previous statement that he should have been nominated for *Moonrise Kingdom*) or Mychael Danna win for *Life of Pi* (he has already claimed the Golden Globe). Adele will win the Best Original Song Oscar because no one can beat her (except for possibly Claude-Michel Schönberg, Herbert Kretzmer, and Alain Boublil for their new song "Suddenly" in *Les Misérables* which blends effortlessly into the musical).

Whoever wins an Oscar this year should be proud of the work they have done. It was an incredible year for film and one where many films were exceptional and have been leading the pack for the Oscar. With an interesting choice in host Seth MacFarlane, the Oscars will definitely be a must-watch. I, for one, am interested to see how Mr. MacFarlane will differentiate himself from other hosts of the past few years. Either way, with no clear front-runner going into the Academy Awards on February 24, like there was last year with *The Artist*, it will definitely be an interesting show to watch and full of many surprises.

The 85th Annual Academy Awards will be broadcast on ABC on February 24 starting at 7 pm. Go to oscar.go.com to see the full list of nominees.