

The Oscars

-Alex Kerai

It has begun. That yearly ritual which involves hefty ad campaigns and numerous award shows and culminates in the crowning of a “Best Picture” winner on the biggest night in cinema: The Academy Awards (Oscars). Each year, there are films that come out with high Oscar hopes and begin a massive ad campaign just to land on the Oscar ballot, and each year there are films which surprisingly don’t succeed. This year changed things for Oscar voters since the Academy expanded their field of Best Picture contestants to ten (up from five in previous years), yet the nominees had to receive at least 5% of the top vote. This rule change came to late for movies like *The Dark Knight* and *Gran Torino* who had been snubbed by Oscar voters in years past. However, this Oscar season brings in some of the heavy-weights in acting and directing while some of the movies nominated may not have lived up to past year’s expectations.

There were many surprising omissions from this year’s Oscar ballot when the nominees were announced on January 24. To start, *Drive* (the thriller film starring Ryan Gosling) was not nominated for Best Picture, Best Actor (Ryan Gosling) or Best Supporting Actor (for Albert Brooks) which many critics thought that it would receive. Actually, the general surprise was with how Ryan Gosling was not nominated in general either for his stellar performance in *The Ides of March* or *Drive*. Another big surprise was the nomination of Max von Sydow (Best Supporting Actor *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*), Demian Bichir (Best Actor *A Better Life*), and Nick Nolte (Best Supporting Actor *Warrior*) along with Melissa McCarthy (Best Supporting Actress *Bridesmaids*), all of whom seemed to take the place of Oscar shoo-ins Leonardo diCaprio (*J. Edgar*), Albert Brooks (*Drive*), Patton Oswalt (*Young Adult*), Michael Fassenberg (*Shame*), Shailene Woodley (*The Descendants*), and Tilda Swinton (*We Need to Talk About Kevin*). Another interesting nomination came in the form of Terrence Malick, the director of *Tree of Life* who was nominated for Best Director and seemed to replace David Fincher (*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*) and Steven Spielberg (*War Horse*). The Oscars are known for their surprising nominations and exclusions, just look no further than Christopher Nolan who’s blockbusters *Inception* and *The Dark Knight* failed to gain him a Best Director’s nod.

The front-runners for this year’s Best Picture race come in the form of three films, two of which are odes to classic cinema: *The Artist*, a silent black and white film set in 1927 when sound was entering cinema; *Hugo*, Martin Scorsese’s adaption of the best selling book which is set in 1930s Paris; *The Descendants*, George Clooney and Alexander Payne’s adaption of the best-selling novel which is set in Hawaii in the present day. Right now, it looks as if *The Descendants* and *The Artist* are the front runners, but I wouldn’t be surprised if *The Help* pulled off an upset. Of all the Best Picture films, *The Help* has grossed the most (\$169.6 million as of February 3) which is not low for a Best Picture nominee (*The King’s Speech*, last year’s Best Picture winner, grossed only \$15 million). All four have won major awards and been put on many critics top ten lists of 2011, but the big question still remains as to who will win the title of Best Picture?

On the acting front, there are two front runners for the Best Actor and Best Actress categories. For Best Actor there is the French actor Jean Dujardin for *The Artist* (who won the BAFTA [the British Academy Awards] and SAG award) and George Clooney for *The*

Descendants (who won the Golden Globe). Best Actress has a neck-and-neck race between Meryl Streep for *The Iron Lady* (who won the BAFTA and Golden Globe) and Viola Davis for *The Help* (who won the SAG Award), both of whom are favored to win. Looking at the Best Supporting Actor category, the clear frontrunner (who has swept all major awards) is Christopher Plummer for *Beginners* (who won the SAG and BAFTA, and Golden Globe award) and looking at the Best Supporting Actress category, it is a race between Octavia Spencer for *The Help* (who won the SAG Award, Golden Globe and BAFTA award and is the front runner) and Berenice Bejo for *The Artist*. One thing is known for sure, this year was filled with amazing performances and any of the people nominated are well deserving.

The directing and writing categories for this year are filled with great films like *Moneyball*, *The Descendants*, *Midnight in Paris*, *The Artist*, and *Bridesmaids* (among others) and are a true representation of the variety that this year's films had. There is a representative from small indie films all the way up to massive blockbuster and from heavy dramas to hysterical comedies. Beginning with the directors, two big omissions were Steven Spielberg and David Fincher and one surprising entry was Terrence Malick. Right now, the frontrunners are the same as they are for Best Picture: Martin Scorsese (*Hugo*), Alexander Payne (*The Descendants*), and Michel Hazanavicius (*The Artist*). So far, Scorsese has won the Golden Globe and Hazanavicius has won the BAFTA and Director's Guild Award. Right now, it looks as if Scorsese is the front runner, although Hazanavicius could score an upset though. For writing, it looks like *Moneyball* (written by veteran screenwriters Aaron Sorkin and Steven Zaillian) will win for Best Adapted Screenplay, with *The Descendants* possibly pulling an upset, while *Midnight in Paris* (by Woody Allen) is the clear front-runner for Best Original Screenplay having already won the Golden Globe for Best Screenplay, but look for *The Artist* (by director Michel Hazanavicius) to possibly pull an upset; however with the results of the Writers Guild Awards not released until February 19, it is hard to tell. All I know is that it will be an interesting race to follow.

Looking at two final categories (Best Animated Feature and Best Original Score) there were some surprises. In the Best Animated Feature category, the biggest surprise was the omission of Spielberg's *The Adventure of Tin-Tin* (which had won at the Golden Globes and Producers Guild Awards and was nominated at the BAFTA) and Pixar's *Cars 2* in place of lesser known films such as *A Cat in Paris* and *Chico & Rita*. Best Original Score is really just a race between John Williams and *The Artist*. John Williams composed the music for both of Steven Spielberg's films this year (*War Horse* and *The Adventure of Tin-Tin*) while *The Artist* has already won the BAFTA and the Golden Globe. A surprising exclusion from the Best Original Score race was Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross's score for *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (the duo had won last year with *The Social Network*).

Who will win the most awards come Oscar night? Will it be *Hugo* with 11 nominations or *The Artist* which is poised to win most of the major categories? Will *The Help* cause an upset over Meryl Streep or will she finally get her Oscar? Will a silent movie prevail over one starring George Clooney? And who will win the most coveted prize in all of cinema? All will be revealed on February 26 when the Academy Awards will be broadcast on ABC at 7pm and will be hosted by Billy Crystal.

You can find all of the 2012 Oscar nominees here: <http://oscar.go.com/nominees/>