

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

What I Loved About the Oscars

Adam Leipzig · Wednesday, February 25th, 2015

The Oscars are the best and the worst of television — they are appointment viewing worldwide, yet everyone hacks them to pieces as the show plays on.

I thought the 87th Academy Awards was a good event: producers Craig Zadan and Neil Meron struck the right balance of honor and irreverence, and Neil Patrick Harris made his hosting duties look effortless. Not every line zinged, but it never does, and there were enough buoyant moments to keep the evening afloat.

Indies Rule

The Oscars were yet another moment to applaud independent cinema, as the indies swept every major award category. (For a list of all the winners, with indie movies highlighted, see below.)

The studios are not creatively bankrupt. They can still make great movies, and execute scale in a way no one else can. *Guardians of the Galaxy* and *Interstellar*, two films from 2014 that represent unique and unconventional creative choices, albeit in vastly different ways, are only possible with massive studio budgets and operations supporting them.

Yet the demarcation between studio films and independent films has never been clearer. Studios make gigantic movies with known brands, with a brand being a franchise, like the *Divergent* novels or *50 Shades of Grey*, a famous director, like Christopher Nolan, or comic book heroes from the DC or Marvel universes.

Indie movies are more personal and do not need to achieve global box office success to make back their investment. This is true even as the average budget of independent movies has grown, thanks to smart, entrepreneurial new financiers willing to take risks on creative vision.

The ratings for the 87th Academy Awards were down 16% from the year before, owing largely to the fact that fewer people in America saw the movies that were nominated and won — because, again, most of them were indies. So while the Academy is still one of the oldest, whitest, most male organizations around, and has a big blind spot when it comes to race, Academy voters do validate the quality of independent cinema over routine studio fare.

It's further demonstration that there is no relationship, positive or negative, between commercial viability and artistic accomplishment.

Highlights and an Internationale

What else did I love?

The Oscars were also a celebration of the international presence of cinema, with Mexican and UK citizens grabbing gold in abundance. Alejandro González Iñárritu's shout-out to his Mexican countrymen, on both sides of the border, was as welcome a wake-up call as Patricia Arquette's demand for equal rights for women in America.

Julianne Moore finally won. She is the bravest actress I know, and her honest, fearless portrayals of characters others would shun earns my continuing admiration.

"Heil fucking Hitler!" "Heil fucking Hitler!" Yep, they said the F word twice in *The Imitation Game* clip, showing once again that The Weinstein Company has no truck with parochialism... and that the Academy didn't prescreen those clips carefully. Thank God. Which is in contrast with bleeping out the "God" in "God damn!" coming from JK Simmons' mouth in the *Whiplash* clip.

Paweł Pawlikowski, the director of *Ida*, who demonstrated how to keep the orchestra from playing you off: Just keep talking. The orchestra relented.

Now we know Common's and John Legend's real names.

Lady Gaga won't become the next Barbra Streisand... she will become the next Bette Midler.

John Travolta owning it.

Jessica Chastain calling out "*Chiiiiivo!*" with sweet affection; that's cinematographer Emmanuel Lubezki's nickname. Every single one of the nominated cinematographers is a personal hero of mine.

More people from technical areas and executive management in the *In Memoriam* segment, and deservedly so.

What didn't I love?

Not enough acclaim for *Boyhood*, which will stand as a landmark cinematic achievement for decades.

The Grand Budapest Hotel was still my favorite film of the year — it is 100 minutes of pure cinema joy. It would have been my pick for Best Picture... but overall, the awards this year were well distributed and honored exceptional people and movies.

Here is the full list of winners and nominees, in the order the Oscars were presented, with independent film winners in GREEN.

Best supporting actor

WINNER: JK Simmons for *Whiplash*

Robert Duvall for The Judge
 Ethan Hawke for Boyhood
 Edward Norton for Birdman
 Mark Ruffalo for Foxcatcher

Achievement in costume design

WINNER: The Grand Budapest Hotel – Milena Canonero

Inherent Vice – Mark Bridges
 Into the Woods – Colleen Atwood
 Maleficent – Anna B Sheppard
 Mr Turner – Jacqueline Durran

Achievement in makeup and hairstyling

WINNER: The Grand Budapest Hotel – Frances Hannon, Mark Coulier

Foxcatcher – Bill Corso, Dennis Liddiard
 Guardians of the Galaxy – Elizabeth Yianni-Georgiou, David White

Best foreign-language film

WINNER: Ida – Paweł Pawlikowski

Tangerines – Zaza Urushadze
 Leviathan – Andrey Zvyagintsev
 Wild Tales – Damián Sziffrón
 Timbuktu – Abderrahmane Sissako

Best live-action short film

WINNER: The Phone Call – Mat Kirkby, James Lucas

Aya – Oded Binnun, Mihal Brezis
 Boogaloo and Graham – Michael Lennox, Ronan Blaney
 Butter Lamp – Wei Hu, Julien Féret
 Parvaneh – Talkhon Hamzavi, Stefan Eichenberger

Best documentary short subject

WINNER: Crisis Hotline: Veterans Press 1 – Ellen Goosenberg Kent, Dana Perry

Joanna – Aneta Kopacz
 Our Curse – Tomasz Sliwinski, Maciej Slesicki
 The Reaper – Gabriel Serra
 White Earth – Christian Jensen

Achievement in sound mixing

WINNER: Whiplash – Craig Mann, Ben Wilkins, Thomas Curley

American Sniper – John T Reitz, Gregg Rudloff, Walt Martin
 Birdman – Jon Taylor, Frank A. Montaño, Thomas Varga
 Interstellar – Gary Rizzo, Gregg Landaker, Mark Weingarten

Unbroken – Jon Taylor, Frank A. Montaña, David Lee

Achievement in sound editing

WINNER: American Sniper – Alan Robert Murray, Bub Asman

Birdman – Aaron Glascock, Martín Hernández

The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies – Brent Burge, Jason Canovas

Interstellar – Richard King

Unbroken – Becky Sullivan, Andrew DeCristofaro

Best supporting actress

WINNER: Patricia Arquette for Boyhood

Laura Dern for Wild

Keira Knightley for The Imitation Game

Emma Stone for Birdman

Meryl Streep for Into the Woods

Achievement in visual effects

WINNER: Interstellar – Paul J Franklin, Andrew Lockley, Ian Hunter, Scott R Fisher

Captain America: The Winter Soldier – Dan Deleeuw, Russell Earl, Bryan Grill, Daniel Sudick

Dawn of the Planet of the Apes – Joe Letteri, Dan Lemmon, Daniel Barrett, Erik Winquist

Guardians of the Galaxy – Stephane Ceretti, Nicolas Aithadi, Jonathan Fawkner, Paul Corbould

X-Men: Days of Future Past – Richard Stammers, Lou Pecora, Tim Crosbie, Cameron Waldbauer

Best animated short film

WINNER: Feast – Patrick Osborne, Kristina Reed

The Bigger Picture – Daisy Jacobs, Chris Hees

The Dam Keeper – Robert Kondo, Daisuke “Dice” Tsutsumi

Me and My Moulton – Torill Kove

A Single Life – Joris Oprins

Best animated feature film

WINNER: Big Hero 6

The Boxtrolls

How to Train Your Dragon 2

Song of the Sea

The Tale of the Princess Kaguya

Best production design

WINNER: The Grand Budapest Hotel: Adam Stockhausen, Anna Pinnock

The Imitation Game: Maria Djurkovic, Tatiana Macdonald

Interstellar: Nathan Crowley, Gary Fettis

Into the Woods: Dennis Gassner, Anna Pinnock

Mr Turner: Suzie Davies, Charlotte Watts

Achievement in cinematography

WINNER: Birdman: Emmanuel Lubezki

The Grand Budapest Hotel: Robert D Yeoman

Ida: Lukasz Zal, Ryszard Lenczewski

Mr Turner: Dick Pope

Unbroken: Roger Deakins

Achievement in film editing

WINNER: Whiplash – Tom Cross

Boyhood – Sandra Adair

The Imitation Game – William Goldenberg

The Grand Budapest Hotel – Barney Pilling

American Sniper – Joel Cox, Gary Roach

Best documentary feature

WINNER: Citizenfour – Laura Poitras, Mathilde Bonnefoy, Dirk Wilutzky

Finding Vivian Maier – John Maloof, Charlie Siskel

Last Days in Vietnam – Rory Kennedy, Keven McAlester

The Salt of the Earth – Wim Wenders, Juliano Ribeiro Salgado, David Rosier

Virunga – Orlando von Einsiedel, Joanna Natasegara

Best original song

WINNER: Glory from Selma – Lonnie Lynn (Common), John Stephens (John Legend)

The Lego Movie – Shawn Patterson (Everything Is Awesome)

Beyond the Lights – Diane Warren (Grateful)

Glen Campbell: I'll Be Me – Glen Campbell, Julian Raymond (I'm Not Gonna Miss You)

Begin Again – Gregg Alexander, Danielle Brisebois (Lost Stars)

Best original score

WINNER: Alexandre Desplat – The Grand Budapest Hotel

Alexandre Desplat – The Imitation Game

Hans Zimmer – Interstellar

Jóhann Jóhannsson – The Theory of Everything

Gary Yershon – Mr Turner

Original screenplay

WINNER: Alejandro González Iñárritu, Nicolás Giacobone, Alexander Dinelaris, Armando Bo – Birdman

Richard Linklater – Boyhood

E Max Frye, Dan Futterman – Foxcatcher

Wes Anderson, Hugo Guinness – The Grand Budapest Hotel

Dan Gilroy – Nightcrawler

Adapted screenplay

WINNER: Graham Moore – The Imitation Game

Jason Hall – American Sniper

Paul Thomas Anderson – Inherent Vice

Anthony McCarten – The Theory of Everything

Damien Chazelle – Whiplash

Best director

WINNER: Alejandro González Iñárritu for Birdman

Richard Linklater for Boyhood

Bennett Miller for Foxcatcher

Wes Anderson for The Grand Budapest Hotel

Morten Tyldum for The Imitation Game

Best actor

WINNER: Eddie Redmayne for The Theory of Everything

Steve Carell for Foxcatcher

Benedict Cumberbatch for The Imitation Game

Bradley Cooper for American Sniper

Michael Keaton for Birdman

Best actress

WINNER: Julianne Moore for Still Alice

Marion Cotillard for Two Days, One Night

Felicity Jones for The Theory of Everything

Rosamund Pike for Gone Girl

Reese Witherspoon for Wild

Best picture

WINNER: Birdman

American Sniper

Boyhood

The Imitation Game

The Grand Budapest Hotel

Selma

The Theory of Everything

Whiplash

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