

Columnist: Oscars contain usual glaring injustices

The envelope, please

Charles Lieurance



'Tis the season for critical condescension. Time for Rex Reed to announce that his "big succulent peach of a movie" didn't get so much as a wink from Oscar, then go on to rave endlessly about fashion crimes committed during Monday night's Academy Awards ceremony. Time for every critic from Joe Bob Briggs to Andrew Sarris to tell why Oscar is irrelevant, passe, rigged, insignificant, incestuous, too square, too fashionable, dull, atheoretical and just flat-out wrong.

But even after they've maimed Oscar's potency by issuing their own pedantic top-10 lists (always including some nine-hour-plus "film essay" on the color blue) and donned rented tuxedos to host their own "If we picked the winners" TV shows, they will watch the proceedings. They will watch through the flatulence and back-stabbing, the groveling thank-yous, and the sickening pomp and glitter. They will titter at the faux pas and bow their heads in quiet reverence while Oscar trots out some 101-year-old extra from D.W. Griffith's "Intolerance" who will, complete with shakes and sporadic fits of narcolepsy, misremember American cinema's golden age. They will see the thing out until the final Oscar-nominated song is welped out by Sonny Bono or Robert Goulet, and the last envelope — sealed what seems like decades ago by Price-Waterhouse — is peeled open by some unnamed, coke-fried anti-celebrity.

This year's Oscars contain the same glaring aberrations of justice as any previous year. Deserving maverick films like "Raising Arizona" and

"River's Edge" were ignored, but then only the kind of idealist who wants to play a street-corner shell game more than three times ("Just one more time, but lemme get my specs on for this one...") would give them any chance to begin with. "Angel Heart" was monstrously neglected for the cinematography nomination, but that was a film for weirdos who've actually plodded through Goethe's "Faust." Tom Waits' performance in

"Morning, Vietnam," Robin Williams, as Best Actor for, once more, playing himself. He did do it well, though.

For Best Picture predictions, it's best to think like the Academy. For most people who follow film religiously, mind-melding with the Academy is a frightening thought.

"The Last Emperor," Bernardo Bertolucci's staggering, geo-erotic epic, was too big to be ignored by the

years where everyone in the Academy went to Cannes over vacation, "The Last Emperor" won't take an Oscar.

"Moonstruck" is a fine film, but it's a little too quirky for the Academy. There's too much over-the-top acting (blamed on the moon, of course) and the whole affair's a bit stagey for Oscar's finicky tastes. When there are safer films like "Fatal Attraction" and "Broadcast News" to

Academy's in this kind of populist mood, this yuppie/AIDS fable should grab every category in which it's nominated. The film itself is nothing but well-executed hokey, of course, but it got mentioned in Time and Newsweek outside the entertainment page, so it must be important.

"Hope and Glory" is a strange little film memoir by a director who's not exactly Oscar-prone, John Boorman. Also, as far as Hollywood goes, England is as far away as Tibet. We let the limeys in as brothers, but we still won't let our Oscar marry one. I think we can safely say "Chariots of Fire" was just the Academy's version of affirmative action. The quota is probably filled for the next decade or so.

The next big guess, of course, is who will sing the five nominated Best Original Songs during the ceremony. Usually the duties of singing these usually pathetic ditties are split between people you haven't heard sing since you raided your father's record collection for something romantic to put on the stereo that weekend in high school when your parents were away, and atrocious top-40 stars just as bad as the ones who originally performed the songs in the films.

Perhaps the most sinful omission in this category is 1987's obvious musical highlight — Annette Funicello and Fishbone together at last in "Back to the Beach" singing "Jamaica Ska." And then Pearl Bailey and Huey Lewis and the News singing it at the ceremony? Where is the Academy's sense of adventure?

The nomination of the song "Cry Freedom" as the song from "Cry Freedom" destroyed an age-old dream of mine — seeing Barbara Mandrell sing Peter Gabriel's "Biko."

The other tunes are really too undistinguished for anyone to care who sings them.

Bob Seger's "Shakedown" done by Andy Williams maybe... What a night, what a night.



John Bruce/Daily Nebraskan

"Ironweed" makes those in the running for Best Supporting Actor look like walk-ins at the Stanislavski Matchbook University and was the only really lively thing about an otherwise morose cinematic meditation.

Barry Levinson's "Tin Men," one of the finest American films of the decade, was ignored completely by the Hollywood glitterati. The Academy did, however, nominate the star of Levinson's far-inferior "Good

powers that be, but the director's name is Bertolucci. Also, the stars are, except for roles too trivial to mention, from faraway places with strange sounding names. The main exception, Peter O'Toole (what's making an epic without Peter O'Toole?), is, one, from England, and two, "not one of us, if you know what I mean" (remember, we're thinking like the Academy now).

Unless this is one of those fluke

fall for, who needs "Moonstruck?"

"Broadcast News" is my pick for the Best Picture. It's a picture-perfect contemporary screwball comedy, and there's a Hollywood camaraderie feel to it (blessed for all time by an unannounced cameo by Academy favorite Jack Nicholson) that should make it a cinch for the big statue.

"Fatal Attraction" might take it simply by virtue of being the "picture everybody's talking about," and if the

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