

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

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And the Oscar goes to...

Oscar watchdogs take their shot at picking the Academy Awards

By **Gerry Beltz and Jeff Randall**
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It's that time of year again, and thankfully, it's not a year of "Forrest Gump and the other four nominees." There are several strong contenders in all of the major categories this year, and "Braveheart" leads the pack with 10 nominations.

Sadly, many films were nearly ignored, if not forgotten altogether. "The Usual Suspects" garnered only one major nomination, and fine films such as "Clockers," "Seven" and "The American President" got the shaft.

And on an even more important note, the Academy dumped David Letterman as its master of ceremonies. That's right, the man who got Barry White to say "Do you wanna buy a monkey?" is out and Whoopi Goldberg is in. Oh well ...

Despite the ignorance of the Academy in some regards, we at the Daily Nebraskan still plan on watching Monday's ceremonies. And, of course, we have our own opinions regarding who will win what in the major categories. This year's self-appointed Oscar watchdogs are Gerry Beltz, film critic extraordinaire, and Jeff Randall, a part-time critic who just really likes movies.

So, without further ado, this year's picks.

BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS

Jeff: Don't believe the hype; this definitely was not the Year of the Woman. The fact that Joan Allen and Kathleen Quinlan were nominated for two roles that basically consisted of crying over their husbands is proof of that. Nobody saw "Georgia" (well, nobody in Lincoln did) and Mira Sorvino's role doesn't have a universal appeal. I'll go with Kate Winslet in "Sense and Sensibility," just to play it safe.

Gerry: Nobody saw Marc Winningham, and Quinlan's role wasn't that outstanding, so that's two down. The other three make it a very

tight race, but Sorvino takes third for playing a prostitute and Allen loses out for being in an Oliver Stone film. Winslet takes home the statue.

BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR

Jeff: This one is tough. There's a whole bunch of talent, and that talent happens to reside in some of the year's best films. Brad Pitt faltered at the end of "12 Monkeys," Tim Roth was good in what amounted to an average film, Ed Harris sat around most of the time and James Cromwell ... yeah, right. Give it to Keyser — er, Kevin Spacey in "The Usual Suspects."

Gerry: First, let's kick out the pig-film guy to get this into a serious standing category. Pitt hasn't paid his dues, and his role was too off-the-wall for the Academy. I'll also kick out Roth for a great performance in an average film (good call, Jeff!). Between Harris and Spacey, I'll go with Spacey. Granted, Harris has paid his dues, but this will be the Academy's token "surprise" winner for the younger generation (not to mention that he deserves it).

BEST ACTRESS

Jeff: I'd really like to see Elisabeth Shue win. But her role was a bit too gritty to grab it. "Bridges" was a bit too far back for anybody to remember. Emma Thompson and Meryl Streep both have won too much already, and their respective performances weren't great when compared with their past work. I'll give it to Susan Sarandon, although I've got this sick feeling that Sharon Stone might actually sneak up for the steal. Go figure.

Gerry: Hey, Sharon, does the name "Custer" ring a bell? Don't worry about having a speech ready. Thompson hasn't a chance, but she'll get Best Adapted Screenplay. I'll agree with my partner-in-crime on the Shue issue, and Streep has already proved herself in the past. Sarandon will finally take home her little gold dude, after an exorbitantly long speech.

BEST ACTOR

Jeff: Richard Dreyfuss was a bit too sappy, and Anthony Hopkins was a bit too slimy. In a year when the Academy is once again under fire for real or imagined racist tendencies, Sean Penn's white supremacist character in "Dead Man Walking" could be too hot to handle. Massimo Troisi would have had a good chance if he didn't have the doubly bad fortune of dying AND being in a foreign film. Give it to Nicolas, who also happened to turn in the best performance.

Gerry: Dreyfuss would be nice, but he won't win it. Hopkins, possibly. He had a good performance, but he also had more make-up than Tammy Faye. Massimo is dead, so his chances got buried with him. Close race in the scum roles for Cage and Penn, but Cage has been paying his dues (and didn't marry Madonna), so I'll give the nod to him. (Oh yeah, he deserves it, too.)

BEST DIRECTOR

Jeff: "Braveheart" just wasn't that good, "Babe" faces the curse of being a comedy and Michael Radford's "The Postman" doesn't have that mysterious Oscar quality about it. As far as I'm concerned, this is a two-man race between Mike Figgis and Tim Robbins. Both films are incredibly dark and don't end too happily. But I'll give the edge to Figgis because he didn't hire his "life partner" to star in his film. Oh, yeah, and "Leaving Las Vegas" was just plain great.

Gerry: No, Jeff, this is a THREE-man race; you missed Mel Gibson! He has a very good shot as a matter of fact, because the Old Timers Academy still has a problem with that free-minded Robbins and perverse Mike Figgis. Good calls on Noonan and Radford, though. I'll go with Gibson. Figgis' film was just too dark for the Academy, and Robbins would give a longer speech than Sarandon will. Noonan directed a pig, 'nuff said.

See PICKS on 10

Oscar Nominees

Ceremony to be held Monday
8 p.m. on ABC

Best Supporting Actress

- Joan Allen "Nixon"
- Mira Sorvino "Mighty Aphrodite"
- Kate Winslet "Sense and Sensibility"
- Kathleen Quinlan "Apollo 13"
- Mare Winningham "Georgia"

Best Supporting Actor

- Brad Pitt "12 Monkeys"
- Tim Roth "Rob Roy"
- Kevin Spacey "The Usual Suspects"
- Ed Harris "Apollo 13"
- James Cromwell "Babe"

Best Actress

- Elisabeth Shue "Leaving Las Vegas"
- Susan Sarandon "Dead Man Walking"
- Meryl Streep "The Bridges of Madison County"
- Sharon Stone "Casino"
- Emma Thompson "Sense and Sensibility"

Best Actor

- Nicolas Cage "Leaving Las Vegas"
- Richard Dreyfuss "Mr. Holland's Opus"
- Anthony Hopkins "Nixon"
- Sean Penn "Dead Man Walking"
- Massimo Troisi "The Postman"

Best Director

- Chris Noonan "Babe"
- Tim Robbins "Dead Man Walking"
- Mel Gibson "Braveheart"
- Mike Figgis "Leaving Las Vegas"
- Michael Radford "The Postman"

Best Picture

- "Babe"
- "Apollo 13"
- "Braveheart"
- "The Postman"
- "Sense and Sensibility"



Nicolas Cage's performance in "Leaving Las Vegas" already has earned him an armload of awards, and he's the gamblers' favorite for Best Actor in tonight's Academy Awards presentation.

Photo courtesy of United Artists Inc.