

# Oscar-nominated movies draw crowds

LOS ANGELES (AP) — "The Cider House Rules" doubled its money. "American Beauty" climbed past \$100 million. "The Sixth Sense" is creeping toward the all-time top 10.

Just what are the Oscars worth? Tens of millions of dollars at the box office for some top nominees.

Many moviegoers are in their annual Oscar mode, scrambling to see best-picture contenders and other films with big nominations before they watch the Academy Awards this Sunday.

"Mainstream audiences across the country look for reasons to see a movie that maybe they haven't felt compelled to see yet," said Paul Dergarabedian, president of Exhibitor Relations Co., which tracks movie admissions.

"Oscar nominations are de facto word of mouth from a source they trust."

"Rather than a friend saying you've got to go see this movie, it's

the Academy saying, 'Go see it.'" DreamWorks pulled "American Beauty" from all but a few theaters the weekend before Oscar nominations came out in mid-February, with plans to re-release it right after.

The movie received a leading eight nominations, and is now in its widest release yet, 1,650 theaters. It has added \$28 million to its gross, hitting \$103 million last weekend.

"American Beauty" was a record 20th movie released last year to top \$100 million, a figure it probably would not have approached without its best-picture and other nominations.

"I would love to tell you I knew this was going to happen, but when the movie came out, it would have been difficult for me to think it would do more than \$35 million to \$50 million," said Jim Tharp, DreamWorks' head of distribution.

Smaller movies also benefit from the Oscars. With acting nominations for Hilary Swank and Chloe Sevigny,

arthouse favorite "Boys Don't Cry" has risen from \$3.7 million before the nominations to \$6.8 million as of last weekend.

With seven nominations, including one for best picture, "The Cider House Rules" quickly cashed in.

In fairly narrow release, "Cider House" had grossed just \$22.7 million before the nominations, but distributor Miramax has more than doubled the theater count to 1,738 since then.

Like Miramax' best-picture contenders last year, "Shakespeare in Love" and "Life Is Beautiful," the Oscar nominations have helped double the take for "Cider House" to \$45.8 million.

Last year's surprise blockbuster "The Sixth Sense" is on the verge of moving into 10th place all-time at the box office.

Disney quadrupled the ghost story's theater count, to about 800, the weekend before the nominations.

Since grabbing six nominations,

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Paul Dergarabedian  
president of Exhibitor Relations Co.

including best picture, "The Sixth Sense" has rung up an additional \$6.5 million, for a total of \$288.5 million. That is just \$1.8 million shy of "The Empire Strikes Back."

# Artists call for Oscar animation category

■ Full-length animated films rarely win when nominated for the award.

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Beloved by all ages and praised by critics, cartoons such as "Pinocchio" and "The Iron Giant" have proven a perennial sure bet during Oscar season: They never win, and are rarely nominated.

The dearth has led some artists to call for a new Academy Award honoring feature-length animation, despite objections from others who say it would diminish cartoon's standing against live-action fare.

"There is a lot of interest in animated films. They're very popular, and there's a large selection out there. Why not give them their own division or category?" asked Tom Sito, president of

the Motion Picture Screen Cartoonists Guild, Local 839.

A longtime advocate for an animated feature Oscar, Sito has worked on such films as "The Little Mermaid," "Aladdin" and "Beauty and the Beast," the only feature-length cartoon ever nominated for Best Picture.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences periodically considers forming an animated feature category, but has declined because of a shortage of nominees.

Studios in the United States have released an average of only seven fully animated features each year since 1989, according to Exhibitor Relations Co., which tracks box office statistics.

"You have to have more than that to play the game," Academy spokesman John Pavlik said. "Otherwise, we'd be giving nominations to almost every animated feature that comes out."

One way to add more films to the proposed category would be easing qualifications to include movies that are only partially animated, such as sci-fi or action thrillers which use animation in virtually every scene.

With the advent of computer-generated images, visual effects films and purely animated movies now use "essentially the same techniques," according to Sito, who helped blend animated characters with real actors in "Who Framed Roger Rabbit."

By that rationale, Buzz Lightyear and Woody the cowboy from "Toy Story 2" could be considered cousins to Jar Jar Binks in "The Phantom Menace" and the dinosaurs in "Jurassic Park."

However, the Oscars already offer a category for visual effects, and some filmmakers may balk at the animation label.

"There are hybrids of live-action

and animation, but it would be hard to create a category that includes both," Pavlik said. "I don't see how that could be done in a way that would satisfy everyone."

Opposition to an animated feature award also comes from artists who would consider it a symbol that their work is inferior to live-action productions.

"Animation has never gotten the respect it deserves, but this would just further ghettoize it."

"You'd essentially lock yourself out of the Best Picture category," said Steve Hulett, an animator on such films as "The Fox and the Hound" and "The Great Mouse Detective."

Sito said the idea of competing with live-action films, however romantic to animators, remains a longshot.

"It's a nice idea but a tough sell," he said.

# Fox president resigning

Programming year plagued by low ratings

NEW YORK (AP) — Fourteen months after he left Comedy Central to take over programming for the struggling Fox network, Doug Herzog is calling it quits.

Herzog has been trying to leave since one of his predecessors, Sandy Grushow, was installed last November to supervise the network and Fox's television studio.

His year in the hot seat was a nightmare of falling ratings, failing shows and fallout from the "Who Wants to Marry a Multimillionaire" fiasco.

"I would imagine that the worst is behind us," Herzog said Wednesday. "I'm sorry I had to live through it. That's timing. At the same time I'm walking out of here with two comedy successes to look back on."

His slate of new programs for last fall, including the critically praised comedy "Action" and the drama "Harsh Realm," all failed in the ratings. Fox's average prime-time viewership has slumped from 11.2 million last year to 9.3 million this season.

The promising performance of midseason replacement comedies "Malcolm in the Middle" and "Titus" has given Fox hope recently. Yet two stalwarts of its schedule, "Beverly Hills, 90210" and "Party of Five," are in their last season and Fox still isn't sure that "The X-Files" is coming back for another year.

Herzog, 40, was Fox's fifth entertainment president in eight years.

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