
'Birdman' grabs best picture, best director at Oscars

23/02/2015



On a stormy night in Hollywood, the 87th annual Academy Awards — which came in humbled by backlash to its all-white acting nominees — bristled with politics and heartfelt speeches about women's rights, immigration, suicide prevention and race.

In a battle of B-movies for best picture, the Oscars awarded "Birdman" best picture, opting for a movie that epitomizes much of Hollywood — showy, ego-mad, desperate for artistic credibility — over one ("Boyhood") that prized naturalism and patience. "Birdman (or The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)" also won best director for Mexican filmmaker Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu, best original screenplay and best cinematography.

"Maybe next year the government will inflict immigration restrictions," said Inarritu, recalling last year's best director winner, Alfonso Cuarón. "Two Mexicans in a row. That's suspicious, I guess."

Inarritu, a larger-than-life figure of frizzy hair, regularly wrapped in a scarf, concluded the night's many moving speeches that called for societal change. Inarritu said he prays his native country finds "a government we deserve" and that immigrants to the U.S. "can be treated with the same dignity and the respect of the ones who came before and (built) this incredible immigrant nation."

The ceremony, hosted by Tony Award veteran Neil Patrick Harris, was heavy on song-and-dance to near-Grammy levels, perhaps headlined by Lady Gaga lavishly performing "The Hills

are Alive" from "The Sound of Music" with Julie Andrews looking on.

The awards that overwhelmingly went to less-seen independent films, were spread around. All eight of the best-picture nominees won awards, including Eddie Redmayne for best actor for his technically nuanced performance as Stephen Hawking in "The Theory of Everything."

"Please know this that I am fully aware that I am a lucky, lucky man," said Redmayne. "This belongs to all of the people around the world battling ALS."

All of Sunday's acting winners were first-timers, including best actress winner Julianne Moore, who won for her performance as an academic with early onset Alzheimer's in "Still Alice."

"I read an article that said that winning an Oscar could lead to living five years longer," said Moore. "If that's true, I'd really like to thank the academy because my husband is young than me."

Wes Anderson's "The Grand Budapest Hotel" was honored for its hand-made craft; "Whiplash" for its pulsating pacing and J.K. Simmons' drill-sergeant jazz instructor; "Boyhood" for Patricia Arquette's moving mother; "American Sniper" for its war film sound editing; "The Imitation Game" for adapted screenplay; and "Selma" for Common and John Legend's best song.

Harris gave the Academy Awards a cheery tone that sought to celebrate Hollywood, while also slyly parodying it. "Tonight we honor Hollywood's best and whitest — I mean brightest," he began the night, alluding to the much-discussed lack of diversity in this year's all-white acting nominees.

It was the first salvo in a night that often reverberated with heartfelt calls for change.

"To every woman who gave birth, to every taxpayer and citizen of this nation," said Arquette. "We have fought for everybody else's equal rights. It's our time to have wage equality once for all. And equal rights for women in the United States of America."

Cheers erupted throughout the Dolby, perhaps the loudest coming from a fellow supporting-actress nominee who Arquette bested: Meryl Streep. "Made my night," Streep told Arquette backstage.

Tears streamed down the face of David Oyelowo, who played the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in "Selma" and was famously left out of the best actor nominees, during the rousing performance of the song "Glory" from the film. Immediately afterward, Common and Legend accepted the best song Oscar with a speech that drew a standing ovation.

"We wrote this song for a film that was based on events that took place 50 years ago," said Legend. "We say that 'Selma' is now, because the struggle for justice is right now. We know that the voting rights act that they fought for 50 years ago is being compromised right now in this country today. We know that right now the struggle for freedom and justice where we live in the most incarcerated country in the world."

Graham Moore also moved the star-studded audience in his acceptance speech for best adapted screenplay for his "The Imitation Game" script. Moore said when he was 16 years old he tried to kill himself.

"Stay weird, stay different," he said.

Wes Anderson's "The Grand Budapest Hotel," a European caper released in March, when many awards contenders were still shooting, tied for the most Oscars with "Birdman." The academy awarded Anderson's latest confection with awards for production design, score, costume design and makeup and styling.

"Wes, you genius," said score winner Alexandre Desplat. "This is good."

The night's first Oscar went to Simmons, a career character actor widely acclaimed for one of his biggest parts: a drill sergeant of a jazz instructor in the indie "Whiplash." Simmons fittingly accepted his supporting acting Oscar with some straightforward advice, urging: "Call your mom. Call your dad."

Most of Sunday's early awards went as expected, though Disney's "Big Hero 6" pulled off something of an upset in the best animated feature category, besting DreamWorks' favored "How to Train Your Dragon 2."

The Mexican cinematographer Emmanuel "Chivo" Lubezki became the first to win best cinematography twice in a row. After last year winning for the lengthy shots of the space adventure "Gravity," he won for the stretched out takes of "Birdman."

"It sounds like a nightmare," Lubezki said backstage, recalling on his first impression of Inarritu's plans to shoot it as if in one shot. "There was no book on it. It was like an experiment."

The black-and-white Polish film "Ida" took best foreign language film, marking the first such win for Poland despite a rich cinema history. Director Pawel Pawlikowski charmed the audience with a bemused acceptance speech that ran drastically over his allotted time.

Pawlikowski remarked on having made a quiet film of contemplation about withdrawing from the world, "and here we are at the epicenter of noise and attention. It's fantastic. Life is full of surprises."

Several of this year's biggest box-office hit nominees — Clint Eastwood's Iraq war drama "American Sniper" and Christopher Nolan's sci-fi epic "Interstellar" — had to settle for single wins in technical categories. "Interstellar" won for visual effects, while "American Sniper" — far and away the most widely seen of the best-picture nominee — took the best sound editing award.

The Edward Snowden documentary "Citizenfour," in which Laura Poitras captured Snowden in the midst of leaking National Security Agency documents, won best documentary.

"The disclosures that Edward Snowden reveals don't only expose a threat to our privacy but to our democracy itself," said Poitras, accepting the Oscar. "When the most important decisions being made affecting all of us are made in secret, we lose our ability to check the powers that control."

Harris' opening quickly segued into a song-and-dance routine that celebrated a love for movies, complete with a villain to his sunny outlook in Jack Black. The comedian jumped on stage to counter that Hollywood movies weren't so fabulous: "Opening with lots of zeroes, all we get is superheroes."

"After 'Fifty Shades of Grey,'" Black added, referring to the weekend's top box office draw, "they'll all have leather whips."

Harris struck a chipper tone, while slyly mocking the Oscars or parodying Michael Keaton's half-naked scene in "Birdman."

The \$160,000 gift bags for attendees, Harris said, came with "an armored car ride to safety when the revolution comes." The performance by Andy Samberg's Lonely Island of the Oscar-nominated song "Everything Is Awesome" from "The Lego Movie," let some live out their Oscar dreams, handing out golden Lego statuettes to Oprah Winfrey and Steve Carell.

Hard showers fell on the red carpet as guests arrived at the ceremony, as workers dispensed pink towels for soggy celebrities. One former Oscar nominee, Viola Davis, said on her way into the ceremony that Hollywood's diversity problems run deeper than the Oscars.

"You have to greenlight more stories that include people of color," said Davis, asked about how to improve diversity in Hollywood. "You can't get nominated for anything you're not in."

LIST OF WINNERS:

Complete list of winners at Sunday's 87th annual Academy Awards presented by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Best picture: "Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)."

Actor: Eddie Redmayne, "The Theory of Everything."

Actress: Julianne Moore, "Still Alice."

Supporting actor: J.K. Simmons, "Whiplash."

Supporting actress: Patricia Arquette, "Boyhood."

Directing: Alejandro G. Inarritu, "Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)."

Foreign language film: "Ida."

Adapted screenplay: Graham Moore, "The Imitation Game."

Original screenplay: Alejandro G. Inarritu, Nicolas Giacobone, Alexander Dinelaris Jr. and Armando Bo, "Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)."

Animated feature film: "Big Hero 6."

Production design: "The Grand Budapest Hotel."

Cinematography: "Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)."

Sound mixing: "Whiplash."

Sound editing: "American Sniper."

Original score: "The Grand Budapest Hotel."

Original song: "Glory" from "Selma."

Costume design: "The Grand Budapest Hotel."

Documentary feature: "CitizenFour."

Documentary (short subject): "Crisis Hotline: Veterans Press 1."

Film editing: "Whiplash."

Makeup and hairstyling: "The Grand Budapest Hotel."

Animated short film: "Feast."

Live action short film: "The Phone Call."

Visual effects: "Interstellar."
