

Spotlight On... Montages

In attempts to keep the length down to a reasonable amount (showing clips of the 10 films nominated for best picture would seem like it would go on longer than the typical 3-4 hour event), there have been a few strategies put in place for the Academy Awards. First of all, the nominees for best song will not be performed live by the artists. Instead, audiences will be treated to (drumroll, please)... yet another in an array of **MONTAGES**. A short piece from each of each song will be presented throughout the evening with scenes from their respective movie. I don't even recall the nominations for best song nor score so, as a viewer, it may be for the best. However, how about the songwriters of the nominated pieces?

Another attempt to limit the time is a change in the acceptance speeches. Each nominee is being asked to provide two speeches: one signifying what winning the award means to them. The second is the traditional laundry list of thank you notes which will be actually delivered back stage shown later via internet. I guess there will be no way that someone can forget to thank Fido plus cut down on the emotional impact that may not be as important to the average at home viewer (especially as the evening/early morning wears on).

So... what do you think about the two changes to the gala event? Should the Best Original Song nominees be allowed their moment in the spotlight? Should the winners be given stipulations on when and what to say? Or is it just the show's producers way of getting all the Best Picture nominees in there? I'd add a poll but I think there are too many possible responses so I'll let the comments speak for themselves.

The Next Karate Kid After The Last Next Karate Kid

Yep, you guessed it... ANOTHER REMAKE that does not need remade. Why, oh why can't people be ORIGINAL!?!? I did enjoy the first two *Karate Kid* movies... they went downhill after that. I wonder if Hilary Swank holds her turn as *The Next Karate Kid* in high regard.

I guess there are changes in the plot line: Work causes a single mother to move to China with her young son; in his new home, the boy embraces kung fu, taught to him by a master. Well.. single mother forced to move, kid embraces martial arts taught by a master. The fact that the master is changed to Chinese and not Japanese changes little. The fact that the stage goes to the Orient in the first movie instead of the sequel... well, maybe we will be saved from a sequel.

Looking at the cast list, I was shocked to see Jaden Smith (son of Will and Jada Pinkett-Smith) at the top of the list. I then looked at the creative geniuses behind the endeavor. Imagine my astonishment when I saw both of the Smiths listed as two of the **FIVE PRODUCERS?! Really... do we need 5 producers to make a remake of a 25 year old movie? Oh... and if you have been wondering what has happened to the long-forgotten (at least by me) Jackie Chan [look no further](#).**

So, lets see if Hollywood can bring us any good movies for the summer.

A Movie Suggestion For An Upcoming Date Night

Prior to viewing *Sherlock Holmes* amongst all the needless ads, I did see a trailer for a movie that is definitely high on my list for viewing. Although NOTHING can take away the comedic genius which he brings to his portrayal of Michael Scott, Steve Carrel has made some great movies as well. Some of my favorites: *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Evan Almighty* (I actually enjoyed it more than its predecessor, *Bruce Almighty*), and the updated *Get Smart*. This spring, he will be paired with his female counterpart, Tina Fey in the new movie *Date Night*. Sure to be a hilarious movie coming April 9.

And The Nominees Are...

This morning, the Academy Award nominations were announced.

The big news this year: the expansion of the Best Picture Category from 5 nods to 10. As the list proves, this was done in order to pay homage to not only the “good” films but also to the popular films that everyday joes are likely to have seen. There is also another first among the nominees which I will get to.

And AWAAAAAY We Go

Best Actress In A Supporting Role:

- Penelope Cruz (*Nine*)
- Vera Farmiga (*Up in the Air*)
- Maggie Gyllenhaal (*Crazy Heart*)
- Anna Kendrick (*Up in the Air*)
- Mo’Nique (*Precious: Based on the Novel ‘Push’ by Sapphire*)

Best Actor In A Supporting Role:

- Matt Damon (*Invictus*)
- Woody Harrelson (*The Messenger* not for the other big WH movie of the year: *Zombieland*)
- Christopher Plummer (*The Last Station*)
- Stanley Tucci (*The Lovely Bones*)
- Christoph Waltz (*Inglourious Basterds*)

Best Actress In A Leading Role:

- Sandra Bullock (*The Blind Side*... the sweetheart of this year’s list)
- Helen Mirren (*The Last Station*)
- Carey Mulligan (*An Education*)

- Gabourey Sidibe (*Precious...*, the Dark horse in this race)
- Meryl Streep (*Julie/Julia...* enough said)

Best Actor In A Leading Role:

- Jeff Bridges (*Crazy Heart*)
- George Clooney (*Up in the Air...* speculation of a Bridges/Clooney battle)
- Colin Firth (*A Single Man*)
- Morgan Freeman (*Invictus...* portrayals of historical figures, hmm)
- Jeremy Renner (*The Hurt Locker*)

Best Animated Feature:

- *Coraline* (Henry Selick, director)
- *Fantastic Mr. Fox* (Wes Anderson)
- *The Princess and the Frog* (John Musker and Ron Clements... Disney's first classic animation feature since the Pixar revolution)
- *The Secret of Kells* (Tomm Moore)
- *Up* (Pete Docter... Disney/Pixar's best to date)

Best Director:

- James Cameron (*Avatar*)
- Kathryn Bigelow (*The Hurt Locker...* Mr. Cameron's ex-wife the first time a former couple has ever been nominated for the award... she could also come off as the first female Best Director winner)
- Quentin Tarantino (*Inglourious Basterds*)
- Lee Daniels (*Precious...*)
- Jason Reitman (*Up in the Air*)

Best Picture:

- *Avatar* (James Cameron and Jon Landau, Producers)
- *The Blind Side* (Nominees to be determined? Don't we know who produced it?)
- *District 9* (Peter Jackson and Carolynne Cunningham,

Producers)

- *An Education* (Finola Dwyer and Amanda Posey, Producers)
- *The Hurt Locker* (Nominees to be determined?)
- *Inglourious Basterds* (Lawrence Bender, Producer)
- *Precious...* (Lee Daniels, Sarah Siegel-Magness, and Gary Magness, Producers)
- *A Serious Man* (Joel Coen and Ethan Coen, Producers)
- *Up* (Jonas Rivera, Producer)
- *Up in the Air* (Daniel Dubiecki, Ivan Reitman, and Jason Reitman, Producers)

There you have them. The MAJOR nominees for this years Oscar parties. Grab your ballots, make your choices, and watch ABC on March 7th when Alec Baldwin and Steve Martin co-host the 81st (or is it 82nd... conflicting details) Annual Academy Awards. Co-hosts? For the rest of the nominees, check them out at abc.com

Final Tally:

- *Avatar* and *The Hurt Locker* tied with 9 nods apiece
- *Inglourious Basterds* with 8
- *Precious* and *Up in the Air* with 6
- *Up* received 4 nominations

IT

Last Saturday night, because the temperature wasn't too bad, we went for an evening family walk and took the kids to Walgreens for milk. Even at just 6:00, it was already completely dark outside, and a dense fog was starting to settle in, so Hubby and I decided it was a perfect night to watch a scary movie. The only thing is that we watch A LOT of horror movies, and most of them just aren't scary anymore.

Call it desensitization to the horror, or maybe it's the fact that we have 4 kids and it's difficult to find something scarier than say, 3 of them being wide awake at midnight or someone taking off their dirty diaper and making a mess with it. But whatever the reason, it's hard to find a movie that will actually scare either of us.

While we were trying to choose a suitable scary movie, we came across Stephen King's IT. My husband was skeptical, but I was certain it would be terrifying, so we gave it a try. And I was right, well partially right anyway – the first time Pennywise the horror clown was shown on the screen, it was so creepily done that my husband grabbed ME and not the other way around – which was only actually because I couldn't even watch it; it was so scary! Unfortunatley, my husband was no longer scared once Pennywise began to talk, but I was creeped out by the entire movie... well, at least until the end, when the big showdown scene completely disappointed me and took away my fear – that's all I'll say, don't want to spoil it if you haven't seen IT.



I like to research movies that I watch; I look them up on imdb.com to see if I'm correct when I recognize actors from other movies. When I looked up IT, I came across information that pointed to the theatrical release of an IT remake in the near future – I'm there!!

I think I might want to read Stephen King's IT the novel first

before I see the remake maybe; I've been thinking about what to read after I finish the 2nd Harry Potter book, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. It's going kind of slowly for me; I think I'm ready for a break from Hogwarts – some Stephen King should do the trick! Then again, maybe not, I've been having enough trouble sleeping as it is – matter of fact, I go in for a sleep study later today. That's all I need is to get my sleep problems under control and then give myself nightmares by reading scary books... But anyway, wish me luck – I'm a little nervous about the study (I don't know what I do in my sleep, and I don't know how I feel about **strangers** knowing what I do when I sleep – that's kind of personal! Plus I'm going to miss my family like crazy and worry about them. I hate sleeping in hospitals, but at least in the past, I've had a newborn baby to cuddle!).

[Click here](#) if you want to do more reading about the IT remake – but keep in mind that this article complains about the same spoiler at the end of IT that I hated, so if you don't want to know what happens, don't read it! And one more thing... I thought Tim Curry was just excellent in IT. He was unrecognizable, which was probably part of the charm!

In Development?

My sister just informed me of some trailers she just saw on youtube. Some fake and others I knew about already. The reboot of *A Nightmare on Elm Street* is due this Spring. I had to laugh when she swore that she saw an official preview for *Jaws V*. Even more telling was the fact that she said that Roy Scheider and Richard Dreyfuss were going to reprise their characters from the original. Hilarious, because Sheriff Brody was killed sometime between *Jaws 2* and *Jaws 3-D*. And

once again, following the debacle that was *Jaws: The Revenge* (tagline: "This time, it's personal."), I ask: **WHY?!** Especially when it's been a good 25 years since the last one.

Finally, [Spider-Man 4](#) is about to get underway. Something very strange: after only 3 films in the last decade, we are getting a re-haul of the franchise. A new director is taking over which will probably mean a new cast. But why reintroduce the series when it has only been a few years since the last film was released. While by far the worst of the trilogy, *Spider-Man 3* still had moments of fun and it did have a lot to live up to following the phenomenal second installment.

Harry Potter – Reading Vs. Watching

Now that I've read the first installment in the Harry Potter series, I decided to watch the movie make the story come to life. I wasn't disappointed, but I much prefer the book – the movie leaves out a lot of details. It was obvious that was going to happen otherwise the movie would be about 12 hours long, but the excluded details were enough to make me prefer the book to the movie. Here is a run-down of thoughts I had while enjoying the movie last night:

- Did the beginning of the movie portray Professor McGonagall as a cat as she is in the book? I didn't notice it, but I also came into the movie a minute or two late due to an unplanned (though pleasant!) phone conversation. I would have liked to see her as a cat.
- I really liked seeing how the train station came to life, and especially how exactly they found platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$!
- Did the movie explain the resident ghosts of Hogwarts? I noticed lack of explanation for other characters as well – especially Neville! – but as stated before, it's a long movie, so maybe it was out of necessity that they had to cut some descriptions that were present in the book.
- The movie is well cast and directed. Everything is just like I pictured from the book, and that's a good thing. I had considered waiting to watch any of the Potter movies until I was finished reading the series for fear that movie would ruin my vision of Hogwarts, but I'm glad I didn't wait; the movie was very enjoyable. I was pleased to see that creatures like the Gringotts bank goblins, for example, looked just like the

sketches in the book which also helped to make my expectations match the movie.

- Visually, the invading troll was cool, although its extreme smelliness was completely downplayed in the movie – one of the things I wish was not.
- This movie would be so cool in 3D!!
- The character Hagrid gained about 50 IQ points for the movie. He was likable, but reads dumber than he acted in the movie. I think I would have liked to see him more like he was in the book.
- The movie is a good representation of the book brought to life, but how is it to watch it on its own if you haven't read the book? I will talk to my husband about this because he did just that. And for me – the movie almost went too fast for me. I saw events happen in minutes that in real time, took me weeks to read about! But then again, there are over 300 pages being shown in under 3 hours.
- The character Severus Snape stood out as being very well cast – I'm not remembering a very vivid depiction of him in the book, and the movie did not disappoint in this regard.

FOLLOWING MIGHT BE SPOILERS – YOU MIGHT NOT WANT TO READ ANY FURTHER IF YOU HAVEN'T SEEN OR READ HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE

- Quirrell didn't seem to be stuttering much in the movie, which brings me to a minor complaint that I have about both the book and the movie. I felt that Professor's Quirrell's character was not elaborated upon enough to fully give the audience the big surprise ending. Sometimes I would even get Quirrell mixed up with Filch (while reading the book anyway), but I guess that could also be a side effect of reading while falling asleep!

- Did I miss something, or does neither the book nor the movie elaborate upon why Harry's scar hurts when he see Snape?

Overall, a very enjoyable movie-watching experience! Fun for everyone – the kids weren't scared by it and enjoyed it, and my husband liked it so much that he's been asking me when I'm going to finish the 2nd book because he wants to see the 2nd movie!

The Abyss

It took two nights, but we finally made it through the sci-fi 80's thriller, [The Abyss](#). What is with me and all the science fiction lately? Not usually my cup of tea; I guess I've just been enjoying a change of scenery. One reason for wanting to watch the Abyss is that I was very impressed by director / writer James Cameron's latest movie, Avatar. I enjoyed the movie in a little theater with old fashioned sound equipment, and I also got to catch it at a larger theater with awesome sound and in 3D – I REALLY enjoyed it! That doesn't mean I'm a James Cameron fan, however, and you couldn't pay me to sit through Titanic, whose concept I always thought sold out the disaster itself. I mean, for characters in the movie, there were over 2200 real Titanic passengers from which to choose – why spend millions of dollars to bring to life fictionalized accounts of such a horrible tragedy?

But back to The Abyss, another James Cameron water movie... Overall, this winner of the 1990 Oscar for visual effects was enjoyable, but I don't even know if I can say this is a watch-again-er for me. Reading the trivia on imdb.com about how the movie was filmed was almost more interesting than the movie itself, which tells the story of a group of oil workers

who are hired to go on a dive search for a missing nuclear sub. Enter some Navy SEALs and a mysterious alien species, and you have enough action for a 138 minute movie. All of the diving and talk of the oceanic pressure kinda got to me after awhile; I don't think scuba diving is something I'm ever interested in doing. But I enjoyed the story and especially the visual effects, and without risking spoiling anything, let's just say that in typical 80's fashion, the plot was predictable. If you do happen to check this one out, or if it happens to be one of your old favorites, I highly recommend reading the trivia section on imdb.com to further your enjoyment.

A New Miracle

Since none of the channels I get are bothering to show the glorious original 1947 version this year, I decided to spend my nine dollars on the *Miracle of 34th Street* DVD. There is a treasure trove of added features including a very rare 1955 broadcast on the ["20th Century Fox Hour of Stars"](#) of yet another adaptation. I found it very well done for the limited 45 minute run time. There were of course deletions from the original but there was one scene that was in this adaptation that I saw for the first time on the stage: Mr. Sawyer giving his speech on the evils of myth at Susan's Progressive School.

There were also a few behind the scene stories that were very informative:

- The filming of the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade was the real McCoy filmed on Thanksgiving Day, 1946. This was the second parade given following its hiatus during WWII.

- Edmund Gwenn (who played Kris Kringle and won the Best Supporting Actor Oscar in the original) was Santa at the end of the parade.
- Many of the interior scenes for Macy's Department Store were actually filmed at the flagship store during the holiday season. WOW! Imagine the chaos that must have caused! An identical duplicate was recreated on a Hollywood sound stage in the event that some scenes needed to be redone.
- Both R.H. Macy and the Gimbel Brothers loved the film much to the delight of the filmmakers.
- The film was released in June, 1947. Fox did not want audiences thinking they were going to a film about the Christmas season in the summer so in its publicity campaign, scenes were carefully selected that would not draw attention to the fact. The risk paid off and "Miracle" became a hit that ran in theatres for an unheard of 6 month stand.

A holiday treasure that teaches everyone that "faith is believing in something when common sense tells us not to." Isn't that what Christmas is all about?

A Show And A Cop In A Mall

Before the curtain went up on night two of the play, I got to watch the hilarious escapades of *Paul Blart: Mall Cop*. The film finds officer wannabe and quite agile mall security man Paul Blart (Kevin James of "The King of Queens") up against a group of high-tech robbers on Black Friday. I must congratulate the writers of the piece for setting the action at the end of the busiest shopping day of the year... what a coup that would be! The bad guys take a number of hostages including the object of Paul's affection. The security officer takes it upon himself to not only defend and protect his mall but also rescue the hostages. Several laugh out loud moments abound. I also loved the use of 80s tunes throughout, including "I Can't Hold Back" by Survivor. I also found Paul's "Detroit Rock City" on Guitar Hero very entertaining. A hilarious movie that was a much more family oriented take on *Die Hard*.

Night two *It's a Wonderful Life* was great! Dan and Carla were up from Sandusky. After the show, Dan told me that I rivaled Lionel Barrymore (who originated the role in the classic movie). Quite a compliment from someone who watches the film annually. Over 100 people were in the audience so while only filling about a third of the seats, a great turnout. For some reason, I got more boos at curtain call that night one. And several audience members told me how evil my performance was.

After intermission, there was a drawing for a free ticket to a show next year (something that was forgotten Friday night... sorry). I could have sworn that the name ShelBY Shaffer was announced. However, two things are wrong with that. One, I don't think she could win since she is part of the show. Two, she did not sign up for the draw. The winner was Shelly

Shaffer (no relation).

So for a good time... check out *Paul Blart: Mall Cop* and come to one of the final four productions of *It's a Wonderful Life*. Incidentally, I did watch the last half hour of the movie after returning from the performance.