

## Predicting the 2013 Academy Award Nominees

Written by Mike Schulz

Thursday, 03 January 2013 12:44

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Will it be *Argo*'s year or *Lincoln*'s? Affleck's or not-Affleck's? Day-Lewis' or ... ?

Well, it's gonna be Day-Lewis'.

But before we can take stabs at guessing this year's Oscar winners, they have to be nominated first, so the following are my predictions – subject to immediate hand-wringing and eventual embarrassment – for the 2013 Academy Award nominations, which will be officially announced on Thursday, January 10. (The ceremony will take place on Sunday, February 24.)

### **Best Picture**

*Argo*

*Beasts of the Southern Wild*

*The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*

*Django Unchained*

*Les Misérables*

*Life of Pi*

*Lincoln*

*Moonrise Kingdom*

*Silver Linings Playbook*

*Zero Dark Thirty*

For the second year in a row, films hoping to make the Best Picture roster will need to score at least 5 percent of first-place rankings on voter ballots, with between five and 10 titles eventually composing the final lineup. But I swear: My prediction of the 10 titles above isn't a case of hedging my bets; I actually do think a full 10 will be cited this year, and even think there are four or five additional possibilities that shouldn't be underestimated.

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What do we know for sure? Well, based on their critical reception, precursor nominations, and public support – even if, because of their release platforms, some of them so far boast *limited* public support – I don't think anyone could make an argument for the exclusion of

*Argo*, *Les Mis*

*é*

*rables*, *Life of Pi*, *Lincoln*, *Silver Linings Playbook*,

or

*Zero Dark Thirty*.

(

*Les Mis*

' popularity, and reported strength within the industry, should handily trump the movie's more dismal reviews, of which there are

*plenty*

.)

*Django Unchained*

was wholly ignored by the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), but given its huge box office and five Golden Globe Award nominations, Quentin Tarantino's latest should easily make the cut. Actors were, of course, responsible for

*The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*

appearing among SAG's five nominees for Best Ensemble – considered by many the guild's Best Picture equivalent – and the Academy's actors' branch, specifically the

*elder*

members of the acting branch, will likely secure it placement here, too. And for spots nine and 10, I'm going with the critically adored summertime indies

*Beasts of the Southern Wild*

and

*Moonrise Kingdom*

, although those appear to be on far shakier ground. (With

*Beasts*

bypassed by the Globes and ineligible for the SAGs, it's nearly impossible to guess how it might land in the Oscar race, and while most people adore Wes Anderson's latest, will it be deemed too lightweight for such weighty recognition?)

But unlike with, say, the 2010 Best Picture race – the one that found room for *District 9* and *The Blind Side* –

it doesn't seem like there will have to be any unnecessary padding to get to 10 contenders this year; there are actually so

*many*

movies with passionate fan bases that a cutoff of 15 included titles wouldn't feel entirely inappropriate. So beyond the films listed above, be sure to keep a few others on your radar, among them the (mostly) well-regarded Paul Thomas Anderson experiment

*The Master*,

the end-of-life chamber drama

*Amour*

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, the tsunami-survival tale

*The Impossible*

, Robert Zemeckis' unexpectedly hard-hitting

*Flight*

, and even, in a potential bone thrown to Hollywood tentpoles,

*Skyfall*

. If it weren't a James Bond flick, wouldn't a movie boasting previous Oscar winners and nominees Judi Dench, Javier Bardem, Ralph Fiennes, and Albert Finney – and a previous Best Director winner in Sam Mendes – be immediately considered the

*pinnacle*

of Oscar bait?



### Best Director

Ben Affleck, *Argo*

Kathryn Bigelow, *Zero Dark Thirty*

Ang Lee, *Life of Pi*

David O. Russell, *Silver Linings Playbook*

Steven Spielberg, *Lincoln*

In all but a smattering of cases over the past few decades, you can, for this category, correctly predict a solid four out of five – or better – just by going with the five feature-film contenders for the Directors Guild of America (DGA) Awards. This year, those contenders are being announced on January 8, after this article has already been published. D'oh!

Yet guessing the DGA nominees is usually pretty simple if you just go with the five films most likely to receive Best Picture recognition, making the likeliest options for that lineup Affleck, Bigelow, Russell, Spielberg, and *Les Misérables*' Tom Hooper. I am not, however, at all convinced that Hooper will follow that potential nod with a thumb's-up from the Academy.

Despite his recent Oscar win for

*The King's*

*Speech*

most of the griping about

*Les Mis*

seems directed at its director and his alternately too-busy and too-claustrophobic approaches to

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his material; beyond the plaudits he's received for the decision to have his cast sing live, I'm not sensing much love for Hooper's

*other*

contributions to the project. Consequently, I'm going with the idea that Hooper's lack of a Globe nomination was less unexpected than prescient, and that Lee will usurp his spot on the final ballot.

Don't imagine, though, that this year's options are narrowed down solely to those six helmers, as the directors' branch of the Academy, bless 'em, is the group that routinely delivers the Oscar races' biggest shockers. (Fernando Meirelles for *City of God*? Mike Leigh for *Vera Drake* ? Paul Greengrass for

*United 93*

? Who woulda thunk it?) To be sure, some of the other possibilities wouldn't be all that shocking; Tarantino got a Globe nod for

*Django Unchained*

, probably at the un-nominated Russell's expense, and

*The Master*

's

Anderson was named Best Director by the (frequently, seemingly) influential Los Angeles Film Critics (LAFC) Association. But outside-the-box alternatives can be found all over the place:

Anderson for

*Moonrise Kingdom*,

Benh Zeitlin for

*Beasts of the Southern Wild*

, Michael Haneke for

*Amour*

, Juan Antonio Bayona for

*The Impossible*

... . So you'd be right to anticipate a surprise in this category, just so long as that surprise isn't Christopher Nolan for

*The Dark Knight Rises*

. You do realize it's time again for Nolan's every-other-year Best Director dissing, don't you?



### Best Actor

Bradley Cooper, *Silver Linings Playbook*

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Daniel Day-Lewis, *Lincoln*

John Hawkes, *The Sessions*

Hugh Jackman, *Les Misérables*

Denzel Washington, *Flight*

I could easily waste your time by composing a list of outside possibilities for Best Actor nods: the Globe-nominated Richard Gere for *Arbitrage* and Jack Black for *Bernie*; French acting legend Jean-Louis Trintignant for

*Amour*

; ensemble anchors Ben Affleck for

*Argo*

and Jamie Foxx for

*Django Unchained*

. (Well, look at that. I just

*did*

waste your time.) But as we're annually reminded, the surest bets in the acting categories are those performers who score a trifecta of recognition from the Globes, SAG, and Critics' Choice Awards (CCA), and this year, there are exactly five leading-actor contenders who've done so: Cooper, Day-Lewis, Hawkes, Jackman, and Washington. I guess we're good to go, huh?

And yet there is one other actor who could very possibly sneak into the lineup ... not that he likely cares all that much. When *The Master* debuted this September, it seemed inconceivable, even by those who didn't like the film, that star Joaquin Phoenix wouldn't be recognized for his Method-like fearlessness and physical and emotional intensity; the LAFC obviously admired his work when the organization awarded him its Best Actor prize last month. And then came the

"We should've seen

*that coming...*" media frenzy

when Phoenix, in

*Intervie*

*w* magazine, had the gall to suggest that the Oscars aren't necessarily life's be-all and end-all. ("I'm just

saying that I think it's bullshit" is one of his more choice sound bites.) Add to this hullabaloo

voters' likely perception – in the wake of the years-long performance-art commitment that resulted in

*I'm Still Here* –

that Phoenix is crazy as well as rude, and a vote for the actor would actually be a pretty brave

statement to make... and just how often in Oscar history have Academy members proven

themselves to be

*brave*

? If Phoenix usurps anyone's slot in the Best Actor race, it'll likely be Jackman's, but the man was ignored by SAG, and it looks like an Oscar shunning will follow.

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### Best Actress

Jessica Chastain, *Zero Dark Thirty*

Jennifer Lawrence, *Silver Linings Playbook*

Emmanuelle Riva, *Amour*

Quvenzhané Wallis, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*

Naomi Watts, *The Impossible*

As happens nearly every year, Academy Awards prognosticators entered the season with the standard cry that the field of potential Best Actress contenders was weak. As also happens nearly every year, we now find ourselves with a plethora of contenders, and at present, there are only two of them – the Globe-, SAG-, and CCA-cited Chastain and Lawrence – that I think are sure-fire nominees. I am, however, also feeling mostly confident about previous nominee Watts' chances here, as she also went a perfect three-for-three in the pre-Oscar precursors. The film's somewhat middling critical reception makes me a bit leery, but the performer has vocal industry support (including a letter of advocacy, in a recent *Entertainment Weekly*, by previous Best Actress champ Reese Witherspoon), and Watts has missed enough Oscar opportunities in the past – for *Mulholland Dr.*, *King Kong*, *Fair Game* ... – to make her seem not just deserving but due.

One other possibility – *Rust & Bone's* Marion Cotillard – received Globe, SAG, and CCA recognition for Best Actress, and that means that even though her vehicle is a French-language art film that few have seen, I should probably be considering Cotillard more strongly than I am. She does, after all, play a woman who loses her legs in a horrific accident (Oscar bait) and spends a goodly portion of the movie naked (heterosexual-male-voter Oscar bait). But if *The Master* is disliked by many, *Rust & Bone* is *re-e-ally* disliked by many, and nearly every year, one performer who earns the precursor trifecta gets left out of the Oscar race. (Last year, it actually happened to *two* :

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*J. Edgar*

's Leonardo DiCaprio and

*We Need to Talk About Kevin*

's Tilda Swinton.) For now, I'm thinking the divisiveness of Cotillard's film will make her the unlucky snub-ee this year, with

*Amour*

's 85-year-old Riva – like Joaquin Phoenix, a CCA nominee and LAFC victor – instead filling the category's French-language-performance slot. And for nominee five, let's bookend Riya's potential oldest-Best-Actress-nominee-ever with Wallis' potential

youngest-Best-Actress-nominee-ever. There are plenty of additional choices if voters want to go with a more mature option than nine-year-old Wallis, principally the SAG- and Globe-nominated Helen Mirren for

*Hitchcock*

, but also the Globe-cited Judi Dench for

*The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*,

Rachel Weisz for

*The Deep Blue Sea*

, Maggie Smith for

*Quartet*

, and eternal option Meryl Streep for

*Hope Springs*

. I'm sorry, though: Isn't the potential pairing of contenders Riva and Wallis just too damned adorable to resist?



### **Best Supporting Actor**

Alan Arkin, *Argo*

Robert De Niro, *Silver Linings Playbook*

Philip Seymour Hoffman, *The Master*

Tommy Lee Jones, *Lincoln*

Ewan McGregor, *The Impossible*

In truth, because it's an awfully kick-ass lineup, I should probably be going with the same five performers who netted SAG nominations: Arkin, De Niro, Hoffman, Jones, and *Skyfall*'s Javier Bardem. Yet while that would seem, and would  
*be*

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, a mad-cool assemblage of talent, there are a couple of statistics preventing me from being fully committed to the idea: (1) The last time an acting category was composed, as this one would be, entirely of previous Oscar nominees happened with Best Actress way back in 1995, and (2) the last time an acting category was composed, as this one would be, entirely of previous Oscar

*winner*

was

*never*

. Going with the odds, then, who among SAG's cited quintet gets left out?

Hoffman and Jones, who've shared a pretty even split of prizes among film-critics awards this season, seem totally safe. Like those actors, Arkin made a precursor-nomination three-peat, so he appears on solid ground, though it could be argued that he gives much the same (delightful) performance in *Argo* that he did in *Little Miss Sunshine* and, you know, most everything *else* he's appeared in over the years. De Niro was denied a Globe nomination, but that might just be the effect of residual resentment following his controversial, mildly insulting Lifetime Achievement Award speech at the organization's 2011 soiree. My prediction is that while it would be great for the Academy to finally recognize a performer's juicy turn as a James Bond villain, Bardem might still seem too cartoonish an option, and his character too nefarious for current Academy tastes. (Last year, each of the 20 contenders in the acting categories – to the possible disappointment of Albert Brooks, Michael Fassbender, and Tilda Swinton – played likable, sympathetic characters.) Other possibilities range from

*Django Unchained*

's Globe

nominees Christoph Waltz and Leonardo DiCaprio to a quartet of options that haven't gained much precursor traction:

*Beasts of the Southern Wild*

's Dwight Henry,

*Django*

's Samuel L. Jackson,

*Magic Mike*

's Matthew McConaughey, and

*Les Mis*

*ables*

*ables*

' Eddie Redmayne. Instead, though, I'm going out on a limb with McGregor, whose name – like last year's nominees Gary Oldman and Max von Sydow – has been nowhere to be found in the Globe, SAG, and CCA races, but who is earning raves for his moving

*Impossible*

portrayal, appears incredibly well-liked in Hollywood, and has certainly paid his dues with no Academy recognition to date. Personally, I'm still waiting for McGregor to receive a way-belated nomination for

*Moulin Rouge*,

but hey, this would be nice, too.



### **Best Supporting Actress**

Ann Dowd, *Compliance*

Sally Field, *Lincoln*

Anne Hathaway, *Les Misérables*

Helen Hunt, *The Sessions*

Maggie Smith, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*

Like the Supporting Actor race, this year's Best Supporting Actress category could be handily filled with former Oscar nominees and winners, and three of them – victors Field and Hunt, and inevitable victor Hathaway – are assured of placement here. Despite receiving no Globe nod for *Marigold Hotel* (though she was cited for both *Quartet* and PBS' *Downton Abbey*), I'm thinking you can add the SAG-lauded Smith to that trio; if her film is, indeed, going to find its way to the Best Picture race, it needs

*some*

acknowledgment in another category, and Smith, in that regard, is the film's most likely chance at additional recognition. And included among this year's Globe and SAG contenders, to the considerable surprise of many, was Nicole Kidman for her reportedly flashy turn in Lee Daniels' critically trashed

*The Paperboy* –

though I'm hesitant to predict her, considering that by "reportedly flashy turn" I mean "role in which she urinates on Zac Efron." Couldn't Kidman's inclusion here cause more than a few elderly Academy voters to immediately drop dead?

A smart guess for choice number five would definitely be *The Master's* Amy Adams, given her Globe and CCA nods, her LAFC prize, and a career that's already netted her three Supporting Actress nominations over the past seven years. There is, however, that anti-

*Master*

bias to contend with, and that anti-villain bias (despite Adams' portrayal transcending simple villainy), and there are far more empathetic possibilities, albeit unlikely ones, in

*Skyfall*

's Judi Dench,

*Silver Linings Playbook*

's Jacki Weaver, and

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*Les Mis*

*é*

*rables*

' Samantha Barks. Every Oscar race, though, deserves a good, triumph-of-the-underdog story, and this year, I think that story will be Dowd's. Mostly unfamiliar by name, but recognizable from decades of fine work in movies and TV, Dowd received raves for the little-seen indie

*Compliance*

, even securing a CCA nod and Supporting Actress win from the National Board of Review. But what, I think, will land the performer placement here is the widely reported news of her financing an Oscar campaign with \$13,000 of her own cash, as meager box-office receipts prevented the film's studio, Magnolia Pictures, from sending screeners to voters. A nomination for Dowd would be perceived as both career recognition and an approving nod at the performer's tenacity, and would no doubt make everyone feel great ... except for Kidman and Adams, of course.



### **Best Original Screenplay**

*Amour*, Michael Haneke

*Django Unchained*, Quentin Tarantino

*The Master*, Paul Thomas Anderson

*Moonrise Kingdom*, Wes Anderson, Roman Coppola

*Zero Dark Thirty*, Mark Boal

With the nominations for this year's Writers Guild of America Awards not yet announced, I'm flying somewhat blind here. But I also think the assemblage above is an entirely plausible lineup of contenders, with all but *Amour* appearing to be completely safe bets. If voters do find Haneke's meditative opus a bit too severe for their tastes – even though the writing categories are generally the places where bleakness isn't necessarily a deal-breaker – be on the lookout especially for Rian Johnson's *Looper*, Martin McDonagh's *Seven*

*ven Psychopaths*

, and John Gatlin's

*Flight*

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### Best Adapted Screenplay

*Argo*, Chris Terrio

*Beasts of the Southern Wild*, Lucy Alibar, Benh Zeitlin

*Life of Pi*, David Magee

*Lincoln*, Tony Kushner

*Silver Linings Playbook*, David O. Russell

Again, I consider four out of five of these predictions mighty solid, with Alibar's and Zeitlin's script the only one I'm hesitant about backing. (Complaints about

*Life of Pi*

's occasionally intrusive flashback narrative, however, could get in the way of the film's inclusion here.) If

*Beasts*

proves to be a non-starter with the Academy, plan on its nomination instead going to Ol Parker's

*The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, *The Sessions*

' Ben Lewin,

*Anna Karenina*

's Tom Stoppard, or

*The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

's

Stephen Chbosky – or, if the writing branch really,

*really*

loves the film,

*Les Mis*

*é*

*rables*'

William Nicholson. But don't bet your francs on it.



### Best Animated Feature

*Brave*

*Frankenweenie*

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*The Painting*

*ParaNorman*

*Wreck-It Ralph*

In a perfect world, at least *my* perfect world, *ParaNorman* would walk off with this Oscar. As it stands, it's the title here that I'm least comfortable in predicting, with

*Rise of the Guardians*

and a whole gaggle of mostly unknown, hand-drawn European works (among them

*The Painting*

) ready to swoop in

à

*la*

last year's nominees

*A Cat in Paris*

and

*Chico & Rita*

. Still, my enormous affection for

*ParaNorman*

and its numerous Animated Feature wins from critics groups are keeping me put, despite it being a decision I'll likely regret.

### Best Original Song

"For You," *Act of Valor*

"From Here to the Moon and Back," *Joyful Noise*

"Learn Me Right," *Brave*

"Skyfall," *Skyfall*

"Suddenly," *Les Misérables*

Last year, I went an embarrassing zero-for-two with my predictions in this category, so you really shouldn't listen to me here. (Then again, I don't know anyone who predicted that there would *be* only two nominees in this category last year.) So throwing my hands in the air, I'm going with a surprisingly awesome James Bond number, the familiar crooning of Keith Urban and Dolly Parton, yet another Pixar ditty, and the only newly composed song in *Les*

*Mis*

which is also, hands down, the worst song in the movie. Expect a one-out-of-five finish for me. ...

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### As for the other categories ...



#### **Best Foreign-Language Film**

*Amour* (Austria)

*The Intouchables* (France)

*No* (Chile)

*A Royal Affair* (Denmark)

*War Witch* (Canada)

#### **Best Documentary Feature**

*The Gatekeepers*

*The House I Live in*

*How to Survive a Plague*

*Mea Maxima Culpa: Silence in the House of God*

*Searching for Sugar Man*

#### **Best Original Score**

*Anna Karenina*

*Argo*

*Life of Pi*

*Lincoln*

*Zero Dark Thirty*

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### **Best Cinematography**

*Life of Pi*

*Lincoln*

*The Master*

*Skyfall*

*Zero Dark Thirty*

### **Best Film Editing**

*Argo*

*Life of Pi*

*Lincoln*

*Silver Linings Playbook*

*Zero Dark Thirty*

### **Best Production Design**

*Anna Karenina*

*Django Unchained*

*The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*

*Les Misérables*

*Lincoln*

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### **Best Costume Design**

*Anna Karenina*

*Hitchcock*

*Les Misérables*

*Lincoln*

*A Royal Affair*

### **Best Sound Editing**

*The Dark Knight Rises*

*The Impossible*

*Life of Pi*

*Skyfall*

*Zero Dark Thirty*

### **Best Sound Mixing**

*The Dark Knight Rises*

*Les Misérables*

*Life of Pi*

*Skyfall*

*Zero Dark Thirty*

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~~The Way, Way Back~~ *The Way, Way Back*