

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

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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.

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

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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

, 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*

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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 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

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... . 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*

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

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when Phoenix, in

w zine, 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.

*Intervie
maga*



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.

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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

:

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?

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Best Actor: Tom Hanks in *The Way, Way Back*

Best Actress: Carey Mulligan in *Only Lovers Left Alive*

Best Supporting Actor: Matt Damon in *The Way, Way Back*

Best Supporting Actress: Carey Mulligan in *Only Lovers Left Alive*

Best Foreign Language Film
The Way, Way Back

Best Cinematography
The Way, Way Back

Best Music
The Way, Way Back

Best Edited
The Way, Way Back