



Headlight



Written by the students of Marblehead High School for our school and community

The Oscar Issue

www.mhsheadlight.weebly.com

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Editor's Welcome

Alex Kerai, Senior
Editor-in-Chief

During my freshman year, and my first year on the Headlight staff, I wrote a preview of the upcoming Oscar race in my first "Headlight Oscar Preview." Four years later, I am very proud to introduce Headlight's first full Oscar Issue! I have loved the Oscars for as long as I can remember and writing about them has been an amazing experience for me. For the past few weeks I have been curating this issue which includes my own predictions, interviews with fellow movie buffs (both MHS students and faculty), and a poll conducted from a sampling of students at Marblehead High School of which films and actors they think will take home the Oscar Sunday. I really hope that after reading this you go out and watch some of the movies from this amazing year in film... And don't forget to tune in to the Oscars this Sunday, February 22nd, at 7pm on ABC!

A Second Opinion

For our first ever full Oscar Issue, I had the pleasure of interviewing both a student and faculty member at MHS in addition to my annual article. Each had thoughtful insight on the past year in film and their Oscar predictions. First up, MHS student Cam O'Connor who works at Chet's Video in Marblehead.

Q: What were some standout films, performances and technical achievements from this year?

A: There was a very diverse and varied amount of talent within the films that came out this year. From big blockbusters like *Guardians of the Galaxy* and *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*, to the quirky and unique films like *Grand Budapest Hotel* and *Birdman*, 2014's top films covered the whole genre spectrum. We even got an incredible horror film, *The Babadook*. *Whiplash* and *Selma* are up there too, but *Boyhood* took the prize for my personal favorite.

Q: Which films do you think were snubbed by Oscar voters this year?

A: *THE LEGO MOVIE*. When I saw that it didn't get an animation nomination, I freaked out. Also, big loss that *Selma* didn't get recognized for lead actor and director.

Q: Who do you think will win Best Picture?

A: I don't see what could stand in *Boyhood's* way, honestly. It's a once in a lifetime experience; a film that can't be recreated. It's a film aged to perfection, with an idea that has summed up our generation. If it doesn't win, I don't know what will... *Birdman*?

I also met with Mr. Connor Ryan, a Film Studies and English teacher at Marblehead High School. We sat down to discuss the past few years of film in general.

Q: What makes a good Oscar film?

A: Well the true magic of movies, or the magic of art in general, is that it simultaneously shows us our lives and shows us what our lives are not. But I think what makes a good Oscar film is a combination of production value – which is really the director – star power and timing. But it should be based more on story. All of the wonderful technical achievements of recent years have sometimes come at the cost of story, which I would argue is still at the foundation of any good film. Which is why something like Christopher Nolan's new *Batman* series or Peter Jackson's Tolkein films will last longer than James Cameron's *Avatar*... I hope.

Q: Looking at trends in Oscar voting in the past, what do you think voters look for?

A: I think voters want to be surprised. And sometimes that surprise comes with the scale of the film, so what immediately comes to mind is *Titanic*. Sometimes they're surprised with a performance; you could look at almost anything Meryl Streep has done in the last decade. (*pauses*) Although it's unrelated to your question, one thing I've seen over the last few decades that's particularly exciting is that it seems there are a number of actors that are hitting that weird age – the end of middle age – where they get to come back in supporting roles, and there have been a lot of great roles. You think of Alan Arkin, Helen Mirren, Judi Dench, Bruce Dern, Christopher Plummer. That is really neat. It seems to me that the "third act" is more the case now than it used to be.

Q: You mentioned how there's been changes in technology. How do you think it's affecting the film industry as a whole?

A: So, financially I think it means that the expectation of special and visual effects are such that you get trapped into the big budget thing: every battle scene has to be larger than the one previous. In terms of acting, I think it's fair to say that actors have to be more physical than they have ever been. If you compare a generation ago of leading men like Robert Redford and Paul Newman, their athleticism does not come close to a Matt Damon, Brad Pitt, and Jeremy Renner. Actors are being asked to do far more physical stuff. I suppose the other neat thing is that since there's this incredibly high level of technical precision, it creates that sort of willful resistance. Someone like Wes Anderson, with ultra traditional – almost antique – terms of production, wouldn't thrive in a world without the James Cameron and Michael Bay types. Part of his success lies in the act that his competition are these big budget, big star, big production films. He's a fresh alternative.

Q: Any final thoughts on the film industry in general?

A: I don't fully understand, and I'm behind on this as well, but it seems there's a blending of film and TV – particularly cable TV – in ways we haven't seen. That could change films in a really interesting, unforeseen way. As far as predictions go, I would watch the new players to see how they shape it. And that weird mix where "celebrity film actors" are going to work on series. 20 years ago, a Kevin Spacey would never have taken a TV job. That's kinda cool for today.

Headlight's Oscar Preview

I have been enamored by film for many, many years. The worlds that are conjured up with a couple of actors, a good script and a camera is incredible. But what makes this year even more unique is that 125 years after the invention of the first motion picture camera, filmmakers are still finding original ways to make films and transport audiences to new worlds. For the first time in over a decade, the frontrunner(s) for Best Picture have surprised audiences with their scope and imagination – but in completely opposite ways. *Boyhood*, my favorite film of the year, was shot over twelve years and captures the life of Mason Evans Jr. as he goes through grades one through twelve. Richard Linklater's incredible fictional tale beautifully captures what it feels like to grow up but doesn't focus solely on Mason, but looks at what it means to go through motherhood, fatherhood, sisterhood and everything in between. *Boyhood* is in stark contrast to its fellow Best Picture frontrunner *Birdman*, but is no less of an artistic achievement. *Birdman's* shoot required meticulous rehearsals and preparation beforehand so the completed film could look like one seamless, continuous shot – something that had never been done before. Keeping with the 87th Academy Awards' slogan, "Imagine what's possible," this year's filmmakers have done that and then gone ten steps beyond.

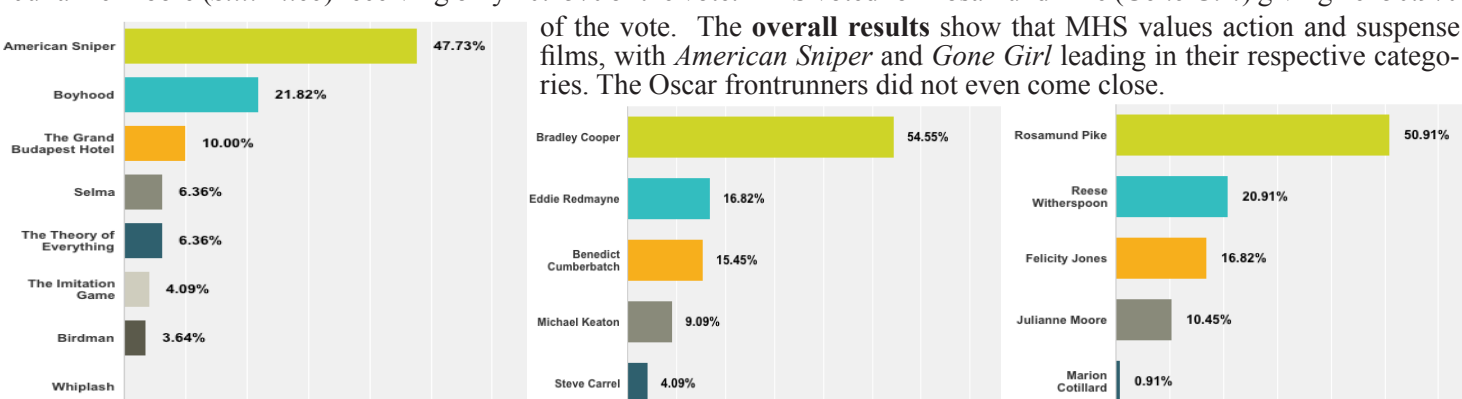
As always though, the Academy manages to overlook some incredible achievements of the past year when announcing its nominees. One big snub is *The Lego Movie* which was amazingly animated and had one of the best – and nostalgic – stories of the year. Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross's score for *Gone Girl* was also left off of Oscar ballots this year, even though they composed a brilliantly creepy score that echoed David Fincher's direction with the film. Gillian Flynn was also snubbed for Adapted Screenplay with *Gone Girl*, although she adapted her own novel for the screen. It had been expected to secure a nomination with its brilliantly crafted twists and turns. However, one of the most pleasant surprises of the year was *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, Wes Anderson's eighth feature that was finally recognized by the Oscars. It is a brilliant little film that is a nostalgic look back on lost time and changing culture. In fact that's what a lot of this year's films did so well, from *Guardians of the Galaxy's* soundtrack to biopics like *Selma*, each film reminded audiences of the past and how only film can capture what is truly gone.

This year's Best Picture winner is a toss-up between *Boyhood* and *Birdman*. *Boyhood* had seemed like a lock a few months ago, but *Birdman* has been gaining steam with its guild wins. I still think that *Boyhood* will prevail as it is more than just an incredible technical achievement but a brilliant idea and execution of story. Best Director is also a toss-up between Richard Linklater for *Boyhood* and Alejandro González Iñárritu for *Birdman*. The Academy could go either way, but if they follow the Director's Guild, they will honor Iñárritu – similar to what they did last year with *Gravity*. The only truly contended acting race this year is the Best Actor race between Eddie Redmayne (*The Theory of Everything*) and Michael Keaton (*Birdman*). With Redmayne's career just starting, the Academy is more likely to award Keaton for his career-altering performance. Best Original Screenplay will be another category to watch as it includes some of the most original stories in recent years. *Birdman*, *Boyhood*, and *The Grand Budapest Hotel* are all strong contenders, but I bet *Grand Budapest* will walk away as the winner, as it is the most original of the bunch. Best Adapted is likely to go to *The Theory of Everything* however, *Whiplash* could pull an upset. Best Cinematography will inevitably go, for the second consecutive year, to Emmanuel Lubezki for the incredible feat of *Birdman*, but Roger Deakins's work on *Unbroken* is an equal contender (and a possible upsetter). Best Original Score is difficult to predict with such amazing work done this year, but Alexandre Desplat's double nomination could finally secure him a win. I predict his *Imitation Game* score will take the gold due its intricate arpeggiated score. Although "Glory" from *Selma* will win Best Original Song – think of it more as a consolation prize for the film – "Lost Stars" from the underappreciated *Begin Again* should take home the statue. Sound Editing and Mixing will go to *American Sniper* for the incredible work they did to create suspense without a score. Production Design and Costume Design has to go to the period pieces and exquisite sets in Wes Anderson's *Grand Budapest Hotel*. Film Editing, as with Best Picture, is a toss-up between *Birdman* and *Boyhood*. The question for this category, and the question that will reign over the night's proceedings, is whether the Academy will chose the technical achievement or brilliant storytelling.

As someone who grew up on movies, and every year awaits the Oscars, it's been a dream come true to have the opportunity to write about the Oscars for four years. Films make us think, believe, love, hate, laugh, get scared and, most of all, appreciate the world around us. For a couple hours in a darkened theater we escape to new worlds and forget the life we live. But we are able to connect to the people in the films – the stories they tell – because they are universal and the films, although they are escapist, are so grounded in real life. We recognize the emotions and the characters and the story arcs because we've lived them in one way or another. Film is our way of connecting with one another and sharing our life stories. And the Oscars aren't about who wins or loses Sunday night; they're a celebration of art, of life and of our world. But still, it doesn't hurt to hear your name called after those five words: "And the Oscar goes to..."

How Did the MHS Community Vote in This Year's Oscar Races?

220 students participated in Headlight's first Oscar survey. For **Best Picture**, 105 students voted for *American Sniper* which could upset on Oscar night. The two frontrunners – *Birdman* and *Boyhood* – gathered only 56 votes total. The **Best Actor** race, which is the most contested, had 54.5% of the vote going to Bradley Cooper (*American Sniper*). Frontrunners Eddie Redmayne and Michael Keaton got only 25.9% total. The **Best Actress** results are quite surprising with projected winner Julianne Moore (*Still Alice*) receiving only 10.45% of the vote. MHS voted for Rosamund Pike (*Gone Girl*) giving her 50.9%



Dressed up for the Red Carpet with nowhere to go on Oscar night??

You don't have go all the way to LA, just drive downtown to Warwick Place to the Marblehead Friends of the Performing Arts 2nd Annual Oscar Party!!

There will be food, music, raffles, "Oscar Bingo," lots of popcorn, two theaters showing the Oscars and, of course, a Red Carpet!

Visit fopamhs.blogspot.com for more info or fopa-oscars2.eventbrite.com to buy your ticket

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