



## **"Oscar, its History"**

***By Stanley Robinson***



The Oscar® statue is Hollywood's greatest prize, and Hollywood always buzzes as the movie industry prepares for its biggest awards presentation: the Academy Awards, commonly known as the Oscars. This Oscar night, February 27th, 2005, millions of people throughout the world will watch the show on ABC-TV to see if their favorite movie won the prized Oscar® statue. The Oscars is an American social occasion, the place where Hollywood's popular and powerful walk the "red carpet" and go to see and be seen!

The gold statue "depicts a knight holding a crusader's sword, standing on a reel of film with five spokes, signifying the original branches of the Academy: Actors, Writers, Directors, Producers and Technicians." The Award is an 8.5-pound (3.85 kg), 13.5-inch (34.3 cm) statue cast in bronze and plated in 24-karat gold, with a round, black marble base.

When the statue was created in 1928, it was referred to as the Academy Award of Merit. Although there are several stories that lay claim to naming the statue Oscar, the one that the Academy supports is: then-Academy librarian Margaret Herrick remarked that the statue looked like her Uncle Oscar (Pierce). The name stuck, and the Academy staff began referring to the statue as 'Oscar'. Writing about Katherine Hepburn's Best Actress win in 1934, Hollywood columnist Sidney Skolsky used the name 'Oscar' in his column, and it seemed to stick after that, although the Academy didn't recognize the name 'Oscar' officially until 1939.

Oscar is awarded by the American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, commonly referred to as "the Academy." The Academy was formed in 1927, and is a professional honorary organization of motion picture artists and craftsmen. The primary goal of the Academy is to "advance the arts and science of motion pictures."

When Award nominations are announced, voting has begun months prior to that announcement. Award nominees are voted for by secret ballot, with up

to five nominees in each category. Voting members of the Academy can only vote for nominees in their respective Academy branch. There are 13 Academy branches: actors, art directors, cinematographers, directors, executives, film editors, music, producers, public relations, short films and feature animation, sound, visual effects and writers. This means that directors vote for directors, writers for writers, actors for actors, etc. All Academy members nominate and vote for Best Picture.



All Academy members are sent secret ballots to complete and return to the Academy as late as the week of the awards. Ballots are opened and counted by an accounting firm, usually PricewaterhouseCoopers, chosen by the Academy president. Tabulation of final ballots is done by simple majority -- the Oscar goes to the nominee receiving the greatest number of votes. Write-in ballots have not been allowed since 1935.

Each year, a few hundred films are released, most of which are Oscar-eligible. Films for nomination are selected in a first round of voting by a committee of Academy-member documentarians and a second round where all members of the Academy in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles are invited to see the films and participate in the final determination of the nominees.

In the Academy's early years, the award winners were announced the night before the ceremony. This allowed newspapers to have the winners listed in the late-night editions that would go out on the night of the Oscars after the winners had been announced.

However, newspapers began printing the Oscar edition earlier in the evening, and by 1940, ceremony guests could pick up a paper and find out who won while on their way to the ceremony. Perhaps sensing that this early notification would bring an end to people actually attending the ceremony, and to add the suspense that we now associate with the ceremony, the Academy began keeping results in the sealed envelopes that we know today. Now, when the Oscar presenter says, "and the Oscar goes to...", we're all finding out at the same time.

The attention and interest surrounding the ceremony continued to grow and the media began to have live coverage. The first telecast (black and white) of the Oscars was in 1953, and Bob Hope was the host. Today shows are broadcast on U.S.-network television and beamed around the world. This world wide coverage has contributed to the frenzy of media attention that now swirls around pre-Oscar get-togethers, the ceremony itself and post-ceremony parties. Modern Oscar ceremonies aren't just about movies. Musical guests are invited to perform at the televised event, increasing

appeal to a wider television audience. Great scrutiny is placed on who the nominees are, what the attendees wear, what the winners say, and who snubbed the ceremony to stay home.

Here are a few "Oscar" Tid bits...

- First Color Best Picture: "Gone With the Wind" (1939)
- Oldest Winner for Best Actor: Henry Fonda, "On Golden Pond", 76 years old (1981)
- Oldest Winner for Best Actress: Jessica Tandy, "Driving Miss Daisy", 80 years old (1989)
- Oldest Actor to Receive an Award: Groucho Marx, Honorary Award, 83 years old (1973)
- Youngest Winner: Shirley Temple, Special Award, 6 years old (1934)
- Most Acting Nominations and Awards: Katherine Hepburn, 12 and 4 wins
- 2nd Most Acting Nominations and Awards: Meryl Streep, 12 nominations and 2 wins
- Most Musical Nominations: John Williams, composer, 37 nominations
- Most Film Nominations: "All About Eve," 14 (1950)
- Most Film Awards: "Ben Hur," 11 (1959), "Titanic," 11 (1997) "LOTR: Return of the King" 11 (2003)
- Most Oscar wins: Walt Disney, 26 Oscars from 64 nominations
- In 1959, actor-comedian Jerry Lewis hosted the Academy Awards show. It ran 20 minutes short.



**The 78th Academy Awards®** will be presented on Sunday, March 5, 2006, at the Kodak Theatre at Hollywood & Highland, and televised live by the ABC Television Network beginning at 5 p.m. PST, preceded by a half-hour arrival segment.

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