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2022 Oscars Breakdown: Reactions, Predictions and Insights

Matt Parks, Staff Reporter

Every year, the countdown to the 94th Academy Awards kicks off after the long-awaited nominations are released, raising expectations and questions alike. Amy Schumer, Regina Hall and Wanda Sykes will host this year's esteemed awards. Renowned as the biggest night in Hollywood, the Oscars are a celebration of the year's best films, actors and the teams behind the camera whose work brings a film to the silver screen.

This year's nominations reflect the continuously strong presence of Netflix as a contender for some of the most regarded awards, including Best Picture. The question of whether or not to return to the communal viewing experience of cinema also circulates the Oscars conversation due to the distancing ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic. The relevance of the awards itself is another question as younger generations don't seem as concerned with the establishment.

Whenever nominations become public, the list is always scrutinized and broken down into usual suspects, surprises and snubs.

One category that contained some of the biggest surprises this year included the coveted title of Best Actress. While Oliva Coleman, Kristen Stewart and Nicole Kidman are all familiar names, some Seattle University students were surprised to see Penélope Cruz and Jessica Chastain up for the award over Lady Gaga or breakout "West Side Story" star Rachel Zelger.

First-year Premajor Studies student Van Roeder wasn't surprised by the actresses nominated in this category. He particularly found Chastain's performance compelling.

"Jessica Chastain in 'The Eyes of Tammy Faye,' I thought did a wonderful job," Roeder said. "I think she's got a good shot at winning, although it is the Oscars and they love Nicole Kidman."

It was a big year for Netflix, earning 27 nominations, including three Best Picture nominations for "Don't Look Up," "Tick, Tick... Boom!" and "The Power of the Dog." Professor and Director of Film Studies Kirsten Moana Thompson sees "The Power of the Dog" as a primary contender, expecting to see wins for Best Actor, Best Picture and Best Director for the film.



Jordie Simpson

Fresh popcorn perfect for a new movie.

“It engages—even though it was shot in New Zealand—with key issues both of today and of America’s past,” Thompson said. “The Western is an important genre in American cinematic history and the landscape of the Western is an important part of Campion’s approach to that story. In addition, it’s dealing with contemporary issues of sexuality and desire and gender, which I think speak to our moment.”

Thompson believes that Jane Campion will take home Best Director because of the way in which she approached and directed “The Power of the Dog.”

“The Academy, I think, also recognizes that it has overlooked women for far too long ... Campion would be only the third woman to have won the Best Director award, and they’ve overlooked her own work before,” Thompson said. “Oftentimes, these kinds of factors of the history of non-recognition in the Academy play a part in the voting practices and preferences of who votes.”

While some movies and individual acting performances earned surprising nominations, others got snubbed.

Fourth-year Marketing major Luke Skinner was shocked that films “Titane” and “Red Rocket” were overlooked as well as Jordie Comer’s performance in “The Last Duel.” He anticipates a win in Best Supporting Actor for Kodi Smit-McPhee and Greig Fraser to win Best Cinematography for “Dune.”

Netflix and other streaming platforms’ (Apple TV+ has six nominations) presence in the Academy Awards highlights a shift in the entertainment industry. Awards once reserved for movies released in theaters are now open to streaming giants, who have raised their budgets to match up against Hollywood studios.

Film Studies professor John Trafton, was pleasantly surprised to see the love for “Drive My Car”—a film that he doesn’t expect to win, but is one of his favorites from the year. He weighed in on the complexities with the streaming industry and the traditional viewing experience.

“Netflix has [been] seen as a threat to the traditional movie-going experience, which must be preserved,” Trafton said. “That communal aspect of film going and experiencing these images on the big screen must be saved and maintained.”

While the shift in the viewing experience is apparent at the Oscars this year, another question emerges on the relevance of the occasion. Every year, the number of viewers watching the Academy Awards continues on a declining trend. This year could be the lowest of all.

Skinner thinks the Academy Awards has failed to adapt to the landscape of film evolution, and is out of touch with what kinds of media people are consuming.

“I think part of it is the lack of diversity in how they nominate films,” Skinner said. “I know that’s something that they’ve been working on, and that’s great. To some degree, they kind of hold this regard for themselves, it feels like this very self-praising show where everyone’s standing around clapping for each other. It feels very disconnected from the actual film-going experience.”

Thompson sees the Oscars as serving a dual purpose: to market films and as a prestigious event. She believes that in an age of social media where younger audiences only watch clips of events, the marketing side of the Oscars as a television event is over, but that it still will always be held as a prestigious event.

The 94th Academy Awards will air March 27 at 5 p.m. PST and can be viewed on broadcast television on ABC. It can also be streamed on abc.com and through the ABC app.