

Nave: 'La La Land' to dominate Oscar winners

By Howie Nave

One thing for sure at this year's 89th Academy Awards ceremony, there is way more diversity than at last year's Oscars show (and the year before that).

In fact, having nine nominations in the Best Picture category alone offers up quite a diverse selection of films ranging from the human struggle, life in a musical and all things extraterrestrial (involving an alien that doesn't get political). No doubt there will be acceptance speeches with a political tone to them as it seems to be the norm at any Hollywood awards show lately.

Will comedian/host Jimmy Kimmel set the stage for things to come by being political? He has vowed that he won't, but I can tell you from experience comedians tend to go off script after feeling the room out. I mean, I thought Chris Rock did one of the best jobs ever addressing the elephant in the room at last year's Oscar for the lack of minorities nominated. It was brutal and well, for me, the highlight of the evening. This Sunday should be an interesting one with Kimmel as he has such a wide range of topics to cherry pick from given the spectrum of movies nominated this year.

That said let's see who's going to win, or more important, who should win. In the Best Picture category we have nine, count'em nine movies in the running that include:

"Arrival"

"Fences"

"Hacksaw Ridge"

"Hell or High Water"

"Hidden Figures"

“La La Land”

“Lion”

“Manchester By the Sea”

“Moonlight”



There's no shortage of color at this year's event with contenders "Hidden Figures," "Fences," "Lion" and "Moonlight." Obviously being the biggest science fiction geek in this universe I'd like "Arrival" to be the upset, but sci-fi never gets the top prize. ("ET: The Extra-Terrestrial" I feel still should've won back in 1983 even though it was nominated). "La La Land" with its 14 nominations (the most ever tying with "Titanic") is the favored, but personally I think it's overrated. Still, it does represent total escapism from the ugly reality of the real world so yes, I'm going to say "La La Land" wins for Best Picture.

In the category for Best Actor we have:

Casey Affleck, "Manchester By the Sea"

Andrew Garfield, "Hacksaw Ridge"

Ryan Gosling, "La La Land"

Viggo Mortensen, "Captain Fantastic"

Denzel Washington, "Fences"

The odds are that it's going to go to Ben's younger brother,

Casey Affleck and, yes, he did a remarkable job (and was nominated for an Oscar in the Supporting Actor category for the 2007 flick, "The Assassination of Jesse James). He has a good shot and if Casey wins this Sunday he and Ben will become the 16th Oscar-winning sibling pair in history. Denzel Washington could be the spoiler as he was brilliant (and wore several hats also directing "Fences"), but I'm going with Casey Affleck for Best Actor.

In the category for Best Actress we have:

Isabelle Huppert, "Elle"

Ruth Negga, "Loving"

Natalie Portman, "Jackie"

Emma Stone, "La La Land"

Meryl Streep, "Florence Foster Jenkins"

Hollywood has a way of making love to its own and odds are Emma Stone is going to win and, yes, she was very good and won several of the other awards that lead up to the Super Bowl of motion pictures so she's probably going to snag it. I don't think anybody saw "Elle" in part because it is a foreign film. As much as I enjoyed Natalie Portman's performance in "Jackie" it's all about Emma. It's worth noting here that Meryl Streep (who was hilarious in "Florence Foster Jenkins") has been nominated now 20 times (winning three in this category), but it'll be Emma Stone for Best Actress.

Moving on to the category of Best Supporting Actor we have:

Mahershala Ali, "Moonlight"

Jeff Bridges, "Hell or High Water"

Lucas Hedges, "Manchester By the Sea"

Dev Patel, "Lion"

Michael Shannon, "Nocturnal Animals"

I'm slightly biased on this one being a huge fan of actor Jeff Bridges (who won an Oscar for Best Actor at the 2010 Oscars for "Crazy Heart") and had him on my morning radio show and

podcast. His movie, "Hell or High Water" is also up for Best Picture and Best Original Screenplay. Bridges said his flick "shines a light on why the election went the way that it did." The favorite though seems to be leaning toward both Mahershala Ali for "Moonlight" and Lucas Hedges for "Manchester By The Sea," but I'm still going for Jeff Bridges to win for Best Supporting Actor.

In the Best Supporting Actress category we have:

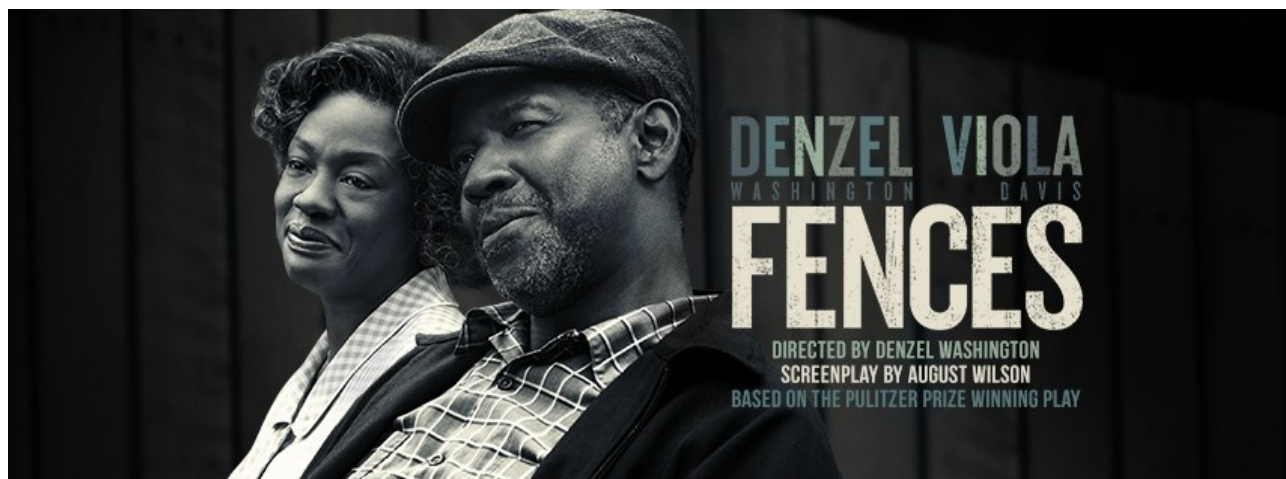
Viola Davis, "Fences"

Naomie Harris, "Moonlight"

Nicole Kidman, "Lion"

Octavia Spencer, "Hidden Figures"

Michelle Williams, "Manchester By the Sea"



I love Viola Davis! Not just her acting, but if you ever get the time research her personal life, she is one amazing woman. I know all actors have had their personal struggles to get where they are, but I'm just so impressed with Davis who was nominated in 2009 for Best Actress in "Doubt" and in the supporting role for 2011's "The Help." Viola Davis will win an Oscar for her brilliant portrayal of wife and mother Rose Maxson, who is the bedrock in the family opposite Denzel Washington as her husband (and up for Best Actor) in "Fences."

We're at the halfway point here with Best Director that

includes:

Damien Chazelle, "La La Land"

Mel Gibson, "Hacksaw Ridge"

Barry Jenkins, "Moonlight"

Kenneth Lonergan, "Manchester By the Sea"

Denis Villeneuve, "Arrival"

Again, wouldn't it be nice if just once, a director would win for their mind-expanding helmsmanship beyond this planet in a sci-fi epic like "Arrival" on this planet? No? All right, but as you may have guessed "La La Land" is going to take home a treasure trove of awards and will give itself a pat on the backside by giving the statue to Damien Chazelle. And it must be mentioned how much of a survivor Mel Gibson is after being shamed for being such a Jew hater that his work is being recognized in this category? I forgave him a long time ago what with the "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" verse from the bible. "Hacksaw Ridge" is an amazing and beautiful piece of filmmaking, so Gibson should be nominated. If you haven't seen his movie, you are really missing out. But for now it's "La La Land" all the way here with Damien Chazelle getting the nod for Best Director.

Let's get a fun category and that is the nominees for Best Animated Feature:

"Kubo and the Two Strings"

"Moana"

"My Life As a Zucchini"

"The Red Turtle"

"Zootopia"

Remember earlier when I said that politics will definitely be part of the agenda at this year's Academy Awards? Well, try weaving the current attitude going on in our country subliminally in only a way an animated flick can pull it off while at the same time entertaining the entire family and

you've got "Zootopia" folks. And this is a Disney flick too! Say what? Who know the folks from that legendary studio could tell a message so subversive involving race, drugs and policy all centered around cute furry creatures? Well, they did and some might find that uneasy, but I have always felt sometimes one can get away with a lot more when you infuse animation into the picture and "Zootopia" does that. I am hoping that it will win for Best Animated Feature.

It's all about the story and up for Best Original Screenplay we have:

Damien Chazelle, "La La Land"

Yorgos Lanthimos and Efthimis Filipou, "The Lobster"

Kenneth Lonergan, "Manchester By the Sea"

Mike Mills, "20th Century Women"

Taylor Sheridan, "Hell or High Water"

Screenwriter Kenneth Lonergan's "Manchester By the Sea" was also directed by him. Truth be known I wasn't too familiar with him. I am now, though. Wow, what an incredible output of creativity. He should win. It's no coincidence his words couldn't have taken shape as his vision from the written page to being behind the camera has given us a Best Actor nominee in the way of Casey Affleck, a Best Picture nod, Best Supporting Actor (Lucas Hedges), Best Supporting Actress (Michelle Williams) not to mention himself as Best Director. This is literally an East Coast vs. West Coast with Lonergan's movie taking place in New England in the namesake town of Manchester-by-the-Sea, Massachusetts with "La La Land" taking place in well, you get the picture and so will "La La Land" for Best Original Screenplay.

In the Best Adapted Screenplay the nominees are:

Luke Davies, "Lion"

Eric Heisserer, "Arrival"

Barry Jenkins, "Moonlight"

**Allison Schroeder and Theodore Melfi, "Hidden Figures"
August Wilson, "Fences"**



Please, oh please, let it be Allison Schroeder and Theodore Melfi for the story based on what really happened at NASA and tuned into a heartwarming and inspiring movie, "Hidden Figures." Am I grateful "La La Land" wasn't nominated? Yes! I wouldn't mind either if Barry Jenkins took home an Oscar for his story (also based on real experiences) for "Moonlight." Again, very inspiring. I wish it was a tie. Both amazing stories and a testament to the human spirit. In fact, I'm going to go out on a limb here and say that both movies, "Hidden Figures" and "Moonlight" will win. It's just too close folks for this category.

In the Best Foreign-Language Film category the nominees are:

- "Land of Mine" (Denmark)**
- "A Man Called Ove" (Sweden)**
- "The Salesman" (Iran)**
- "Tanna" (Australia)**

“Toni Erdmann” (Germany)

Full disclosure, I only saw three of these because it's not easy getting access for screenings (especially living in the high Sierra of Lake Tahoe). I was able to see “Toni Erdmann” through another film critic/friend and loved it. This German gem is a comedy that clocks in at almost three hours. After watching it my accent changed some. Also saw Sweden's “A Man Called Ove” because it actually played locally (at the Fandango in Carson City). It centers around a retired gentleman who is isolated from society visiting his wife's grave, has decided to give up on life (man, this sounds familiar except for the dead wife part) and develops an unlikely friendship when he least expects it. I'm hoping this one wins but I think it's going to go to “The Salesman” from Iran again because of political reasons. Writer/director Asghar Farhadi said he won't attend this year's Academy Awards to protest President Trump's ban on Muslim countries, so how much you wanna bet the Academy will award the Oscar as a statement against the current administration? Exactly.

For Best Documentary Feature the nominees are:

“Fire At Sea”

“I Am Not Your Negro”

“Life, Animated”

“O.J. Made in America”

“13th”

I love documentaries (when they're done right) as they convey the filmmaker's opinion so explicitly, especially on a budget. These films are a definite backlash against last year's all white nominations and are all pretty darn good. Standouts include “I Am Not Your Negro” threading I feel the civil rights movement from the 1960s to the Black Lives Matter movement in our current time in history. That said and because of America's undying fascination with the trial and outcome, I'm giving the Oscar to “O.J. Made in America” hands down.

Music always plays an integral part to any motion picture and this year's Best Original Score nominees include:

Nicholas Britell, "Moonlight"
Justin Hurwitz, "La La Land"
Mica Levi, "Jackie"
Thomas Newman, "Passengers"
Dustin O'Halloran and Hauschka, "Lion"

Let's be realistic here, OK? Since the entire movie is one long musical, Justin Hurwitz wins this one hands down. It would be a major upset if "La La Land" didn't take home the Oscar in this category.

For Best Original Song the nominees are:

"Audition: The Fools Who Dream," "La La Land"
"Can't Stop the Feeling," "Trolls"
"City of Stars," "La La Land"
"The Empty Chair," "Jim: The James Foley Story"
"How Far I'll Go," "Moana"

Again, "La La Land" will win in this category for "City of Stars" which is very catchy. But how about this for an upset? Justin Timberlake's mega hit, "Can't Stop the Feeling" is from the movie "Trolls" and that my friends could be one of the night's biggest upsets.

In one of my favorite categories because it is the canvass for the movie, the nominees for Best Cinematography are:

Greig Fraser, "Lion"
James Laxton, "Moonlight"
Rodrigo Prieto, "Silence"
Linus Sandgren, "La La Land"
Bradford Young, "Arrival"



Again, creating something literally out of this world isn't easy because we as humans have seen it all, so to see Bradford Young's epic science fiction fantasy "Arrival" is without doubt an amazing piece of imagery. But it's going to go (the Oscar) to Linus Sandgren's brilliant piece of cinematic artwork for "La La Land." I mean, just that opening sequence with Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling cinches it right there. So enjoy the after parties "La La Land" you're going to be hungover the next morning with Oscar love and all your agents will be asking for a much higher fee when your next movie comes around.

Howie Nave is host/emcee/manager of The Improv at Harveys. You can hear him Monday-Friday 6 to 10am on KRLT FM-93.9. He has been reviewing movies for years. They may be heard on four other stations each week where he does "A Jew Doing a Movie Review," and he occasionally writes reviews for Lake Tahoe News.