

Reviewer expects 'Platoon' to take Best Picture

The Academy Awards, ostensibly recognition of excellence, are more interesting as a barometer of social interest and public acclaim.

This shouldn't be surprising. All the nominations are made and subsequently voted on by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, comprising Hollywood actors, actresses, writers, directors, producers and technicians.

By Sean Axmaker

In one sense, they are everyday Joes who like the same films as the general public. But they are also part of a community that is often frowned upon for the preponderance of vacuous sex films, exploitation pictures and just plain rotten films ground out of the production machine every year.

The Oscars ceremony is a chance for Hollywood personnel to show off their best to the public. This "best," more often than not, reflects the pictures most vigorously applauded by press and public.

The 1987 Academy Awards should be no different, and this year the ceremonies should be dominated, at least in the categories of Best Picture and Best Director, by Oliver Stone's critically acclaimed "Platoon."

More than a film, "Platoon" has been elevated to the level of a social event, promoted as the first film to "really show it like it was."

The reasons for the critical and public success of "Platoon" are difficult to gauge, but certainly one aspect must be the nation's uneasy relationship with the Vietnam War and the media attention on Vietnam veterans in the last few years. We've had films that dealt with Vietnam in some ways ("The Deer Hunter," "Coming Home"), but this is the first to present the experience of the foot soldier.

I believe another aspect, however, is the way "Platoon" reduces the complex issues of the war and the horrors of guerrilla warfare to the generic elements of a standard war film, given validity by the political nature of the picture. "Platoon" doesn't challenge the audience too much; rather, it collapses the issues into Stone's final statement: "We were really fighting ourselves."

"Platoon" is a cathartic film for the nation because it presents enough grim reality and genuinely disturbing scenes (Tom Berenger shooting the village woman is the key moment) to prove its mission,

but doesn't draw the audience into the even more disturbing implications of these scenes.

Rather, it offers a way for the nation to unload its collective war guilt with the knowledge that it now understands after an easy two-hour sitting.

Woody Allen's "Hannah And Her Sisters," though nowhere near as acclaimed as "Platoon," should also benefit from good critical success.

Best Picture: Again, the favorite is "Platoon," followed by "Hannah."

My own vote goes out to Ivory's "Room With A View," a witty, subtle little picture that is as charming as it is clever. Its chances, however, are as slim as those of "Children Of A Lesser God" and "The Mission." Mere films just can't compete with a social event like "Platoon."

Best Director: Without a doubt, Oliver Stone is the favorite. Having already won the New York Film Critics Circle and the Director's Guild polls, the Oscar is almost assured. Of the remaining four, Woody Allen's chances should rate best.

My vote, however, goes to David Lynch, whose nightmarish vision of America's hidden underbelly in "Blue Velvet" is both engrossing and repelling. This is the most creative direction of the year.

James Ivory is a longshot with "Room With A View," and Roland Joffe ("The Mission") is far outclassed.

Best Actress: The dearth of powerhouse performances in this category is primarily due to the limited powerhouse roles available to women in today's pictures. Things haven't changed much since the '40s.

Women are written "strong" parts, but the men still get the aggressive roles. The one glaring exception this year is Sigourney Weaver, whose heroics in "Aliens" not only save herself but the future of mankind as well.

Weaver's aggressive role is certainly an attractive part of her performance, which is quite good, but I imagine that Marlee Matlin ("Children of a Lesser God") and Jane Fonda ("The Morning After") will emerge as the favorites in this category.

Matlin gives a sensitive performance of a deaf janitor, surprisingly expressive in a silent role. Fonda tackles an issue as well as a role in her portrayal of an alcoholic actress who thinks she may have committed a murder.

Kathleen Turner is a contender, but not a strong candidate. Though certainly one of the country's finest actresses, her performance in "Peggy Sue



Courtesy photo

With public and critical acclaim, reviewer Sean Axmaker expects "Platoon" to take top honors in this year's Academy Awards.

Got Married" shows little of the charisma and strength shown in "Romancing the Stone" and "Prizzi's Honor."

Sissy Spacek (a former winner) is the long shot.

Best Actor: This category is hard to call. Bob Hoskins, James Woods and Dexter Gordon (in his acting debut) are first-time nominees. Paul Newman marks his seventh nomination (without a win), and William Hurt, last year's winner, returns.

Though I haven't seen Dexter Gordon's acclaimed performance ("Round Midnight" has yet to play Eugene), I would give the edge to Newman for his portrayal of pool hustler Fast Eddie Felson, a return to the role he created 25 years ago.

Though this isn't his best career performance, it is his best of the decade, and not having won before, he should place as a sentimental favorite.

My preference is Bob Hoskins, Britain's hoodlum angel in "Mona Lisa." A popular character actor in a number of recent films, this role shows his versatility and depth. James Woods gives a characteristically intense performance in "Salvador," and William Hurt is duly sensitive in "Children." The votes could fall any way.

Best Supporting Actress: As disappointing as leading roles are for women, there is always a rich set of character parts, and this year is no exception.

Two-time winner Maggie Smith ("A Room With A View") and Piper Laurie ("Children") have strong

careers behind them. Maggie Smith in particular gives a memorable performance, but competition is tough.

Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio made her debut in "Money" and is electrifying, while Tess Harper ("Crimes of the Heart") and Dianne Wiest ("Hannah and Her Sisters") are good, though not quite as commanding.

My favorites are the over-protective aunt Smith and street-smart hustler Mastrantonio.

Best Supporting Actor: The most interesting nomination here is Dennis Hopper, who ostensibly received the nomina-

tion for "Hoosiers," but whose performance in "Blue Velvet" knocked the socks off almost everyone who saw it.

Tom Berenger and Willem Dafoe, both of "Platoon," are effectively cast against type and give vivid performances. And Michael Caine's amiable performance in "Hannah" marks his return to form after a decade of lesser roles.

My favorite, though, is the venerable old British character actor Denholm Elliot, whose performance in "Room With A View" is one of his most memorable and most colorful. Hopper and Dafoe are close runners-up.

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