

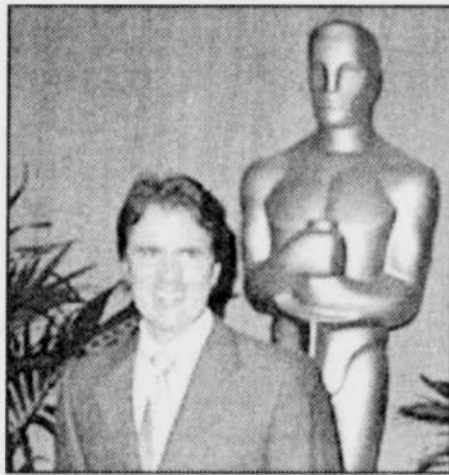
**FILM**

# They like us! They really, really like us!

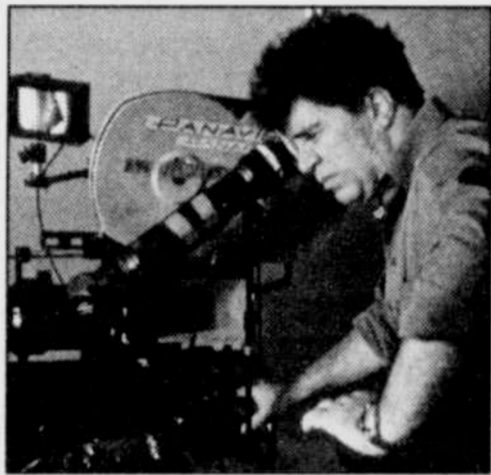
Just Out's guide to the queerest awards show ever

BY JIM RADOSTA

Do wonder the gays love the Oscars: Once a year, the awards supply an addictive combination of ego (remember Julia Roberts' embarrassing upstaging of Denzel Washington last year?), fashion (two words: Halle Berry) and fame (what will Michael Moore tell 1 billion people if *Bowling for Columbine* wins Best Documentary Feature?)



Rob Marshall (left) and Pedro Almodóvar are two of the three gay men competing for Best Director during the 75th annual Academy Awards, airing live at 5:30 p.m. March 23 on ABC



Now more than ever, we really have something to get excited about. This year's nominees include several openly gay filmmakers and queer characters galore.

Let's take a look at the five nominees for Best Picture and figure out which one deserves our endorsement:

• **The Pianist:** Not much queer content in this Holocaust drama—unless you consider statutory-rapist director Roman Polanski to be a “sexual minority.” Regardless, his comeback film is easily the most respectable of the bunch, but viewers should remember that this category honors cinematic achievement, not competence. In other words, size matters.

• **Gangs of New York:** Was America really “born in the streets”? Or was this opportunistic marketing campaign orchestrated by Miramax honcho Harvey Weinstein to cash in on post-9/11 patriotism? *Gangs* seems to be the odd nod, included just to appease Martin Scorsese for continually getting the shaft from his peers. Sure, *Goodfellas* deserved the gold more than Kevin Costner's *Dances with Wolves*, but that doesn't change the fact that a victory here would be nothing more than a Pity Oscar.

• **The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers:** Queer audiences appreciated gay fave Ian McKellen's triumphant resurrection as the wizard Gandalf as well as the unmistakable homoerotic subtext between Frodo (Elijah Wood) and Sam (Sean Astin). Unfortunately, part two of the trilogy based on J.R.R. Tolkien's classic fantasy novels stands little chance of taking home the trophy. Check back next year, when the academy had better recognize the finale, *The Return of the King*.

• **The Hours:** Gay überproducer Scott Rudin is the power broker behind this adaptation of gay author Michael Cunningham's novel directed by identifies-as-gay-but-is-married-to-a-woman filmmaker Stephen Daldry. The ensemble cast, meanwhile, is a queer wonderland: bisexual writer Virginia Woolf (Nicole Kidman), who killed herself in 1941; a depressed '50s housewife (Julianne Moore) who plants one on the lips of her neighbor (Toni Collette); and a modern-day lesbian (Meryl Streep) who cares deeply for a poet dying of AIDS (Ed Harris) but feels detached from her lover (Allison Janney). Does it get any gayer than this?

• **Chicago:** In answer to that last question, yes it does. This film was produced by Martin Richards with, among others, out executive producers Craig Zadan and Neil Meron. Director Rob Marshall and scribe Bill Condon also are gay, and as for Richard Gere and Queen Latifah—well, let's not go there. But the most important gay figure

behind *Chicago* won't be spotted on the red carpet. The late Bob Fosse wrote the 1975 musical that inspired this film, which succeeded at the remarkable task of transferring a vaudevillian stage show to the silver screen—and revived a genre that has not received Best Picture accolades since 1972 (Fosse's *Cabaret*). It's got my vote.

So what about the other 23 categories? Aim your gaydar in this direction:

• **Best Director:** Believe it or not, gay men are the sexual majority in this category, with Daldry and Marshall facing Pedro Almodóvar (*Talk to Her*). I'm pulling for Polanski, mainly because I want to see whether the fugitive risks arrest by showing up for the ceremony.

• **Best Original Screenplay:** Let's see, Almodóvar? Perhaps *Y Tu Mamá También*, a rare honest portrayal of sexual flexibility between two young men? No contest: This belongs to Portland's own Todd Haynes for his absorbing melodrama *Far from Heaven*.

• **Best Adapted Screenplay:** Condon, who prevailed in this category four years ago for *Gods and Monsters*, stands a good chance of winning again for his immaculate adaptation of *Chicago*. As a writer, though, I feel obliged to support Charlie Kaufman for audaciously inserting himself—and his fictitious twin brother—as the lead characters in *Adaptation*.

• **Best Actress:** Kidman is up against Salma Hayek's impressive performance as bisexual painter Frida Kahlo in *Frida*, but without a doubt the winner should be Moore, who played another depressed '50s housewife in *Far from Heaven*.

• **Best Supporting Actor:** Harris is the only gay presence in this category. Sadly, the academy overlooked Dennis Quaid's powerful performance as a closeted gay man in *Far from Heaven*.

• **Best Animated Film:** The queer here is Dean DeBlois (*Lilo & Stitch*), but because of an academy rule that allows only one name per nominee, co-director Chris Sanders is the listed filmmaker. Either way, the clear standout is Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*.

• **Best Foreign Film:** Although the Dutch gay-themed comedy *Zus & Zo* is in the running, Oscar ignored 2002's other big queer musical: gay director François Ozon's *8 Women*. This snub couldn't have anything to do with America's newfound disgust of France, could it?

• **Best Original Song:** Theater queens will be rooting for “I Move On,” written especially for *Chicago* by the legendary composing team of John Kander and Fred Ebb. However, as much as I hate to admit it, Eminem earned the glory for “Lose Yourself” from *8 Mile*. [M]

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