

On Screen 'American Beauty' wins 5 awards at taboo-trouncing Oscars

REUTERS

Once taboo sexual subjects — homosexuality, sex with juveniles, women who live as men — took center stage at the Oscars Sunday as "American Beauty" swept the main awards and "Boys Don't Cry" made a new star out of an unknown actress.

"American Beauty," a tale of a dysfunctional family with its twin plots of repressed homosexuality and adult fantasies of sex with a 16-year-old girl, was named the year's best film, becoming after "Sunset Boulevard" the second film narrated by a dead man to win an Oscar.

Besides being named best film, "American Beauty" won Oscars for Sam Mendes for best director, Kevin Spacey for best actor, Conrad L. Hall for best cinematographer and Alan Ball for best original screenplay.

Meanwhile Hilary Swank, 25, was named best actress for her tragic role as the woman who thinks she is a man in "Boys Don't Cry."

"I think this movie opens the door to letting people know what's going on in society and putting an end to intolerance in the future. It is a very big night in history because of this," said Swank, whose previous roles included work in "The Next Karate Kid" and the television series "Beverly Hills 90210."

A delighted Spacey told reporters, "This film means an enormous amount to me. ... This is an enormous honor. ... I forgot my entire speech." Like other members of the cast, Spacey praised British theater director Sam Mendes for making "American Beauty" a success. Cinematographer Hall compared Mendes to young Orson Welles

conquering Hollywood with his first film, "Citizen Kane."

"American Beauty" was also the first film by the new DreamWorks studio to win a best movie Oscar. The theme of sexual politics figured heavily in many of this year's Oscars. Besides "American Beauty" and "Boys Don't Cry," "The Cider House Rules" won Oscars for best adapted screenplay for novelist John Irving and a best supporting actor award for Michael Caine, who plays a doctor who does abortions long before they became legal.

Irving also added a political note, thanking the National Abortion Rights Action League and Planned Parenthood in his acceptance speech.

After receiving his Oscar for best supporting actor, Caine expressed great empathy for the obstetrician-abortionist he played.

"This man was to me the most compassionate creature I've ever played," Caine said of the character Dr. Larch, who both adopted the children of unwed mothers and performed abortions for young women who would otherwise go to back-ally quacks.

In a night rampant with jokes about the drama the Oscars have been through this turbulent year — including the theft of the statuettes — Caine had an audience of 5,000 of show business's elite jumping to their feet to applaud him and the praise he had for his rivals for the award.

He declared he did not deserve the Oscar but would accept it only on behalf of the four others in the race with him — Tom Cruise, Haley Joel Osment, Michael Clarke Duncan and Jude Law.

"I was watching all the others and

thinking back when I saw all the performances, thinking how the Academy has changed the phrase from, 'and the winner is', to 'and the Oscar goes to.' If ever there was a category that this applies to, it is this one, because I do not feel like a winner."

He said if anyone deserved it, it was Osment, an 11-year-old beaten by a 67-year-old.

Angelina Jolie, 24, the tattooed daughter of Oscar-winning actor Jon Voight, won a best supporting actress Oscar for her portrayal of a mentally ill young woman in "Girl, Interrupted."

Wearing a full-length black dress, Jolie embraced her brother Jamie and both appeared near tears of joy. "I am in shock. I am just so in love

with my brother. He just held me," she said as she paid tribute to other members of her family. "Dad, you are a great actor, but a better father."

In an upset, "One Day in September," a documentary about the slaughter of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics in 1972, beat the widely popular "Buena Vista Social Club," a documentary that fuelled world-wide interest in Cuban jazz and was a major commercial and critical success.

"One Day in September" producer Arthur Cohn said his film had yet to find a distributor and he praised the Academy for giving it the award even though it had no box office record.

Spain's famously colorful director Pedro Almodovar won his first Oscar for "All About My Mother" in the best foreign-language film category.

The Academy Award for best song went to Phil Collins, for "You'll Be in My Heart," from Disney's animated feature "Tarzan."

Comedian Billy Crystal, hosting for the seventh time, opened the show in his now traditional manner — appearing digitally inserted into several classic films from "E.T." to "Casablanca" and "Spartacus" to this year's hot favorite for best film, "American Beauty."

Crystal paid tribute to scrap metal dealer Willie Fulgear for finding 52 of the 55 Oscars that were stolen while en route to the big show and said, "We couldn't have a show without him."

Spotting Jack Nicholson in the audience, Crystal said, "Jack has three Oscars but so does some guy

in Bell" — a reference to the city south of Los Angeles where the Oscars were stolen.

The dress that all Hollywood was talking about after the Grammys — that slit-to-the-navel, cut-to-the-crotch gown that Jennifer Lopez wore to the music industry awards last month — made a surprise Oscar appearance, worn by the very male co-creator of "South Park," Trey Parker. Parker was accompanied by his "South Park" collaborator Matt Stone who wore a replica of the cotton-candy pink Ralph Lauren gown worn to last year's Oscars by the then best actress winner Gwyneth Paltrow.

The youngest nominee, Osment, wore a tiny tuxedo made especially for him.

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