

Oscar Wishlist

By Catherine SWEET

I try to see all five Best Picture nominations each year before the Oscars takes place. This year was no different, and I can log my two cents about Chicago, The Hours, Gangs of New York, The Pianist, and Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers.

The movies are all so different-it's difficult to pick one that is "The Best, 2003." I'll just dive in.

CHICAGO. This is favoured to win this year, and I can see why- it's colourful and full of names that Hollywood loves right now. I think, however, that the "renaissance of the musical" is being talked about more than it's actually happening. Having seen the live stage production, my reaction to the film is somewhat lukewarm. There were some clever things done to adapt it to the screen, but not shocking. The casting was good-I'll give it that. Catherine Zeta-Jones made me consider cutting bangs again, Queen Latifah was mesmerizing (I mean, damn...), and I thought Richard Gere was fine. Renee Zellweger, meh.

THE HOURS. The strength of the three main characters was great. It revolves around how Virginia Woolfe's book "Mrs. Dalloway" effects three women's lives, including the author's. One could say it was slow-moving, but I think it's pace was part of the conflict. Each character had a "Day in the Life" profile,

which, shock of all shocks, wove together in the end. It was quietly powerful, but I'm not really sure what that means. I do know I liked it. Ed Harris, meh.

GANGS OF NEW YORK. At a great whopping 166 minutes, you've got to want to see this film for a good reason. For me, it was the Hollywood buzz. Gritty and violent, I enjoyed Scorsese's labour of love. I was sceptical of pretty-boy DiCaprio in this dirty role, but I was impressed, and I didn't totally hate Cameron Diaz. Everything you've heard about Daniel Day-Lewis' performance is true- it's great. Sad, but great. I can't say the dialogue was spectacular, but the plot was cool. Me likey.

THE PIANIST. The most innocent title has a habit of raising eyebrows when pronounced, causing many to carefully call it "The Pee-anne-ist." Adrien Brody plays the pianist Wladyslaw Szpilman, a Polish Jew during the Nazi occupation of WWII. His profession has little to do with the movie, but ultimately saved him from a Nazi concentration camp. I touched on this in the paper before, but this film truly hurt me. It made me ashamed. It made me proud. I cried loudly and visibly in public. It was awful. I highly recommend it.

LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS: 179 minutes. Jesus, that is a long movie. I didn't find it long as the first one, though. I was wary going into this one, because I didn't think I would like all the battling. It turned out the one of the many strengths of Peter Jackson being dis-

played in this trilogy is his ability to choreograph bloodshed. Bless his heart. The sheer lack of Elijah Wood disappointed me, and apparently Tolkien's book was messed with to give us this story, but I'm sorry- those battles were so carnal, it was hard to wax moralist. Gobsmacking.

It's not very often I actually enjoy all the films chosen for Best Picture, but this year I did. This is a problem. At least in years past I could plp my least

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favourite at the end of a list, but now I have to juggle with all five. Here is how my list would stand, with much rumination:


- 1) The Pianist -to win
- 2) The Hours
- 3) Gangs of New York
- 4) Chicago
- 5) Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers

Unfortunately, there is a well-known and recognized discrepancy between what *should* win and what *does* win. I think Chicago will win, but I don't know if it deserves it. I do know I will pee my pants if The Pianist wins. The

Academy does have a love for emotional struggles, so there could be a surprise.

Keep in mind I wrote this last weekend, so there could be many surprises in store on Sunday night.

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Choice Cuts

Confessions of a Dangerous Mind

George Clooney's directorial debut "Confessions of a Dangerous Mind" recently appeared at City Cinema. This is another script by Charlie Kaufman, the eccentric mind that brought us "Being John Malkovich" and "Adaptation." All things considered, it is quite entertaining, but not up to the standards Kaufman set when he wrote the two aforementioned screenplays.

The film is based on the semi-autobiography of Chuck Barris, the Hollywood producer responsible for television gems such as "The Dating Game," "The Newlywed Game," and best of all, "The Gong Show." Were this merely a retelling of his TV career and largely miserable lovelife, it likely would have been impossibly dull. However, the film (and

Barris's autobiography) assert that while he was a game show host by day, he was a hired CIA hitman by night, helping protect the free world from the spread of communism (even though he was usually a somewhat reluctant killer). Despite the far-fetchedness of this spy story, it at the very least makes for interesting cinema.

The fact that this movie is the story of a pop icon who was popular well before the current young generation's time acts as a double-edge sword. There are many moments in the film where you feel that to appreciate the movie fully, you really had to be a viewer of his shows in your childhood. On the other hand, the exposure to the ghosts of television past can be a somewhat enlightening experience. I can now laugh at references to "The Gong Show" in current television with more confidence and ease. However, a burning desire to know more about "The Gong Show" doesn't alone justify seeing this film, but rather warrants a strong reex-

amination of one's own life goals, I should think.

I found Sam Rockwell quite convincing as Chuck Barris, but alas, since I've never seen the real Chuck Barris, I'm hardly a reliable judge. Drew Barrymore was well-suited to play Barris' public love interest Penny, which contrasted beautifully with his private love interest, Patricia, Barris's fiery contact and co-assassin on the other side of the iron curtain, played with confidence by Julia Roberts.

While few can contest George Clooney's acting abilities, he seemed oddly out of place as CIA agent Jim Byrd, the Chief Quimby to Barris's Inspector Gadget. It was next to impossible to suspend your disbelief and forget that you are watching George Clooney (in a stupid moustache) instead of a secret agent man, likely due to the fact that he cast himself in the role.

However, George Clooney the director was impressive. It is commend-

able that Clooney choose a Kaufman script as his first film that no other director was brave enough to touch. The film was visually pleasing and clever with some really great camera work. While the pace was fairly uneven, it never slowed to the point of boredom. The interviews with Barris's former workmates and gameshow contestants, such as Gene-Gene the Dancing Machine, were a nice touch that helped the audience to accept Barris's outrageous story for just a little while. Clooney has definitely shown potential with this movie.

From any other screenwriter, it would be a great script. From Charlie Kaufman, though, we expect something...more bizarre. It just isn't as weird as we want it to be. Regardless, it is still a good story with some nice performances and is well worth seeing. Definately a rentable movie.

By Brodie MacRae