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The Oscars 2010: Movies that Connect Us -- Part 1

Sr. Rose Pacatte | Mar. 2, 2010 NCR Today

Forty-two feature films have been nominated in a variety of categories for the 82nd Academy Awards, which will take place at the Kodak Theater in Los Angeles on March 7. In a throw back to the 1930s and 1940s, when anywhere between eight and 12 films were nominated for Best Picture, the Academy for Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) decided in 2009 to expand the category to 10 feature films so that additional deserving films might be considered. For a film journalist this provides a banquet of stories to explore but makes it nearly impossible to predict a winner.

Human connection, and therefore human dignity and justice, is a theme that runs through many of the films nominated. Using this as a lens, here are my views on some of the 29 films that I have seen of those nominated as worthy of an Oscar.

I would pray to the patron saint of cinema that those films that tell the truth about humanity and promote human dignity through beauty, truth, and goodness, will win, but, alas, although there are patron saints of television (St. Clare of Assisi) and telecommunications (St. Gabriel the Archangel) the press (St. Paul and St. Francis de Sales), and even actors (St. Genesius) there is no patron saint of the movies. Yet.

Performance by an actor in a leading role
This is a tough call. Jeff Bridges as the boozy country singer who has seen better days in "Crazy Heart," is the sentimental favorite. I would be happy if he wins, though he should have been nominated and won several times before this ("Seabiscuit"; "The Big Lebowski"). George Clooney is so believable in "Up in the Air," Colin Firth and Morgan Freeman are both excellent. But my vote goes to Jeremy Renner for his strong, nuanced performance as the adrenalin soaked leader of a courageous Army team that disposes of roadside bombs in "The Hurt Locker." Each of these films embody some aspect of human experience that promotes empathy, the basic building block of a man's character.

Performance by an actor in a supporting role
I think that Christoph Waltz as the nefarious and evil Nazi officer from "Inglorious Basterds" will win, but Christopher Plummer as the Tolstoy, caught in a conflict between marriage and family and his ideals about Christian discipleship, performs brilliantly in "The Last Station." I didn't see "The Messenger" and Matt Damon's part in "Invictus" was too slight (he should have been nominated for Best Actor for his role in "The Informant" instead.) I didn't care for the film version of "The Lovely Bones" so despite Stanley Tucci's believable creepy character, he doesn't get my vote.

Performance by an actress in a leading role
Each of the films for which these actresses have been nominated is about being truly human. I have heard some film critics say that Sandra Bullock should not have been nominated for her role as the crusading mom who took in a homeless young man in the box office delight "The Blind Side." I disagree. Sandra Bullock is a great actress and gave a crowd-pleasing performance. She made us want to stand up and cheer (and hopefully do some good works, too.) Meryl Streep as Julia Child in "Julie & Julia" is extremely entertaining and gives a flawless impersonation of the famed television chef. Then just when I think Meryl Streep is the best actress of

this generation, here comes Helen Mirren again. She plays Sofya Tolstoy in "The Last Station," puts everyone on notice that marriage is sacred and no one can interfere -- and you believe her. Newcomer Gabourey Sidibe in "Precious: Based on the Novel *Push* by Sapphire" could win easily in her tragic yet hopeful role as an abused teen. I would be surprised if Carey Mulligan in "An Education" wins because I don't think enough people saw her excellent performance. Each of the actresses in this category deserves to win. My vote goes to Gabourey Sidibe in "Precious," but I think this is Sandra Bullock's year and I can live with that.

Performance by an actress in a supporting role
I like Penelope Cruz but I don't think she should have gotten an Oscar last year for "Vicky Cristina Barcelona" and I don't think she should get one for her role in "Nine." Marion Cotillard as the trophy wife was sadly overlooked. Mo'Nique, as the cruel and emotionally shipwrecked mother in "Precious," was scary and gave a riveting, if not repelling, performance. The thing about cinema is that it lets us experience for a couple of hours what it might be like to be someone else. What does a Christian, a person of good will, do after experiencing a film like "Precious"? Someone (Mother Teresa? a newspaper man?) once said that it was her job to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted. This is the role of films like "Precious."

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[Check Sr. Rose's blog at www.sisterrose.wordpress.com for more Oscar commentary.]

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