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## Making educated predictions for Sunday's Oscars

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NCR Today

I saw 120 of the top films released in the United States in 2012, most of them in the top 250 that made at least \$1 million at the box office. I saw 33 of the 45 films in the major categories nominated for an Oscar. I am only going to cast votes here in the categories for which I saw all the films.

On NPR today, host Michel Martin talked about *The Los Angeles Times* story that claims that "most Oscar voters are white, male, out of touch" and of a certain age.

If I were a voting member of the Academy, here are the films I would vote for, as a white, still middle-aged (it's a close call but I still have some time) female and, I like to think, an in-touch film reviewer. And I don't like sympathy wins. Oscars are precious; give them to the truly deserving.

### Best picture

"Hugo" -- This film gets my vote, and I hope it will win; it's a beautiful homage to cinema, the imagination, storytelling and family. It moved me.

"The Help" -- This is a very strong contender, and I loved it.

"The Artist" -- The dog takes home the Oscar, and I wouldn't mind if this refreshing retro film wins.

"Midnight in Paris" -- I would not begrudge Woody Allen a win; I liked this film about writer's block and literary characters very much.

"Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close" -- I liked it very much, but it's a stretch to win.

"Moneyball" -- It's a great film that everyone in leadership should see, but a long shot.

"The Tree of Life" -- After seeing Terrence Malick's cinematic poem three times, I could accept it as Best Picture, but I would be surprised if it wins.

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"The Descendants" -- I belong to the silent majority who thinks George Clooney is a terrific actor but that this film is simply vacuous. I just don't get it and don't like it.

"War Horse" -- A tie with "The Descendants." The horses were amazing, but it's all flash with a moment of brilliance and one-dimensional characters.

#### **Best director**

Martin Scorsese for "Hugo" is my choice, with Michel Hazanavicius for "The Artist" a strong possibility. I'd be fine if Woody Allen or Terrence Malick receives the award, but if Alexander Payne gets it for "The Descendants," I may cry. The publicity for this film is over-the-top here in Los Angeles, but come on. What is it about, really?

#### **Best actor**

The surprise win would be Brad Pitt as the manager of the Oakland A's in "Moneyball." In most films, Brad Pitt poses for the camera, but I thought he was really good in "Moneyball": He gave a fine, nuanced performance. My vote goes to Brad.

If the Academy really liked George Clooney, why didn't they nominate him for "The American" in 2010 or "Good Night and Good Luck" in 2005? Now that was acting.

Gary Oldman is consistently good in all of the films I have seen him in, but I cannot figure out why the Cold War-era film "Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy" even got made. It was a bit of a snooze.

Demian Bichir is fine in "A Better Life," but I don't think so. However, the experience of undocumented immigrants could appeal to the Academy.

Jean Dujardin in "The Artist" is a definite favorite, but this depends on who is voting. I have heard grumbling in the industry about this backward-looking film as a dreary upstart. I don't agree, but to choose unknowns over Pitt or Clooney or maybe Oldman? Well, you never know. I will take any of these, but sorry, George.

#### **Best actress**

This is a tough call, but my vote goes to Viola Davis for "The Help." She's just wonderful. Second choice would be Glenn Close for "Albert Nobbs."

I love Meryl Streep, but she should have gotten the Oscar for playing Julia Child, not Margaret Thatcher in "The Iron Lady." The film and the performance have to be worth it, I think.

Hands down, the Swedish version of "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo" was better than Rooney Mara's

American version. Michelle Williams would be a surprise win for me. She is following in Meryl's steps here with a great imitation, but what was "My Week with Marilyn" about, really?

### **Best supporting actor**

My vote goes to Max von Sydow for "Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close." He never says a word, but his face tells the story. But I bet Christopher Plummer will win for "Beginners," about an elderly widow who comes out gay.

Nick Nolte was good in "Warrior," but why didn't someone nominate Tom Hardy? Wow.

It was nice to see Jonah Hill in a normal role in "Moneyball." He could win, but I think it's not his time.

### **Best supporting actress**

This category is a close call. Jessica Chastain, the flavor of the month, was truly excellent as the poor white girl who married above her station in "The Help," and Berenice Bejo was excellent in "The Artist." Janet McTeer was good in "Albert Nobbs," but I think this is between Melissa McCarthy in "Bridesmaids" and Octavia Spenser in "The Help." But comedies are not Academy favorites, and since I have to choose, I am going with Octavia Spenser for "The Help."

### **Best cinematography**

I am voting for "Hugo," but I would like "The Tree of Life" to win. This is an extraordinary film, and each time I see it, it gets shorter. (The movie verges on three hours.) The play between light and the camera's vision is of a divine quality; God's creation and man's contrasted in a fascinating, innovative, nonlinear story.

### **Best adapted screenplay**

"Hugo" wins because John Logan took an imaginative book with illustrations fused with few words that made you think you were already in a movie. This is a brilliant adaptation. The others are only OK.

### **Best art direction**

Once again, my vote goes to "Hugo." If you haven't read the book yet by Brian Selznick, put the actual book on your list and be amazed. The only one that would disappoint me with a win is "War Horse."

### **Best original song**

With only two nominees, give it to "Man or Muppet" from "The Muppet Movie." The macaws from "Rio," though the film is very deserving, will have to wait.

### **Best original score**

Tough call, really, but I am going with Howard Shore's "Hugo." True, this is going up against John Williams in "War Horse," but I was not as moved by Williams' score.

### **Best makeup**

Now why didn't they nominate "My Week with Marilyn" for this category? Come on, the makeup was brilliant.

I think "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hollows Part 2" deserves the Oscar. "Albert Nobbs" and "The Iron Lady" are fine but rather ordinary given the magic Hollywood works with make-up.

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