

THE CampChuck REVIEWER

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Editor, critic, layout, distribution, and general factotum ...



Ten Top Paid Actors Pledge 40% of Salaries to Attain Alternatives to Coal page 9

The 94th ANNUAL ACADEMY AWARDS NOMINATIONS

Oscar Night: Sunday, March 27

Best Picture

Belfast

CODA

Don't Look Up

Drive My Car

Dune

King Richard

Licorice Pizza

Nightmare Alley

The Power of the Dog

West Side Story

Best Director

Kenneth Branagh

Ryūsuke Hamaguchi

Paul Thomas Anderson

Jane Campion

Steven Spielberg

Best Actor

Javier Bardem

Being the Ricardos

Benedict Cumberbatch

The Power of the Dog

Andrew Garfield

tick, tick ... BOOM!

Will Smith

King Richard

Denzel Washington

The Tragedy of Macbeth

Best Actress

Jessica Chastain

The Eyes of Tammy Faye

Olivia Colman

The Lost Daughter

Penelope Cruz

Parallel Mothers

Nicole Kidman

Being the Ricardos

Kristen Stewart

Spencer

Best Supporting Actor

Ciaran Hinds

Belfast

Troy Kotsur

CODA

Jesse Plemons

The Power of the Dog

J.K. Simmons

Being the Ricardos

Kodi Smit-McPhee

The Power of the Dog

Best Supporting Actress

Jessie Buckley

The Lost Daughter

Ariana DeBose

West Side Story

Judi Dench

Belfast

Kirsten Dunst

The Power of the Dog

Aunjanue Ellis

King Richard

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Best Documentary Feature

Some might suggest that mentioning the film “Ascension” on the cover page of *The CampChuck Reviewer* increases its chances of winning the Best Documentary Feature Oscar. More likely, mentioning it merely boasts that I actually know someone who was nominated for an Academy Award.

More likely than that, mentioning it responds to two (2), comments by the father of the “Ascension” co-producer, Kira Simon-Kennedy. One of my college roommates from 50 years ago, Alan Kennedy, said, “Maybe front-page news in your Oscar newsletter?” Proud father aside, “Ascension” deserves the nomination and has a decent chance of winning against stiff competition.

Fond memory aside that I have of a young child who I couldn't possibly imagine would become a filmmaker, “Ascension” assembles a fresh, contemporary mosaic. It captures work life in China – government-throttled, capitalist-communist China. It manages a point of view that is both biting and non-judgmental – all with a strangely resonant vitality.

“Ascension” bopping visits to dozens of workplaces could be its ticket to Oscar if voting embraces the film's style and vision. However, “Flee” may offer a more clever version of innovation that may turn voters' heads. “Flee” starkly softens its account of a harrowing Muslim refugee story in the form of an animated documentary. Though very well done, this frontrunner seems a touch more like gimmick than Oscar scarfing technique.

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Best Supporting Actor

Four of the 12 Oscar nominations for “The Power of Dog.” are acting bids. Besides Benedict Cumberbatch’s somewhat overrated Best Actor nod and Kirsten Dunst’s overrated Best Supporting Actress nod, there are two, yes two, Best Supporting Actor bids: Jesse Plemons and Kodi Smit-McPhee. Overrated and somewhat overrated.

All act well. Neither the parts nor their chemistry registers as special. Plemons plays the overshadowed brother of the more interesting Cumberbatch character, an uninteresting non-path to a Best Supporting Actor role. Smit-McPhee, as Plemons’s stepson, has some facets that add the most flavor to the film’s story but not enough. Smit-McPhee is nerdy & perhaps effeminate, not a match for the hard ranching culture.

While those two at least feel prominent in their Supporting Actor roles, J.K. Simmons is the least noticeable of the Best Supporting Actor performances. “Being the Ricardos” beams such a spotlight on its title characters – Lucille Ball (Nicole Kidman) and Desi Arnaz (Javier Bardem), playing Lucy and Ricky Ricardo. J.K. Simmons solidly portrays the also iconic William Frawley playing TV character, Fred Mertz, but Kidman and Bardem suck up any awards chances the film has.

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Email: jaffee@startlets.com (that’s three “t’s” in startlets).

Manufactured Mailbag

Dear Editor,

Look at the nominations. They cast British Benedict Cumberbatch as an American cowboy and American Kristen Stewart as the British Princess Diana. Why do they do things like that?

Cristina Cross, St. Paul, MN

Dear Cristina,

Well, they are actors. If they can pull it off, why not? Maybe they cast for the look ... or for appropriate star power.

More interesting among this year’s nominees – and worthy of winning -- is Tony Kotsur, playing the father in CODA. Here, they hired a deaf actor to play a deaf character (along with the most famous deaf actor, Marlee Matlin as the mother).

Ed.

Dear Editor,

Dude, I just had a brain flash. “The Oscars Streaming Package.” After announcing the nominees, people pay \$9.99 to see any Oscar nominated film they want. For \$99.99, they can see all the films from the major Oscar categories. This year, that would be 18 pictures ... nice discount, right? Man, I’m onto something, right?

A friend, Los Angeles

Dear friend,

It is almost worth it that I get a letter to the editor from you every year to hear this one idea of yours. You’d have to coax a lot of separate private interests, but it’s a good customer-oriented idea.

Ed.

Dear Editor,

I have to ask. Is your cancer gone? Are you well?

Betty Behter, Hardy, NH

Dear Betty,

It’s worth noting that I’ve felt fine for 3 years since my massive cancer surgeries. I allow myself to project to the significant milestone of feeling well 5 years after. Still, I’m not cancer free, and I’m well satisfied that I’ve received what I call my 4th reprieve based on quarterly MRI/CT scans that my condition remains stable, not substantially worsening.

Ed.

Dear Editor,

I don’t like to admit it, but I don’t want to go back to movie theaters. Don’t you think streaming new movies on TV at home is so convenient and comfy?

Conchita Potate, Akron, OH

Dear Conchita,

Is this a taste of what goes for a pandemic lesson? Movie appreciation isn’t the same at home, though I grant it’s another way to bring the world to your nestled inclinations. I’m tugged too.

Ed.

Dear Editor,

Your Meryl didn’t get nominated.

Nina Nenyehyeh, Raspberry, WY

Dear Nina,

Ms. Streep had fun doing a satiric role that isn’t Oscar resonant.

Ed.

Pandemic; (Nuclear?) War; Climate Change

Could be that since writing this newsletter, Vladimir Putin has used a nuclear weapon on somebody. That would sure put two-plus years of “mild” pandemic into perspective. Or else could be some string of events has escalated us into war with Russia – not “merely” supporting Ukraine’s war against Russia. This also would be a huge counterpoint to our pandemic experience. Indeed, even if Russia’s aggression “only” unfolds in Ukraine, what does that say about our chances of addressing something like Climate Change?

Assume nuclear confrontation hasn’t happened and its prospect is just a scary reminder. Assume that we are substantially past the Covid19 pandemic and are better aligned to address an inevitable next pandemic. Let’s assume we’ve learned such a pandemic lesson. Assume we can now prime ourselves appropriately to address Climate Change.

Can we upgrade our catastrophe-averting behavior? Can we address the existential threat of Climate Change like it’s a next pandemic multiplied by 100? Can we mobilize against Climate Change as if the nightmare it would create were analogous to adapting to the toll of nuclear bombs dropped? Building a worldwide commitment to averting Climate Change may be easier than assuring that crazy people won’t press nuclear war buttons. It may be the all-around most enlightened thing that everybody in the world can do.

If we upgrade our dribs and drabs efforts into top to bottom, inside and out, now onward commitment, we can keep what is already happening from getting too dismantlingly bad. We can even reverse what our behavior, what OUR heedless behavior, has wrought.

Enough overcharged rhetoric. CampChuck continues as it has **since 1992, matching every subscription dollar for dollar**. All subscriptions – over \$42,000 plus CampChuck’s 100% match of \$42,000 -- have funneled through CampChuck to RMI and Food Banks. Whether you subscribe at the official \$5 level or the average participation of \$30, think sustainable economic practice and the golden rule. And think access to CampChuck’s newsletters.

How close did Vladimir Putin bring us to nuclear war?

What is the salient lesson from our pandemic?

Can we prevent (the worst of) Climate Change?

Such questions (however daunting) beg that we do what is in our collective power to do

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Rocky Mountain Institute

This nonprofit helps individuals and communities and businesses and governments to make money, yes, make money, by being smart about the environment. By research and science, by education and negotiation, by example, the Rocky Mountain Institute helps us ... and the U.S. ... and the world “us” to make long term economic sense by making long term environmental sense.

Note:

Different than all the other years that CampChuck has been encouraging subscription/donations, I’m only listing Rocky Mountain Institute as a place to show your support.

Yes, I will still honor checks made payable to the “Food Bank of Nevada County.” The pressing need shouts to lend a helping hand to the hungry – to the “food insecure” (how’s that for modern terminology). Yes, I will still honor checks made payable to “Futures Without Violence.” Although curiously, this issue/organization has not drawn your CampChuck attention nearly so much as the other two, in recent years it has been a commanding subject deserving activist support.

The existential crisis of Climate Change threatens our lives, our complacency, our children, like no other affliction. In the shadow of pandemic & war, consider upgrading behavior and commitment big time.

Best Supporting Actor

(continued from page 2)

Too bad, because Simmons is always a compelling supporting addition to films,

The only serious competition for the Best Supporting Actor Oscar comes from Ciaran Hinds in “Belfast” and Troy Kotsur in “CODA.”

Both feel like ensemble players, important to the fabric of their films without disproportionately standing out – good Best Supporting Actor material. Ciaran Hinds plays the granddad in “Belfast,” one of the two frontrunner films. It’s a crusty, sentimental role that helps round out the family orientation amidst the violent strife in the neighborhood.

Unless the voting veers toward the older actor (Hinds), this award goes to a somewhat younger version of family values. Tagging a deaf actor, Troy Kotsur, to play the deaf father in “CODA” provides a hook for voters to hang any sentimental inclinations. But



Kotsur doesn’t just get the deaf aspect right. He communicates the pride in who he is: a fisherman, a

community member, and a loving, bonded family man. He makes a sturdy, very likable impression. Best Supporting Actor for Kotsur seems like the easiest pick in the major categories.

Best Supporting Actress

Both Kirsten Dunst in “The Power of the Dog” and Judi Dench in “Belfast” mix well in the ensemble quality of the acting in their films. Neither do anything special to warrant a Best Supporting Actress Oscar, but there’s a difference to note. Dunst is stuck in an unimpressive story, offering little chemistry to the character interactions.

Judi Dench shows yet again why she is an acting stalwart. She commands a wonderful regular-person quality playing the grandma in a film that’s all about family, with violent civil unrest in Ireland as the telling backdrop.

Both “Belfast” and “The Power of the Dog” are the kinds of films that could ride waves of Oscar-winning attention. Though neither actress should take home Gold, it would not tarnish the awarding to make Judi Dench the oldest-ever (87) Oscar winner for acting.

Actually, all five nominees for Best Supporting Actress don’t suggest that any actor offers the kind of bolstering performance that stirs Best Supporting Actress juices.

Aunjanue Ellis (“King Richard”), Jesse Buckley (“The Lost Daughter”), and Ariana DeBose (“West Side Story”) all feel like notable ensemble acting contributors rather than Best Supporting Actress standouts.

It’s a bit difficult to stay with the idea that a film about living tennis legends, Serena and Venus

Williams, isn’t primarily about them. It’s about the title character. It’s about their dad, “King Richard” Williams.

Aunjanue Ellis, playing the mom, suffers a double trap: Her character isn’t Serena or Venus, and she plays second banana to her husband Richard. The film shows that she’s an estimable force in her daughter’s lives, in the strength of the Williams family. This sort of feel could sneak Aunjanue a surprise win, but probably not.

Jesse Buckley might be said to rise above the ensemble feel for the acting in “The Lost Daughter.” She plays the flashback version, the younger version of Olivia Coleman’s lead character. Buckley informs the how and why of the older character’s behavior. As far as Oscars go, it’s hard to get past that “The Lost Daughter” barely registers on the box office radar.

Though hardly a box office blockbuster, “West Side Story” carries some film history oomph and some Steven Spielberg oomph. Ariana DeBose will benefit, being singled out as Best Supporting Actress for a film that will otherwise be passed over in the major Oscar categories. Her lively singing and dancing presence will substitute for a more straightforward acting hook on Oscar.

Voters will also lift DeBose into winning an Oscar for the same role that earned Rita Morena her Oscar in 1961.



Best Picture, Best Director

The 10 nominees for Best Picture don't particularly have Best Picture written all over them. There's no transcendent little film on the list. There's no big film dripping "pick me" on the list. Three films tickle Best Picture with a fuzzy kind of preeminence.

"West Side Story" carries the cinematic spectacle that comes with being a movie musical. Stir in the respect for director Steven Spielberg (although his Best Picture winning "Schindler's List" and his Best Director winning "Saving Private Ryan" make daunting comparison). Dial in a prestigious remake of the Best Picture winning original (although the 1961 winner makes another daunting comparison). Spielberg distinguishes himself yet again, but not at a Best Director or Best Picture level.

"The Power of the Dog" puffs its cinematic chest with a Big West feel, a bigger than its britches feel. It poses for Oscar Gold with seemingly rich character relationships. Frontrunner critical acclaim notwithstanding, the characters in this film don't radiate. No chemistry buzzes. The story drags the weight of ho hum. The well-realized look does the best it can with not enough. This shouldn't be churning Oscar ballyhoo. All of this is to say that a merely good film will wheedle its way into a Best Picture Oscar and Best Director for Jane Campion.



Ah, Jane Campion, she'll become the third woman to win the Best Director Oscar (after Kathryn Bigelow for "Hurt Locker" and last year's Chloe Zhao for "Nomadland"). Perhaps, highlight more praisingly Campion's marvelous 1993 film, "The Piano" (nominated for Director, Picture; won for Actress, Supporting Actress, & Campion's Writing).



"Belfast," now here's a film that deserves attention, perhaps short of calling it excellent. It stokes its frontrunner potential on combining a family story with the turbulence of Ireland's "troubles" between Catholics and Protestants. The tightly knit family tugs beautifully, with the 9-year-old son at the center and with the rest of the family well intertwined. The topical "troubles," though well integrated into the family story, might have managed a more gripping share of the film's energy. That aspect could keep

"Belfast" from Best Picture and Director Oscars. Then again, that understatement may tip the Oscar-winning balance to its charming storytelling.

After highlighting the films contending most noticeably for Best Picture and Best Director, the film that deserves to sneak to the top of the heap is "CODA." Stylistically, "CODA" doesn't make a big picture splash or corner a special small picture intimacy. It travels a fairly formulaic scripting, although to its great credit, it does so with great vitality, warmth, and coming-of-age freshness.

The distinctive character of "CODA" percolates through a deaf family. Mom, dad, and brother are deaf. The daughter is a CODA – Child of Deaf Adults." The daughter, as part of the film's coming-of-age story, is finding a life larger than her deeply bonded deaf family. The daughter, adding an extra deaf-story tweak, is developing her love of singing.

Oh, it would be nice if this could be a year when the Best Picture Oscar goes to a film whose director isn't even nominated. This has happened only a handful of times in 93 years. Oscar winning directors have their films win Best Picture about 70% of the time. It's also notable that this year's Directors Guild Award (DGA) went to Jane Campion for "The Power of the Dog." Only 7 DGA winning directors didn't also have their films win the Best Picture Oscar. Another associative ding against "CODA" and its director Sian Heder is not getting a DGA nomination for its director.

The rest of the nominees trip over various shortcomings.

"Don't Look Up" tries ambitiously to do substantial satire with a huge asteroid soon to pummel planet Earth. Yes, its message hits hard on the real existential threat of Climate Change. No, it doesn't stir up an inspiration to activism. It barely translates as a lesson that we should worry more. It's too much of a clutter of exaggerated characters, requisite romantic subplot, and its too obvious educational metaphor. Leonardo DiCaprio, who usually performs better than you would suspect, shouldn't be boasting about this acting turn.

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Best Picture, Best Director

Meryl Streep, the best actor ever, took her cheeky role to have fun, not to flout her bestness. Jennifer Lawrence, who consistently improves a film with her presence, doesn't especially. In what is a funny sci fi drama with something to say, "Don't Look Up" is ripe entertainment but certainly not Oscar material.

"Drive My Car," with its Best Director nominee Ryūsuke Hamaguchi, is the artiest film on the Best Picture list. It may manage a win as a Best Foreign Language Film nominee, but it's too much work for what you're likely to make of its meaning, its chemistry, or its craft. "Parasite," a couple years ago, deserved all the stir that it generated. It arguably deserved its Best Picture Oscar (first time for a foreign language film). "Drive My Car" deserves respect, introspection, but not Oscars.

"Dune," no slouch on the arty meter, is the blockbusteriest film with a Best Picture nod. It's rendering of a classic science fiction book does a great job, especially visually. Its lead, Timothee Chalamet, combines aspects of having maturity beyond his years plus youthfulness that's not entirely ready. The surrounding characters assure this film is more than just a techno-whizzing sci fi romp, but it's hardly Oscar-level transcendent.

"King Richard" twists on the biopic. What makes it a film to watch is that it's about Serena (the best female tennis player ever) and Venus (near the top of the best female tennis players ever). These two Williams sisters definitely have a film worthy story. It may be a film that showcases their formative years, but "King Richard" is really about the dad. The dad had the vision; the dad ran the tight ship as both family man and the coach of champions. The dad carries the personality of this film, which is fine, but it's the kind of centrally splashed footnote that keeps it a very good film, not an Oscar ripe film.

"Licorice Pizza" twists on coming-of-age filmmaking. It's what you'd expect from director Paul Thomas Anderson. The lead teens are not teen-movie attractive, teen-movie cool, teen-movie nerd wonders, teen-movie smart. They do have vitality and freshness and gusto for being themselves for themselves and each other. While the latter helps this be a good new take on tried-and-true filmmaking, the former keeps it from serious Oscar consideration.

"Nightmare Alley" provides Cate Blanchett with a stylish supporting opportunity, and there's a bunch of effective actors supporting the flowing juices of this yarn. The center of attention, though, is Bradley Cooper. It's an offbeat film, with him taking an offbeat turn. Cooper's character finds his calling at a carnival, his life in show business -- that is, in the con man business. (His con man involvement in "American Hustle" was better.) The film carries you down a winding road of good storytelling, but nothing sharp enough for an Oscar.

(continued from page 1)

Best Documentary Feature

"Attica" deals a classic documentary approach, classic and rough to watch. Voters may latch on to its more traditional style, crediting its harsh truth-be-told reporting. Prisoners take over Attica prison until the powers that be could assert their power.

Also in the classic documentary tradition, "Writing with Fire" is video journalism about journalists. It's in India, and the shoestring, independent journalists are women, women chasing hard-hitting news. This film might have the documentary facets to win. (I did not see this film.)

The easiest choice for Best Documentary is "Summer of Soul" -- a feel-good, culturally rich, and informative buried treasure. It's about a music festival that happened in 1969 (essentially sidelined into oblivion by Woodstock happening the same summer). This Harlem, New York festival parades a surprising range of different kinds of Black music through a single venue.

Should Oscar's Best Documentary go to the tastiest, most digestible content ("Summer of Love")? Should the title Best bend to a fresh turn at classic documentary ("Attica," which won the Directors Guild Award, or "Writing with Fire")? Should Documentary Gold go to animation -- a calculated delivery mechanism ("Flee")?

No, I proffer a CampChuck bump. Kiki (Kira Simon-Kennedy), the little girl I knew way back when, grew up to be an Oscar-winning co-producer ("Ascension"). That's what I predict, and I'm sticking to it.



Note: The five Best Documentary Feature nominations this year reminds that documentaries are a very rich way to go for enlightening and satisfying film watching.

Best Actress

Transformative makeup renders two of the nominees for Best Actress unrecognizable. Nicole Kidman plays Lucille Ball in “Being the Ricardos.” Her makeup heightens the impression that Kidman portrays only a facsimile of one of the most famous faces in the history of television. While it’s a telling window into the real-life complexity around “I Love Lucy,” its rich story muddles appreciation for Kidman’s acting accomplishment.

Jessica Chastain plays Tammy Faye in “The Eyes of Tammy Faye.” Her makeup feels like a quintessential part of the performance. It is a foundation for the complicated and telling character Chastain portrays. Though hardly an icon as Lucille Ball was, Tammy Faye was a huge TV presence for about 10 televangelical and audience-fleeing years.

What is the mixture of the truth that was Tammy Faye? Was she shallow, naïve, tunnel-visioned, deluded? Was she loving, compassionate, committed, maybe a curious, narrowly channeled kind of smart? Jessica Chastain does a masterful job of pulling you in and holding you through an uncomfortable journey. The inside look at what built



and tore down Jim Bakker and Tammy Faye Bakker may have been too icky to rate a Best Picture nom, but it’s a trip to Oscar Gold for Jessica Chastain.

More famous than Lucille Ball and certainly more famous than Tammy Faye, there’s also a Best Actress nomination for playing Princess Diana. Kristen Stewart rises to this occasion very nicely in a film called “Spencer” (Diana’s family name). While “nicely” is an appropriate tack for how to portray Diana’s struggle being Princess Diana, it’s a tad understated for capturing a Best Actress Oscar. One might think this is just the sort of effect to win. Alas, playing a famous real person can boost a performance or shackle it. With Princess Diana, the portrayal wrestles being famous for being famous.

In the opposite direction, Olivia Colman (in “The Lost Daughter”) and Penelope Cruz (in “Parallel Mothers”) play regular people, not famous people. It feels less burdened to consider their performances as Oscar worthy.

Playing oh-so-British royalty, as in “The Crown” or her Oscar-winning “The Favourite,” or just a daughter in “The Father” or a mother in “The Lost Daughter,” Olivia Colman repeatedly puts engaging humanity into her roles. There’s a bit of “so what” about the story in “The Lost Daughter” that undermines her Oscar chances. Too bad, because it’s a complex rendering of her character’s failed attempt to be an unnoticed part of a holiday beach scene added to troubling memories of her years raising children.

Pedro Almodovar directs fairly curious and affecting, often women-oriented films, but “Parallel Mothers” isn’t likely to overcome the disadvantage of being a foreign language film. This weighs less heavily on Penelope Cruz’s Best Actress chances, but maybe just enough. She plays a mother, a sister, a daughter, with further weaving into lots of community players, plus a bit of supposedly resident magic. Displaying lots of vitality in a regular person, Cruz makes us care about the story and her part in it. She makes us appreciate her as a regular person rather than as a sexy actress that comes to mind from many of her other films. However, good as she is, there’s not enough of a dramatic turn in “Parallel Mothers” to win Oscar.

20th Wild & Scenic Film Festival Awards:

Festival info at wildandscenicfilmfestival.org

(Here are the 2022 award-winning films.)

“The Ants and the Grasshopper”	jury award
“The Arctic: Our Last Great Wilderness”	most inspiring adventure
“Black Ice”	best of fest
“The Magical Forest and the Things”	best kid’s film
“El Mago Georges”	honorable mention
“End of the Line: The Women of Standing Rock”	honorable mention
“First We Eat”	honorable mention
“Ghost Ponds”	student filmmaker award
“Inhabitants: An Indigenous Perspective”	people’s choice
“Loon”	best short short
“My Garden of a Thousand Bees”	jury award
“My Last Day of Summer”	best kid’s film, honorable mention
“The Seeds of Vandana Shiva”	spirit of activism
	also The John de Graaf Environmental Filmmaker Award
“Tigre Gente”	honorable mention
“Youth v Gov”	best in theme (Currents of Hope)

Best Actor

Although “The Power of the Dog” is a frontrunner for scarfing up Oscars, including one for Benedict Cumberbatch, all of the four other nominees for Best Actor outdo Benedict’s bid. Well, maybe not. Denzel Washington, as good as he always is, seems a bit casual playing “The Tragedy of MacBeth.” He seems more to be visiting Shakespeare than tackling Shakespeare. Is it fair to ding Denzel for not sporting a British accent?

Cumberbatch, at least, seems more like he inhabits his character. Not incidentally, to play a cowboy, he has to drop his British accent. His character is rough, confident and off-putting. The role has facets that make for an Oscar contending role. However, probably the fault of the story rather than the acting, the film lacks chemistry. Cumberbatch lacks chemistry.

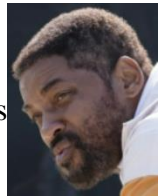
Javier Bardem makes a curious impression in “Being the Ricardos.” Whereas co-star Nicole Kidman plays her Lucille Ball under transformative makeup, Javier Bardem, playing Lucy’s husband, Desi Arnaz, has no makeup. He looks nothing like Desi Arnaz. What’s curious, Bardem’s portrayal is more interesting than Kidman’s. It is distracting that he doesn’t look like Desi Arnaz while it’s distracting that Nicole Kidman more or less does look like Lucille Ball. Through it all, Bardem makes us like him as he always does, but for this, one does not give Oscars.

The performance that deserves the Best Actor Oscar is Andrew Garfield playing Jonathan Larson in “tick, tick ... BOOM!” Not especially famous, Jonathan Larson died in his mid-30s from a heart problem. He was most

famous for creating the Broadway musical “Rent” and developing a musical called “tick, tick ... BOOM!” which is about his struggles to create musicals.

Andrew Garfield, with no history as a musical performer, sings great and acts better. He channels Larson’s talent, energy, and ambition along with a clear sense that Larson must have been a neat guy to know.

The performance that will win the Best Actor Oscar is Will Smith’s. He also plays a creator, the champion-maker of the Serena Williams and Venus Williams phenomenon. As the title character in “King Richard,” Smith does a solid job as Richard Williams, their dad.



It’s more than a solid job, because he conveys the dad’s hard baked but clearly devoted and loving personality as a family man, or you might say as the manager of their lives. Smith needed to convey his drive, his passion, his activated vision for his girls. Smith needed to make Richard Williams likable. It’s a very movie-ish role and film. Will Smith registers as both accomplished and likable.

It checks lots of boxes for being an Oscar winning role, but it’s difficult to detach from the feeling that Smith’s win is a celebrity win for an odd shift on a celebrity story. It’s OK for him to win the Oscar, but his long entertainment history (yes, including Oscar nominations for “Ali” and “The Pursuit of Happyness”) doesn’t exactly say this “Men in Black” actor is overdue to win an Oscar.

Regarding the Guild Awards

You may enjoy romancing the Oscars. However, it’s only fair to remind people that Oscar’s Actor, Actress, Supporting Actor, and Supporting Actress winners tend to align quite well with the Screen Actors Guild Awards. Oscar’s Best Director & Best Picture align well with the Directors Guild Award (DGA).

This year’s SAG awards went to actor Will Smith (King Richard), actress Jessica Chastain (The Eyes of Tammy Faye), supporting actor Troy Kotsur (CODA), & supporting actress Ariana DeBose (West Side Story). Expect maybe all 4 to win Oscars. Note: SAG nominated Lady Gaga (House of Gucci) & Jennifer Hudson (Respect [as Aretha Franklin]) were passed over for Oscar’s actress nominations. The 5 SAG actor nominees all received Oscar nominations. The SAG nominated Caitriona Balfe (Belfast) & Cate Blanchett (Nightmare Alley) were passed over for Oscar supporting actress nominations. 3 SAG nominees for supporting actor didn’t receive Oscar nods: Ben Affleck (The Tender Bar), Bradley Cooper (Licorice Pizza), and Jared Leto (House of Gucci).

The Directors Guild Award went to Jane Campion (The Power of the Dog). Expect her to win Oscar’s Best Director and her film to win Best Picture.