

## Show Oscar the money Awards value fame, not true talent

Columnist



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For 70 years, the Academy Awards has dictated to American audiences the year's best in the motion picture world. But in recent years, the Oscars has sent the message to movie-goers that achieving motion picture greatness no longer requires story lines, acting or directing that celebrate the art form, but merely star power.

Take this year's nominees, for instance. Included in the race for best picture is *Jerry Maguire*, starring Tom Cruise.

The movie garnered a significant amount of money, but the story of a sports agent/playboy who finally finds true love is no more powerful than that of the box office bomb *Boomerang*.

Cruise's history of financially successful films, not the artistic quality of *Jerry Maguire*, is surely the basis for the film's nomination. However, when members of the Academy recognized Cruise, they overlooked *The People vs. Larry Flynt*.

This true story of a porn-publishing maverick was more deserving of a nomination. In the film, Woody Harrelson and Courtney Love deliver powerful performances in a compelling story of an unlikely champion who takes his First Amendment rights-violation case to the U.S. Supreme Court.

By traditional standards, the film should have received a nomination. But because recent trends acknowledge only fame and popularity, the Academy Awards committee denied the film a nomination.

Perhaps as tragic as the Academy Awards' denial of a



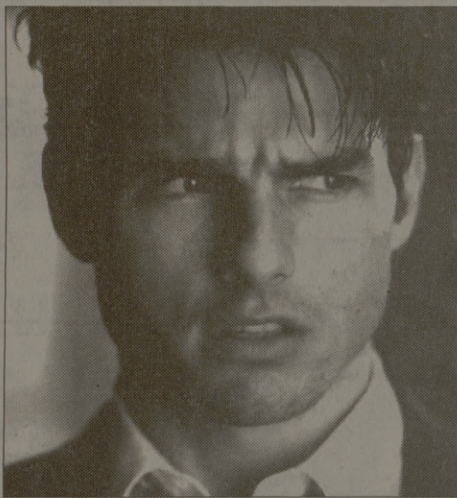
Stew Milne, THE BATTALION

But the nomination, which Love and Madonna deserved, went to actress Diane Keaton for her role as Bessie in *Marvin's Room* — another example of how the Academy recognizes big names instead of good performances.

And though Love's on-screen partner, Harrelson, deserved a Best Actor nomination for his role as Flynt, it can be argued that his nomination would have been based more on past film exposure than the actual performance.

To better represent the motion picture industry, the Academy Awards should follow suit of the Golden Globes, which continues to celebrate the art of filmmaking. Earlier this year, the Golden Globes awarded Madonna with Best Actress and recognized *The People vs. Larry Flynt* for its contributions to the industry with a nomination for Best Picture.

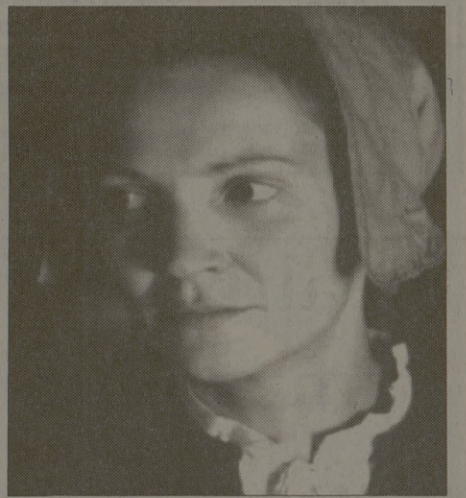
As it stands, the Academy Awards is sending a message to filmmakers that the only requirement to achieve an Oscar is a mediocre, trite film with a big-name star. Until the Academy Awards committee recognizes this sad trend it has started, the motion picture industry will suffer.



Tom Cruise is nominated for Best Actor for his performance in *Jerry Maguire*.

## Let the stars shine

Hollywood honors  
1996's gems  
tonight at the  
69th Academy Awards



Crucible star Joan Allen is a nominee for Best Supporting Actress.

LOS ANGELES (AP) — *The English Patient* has history on its side for a best-picture win, but don't expect to hear its theme music replayed endlessly Monday night. Oscar is likely to be humming more than one tune this year.

A sweep may be beyond the romantic epic's grasp as a mixed bag of films, including *Sling Blade*, *Shine* and *Fargo*, appear poised to reap their share of Academy Award glory.

*The English Patient*, with its leading 12 nominations, seems likely to snare the top honor: With one exception in the last 14 years, the best-picture award has gone to the film with the most bids.

Last year that was *Braveheart*. The year before: *Forrest Gump*. The tradition-buster: *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), which robbed leading contender *Bugsy* of the top honor.

Affection also could favor *The English Patient* because of producer Saul Zaentz, a respected industry figure honored previously for *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975) and *Amadeus* (1984). He's receiving the Irving G. Thalberg Memorial Award on Monday night, when the 69th annual ceremony airs live on ABC.

But the orchestra in the Shrine Autoto-

rium pit may be rapidly shuffling through its sheet music if such major categories as acting and writing are split among other contenders.

Writer-star Billy Bob Thornton's tour de force in *Sling Blade* has his colleagues publicly gushing, and he beat out *The English Patient* writer-director Anthony Minghella for the Writers Guild of America Award for best adapted screenplay.

Whether Thornton can nab the acting trophy from apparent front-runner Geoffrey Rush of *Shine*, who was named best lead actor last month by the Screen Actors Guild, is uncertain.

What is likely is that the best-actor Oscar will go to someone playing a character with a physical or emotional infirmity — a label fitting four of the five roles in the category.

Rush portrays emotionally troubled pianist David Helfgott; Thornton plays a mentally impaired man; Ralph Fiennes is



Frances McDormand scored a nomination for Best Actress in *Fargo*.

a burn victim in *The English Patient* and Woody Harrelson a paraplegic in *The People vs. Larry Flynt*.

Affliction has reaped Oscar gold in the past, so nominee Tom Cruise's healthy sports agent in *Jerry Maguire* may mean he goes home Oscarless.

The best-actress field is generally hale, with the exception of the cancer victim played by Diane Keaton in *Marvin's Room*. That factor may not be enough to overcome support for Frances McDormand, who captured the Screen Actors Guild award for her role as a homespun Midwestern crimebuster in *Fargo*.

A trio of British contenders in the best-actress ranks — Brenda Blethyn of *Secrets & Lies*, Kristin Scott Thomas of *The English Patient* and Emily Watson of *Breaking the Waves* — could cancel each other out and give an added boost to native daughter McDormand.

The supporting actor and actress categories are seen as a lock: Big buzz and Screen Actors Guild awards have gone to Cuba Gooding Jr. of *Jerry Maguire* and veteran Lauren Bacall of *The Mirror Has Two Faces*.

## Jim Carrey's *Liar, Liar* is hilarious, and that's the truth

BRANDON TRUITT  
THE BATTALION

*Liar, Liar*

Starring **Jim Carrey**, **Maura Tierney** and **Cary Elwes**  
Directed by **Tom Shadyac**  
Rated PG-13  
Playing at Hollywood 16  
★★★★ (out of five)

Until now, every Jim Carrey movie has had one major thing missing. Fortunately, director Tom Shadyac (*Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*) singled out the missing piece and included it in his latest release, *Liar, Liar*. Yes, after \$1 billion worldwide ticket sales, Carrey finally appears on-screen with his own hair.

This also may be the first time Carrey has acted anything like a human being in a film.

Shadyac says "the comedy is a little more grounded because Jim plays a realistic character."

The movie is "about real connections to real characters with real feelings," Carrey said. Carrey plays smooth-talking lawyer Fletcher Reede. The film's premise centers around a fantastic birthday wish from Reede's five-year-old son Max (Justin Cooper).

The first 30 minutes of the film develop Reede's relationships with both his family and his job, and the laughs are somewhat sparse.

Most of what is revealed about Reede is

that his current court case and much of his life are based on a foundation of lies.

Reede is an incredible liar, and while this might be a great asset as a lawyer, it causes him to continually neglect and let down Max. Although he loves his father, Max is drawn away from him by his mother's boyfriend Jerry. Cary Elwes (*The Princess Bride*) delivers a remarkable performance as Jerry, and makes viewers wonder how anyone, even the best actor, could pretend to be that much of a dork for even an hour-and-a-half.

While somewhat slow in its arrival, the turn in the movie comes at Max's fifth birthday party, which Reede has promised to attend.

Reede is a no-show because he is trying to sleep his way up the career ladder. He

calls his wife Audrey, played by Maura Tierney (*NewsRadio*, *Primal Fear*), and says he must work late because "the boss has really been riding [him] lately."

In front of all his guests, Max stares thoughtfully into his birthday candles and whispers, "I wish, just for one day, Dad couldn't tell a lie."

When Max's wish comes true, his father is forced to tell nothing but the truth for the next 24 hours. Most of the movie's funniest parts come just after Max's wish comes true and the audience sees just how different life is when people stop lying.

Instead of answering a question like "How are you?" with "Fine, thank you," one might suddenly have to say — as Reede did — "I'm a little upset about a sexual encounter I had last night, thank you." Carrey's classic rubber face gets used to its fullest in these truth-telling scenes because when he tries to lie, his mouth and body work against his mind, getting him into all sorts of contortions and mishaps, including a bathroom brawl with himself.

The hilarity of the movie comes in seeing the difference between Reede's life before and after his son's wish. Un-

fortunately, the much talked about "reality" of the movie ends with this same wish, when Carrey stops lying. All of a sudden the audience sees just how terrible life would be if people actually did

tell the truth all the time.

Of course, those who might be upset at this loss of reality can always take comfort in the utter reality and wiglessness of Carrey's hair.



Jim Carrey can not tell a lie to his clients or enemies in his latest movie, *Liar, Liar*.

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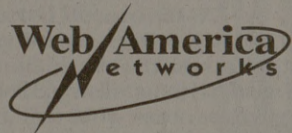
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