

## **Sure, Less Is More--Just Not This Year**

**by Joal Ryan**

We've got to admit--even we were impressed by the moreness backstage here at the 74th annual Academy Awards. More nice things to look at! More security checkpoints! More, well, Hollywood!

Maybe it was the shrimp that melted our cynical heart. Maybe it was the ritzy ballroom turned interview room at the brand-spankin'-new Renaissance Hollywood Hotel, near the brand-spankin'-new Kodak Theater, aka Oscar Central. Maybe it was just being in, well, Hollywood. (All we know is that it wasn't Russell Crowe--suffice to say media types were pulling big-time for Mr. Surly to lose to Denzel Washington.)

Here's more of the more from backstage:

### **More Emotion**

She wasn't crying any longer, but Best Actress Halle Berry (Monster's Ball) was definitely still breathing deep and gathering herself when she made it backstage. "It's a great night. I never thought it would be possible," Berry said of her historic win--the first ever for a black actress in a lead role. "I am filled with so much pride and joy and gratitude." Also filled with pride and joy was hubby Eric Benét who stood just off to the side of the podium, stargazing--at his wife.

Best Actor Denzel Washington (Training Day) was a much more cool customer, even though his win also was historic--he's the first black actor to win two career Oscars and the first black actor to win for a leading role since 1963. He said his prior experience at the Academy Awards (a Best Supporting win for 1990's Glory) helped keep him "very calm" and watching the NCAA basketball tournament until just before his limo arrived. In other words, he was the opposite of Halle. "She doesn't know where she is--she's gone," he said with a laugh. For the record, reporters made more of the black-actor-wins-an-Oscar angle than Washington. He invoked the name of tunesmith Randy Newman more than once (as when he asked whether Newman lost 16 times in a row before winning tonight, was that racism?) and helped a newspaper reporter with the wording on his lede: "Say an actor **won.**"

### **More Surprises**

Well, no one made a peep when A Beautiful Mind was named Best Picture--that was kind of surprising. (Of course, as the telecast passed the four-hour mark, reporters had other things to think of, like blown deadlines...and going home.) Things that did make the pressroom go "Ooh!": Jim Broadbent winning Best Supporting Actor for the little hyped Iris and Amelie not winning Best Foreign Language Film. Berry's win, by the way, made the room go "Yeah!" (Even a security guard was spotted clapping.)

### **More Mystery**

Where did Will Smith go? The buzz was weak. Many back here weren't even immediately aware that Smith had left the Kodak sometime after he served as a presenter but before the Best Actor category was settled. The official word from ABC? "He had to leave for personal matters."

### **More Less Russell Crowe**

On account of his non-win, our favorite wasn't back here in person--but he was in spirit. Reporters asked producer Brian Grazer if he thought Crowe's Best Actor chances were hurt by the dirty-tricks campaign aimed at the biopic? "We had no idea we'd win," Grazer demurred. Was director Ron Howard--gripping two Oscars himself--disappointed Crowe didn't get a share of the film's awards haul? "Sure, I'm disappointed," Howard said. Did Best Supporting Actress Jennifer Connelly have anything she wanted to say about Crowe? "He's an incredible actor," she obliged. "He really carried the film."

### **More Respect**

Not to disabuse your image of reporters, but mostly when awards shows open with serious speeches, we make these you're-hurting-us groaning noises. Except when Tom Cruise did

that very thing tonight, we bought it. And we listened. There was no groaning, no snickering, just the sound of keyboards tapping. We also laughed--in the right places, no less--at documentarian Errol Morris' opening, why-we-love-film featurette. As for the reaction here to Whoopi Goldberg's monologue? Probably the same as it was back at your place. A couple of laughs (for the "Smith family" gag); a couple of you're-hurting-us groans (for any Anna Nicole Smith reference).

And not to further disabuse your image of reporters, but when winners walk backstage, we mostly react by not reacting. (Looks cooler that way.) Except when Sidney Poitier walked backstage, we stood. Most even applauded. Some even gushed. "I just want you to know you were one of the first black persons I saw on TV," said a journo (who happened to be black). The guy inexplicably asked Poitier if he could touch his honorary Oscar--and Poitier let him hold it! (In case you were wondering, the night's other honorary Oscar recipient, Robert Redford, received a semi-standing O. By the time Redford made his way to the press area, the Best Actor category was being announced. "Do you want to watch this, or do you want to go on?" a perceptive Redford asked.)

#### **More Woody Fans**

Woody Allen's surprise appearance turned reporters here into TV viewers, much to the misfortune of Peter Owen, who made it to the pressroom (accompanied by his Best Makeup Oscar for Lord of the Rings) at the same time Woody took to the stage. There was no contest. More of us were watching (and laughing) at Allen than asking questions of Owen. And when Allen did come backstage? Applause. A couple of gasps. And a lot of hands going up. Accordingly, we managed to get to the bottom of what the Original Oscar No-Show was doing at his very first Academy Awards. "I wanted to do something for New York," said the Woodster, his tuxedo already partially dismantled (buh-bye, bow tie).

#### **More Humility**

"I thought [Paul] McCartney would win or Sting would win. But then when The Lord of the Rings was getting all those awards, I began to think that the Enya song might," said Randy Newman, who did win--finally--for his Monsters, Inc. tune "If I Didn't Have You." Lest you think the biting songwriter of "Short People" has mellowed too much--think again. Said Newman of his first Oscar in 17 tries, "If I had tear ducts, I would have teared up up there."

#### **More Walking**

Back when the Oscars were held at, say, Los Angeles' Shrine Auditorium, winners merely had to be ushered offstage and into the ol' circus tent right out back in order to keep their press obligations. Here in Hollywood, winners had to walk through a mall. You try doing that in heels.

#### **More Lord of the Rings Spoilers**

"The three films are quite different...The second film [The Two Towers] is a little grittier, so I don't know if it's going to have the same repercussions," said cinematographer Andrew Lesnie, who scored Oscar gold for lensing the trilogy's first installment, The Fellowship of the Ring.

#### **More Common Sense**

When asked where he was going to put his second Oscar, Denzel Washington said, "Next to my other one--in my house." Ron Howard, meanwhile, showed how much he'd grown as a person by admitting he probably was thinking too much of his abilities when he was convinced his debut feature, the non-epic Grand Theft Auto, would score a Golden Globe nomination for Best Comedy.

#### **One More Funny Woody Story**

"I didn't write it out, but I thought it out in my shower--for about two weeks; I always feel better in my shower," said Woody on how he "drafted" his onstage Oscar remarks.