

What's New In Academy Awards?

Joe Fineman

1967

As is the woeful and morose custom, late February salutes George Washington, who reputedly fathered a nation of sheep, and the motion picture industry boosts itself despite its fathering a low grade of mutton in the disguise of art.

1966 proved the physics maxim that nature abhors a vacuum as the field raised some rather substantial fare to credit with this year's Academy Awards. No lily white fields for shuffling Negroes to help make nuns in or out of, but rather what approaches an honest effort at resolving the elephantine puzzle of the year's best performances by actresses, writers, cameramen and directors.

Scraped were those see-saw subhuman masquerades cornerstoned by a \$1 million celebrity in a \$2 role. Supplanting past marshmellowy creations this year are the likes of "Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf," "A Man For All Seasons," and the bouncy "The Russians Are Coming, The Russians Are Coming" for which Alan Arkin, in his first starring role on film, earned mention for the year's best performance by an actor.

"Alfie," the scurrilous attempt at making Michael Caine Oscar material, lacks both the wit and integrity to match either "Virginia Woolf" or "Season." "The Sand Pebbles" has so far eluded me but reviews have played havoc with the acting of both Steve McQueen and Mako.

In contrast, 1965 ran very weak behind "Ship of Fools," "Doctor Zhivago," and "A Thousand Clowns" while 1966 marked a change of life for the industry, otherwise "My Fair Lady" wouldn't have received the tissue paper awards.

What has been so ridiculous about the awards themselves is their haughty exclusion of so many of the best pictures each season. Two that come to mind are "Nothing But A Man" and "David and Lisa." The 2,800 or so members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences withstand millions of dollars of propaganda towards the election of nominees who hardly represent the year's best output. Talent goes begging for recognition and funds, while a clique of narcissistic boobs pass judgment upon each other.

For this year however, some credit should be given to a select few nominations. Michelangelo Antonioni achieved widespread recognition finally after 12 years of famine among "the artists." It would not surprise me to see him sweep the credits for "Blow-Up." "A Man And A Woman," Claude LeLouch's dramatic montage, is named as best picture, best actress with Anouk Aimee and best director.

In total, what is generally called art films have come away from the pre-election proceedings with perhaps a third of the mentions in the important four categories. Two oversights—(surely they could be nothing else) specifically the absence of "Goal" among documentary features and "The Shameless Old Lady" in foreign language films may mean they were ineligible for 1966. "The War Game," Peter Weiss's tale of horror and nuclear annihilation may be a classic in its own right and should it win in documentary features, our chances of seeing this British TV project would be greatly enhanced.

Presentation of the Oscar awards will take place April 10th. One question I'd like to put to the Academy; is it not about time that experimental and low budget projects be supported through a fund of some sort?



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