

## ARTS

TELEVISION EUNY HONG-KORAL

## Emmys lord it over the Oscars

The TV industry has always picked itself that the Emmy selection process held itself to a higher standard than that of the Oscar.

Oscar voters receive video cassettes of the nominated films to watch at their leisure. Some claim this makes it easy for Academy members to watch selectively and vote irresponsibly. Emmy voters, on the other hand, were required to attend an all-day screening of all the nominees.

That changed this year, when in a controversial move, the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences (Natas) decided to drop the mandatory screenings and send out video cassettes as the Oscars do.

As *Variety* reported on the subject (March 10): "Concerns were raised that at-home viewers might make their selections without viewing the tapes."

Truth be told, the new voting system is unlikely to make a whit of difference in what has traditionally been the most down-home, artistically conservative awards ceremony in the American entertainment industry. (*The 52nd Annual Prime Time Emmys* air on ABC, Sunday, September 10 at 8pm ET.)

The Emmy telecast may not be as spectacular as that of the Oscars, but at least the former has the integrity to deliver what it promises. Natas has always celebrated an American product for an American audience, rather like the California wine industry.

The Oscars, by contrast, are a jaw-droppingly disingenuous attempt to pretend that Hollywood is an international city that respects

film as an art form without borders. Meanwhile, the dewy-faced presenters struggle to pronounce eastern European directors' names, and make alarming pronouncements along the lines that Kurosawa's importance to the film world lies in his influence on George Lucas.

The Emmys encapsulate the considerable gulf between film and television in the US. As Jerry Mathers (Beaver from *Leave it to Beaver*) once remarked on his own experiences as: "When you [go] to a theatre, it's more of a [one-shot] experience, but when you watch [a TV character] grow up in your living room, you have a unique bonding with them." TV personalities are often weekly or daily guests in our homes. As with real household guests, consistency is preferable to surprise.

Despite the unending public outcry that TV is overly youth-oriented, the Oscars demonstrate that film is more so. Oscars notoriously favour fresh faces: Marisa Tomei defeated Vanessa Redgrave (Best Supporting Actress, 1993), after which the Academy should have simply agreed to disband. Julie Christie and Judi Dench were passed over for Helen Hunt (Best Actress, 1997). Juliette Binoche trounced Lauren Bacall (Best Supporting Actress, 1997), probably thwarting Bacall's last shot at the statuette.

The Emmys, on the other hand, like to recognise lifetime achievement and hearken to Old Hollywood, sometimes correcting the film industry's oversights: Danny Kaye and Peter O'Toole never won an Oscar (unless you count the former's

Humanitarian award), but they won Emmys (for *Skokie* and *Joan of Arc*, respectively). Even those who never saw the ABC telefilm *Tuesdays with Morrie* are certain that Jack Lemmon will win for Best Actor in a Telefilm.

Another mark of Emmy conservatism is its seeming advocacy of marital harmony: in all, eight married couples have won Emmys; last year the honour went to Anne Bancroft (for *Deep in My Heart*) and her husband Mel Brooks (for *Mad About You*). Neither had won an Oscar since the 1960s.

The research staff of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Library in Los Angeles could think of only one married couple who had both won Oscars, in different years: Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh.

The Emmys are unchanging even in their awards categories, yielding comical results in such categories as "Variety or Music Programme." There hasn't been too much of this genre since the 1970s (Donny and Marie, Bing Crosby, Lawrence Welk). So now, these awards

consistently go to telecasts of awards ceremonies: last year, the Tonys won, defeating, among others, the Oscar ceremony. This year, there are nine nominations. Be prepared to hear the singular cry: "And the Emmy goes to the Oscars!"

The TV academy likes to tell this story: George C. Scott declined his 1971 Oscar for *Patton* on ideological grounds. A month later, he graciously accepted an Emmy. Thomas O'Neil writes in *The Emmys*: "[Scott said] the Oscars were a degrading popularity contest pitting actors against each other; he considered the Emmy a far truer reflection of...excellence."

Scott's conceits aside, the Oscars and Emmys are equally prone to industry insiderism. But I don't see why this is a problem. The public has already cast their ballots, in the form of box office tallies and Nielsen ratings. Awards ceremonies serve a different function: at these annual affairs, the Hollywood machine exposes how it regards itself, rather than what it thinks of the audience.

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