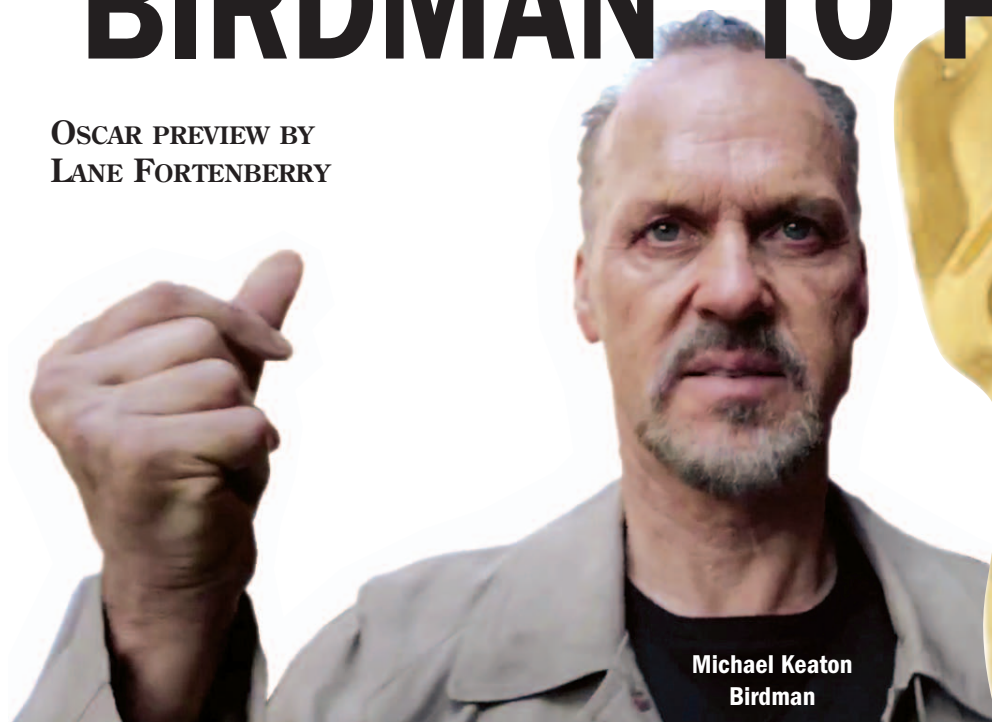
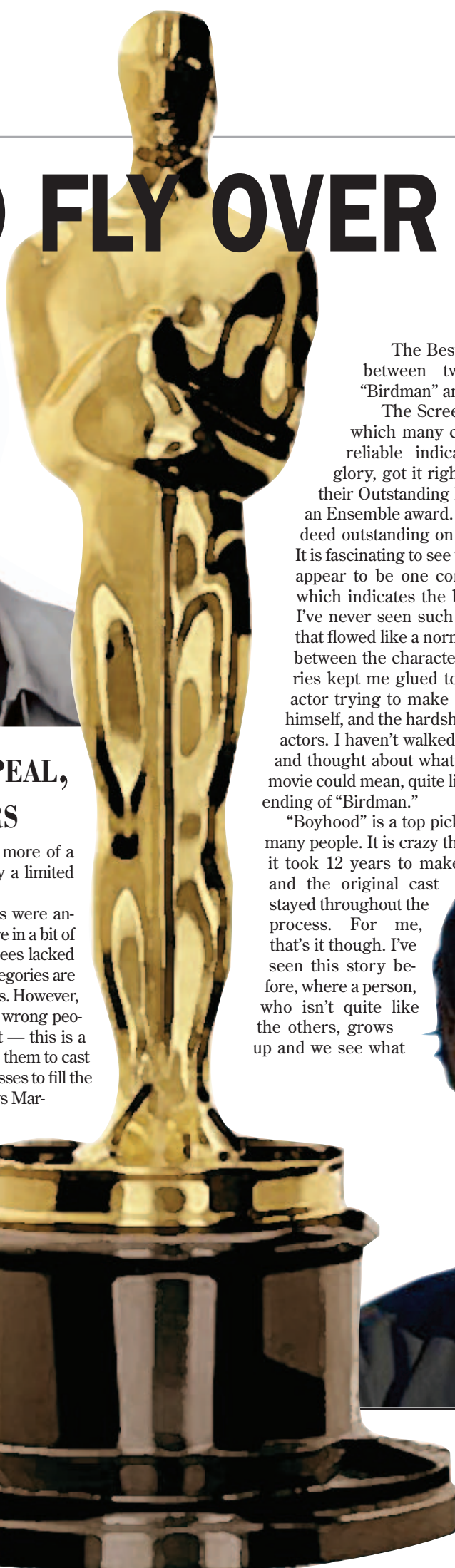


'BIRDMAN' TO FLY OVER 'BOYHOOD'

OSCAR PREVIEW BY
LANE FORTENBERRY



Michael Keaton
Birdman



Best Picture

The Best Picture race is between two movies — “Birdman” and “Boyhood.”

The Screen Actors Guild, which many consider to be a reliable indicator for Oscar glory, got it right this year with their Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble award. “Birdman” is indeed outstanding on so many levels. It is fascinating to see the whole movie appear to be one continuous scene, which indicates the brilliant editing. I’ve never seen such punchy writing that flowed like a normal conversation between the characters. The two stories kept me glued to the screen; an actor trying to make a new name for himself, and the hardships of Broadway actors. I haven’t walked out of a theater and thought about what the ending of a movie could mean, quite like I did with the ending of “Birdman.”

“Boyhood” is a top pick for many people. It is crazy that it took 12 years to make and the original cast stayed throughout the process. For me, that’s it though. I’ve seen this story before, where a person, who isn’t quite like the others, grows up and we see what

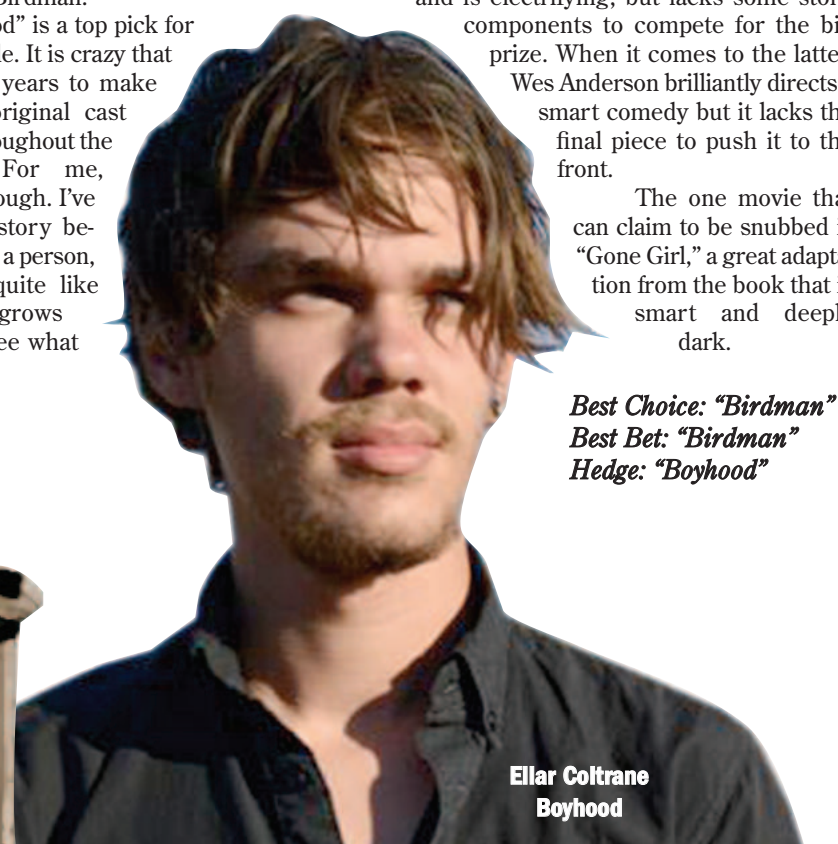
happens in their life. It just hasn’t been documented literally for 12 years. I can’t get over the house scene with the “boys just being boys” vibe. I can’t believe such a horrible few minutes made it into an Oscar-nominated movie. The philosophical writing towards the end just wasn’t fitting and felt forced.

Even though it is a box office monster and very powerful, “American Sniper” doesn’t have a chance to win. You can put a little blame on the fakest baby in the history of film, which completely took away the intensity of the moment. Even though I really enjoyed “Selma,” it didn’t seem powerful enough for what the movie is portraying. “The Theory of Everything” had great moments between Hawking and his wife, but is quite boring most of the time. “The Imitation Game” is wonderful but the pacing is difficult to deal with.

Outside of the two front runners, the best of the rest are “Whiplash” and “The Grand Budapest Hotel.” The former is one of my favorite movies and is electrifying, but lacks some story components to compete for the big prize. When it comes to the latter, Wes Anderson brilliantly directs a smart comedy but it lacks the final piece to push it to the front.

The one movie that can claim to be snubbed is “Gone Girl,” a great adaptation from the book that is smart and deeply dark.

Best Choice: “Birdman”
Best Bet: “Birdman”
Hedge: “Boyhood”



Ellar Coltrane
Boyhood

87TH ACADEMY AWARDS FAVOR INDIE APPEAL, MORE THAN BOX OFFICE BLOCKBUSTERS

The film award season is almost complete. The 87th Academy Awards will wrap up another incredible year of films, Sunday.

One of the most interesting things about the big nominees is that none of them were near the top in box office receipts. For example, the only Best Picture nominee in the top 10 box office movie gross list was “American Sniper,” with a total of \$213,423,957. Compare that to top earner “Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 1,” which pulled in \$335,704,905, or “Guardians of the Galaxy,” which earned \$333,176,600.

The next highest earning nominee on the list, “The Intimidation Game,” comes in at number 51 on the list with \$62,239,555. As a matter of fact, two of the Best Picture nominees weren’t even in the top 100 earners. Action, superhero and children’s movies always seem to dominate the box office, which is understandable because they attract a bigger audience and a more diverse age group. Most Oscar nominees fall in the drama category, which attract adults, and are rated “R” most of the time.

However, it’s been a great year for regular moviegoers like myself. Many personal favorites didn’t even make the list, such as “Nightcrawler.” With so many nominees being worthy this year, it’s hard to

say any movie was snubbed. It’s more of a near-miss kind of thing, with only a limited number of spots available.

When the Oscar nominations were announced, the public and media were in a bit of an uproar, arguing that the nominees lacked diversity. The actor and actress categories are made up of white males and females. However, the blame is being thrown on the wrong people. This isn’t the Academy’s fault — this is a problem with producers. It is up to them to cast a diverse crowd of actors and actresses to fill the roles. David Oyelowo, who portrays Martin Luther King in “Selma,” comes to mind as someone who definitely gave an Oscar-worthy performance.

With all that in mind, this year’s Academy Awards should be a pretty wide open affair, with the trophies spread around.

Best Director



Richard Linklater

Best Director is yet another race between Alejandro G. Iñárritu’s “Birdman” and Richard Linklater’s “Boyhood,” although, this might be a different outcome.

Linklater is probably going to win this award, and it’s because of how long it took to make the film. There have been movies before that took years and years to make, but not quite like this one. Linklater spent 12 years filming people who aged in real time, capturing their lives and the way they change. That’s quite an accomplishment.

Bennett Miller, for “Foxcatcher,” made an incredible movie, but it’s extremely slow at times. Wes Anderson’s “The Grand Budapest Hotel” is just absolutely brilliant. Anderson has long had a reputation for being too artsy to be recognized, so it is nice to see him on this list. He won’t win, but still. Morten Tyldum’s “The Intimidation Game” is an enjoyable, powerful story that doesn’t quite have the goods to pick up the hardware. Smart voters will be all in on Iñárritu. “Birdman” is just all around excellent. The Broadway scenes, the following everyone around for one continuous scene, the acting — everything is incredible. Iñárritu put together one hell of a film. If Linklater wins, there will be few complaints.

Best Choice: Alejandro G. Iñárritu
Best Bet: Richard Linklater
Hedge: Wes Anderson

Best Actress



Julianne Moore

The Best Actress category brings about the most conflict. Julianne Moore is the clear front runner, but Rosamund Pike in “Gone Girl” is a favorite among the box office crowd. Pike might be one of the best “villains” ever. Her dialogue reminds one of Robin Wright’s in “House of Cards.” Pike is soft-spoken, but punchy. She uses her looks to dissect the minds of men to get what she wants. She is smart and charming, yet frightening. “Gone Girl” should have garnered a Best Picture nod and Pike is the main reason why.

Felicity Jones, in “The Theory of Everything,” is a delight to watch. Reese Witherspoon, in “Wild,” gives an emotional performance. Marion Cotillard, in “Two Days, One Night,” seems great, but I really couldn’t tell, because my copy doesn’t include subtitles and it is all in French. Ah, well, c’est la vie.

So Moore is the clear favorite to win. She won the SAG and Golden Globe award for her role in “Still Alice” as a college professor battling early onset Alzheimer’s disease. Her performance is far better than the movie itself. She allows us to experience the symptoms of the horrendous disease and see how other family members and friends react to it.

Best Choice: Rosamund Pike
Best Bet: Julianne Moore
Hedge: Marion Cotillard

Best Actor



Michael Keaton

The Screen Actors Guild got this one wrong. Michael Keaton should have taken that award home. He is incredible in “Birdman.” Instead SAG chose Eddie Redmayne, who plays Stephen Hawking in “The Theory of Everything.” He is dead on playing the great scientist, his struggles with ALS and the emotion he exhibited. But Keaton’s performance is just too strong. He is on the brink of imploding the entire time until his breakthrough on Broadway. He attacks his hardships through emotion and comedy.

I was happy to see Steve Carell nominated for his work in “Foxcatcher.” The makeup work is daunting and added greatly to his ghoulish portrayal of John du Pont. It was unique to see Carell play such a different character, rather than just his comedy roles.

Benedict Cumberbatch, for “The Imitation Game,” and Bradley Cooper, for “American Sniper,” round out the nominees.

It’s too bad only five can be nominated for Best Actor. Jake Gyllenhaal should have been nominated for “Nightcrawler.” He lost 30 pounds for the role to have a creepier, psychotic physique. It is chilling to hear him say, “What if my problem wasn’t that I don’t understand people, but that I don’t like them?” It is his best work to date. Another actor that should have been nominated is David Oyelowo for his portrayal of MLK in “Selma.” Bradley Cooper was lucky to beat this pair to a nomination.

Best Choice: Michael Keaton
Best Bet: Michael Keaton
Hedge: Eddie Redmayne

Supporting Actor



J.K. Simmons

Best Actor in a Supporting role is an absolute lock. There isn’t even a moment’s hesitation about who’s winning this.

J.K. Simmons is electrifying in “Whiplash.” He seems kind and friendly, but with his band in jeopardy, he turns into a raging maniac. His character, Terrence Fletcher, might be one of the most intimidating people ever seen on the big screen.

The ferocity with which he terrifies his musicians, justifying it as pushing them to be the best they can be, leaves the viewer’s heart pounding. Fletcher says the worst thing anyone can say is “Good job.” Sorry J.K., but that was a damn good job.

Edward Norton is enjoyable with his cool-guy presence in “Birdman,” then ends up being a little nutty. Mark Ruffalo is a great actor and Robert Duvall is a legend but that’s not enough, and even though it is Supporting Actor, we didn’t see enough of Ethan Hawke in “Boyhood” to garner the award.

While it’s a great list of actors, no one is as deserving to win this award as Simmons.

Best Choice: J.K. Simmons
Best Bet: J.K. Simmons
Hedge: Why bother, it’s going to J.K. Simmons.

Supporting Actress



Patricia Arquette

Patricia Arquette is a lock to take home Best Supporting Actress. Just sticking around for 12 years to make “Boyhood” is enough to warrant the award, but she actually deserves it as well. Arquette did extremely well playing a divorced mom. She grows up, just like her kids do, and she’s there every step of the way guiding them the best she can. She’s the most deserving to win the award out of this group.

Of course, Meryl Streep was nominated — for the 19th time — for “Into the Woods,” but the nomination is recognition enough. Keira Knightley, in “The Intimidation Game,” and Laura Dern, for “Wild,” will just have to lean on “It’s an honor to be nominated.” The darkest of dark horses may be Emma Stone in “Birdman.” Apart from “The Help” her work doesn’t usually stand out, but she nails her part as Michael Keaton’s daughter. It probably won’t be enough, but it’s a good sign for the future.

Best Choice: Patricia Arquette
Best Bet: Patricia Arquette
Hedge: Emma Stone

Original Screenplay



Birdman

This is one category that Linklater’s “Boyhood” doesn’t have a shot to win. The winner is between Iñárritu’s “Birdman” and “The Grand Budapest Hotel.”

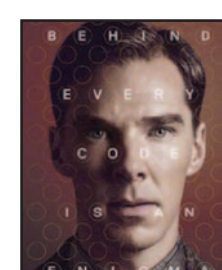
Wes Anderson’s “The Grand Budapest Hotel” is a very smart comedy. That’s why it is in the Best Picture and Original Screenplay categories. It isn’t your everyday comedy. The audience never quite knows what is coming next. It won’t win best picture (although it surely must have a chance with cinematography), and Anderson deserves an award for his continuing excellence.

E. Max Frye and Dan Futterman’s “Foxcatcher” is a very likeable movie, but it’s only suited for a selected audience because of the pace. Dan Gilroy’s “Nightcrawler” is one of the most underrated movies of 2014.

It’s going to be “Birdman,” yet again. The writing is so in-your-face all the time. Iñárritu brings out the best in every cast member. There’s never been a movie quite like it.

Best Choice: “Birdman”
Best Bet: “Birdman”
Hedge: “The Grand Budapest Hotel”

Adapted Screenplay



The Imitation Game

Even though “Whiplash” is on a fine line between adapted and original, it’s in this category and deserves to win. Since it was adapted from director Damien Chazelle’s own short film, it was basically written from scratch. J.K. Simmons’ strong and intimidating dialogue alone is worth the statue. It’s a close one, though.

Graham Moore’s “The Intimidation Game” has a really strong chance to pull ahead. In fact, it wouldn’t be surprising if it takes home the award. These two movies have no shot to win Best Picture so this would be a great consolidation prize.

Jason Hall’s “American Sniper,” Paul Thomas Anderson’s “Inherent Vice” and Anthony McCarten’s “The Theory of Everything” round out the category.

It is frustrating not to see Gillian Flynn’s “Gone Girl” in this category. It is an excellent movie and very well written.

Best Choice: “Whiplash”
Best Bet: “The Intimidation Game”
Hedge: “Whiplash”