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Hollywood Honors Its Own at SAG Awards

Actors applaud actors at SAG Awards. How close were your predictions?



by Emily Soares

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The floor below the stage-right podium is quite dark. Having just accepted the SAG Award for Outstanding Performance by the Cast of a Motion Picture, the 14-member cast of *Chicago* makes its way quietly down the steps and assembles breathlessly in the shadows, preparing to make its way through a gauntlet of photographers and to speak to the press. In the gloom, a distant stage light illuminates the silhouette of John C. Reilly's hair. A nervous giggle. Whispered congratulations. The sheen of a gown. Their excitement is palpable. This is the high point of a night filled with actors in awe of each other, of unexpected awards and the warm recognition of peers. The 9th Annual SAG Awards is officially over. Now the winners, nominees and guests retire to the party onsite or to their own soirees elsewhere. Later there will be time for those who carry the heavy statuette home to process what change it may make to their life or career. For now, it's time to grab some food, as many dinners were certainly left half eaten; anxiety usually does little for the appetite, especially with cameras roaming everywhere to catch greenery in the teeth.

Katherine Zeta-Jones, expecting her and husband Michael Douglas' second child, was one actor undaunted by the suspense of her nominations. "I was just about to tuck into my beef," she said, when she learned that she had won Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Supporting Role in a motion picture. When asked about this year's many juicy film roles for women she said, "I think it's long overdue and I hope it's not the last for a while. It's fantastic to see such a cross-section of women's roles. All different colors. Multifaceted. It's great and I think audiences are applauding that too. So as Nicole (Kidman) said at the Golden Globes®, 'if it works, why not make more?'"

The cast of *Six Feet Under* looked happily dazed and bright-eyed over their win for Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Drama Series. Peter Krause spoke for the group when asked about the importance of the ensemble award. "It's an important award because there's nowhere else in Hollywood that recognizes the ensemble – The Oscars® don't do it; the Emmys® don't do it. And truth be told, nobody in this town does anything alone. Everybody here rests on everybody else."

In the course of the night, countless thanks were made, Christopher Walken sung a few bars for reporters, though declined to dance, and some advice was given. James Gandolfini, accepting his award for Outstanding Performance for a Male Actor in a Drama Series told actors in their struggling years, "Enjoy what's happening to you now 'cause things get pretty weird later on if it works." No doubt this was in reference to his current squabble with HBO over his *Sopranos* contract. Edie Falco, winning for Outstanding Performance for a Female Actor in a Drama Series, also for *Sopranos*, was flattered by the vote of confidence from her peers: "They're saying, 'You did it! I notice you. I'm acknowledging that you do this and that you're affecting us as other actors.' It's very exciting."

William H. Macy, accepting his award for Outstanding Performance by a Male Actor in a Television Movie or Miniseries for the role of Bill Porter in TNT's *Door to Door*, took his SAG card from his wallet and showed the familiar red and white rectangle to the audience. "I got this 30 years ago," he said backstage. "It was a huge moment for me. It was right up there with my driver's license...and marriage certificate...and birth certificate." Macy had much praise for Bill Porter, the door-to-door salesman with cerebral palsy whom he portrays in the movie. "Bill Porter is a great man. I would love to be more like him.... Bill Porter teaches us that the people who say 'no' -- that's their job...Do your job well and everything will be all right. And work harder than the other guy, and you will succeed. So there is a lesson for actors."

Daniel Day-Lewis, who won the award for Outstanding Performance by a Male Actor in a Leading Role for *Gangs of New York*, beat out Jack Nicholson, who was considered a favorite for *About Schmidt*. When asked if he had a message for Nicholson and the other actors nominated for Oscars®, he replied: "Well I won't be showing my rear end to him! Which ceremony was it where he did that? It was the Golden Globes®, right? I don't think mine would be half as impressive as his is, apart from everything else...All I can say is that whatever happens that night, I truly believe that any one of us will be pleased to see the other recognized."

Clint Eastwood accepted his Life Achievement Award with the declaration that he's not retiring anytime soon: "I hope this doesn't mean I'm supposed to collect my pension and head on down the road. Cause that ain't in the game for me."

And for the cast of *Chicago*, the whoops and hollers of photographers, who try to get celebrity attention like parents trying to get a baby to look at the camera, signals their arrival backstage. Now these actors enter the pressroom, each one wrestling with the weight of the statuette in his or her hand, especially cumbersome for the ladies in heels. Renee Zellweger, who also won for Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Leading Role for *Chicago*, is asked what she thinks makes the film so appealing to audiences. Her answer echoes the enthusiasm so many performers professed for their job this evening:

"It's really entertaining. It's been a while (since) you know, you go to the movies and you see something that you just go, 'yay, I'm glad I'm here.' That was us on the set everyday too, by the way. Getting to play these scenes out, wear these costumes, and be around these people. My God. 'Yay, I'm glad I'm here.' And I think that translates onto the screen."

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