

The 80th Academy Awards Show shows its age

Happy Birthday, man.
- Tilda Swinton in her acceptance speech

The Oscar turned 80 this year and we almost didn't get to see it due to the 100-day writers strike from November 2007 to February 2008. But with the Oscars in danger – which would have hit the film studios and not “just” television – the moguls suddenly seemed more willing to reach a deal with the Writers Guild of America just in time for the star-studded extravaganza to take place as usual. It was still striking how the deliberately inane montages such as “Oscar’s Salute to Binoculars and Periscopes”, that were set up as a joke had the strike not been resolved in time, weren’t all that funny in themselves, but, ironically, more in how closely they resembled the usual, uninspired tribute montages throughout the show.

So the Oscar is 80. And it shows. It might not be a coincidence the stage design was more than just reminiscent of “Metropolis” in an odd way. And it was almost symbolic the rainy weather in Los Angeles forced the organizers to construct a see-through tent structure over the red carpet to protect the expensive hairdos of the stars, thus neatly visualising the otherworldly feel of the Academy Award Ceremony that more than ever just seems out of touch with the rest of the world. It’s kind of like McDonalds – the appeal lies in knowing in advance what you’re going to get. Which, of course, doesn’t exactly make what you get exciting. It also makes trying to bring in the real world, in the form of American soldiers presenting an award, via a live satellite feed from Iraq, more than embarrassing and causing a lot of squirming all around.



from imdb.com

“Make art!”, was the enthusiastically naïve exclamation by Glen Hansard, winner for Best Original Song along with Markéta Irglová for “Falling Slowly” from “Once”. Quite fitting, considering this year’s predominance of art-house and subsidiaries to the main studios produced movies that were nominated, from “La Vie En Rose” over “Once” to “Juno”. Yet again, the nominated movies were more than just a contrast to the opening montage that highlighted Hollywood through the likes of “Indiana Jones” or “Terminator”. It was as if the award show wasn’t quite sure what to make of the movies this year, trying to adhere to its well-known and well-used formula of old despite all, brought home by numerous clips from past shows throughout, celebrating itself. Just as it was embodied through the predominance of darker, bleaker movies that clashed with the inexplicable nomination of no less than three conservative tunes from the sugar sweet (Disney produced) musical “Enchanted” that neatly symbolized the utter desperation of the industry to try and keep control of the ceremony (and

the movies). We go from “Happy Working Song” to teen pregnancy. Bizarre. One suspects the studios will make sure to even out the field in coming years.

Given the nature of nominated movies, it also wasn't surprising to see a large number of non-American as well as “non-Hollywood” winners, namely the Cohen Brothers, Daniel Day Lewis, Tilda Swinton and Javier Bardem, amongst others – all more than deserving of the award. Yet we also got another one of those montages, showing the viewer the voting process that included Academy member Brad Bird closing his eyes and just blindly dropping his pen on the list of nominees. Coincidence? At least it produced a much needed laugh in an otherwise dry awards show that seemed to peter out after host Jon Stewart's usual biting commentary at the beginning ("The Democrats do have a historic race going, Hillary Clinton vs. Barack Obama. Normally, when you see a black man or a woman president, an asteroid is about to hit the Statue of Liberty.").

At least the right movie won. “No Country for Old Men” was the winner of the night with four awards, amongst them the most prestigious of Best Supporting Actor, Best Director(s) and Best Picture. The show was a long way away from “Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King” back in 2004 and thankfully so. But still, looks like the Oscar's getting old.