

*Dateline Hollywood***Will Oscar Flip a Coin?**

By Steve Pond

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And the winner is . . . "The Silence of the Lambs." And "JFK." And "Thelma & Louise." And "The Commitments." And "Barton Fink." If ever there was a year when an Academy Award consensus was hard to come by, the events of the past week have reinforced that this is it. Almost every major film that's up for the top Oscars has now won something or other: "Bugsy" and "Beauty and the Beast" won at the Golden Globes, "Silence of the Lambs" and "Bugsy" won critics' awards, "Silence" won the producers' and directors' guild awards. And then, in the space of two days last weekend, six films won awards.

Last Saturday, one big winner was "JFK"—which drew considerable flak for its audacious mixture of historical footage, reenactments and fictionalizations in a variety of film stocks, but was also honored for that bravura job of editing by the American Cinema Editors. The Oliver Stone film won the Eddie Award for the best job of editing on a feature film. The same night (last Saturday), at another hotel ballroom just down the street in the same town (Beverly Hills), the sound editors gave out their awards; this time "JFK" lost to "Barton Fink," which won the Golden Reel award for film editing. "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves" also won in the category of best automated dialogue replacement editing—i.e., getting the actors to dub in garbled lines after shooting has ended. And the following night, the Writers Guild of America gathered in the same hotel where the editors had been the night before, this time honoring the scripts of "Thelma & Louise" and "The Silence of the Lambs"—while several thousand miles away, the British version of the Academy Awards gave its best picture award to "The Commit-

ments," not a contender stateside. And the plot, as they say, thickens.

"Bugsy" is still the favorite for the Best Picture Oscar, though in the last couple of weeks its star has faded slightly, while "Silence of the Lambs" seems to be gaining strength. But the Academy buzz, as well as the usual personal appearance and media blitz from the once-press-shy Warren Beatty, didn't help the film much in its European, Australian and Japanese openings recently. In most places, the film

did only lackluster business; in Germany, for instance, it was soundly out-grossed by "Schtonk," a satire on the phony Hitler diaries, and by the Bruce Willis film "The Last Boy Scout," an American flop.

Box Office Blues

In the United States, meanwhile, ticket sales fell a sizable 23 percent in March, as compared with a year ago. There were bright spots in the month—notably "Wayne's World," which did well all month long, and "Basic Instinct," which debuted last weekend to lots of controversy, scattered protests and a considerable \$15 million take—but overall, March was littered with films whose box office performance ranged from disappointing to disastrous: "Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot," "Article 99," "Once Upon a Crime," "Gladiator," "Memoirs of an Invisible Man," "This Is My Life," "Blame It on the Bellboy" and others. And from the looks of their opening weekends, both Woody Allen's "Shadows & Fog" and Peter Bogdanovich's "Noises Off" are likely to join that list.

'Panther's' Son

Director Blake Edwards made six "Pink Panther" movies with Peter Sellers as the bumbling Inspector Clouseau, and he continued the series after Sellers's death by mixing old and new footage and using other familiar characters from the films. But even though those last two installments were not particularly well received, Edwards has now decided to revive the series nine years after what seemed to be its last gasp. The director is currently casting "The Son of the Pink Panther," in which series regulars Herbert Lom (Dreyfuss) and Burt Kwouk (Kato) will return. The film concerns the illegitimate son of Clouseau, a role that has yet to be cast. . . . And finally, former Columbia Pictures co-chief Jon Peters announced this week that he's acquired the film rights to Jimmy Carter aide Gary Sick's controversial book "October Surprise: America's Hostages in Iran and the Election of Ronald Reagan." Peters has done so in collaboration with his former studio, with whom he has a production deal. And while the announcement called the property "as hot as today's headlines," there's no word on whether Peters and Columbia plan to rush the project into production to capitalize on those headlines.