

Docu dais rains rancor on 'JFK,' 'Truth or Dare'

By Kevin Phinney

An usually staid affair intended to honor Oscar-nominated documentarians turned nasty on occasion Thursday as speakers took potshots at Madonna's "Truth or Dare," Michael Apted's "35 Up" and "JFK," Oliver Stone's film blending fact with fiction.

The mood for the reception, sponsored by the International Documentary Assn., was set by master of ceremonies Jack Haley Jr. Almost immediately after welcoming guests to the Academy of Motion Pictures where clips of the nominated feature and short subject films were to be shown, Haley mocked Stone, nominated in the fiction category for directing

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"JFK."

Haley took exception to Stone's submission printed in Thursday's Los Angeles Times, scoffing at the director's comparison between "JFK" and Akira Kurosawa's "Rashomon." In the opinion piece, Stone drew a parallel between both movies' illustrations of "the impossibility of ever arriving at a single truth."

Haley chided, "I'm sure that will thrill Akira Kurosawa. Then he (Stone) compares his work to the archeological digs to excavate the walls of Troy." Haley then paused for a laugh but was met with only scattered titters. He concluded by repeating the closing sentence from the piece, "Who owns your mind?," then added, "Oliver knows."

Later, documentary filmmakers Irving Saraf and Allie Light (nominated for their behind-the-scenes look at opera singers, "In the Shadow of the Stars") said they did not understand Haley's remarks.

"I was very surprised," said Saraf. "It didn't seem to have anything to do with why we were

there."

Light agreed. "I thought he was going to make some point, but if it was about the film not being truthful, that bothers me. The idea that filmmakers should be held to this one truth is unrealistic because there are so many truths that can be seen one way or another. Anyone who's ever made a documentary knows every eyewitness is inherently subjective. We all try to tell the truth the best we see it, but it can only be told the way we see it."

Documentarian Debra Chasnoff, nominated for her film "Deadly Deception: General Electric, Nuclear Weapons and Our Environment," used the forum to again assail GE for health violations and later said she believes documentaries are instrumental in helping to raise consciousness of issues. "I really enjoyed working with an organization working for social justice, so that's something I'd like to continue."

At another juncture, documentarian Vince DiPersio recounted the words of an HBO publicist upon hearing of DiPersio's nomination: "You mean you guys are going and Madonna's not? What's

wrong with this picture?"

Yet another nominee, Lawrence Hott (up for an award for his film "Wild by Law"), expressed hope that the controversy surrounding this year's nominees "is over by the time '42 Up' is released," a reference to Apted's film series that revisits individuals every seven years. Apted, whose current film is "35 Up," protested to the media when his movie was not nominated.

"If I weren't nominated, I'd feel bad," Light said. "We were surprised that they weren't, too. But when they weren't nominated, at least they had a platform to express themselves."

"I don't think anyone would have beaten down our doors to ask us how we felt if we hadn't been nominated."

The sharp exchange of words did little to dampen most spirits, however.

Most were content to be nominated and looking forward to the fruits a nomination — or a win — might bring.

"I've got a lot of ideas and irons in the fire," said Chasnoff, "and my phone calls are being answered a lot more this month." □