

The Video Monitor

Spinning Gold From Oscar

By Tom Spain
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It's that time of year again. Now that we know who's nominated for what, we can all follow Hollywood's lavishly orchestrated lead and start guessing whose names will be in the envelopes opened next month at the Academy Awards. But at least one sector of Hollywood wants our Oscar thoughts elsewhere—namely the video business, which, barring a sweep by "The Silence of the Lambs," won't reap the benefits of this spring's victories until later in the year when the winners come out on tape. Home video stands to make more money in the short term by reminding us how much we would like to add Oscar winners of years past to our own video libraries.

Savvy video marketers have been mining Oscar mania about as long as there have been videos to market, and this year is no exception: The majority of the top video suppliers will offer promotions in the coming weeks designed to turn yesterday's winners and also-rans into today's video purchases.

The biggest effort comes from MGM/UA Home Video, which is promoting all of the films in its catalogue that won Best Picture, Best Actor or Best Actress awards—a total of 45 movies, 19 of which claimed the top prize, ranging from 1930-31's "Cimarron" to 1988's "Rain Man." With the exception of the \$29.98 double-cassette "Ben-Hur" and the perennially high-priced "Gone With the Wind" (\$89.98), they are priced at \$19.98 each. The list includes four Best Actor or Actress winners previously available on tape at higher prices but new to the \$19.98 price: "I Want to Live!" (Susan Hayward, 1958), "Johnny Belinda" (Jane Wyman, 1948), "Min and Bill" (Marie Dressler, 1930-31) and "The Miracle Worker" (Anne Bancroft, 1962).

Both Warner and Universal are also offering Academy Award-winning films at new low prices. Warner leads off with the \$19.98 re-release of two 1991 hits that have made a fast move from the Oscar podium to the video rental market to the discount shelf: Martin Scorsese's "GoodFellas," featuring Joe Pesci's Best Supporting Actor performance, and Jeremy Irons's award-winning leading man turn in "Reversal of Fortune." Other titles that Warner is offering at \$19.98 for the first time include

a newly digitally remastered "Cabaret," the 1988 Foreign Language winner "Pelle the Conqueror" and 1980's Best Documentary, "From Mao to Mozart: Isaac Stern in China."

MCA/Universal, meanwhile, has cut the price on five vintage winners all the way down to \$14.95. Two feature Best Actress-winning performances in their title roles: 1949's "The Heiress," starring Olivia de

Havilland, and 1980 winner Sissy Spacek as Loretta Lynn in "Coal Miner's Daughter." The remaining three feature Supporting Actress winners Helen Hayes ("Airport," 1970), Dorothy Malone ("Written on the Wind," 1956) and Mary Steenburgen ("Melvin and Howard," 1980).

Columbia TriStar Home Video is likewise reaching back in its archives for three winners of lesser awards ("Ship of Fools," "The Awful Truth" and "Nicholas and Alexandra"), all arriving next month at the new low \$19.95 price (except the double-cassette latter title, priced at \$29.95), as well as recent also-rans "Metropolitan" and "Avalon."

Finally, HBO Video has engineered next month's re-release of "Tom Jones," the 1963 Best Picture winner, new copies of which have been unavailable for some time. HBO claims that it is the only Best Picture winner of the last 40 years that is not currently available on video—a tricky claim since it may well be in your video store, even if you can't buy a brand-new copy. Still, fans of the movie will appreciate its return to the market, now in the letterboxed format that simulates the original screen ratios.

JFK, Previsited

Will Oliver Stone's convincing mix of drama and documentary footage in "JFK" bring the director another Oscar? Voters will have already determined his fate by the time his studio, Warner Bros., re-releases "Executive Action" on tape late next month. He may be glad they're waiting that long; the 1973 film shows that Stone wasn't the first to blend fact with fancy and come up with conspiracy. Starring Burt Lancaster, and featuring a screenplay written by

1950s blacklisted Dalton Trumbo—with input from best-selling conspiracy theorist Mark Lane (“Rush to Judgment,” “Plausible Denial”), “Executive Action” returns next month priced at \$19.98.

Biblical Knowledge

One can't expect video-industry types always to get their messages straight, but one might think they'd take special care when dealing with sacred texts—such as the Bible. Fox Video's “Films of Faith” price reduction on 13 tapes is billed as “a magnificent collection [of] top quality family entertainment with Old Testament themes.” Did we miss the verse that would explain the inclusion of Elizabeth Taylor's “Cleopatra”? Which raises the question of what kind of families they're talking about—especially when they tout the “scenes of vice and gore” in “Sodom and Gomorrah.” We can decide for ourselves when these and 11 others return to the market next month (19.98 for single tapes, \$29.95 for double-cassette movies).