

CLP

Dateline Hollywood

Dollars From Oscars

This Year's Nominees May Benefit Less

By Steve Pond

Special to The Washington Post

This is the time of year when Hollywood tries to answer an enormously tricky question: How much is an Academy Award or an Oscar nomination worth in dollars and cents? The answer, it seems, varies from year to year and film to film, making it difficult to develop any conventional wisdom on the subject. A win in the Best Picture competition can add between \$50 million and \$100 million to the box office take of the right movie, the way it has done in recent years for "Rain Man" and, to a lesser extent, "Dances With Wolves." But for this year's batch of nominees, it will likely mean much less: With "The Silence of the Lambs" already on video and "Beauty and the Beast" long a certified smash with an audience that pays little attention to the awards, only "Bugsy," "JFK" and "The Prince of Tides" stand to benefit much—and they'll be limited because they have already done well.

Last weekend, right after the nominations were announced, their effect on the films competing for Best Picture seemed minimal. "Beauty and the Beast," "The Prince of Tides" and "JFK" all saw business drop between 18 percent and 27 percent, which was slightly better than the drops taken by most other films but hardly indicative of a post-nomination boost. Only the current Best Picture favorite, "Bugsy," seemed to benefit from the Oscar fallout, and that's because TriStar knew its film would get mul-

iple nominations and expanded it from 528 to more than 1,200 screens last Friday.

The Oscar nominations also affected some of the companies whose films are up for awards this year. Orion Pictures, for instance, could win back-to-back Best Picture awards if "The Silence of the Lambs" follows in the footsteps of the company's "Dances With Wolves," last year's big winner—but because the firm is bankrupt and the movie's already out on video, Orion is keeping expenditures down and not mounting a big campaign to promote its film to academy members.

Carolco, meanwhile, has captured

unprecedented mother-daughter nominations for Diane Ladd and Laura Dern in "Rambling Rose," but because the company is also struggling to stay afloat financially, it has put a hold on its campaign for the two actresses. (Not that there was much of a campaign to begin with: During the nomination process, Carolco took out only two ads promoting Ladd and Dern in the Hollywood trade papers, forcing the actresses to pick up the slack and take out additional ads themselves.) Sending academy members videocassettes of the film, which is no longer in theaters, would be one way to help the cause—but the video is due for release the day after ballots must be returned, and for now Carolco hasn't approved the money to send out advance copies. On the other hand, financially troubled MGM can more easily rely on video in its campaign for "Thelma & Louise," which received six nominations; the movie came out on video last month, making it easy for academy members to see.

Troubling Signs

The movie business seems to be enjoying a slight recovery from its disappointing year in 1991, but you can still find signs that business isn't quite back to normal. For instance, anyone who thinks things might be a bit boring in Hollywood these days can find evidence in the slate of films that Troma Inc. is taking to this week's American Film Market in Los Angeles. The AFM is a yearly gathering in which films are bought and sold for distribution around the world, and one of its highlights has always been looking at the offerings from Troma, a New York-based company that specializes in low-budget horror films with spectacular titles: "Sorority Babes in the Slimeball Bowl-O-Rama," for one. But this year, Troma is offering a far more mundane lineup: "Sgt. Kabukiman N.Y.P.D.," "Wizards of the Demon Sword" and the only truly Tromaesque titles, "Class of Nuke 'Em High Part II: Subhumanoid Melt-down" and "The Good, the Bad and the Subhumanoid." By the way, the company says this last film stars "Tromie, the nuclear squirrel."