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Martin A. Grove

Hollywood Report

How 'Silence,' 'JFK' stack up in Oscar race

Oscar overview: In Thursday's look at the best picture Oscar race I focused on TriStar's "Bugsy" and Buena Vista's "Beauty and the Beast," the winners of the best picture Golden Globes for, respectively, drama and musical/comedy. Of course, there also are three other solid entries in this year's best picture race.

Hollywood handicappers see Orion's "The Silence of the Lambs" as a strong contender for best picture, coming into the race as both a critical and commercial success (ending its domestic theatrical run with \$130.7 million). "Silence" has some impressive pre-Oscar awards to its credit, including having been named best picture by the New York Film Critics Circle and the National Board of Review. In addition, its stars, Jodie Foster and Anthony Hopkins, were winners in the New York Film Critics' best actress and actor categories. Foster won a Golden Globe as best actress/drama and the National Board of Review named Hopkins best supporting actor.

The question is whether Academy voters' personal opinions about who killed the president will affect their assessment of Stone's film.

"Silence" director Jonathan Demme was named best director by the New York Film Critics and the National Board of Review. Demme is also a Directors Guild of America nominee (as is "Bugsy's" Barry Levinson, "The Prince of Tides'" Barbra Streisand and "JFK's" Oliver Stone).

For "Silence" the big question is whether Academy voters — a group that could politely be called older demographically — will respond as positively to its emotionally disturbing portrayal of graphic brutality against women as the much younger moviegoing audience did. Going into the race, it certainly appears that Academy members found a lot they liked in "Silence" since they nominated it in seven categories — picture, director, actor, actress, adapted screenplay (Ted Tally, also a Writers Guild of America nominee), editing (Craig McKay) and sound (Tom Fleishman, Christopher Newman).

Of the five nominees, Warner Bros.' controversial "JFK" has had the most media attention. Going into the Oscar race, it boasts a Golden Globes best director win for Oliver Stone, who is also a DGA nominee. At the boxoffice it has done well but has room to grow with its gross now at just over \$63 million.

With eight Oscar nominations, "JFK" is clearly a film in which Academy members see much merit. It is nominated for picture, director, supporting actor (Tommy Lee Jones), adapted screenplay (Oliver Stone and Zachary Sklar, also WGA nominees), cinematography (Robert Richardson), editing (Joe Hutshing and Pietro Scalia), original score (John Williams) and sound (Michael Minkler, Gregg Landaker and Tod Maitland).

In the case of "JFK," the question is whether Academy voters' personal opinions about who killed John F. Kennedy will affect their assessment of "JFK." Some observers argue the Academy could celebrate Oliver Stone as a filmmaker by naming him best director while avoiding the endorsement of his film's content that a best picture award would imply. On the other hand, thanks to "JFK," once-classified CIA assassination files are close to being opened. Oscar voters could also choose to endorse a film that proves movies can change our society.

Monday memo: Concluding my focus on the best picture nominees with Columbia's "The Prince of Tides."

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BUGSY

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 SAMUEL GOLDWYN THEATRE
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