



Morgan Freeman's nomination for best actor is for his portrayal of Hoke Colburn, the stalwart and wise chauffeur of a Southern matron in "Driving Miss Daisy."



Danny Aiello won his Oscar nomination for best supporting actor for his performance in "Do the Right Thing."



"Born on the Fourth of July," the story of Vietnam vet Ron Kovic, landed Tom Cruise a nomination for best actor.

Freeman has inside track for best actor

By Dan Greenberg
special writer

"Unusual" and "unexpected" describe this year's Oscar hopefuls, a list of 103 nominations in 23 categories.

Fifty-one films garnered those coveted slots on the Academy's ballot but, as usual, a handful of films walked off with most of the nominations.

Eight films received four or more that add up to 43 of the 103. Six more had three nominations each so when it comes to the crunch, 14 films got 61 nominations. Most of those were in major categories.

Of course, that's what everyone's interested in, the big money and the important contests like the fourth annual Observer & Eccentric/AMC Academy Award Contest.

To win the O&E/AMC trip to Hollywood, just pick the winners in the top six categories — best actor, best supporting actor, best actress, best supporting actress, best director and best picture.

As usual, the management is offering my services to help you pick those six winners. Lots of luck, because my track record doesn't inspire a lot of confidence.

Nonetheless, here it goes in this unusual year with unexpected nominations.

Most of the major nominations were garnered by unusual films, ones that dealt with uncommon topics or were from unexpected sources for feature films.

Kenneth Branagh's English film, Shakespeare's "Henry V," (three nods) fits both categories, as does another film from overseas, "Camille Claudel," whose lead, Isabelle Adjani, was nominated for best actress.

The life story of an Irish writer and artist, Cristy Brown, who has cerebral palsy, also was unexpected in the mainstream with five nominations.

Although not quite as unusual, two Holocaust films, "Music Box" and "Schindler's List" were well represented, with Jessica Lange nominated as best actress in the former and both Anjelica Huston and Lena Olin as best supporting actress in the latter.

TOPPING THE list with nine nominations is "Driving Miss Daisy," the story of a southern Jewish widow (Jessica Tandy) chauffeured for a quarter century by a black man (Morgan Freeman).

Freeman also has a major role in another big hit with the Academy, "Glory." This is a conventional war film about an unconventional regiment, the Massachusetts 54th, the first black fighting unit in the Union Army during the Civil War.

So there you have something very different from the Academy's usual menu.

WHO IS the best actor in the

group? The answer may not be the same as who is going to win the Oscar for best actor. Understanding Academy politics is like pretending you can explain the workings of the Pentagon and "the check's in the mail."

Tom Cruise has been described as "coming of acting age" in "Born on the Fourth of July" but it seems he proved his mettle last year in "Rain Man."

Despite his popularity and the need for cleansing the national conscience for the way Vietnam veterans were treated, I'm betting he's passed over this time.

The same for Robin Williams in "Dead Poets Society." He garnered many rave notices in a film that did unexpectedly well at the box office with Williams in a role unlike his usual manic persona.

DANIEL DAY-LEWIS' performance in "My Left Foot" is superb and probably as trying on him as it is on audiences. The discomfort of watching an ill person suffer may work to his detriment.

Branagh's Henry V is a fine performance in the best tradition of British Shakespearean acting, but, again, too far out of the mainstream for mass media in America.

That leaves Morgan Freeman as Hoke, Miss Daisy's chauffeur. The gentle sensitivity of a black man in a racist Southern milieu is a long-ignored characteristic in our media, which generally deal in convenient stereotypes.

Freeman's ability to convey that sensitivity without loss of personal dignity makes him the obvious choice. Besides, his acting is the very best.

BEST SUPPORTING actor category is no easier. They'll probably pass over Brando because the Academy doesn't want any more speeches from Indian princesses.

Although Denzel Washington does a fine job in "Glory," the criticism that he was too articulate for a runaway slave may work against him, despite the sympathy that character evokes in contemporary audiences.

Danny Aiello's pizza store owner in "Do the Right Thing" is an excellent portrayal, but too much in the pattern he usually plays.

Dan Aykroyd is excellent as Daisy's balding, conventional, paunchy and very middle-aged son, an exceptional departure from Aykroyd's usual roles.

But the nod from this corner goes to Martin Landau in "Crimes and Misdemeanors." As with his four competitors, the characterization is the very finest.

In a politically driven contest, Landau on the comeback trail from years of obscurity should draw the sympathy vote.

See you next week with the final word on 10 outstanding actresses vying for two coveted Oscars.

Karaoke crooning gives 'Amateur Hour' new meaning

Continued from Page 1

is a place where I can sing. It's fun. American bars don't have this."

That's probably because karaoke isn't yet commonplace in the United States.

"I guess there's a karaoke bar on every corner in Japan, but there aren't too many in America," said Juli Nasalika, an employee at Sushi Iwa, which is in Woodhaven and is the frequent relaxation spot of Mazda workers.

However, there is such a place in not-too-far-away Livonia. Akasaka is a hot spot most-frequented by Japanese folks who live and work in or around that suburb, Yamada said.

TWO SUCH customers were

Formington Hills resident Yelchi Tsushima and Ryuko Wakugawa of Southfield, who sang a duet on the Japanese number "Izakaya."

Tsushima later made Dean Martin proud with a confident rendering of "Everybody Loves Somebody Sometime."

Some of the "locals" also give their vocal chords a try at Akasaka. Tsushima said, "The funny thing is, I didn't know Americans liked to sing. They come in here a lot."

Sushi Iwa and Akasaka notwithstanding, the scarcity of karaoke bars in the U.S. is unfortunate, according to Sklar, an Oakland University student who relishes the Japanese lifestyle.

"They (the Japanese) study our

culture extensively," Sklar said. "It's only fair that Americans learn about Japan's. It's better to have a mutual understanding."

There is no better place to do that than a karaoke bar, the 37-year-old Watanabe said.

"THIS IS NOT 'America' here," Watanabe said. "This is like a microcosm of Japan. Most of the guests are interested in Japan or in Japanese culture."

Karaoke, by contrast, has been a hit in Japan since humble beginnings in the late 1960s. Yamada said people first sang along to music-only records and tapes, reading the lyrics from a songbook.

In recent years, karaoke has made

its way onto car dashboards, primarily as an entertainment form to help weary travelers ward off boredom on long trips, he added.

On the domestic side, the popularity of karaoke can only be helped by enthusiastic Americans, such as Sklar, who talks up the music box.

Since fighting off initial fears, Sklar has become a four-month karaoke veteran.

"It seems to me that a lot more Americans are reluctant to go on stage," he said.

What they do when they get up there may be another source of (right, joked Sklar. "When the Japanese sing, they're always on key. But Americans are off key."



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/istat photographer

Martin Bando of Northville takes a turn singing while Akasaka manager Shigeru Yamada claps his hands in time with the music.