

Welcome to American Mosaic from VOA Learning English.

I'm June Simms.

Today, we talk about the Oscars.

Each year, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences presents the Academy Awards in Los Angeles, California. The awards are called Oscars. They are the top honors in the American film industry.

The 2014 awards ceremony is Sunday night. This year marks the 86th Academy Awards. Nominees and other members of the movie industry will gather for the awards ceremony at the Dolby Theater in Hollywood. The attendees will be dressed in beautiful clothes and costly jewelry. After the ceremony, actors, directors and others attend parties until early in the morning.

About six thousand members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences vote for the winners by secret ballots. There are as many as twenty-five kinds of awards. They include best actors, directors, writers and producers among others.

The top award - best picture - is announced last. That category and the category for best foreign film are permitted up to ten nominees. Also, the entire Academy gets to choose those nominees.

Otherwise, Academy members choose nominees in the same categories in which they work. In other words, actors nominate actors. Directors nominate directors. Designers nominate designers.

But, all Academy members vote to choose the final winners.

This year, actor and talk show host Ellen DeGeneres will lead the awards ceremony. Last year, comedian and producer Seth MacFarlane hosted the event. More than forty million people watched the show on television.

No one knows for sure how the Academy Award came to be called an Oscar. The award itself is a small statue of a standing man. One story goes that a former Academy official said the statue looked like her Uncle Oscar. The first award was presented in 1929. The Academy began to officially use the nickname Oscar ten years later.

So who and what are some of the Oscar nominees this year? There are nine movies nominated for Motion Picture of the Year. They are set all over, from space to sea. One asks a question of the future and technology. Another takes a hard look at the past. One uses first-time technology developed for the film. Another is a reminder of the days before color filmmaking.

The people honored with Oscar nominations for movies of 2013 are as different as the notable films.

So who will Oscar go home with Sunday night? Learning English reporter Caty Weaver went into the studio with VOA film correspondent Penelope Poulou to talk about this year's movies and moviemakers.

“Hi Penelope. Thank you for joining us in the studio.”

“Thank you, Caty, and nice to see you.”

“I would like to start with the category of animated film, partly because I was shocked to find out how much money one of those nominated films made. ‘Frozen’ has made 980 million dollars, in box office.”

“That is right. Of course, many people say that, although it has been so popular, it may not be as high of a quality as previous Oscar nominees and winners.

“In the animated category?”

“Exactly. So, I don’t know what it was that made this film so popular, maybe advertising. I have heard mixed reviews.”

“So, you’re guess for the winner?”

“It is going to be ‘Frozen.’”

“Yeah. ‘Frozen’ is also nominated in another category, original song. The song is called ‘Let It Go.’ Let’s listen.”

“There are nine films nominated for Motion Picture of the Year. Now, did you get a chance to see all of them?”

“I saw all but one. I didn’t see ‘Her.’ I read a lot about it. I read that it was very difficult to pull off a more spontaneous romance due to the circumstances.”

“Her” is about a man who falls in love with the intelligent operating system in his phone. The film presents viewers with a question: how close can technology and humanity become?

“Now ‘Gravity’ is a favorite for a lot of reasons. I mean, it’s a spectacle.”

"Absolutely. I appreciate 'Gravity' very, very much. I think it deserves not best picture. It deserves best director. Because for (Alfonso) Cuaron to do what he did, nobody else has done it yet. And I had the chance to watch it actually at the first screening in L.A. in a huge theater. So, it was almost horrific because none of us had had any feedback about the film. We didn't know what to expect."

"Sandra Bullock plays the lead in 'Gravity.' She is an astronaut floating in space after her ship is damaged. What do you think her chances are for best actress?"

"She's not going to get the Oscar. It's going to go to Cate Blanchett..."

"Really?"

"For 'Blue Jasmine.' Her interpretation was almost Shakespearean. I believe she is a shoo-in."

"Let's talk about, then, performance by an actor in a leading role."

“Now, that’s a tough one. I think that’s the toughest of them all. The favorite of the moment is Chiwetel Ejiofor in ‘Twelve Years A Slave’ because he won the BAFTA. And BAFTA usually influences Oscar voters.”

“Tell our listeners what the BAFTA is.”

“OK. The BAFTA is the equivalent to the American Oscar. It’s the British equivalent. The BAFTAS have gravitas. So that has given Ejiofor momentum, but Matthew McConaughey is right there breathing down his neck.”

“Matthew McConaughey for his role in ‘Dallas Buyers Club’ as an AIDS patient. Also Christian Bale was supposed to be extraordinary in ‘American Hustle.’”

“It was a very, very good movie. I think the whole cast was stellar. Christian Bale has done an amazing job. But because it is such a tight race I cannot put him on the same level as Ejiofor and McConaughey.”

“Right. Well thank you so much Penelope.”

“Thank you Caty.”

That is “Happy,” another original song nominated for an Oscar. Pharell Williams wrote and performed the song for the animated movie “Despicable Me 2.”

On Wednesday, “Happy” made the number one position on Billboard’s Hot 100 singles list. Williams will perform the song at the awards ceremony Sunday night.

“Happy” and “Let It Go” are up against two other competitors. “The Moon Song” is on the soundtrack to the nominated film “Her.” Director Spike Jonze and rock and roller Karen O wrote the song together. Karen O performs it.

One of the biggest rock bands in the world wrote a song for the movie “Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom.” U2 band members were friends for many years with the former South African president and civil rights activist, Nelson Mandela. The song was released in November last year, shortly before his death.

We leave you with U2 performing “Ordinary Love.”





I'm June Simms. This program was written and produced by Caty Weaver.

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