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'And the winner is ...' Valley film buffs share their Oscar picks and plans



A view of an Oscar statue outside the 84th Annual Academy Awards show at the Hollywood and Highland Center in Los Angeles on February 26, 2012. TNS/Lionel Hahn

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NORTHAMPTON — On Sunday, Oscar nominees will walk the red carpet, and Valley film buffs have no shortage of opinions about who they think should win.

Up for best picture this year: "Black Panther," "BlacKkKlansman," "Bohemian Rhapsody," "The Favourite," "Green Book," "Roma," "A Star is Born" and "Vice."

Larry Jackson, of Amherst, previously worked at Orion Pictures, Miramax, and was as a senior production executive at the Samuel Goldwyn Company.

"I'm hoping Mahershala Ali is recognized for 'Green Book,'" he said, "although I thought he should have been nominated for lead actor instead of supporting actor."



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"In terms of lead actor," Jackson added, "I thought Christian Bale gave a truly extraordinary performance completely embodying Dick Cheney in 'Vice.'"

Carol Johnson, executive director at Amherst Cinema, liked "RBG," a film that follows Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and is nominated for best documentary feature.

"Everybody should see that. It's an absolutely astounding story," she said.

Many Valley filmgoers spoke highly of "Roma," a drama directed by Alfonso Cuarón that follows a year in the life of a young domestic worker in 1970s Mexico City. It's up for a slew of awards, including best picture, best foreign language film, best supporting actress and best leading actress.

"It's the first movie in Spanish to be nominated for the best film award," said Barbara Zecchi, a professor and director of the Interdepartmental Program in Film Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, who's also a member of the Film Academy of Spain.

"I hope it's going to win," she added. "It would be a great statement against a wall that is meant to divide Mexico from the U.S."

Northampton City Councilor at large Bill Dwight, who worked at the now-closed Pleasant Street Video in Northampton for 25 years, also was impressed by "Roma." "It was evocative and stunning, and it moved at a pace that was unhurried," he said.

Nina Kleinberg, of Florence, worked as a film editor in Los Angeles in the 1970s and more recently has given lectures on film in venues around the Valley (she recently spoke about the making of "Casablanca" as part of the Northampton Neighbors' and Northampton Senior Center's speakers series). She predicts "Roma" will win in the best foreign language category.

This year's Oscars are not without controversy. Earlier this month, the Academy announced that awards in several categories, including cinematography and film editing, would be given during the commercial breaks instead of broadcasted live. The Academy changed its decision after public outcry, according to the Associated Press.

Kleinberg just got back from a trip to see film industry friends in L.A. where she said everyone was focused on that decision and its reversal. In her eyes, editors and cinematographers already don't get enough credit, and the change was offensive to some people, she said.

“I know this seems like a blip on the radar, but it was huge in Los Angeles,” she said, adding that “the majority of people in L.A. who work in the film industry are not movie stars — they are the people who actually make the movies.”

There is also no show host this year, a situation has not occurred since 1989.

“It’s going to be quite unusual,” said Jackson, who will be watching from home. “I always watch. I never bet money, but I always watch.”

Zecchi also plans to tune in. “I’ll sit on my couch with my two cats and two dogs,” she said.

Johnson, meanwhile, plans to catch this year’s Oscars with a group of friends in Leverett who have been watching the ceremony together for years. They create pools picking their winners. “Everybody bets a whole dollar,” she said. “It’s really about loving film.”


As for Dwight, a self-described movie lover, he won’t be watching the Oscars this year. “It really doesn’t move me,” he said of the ceremony. “It’s a lot of pomp that has little to do with the structural and cultural value of films. It sounds snobby to say that, but it just doesn’t do it for me.”

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