

Navigating our presidential campaign was a piece of cake compared to understanding the nuances of the 2011 Oscar race for the most revered artistic honor in the world.

This is how nine films fell into the big picture.

Three premiered in Cannes mid-May, a distant nine months ago, creating an Oscar campaign as long as any human pregnancy.

At the Palais, the first inkling of Oscar buzz was born as reclusive Woody Allen premiered "Midnight in Paris".

PBS later aired a documentary of Woody discussing his forty-four films showing the astonishing depth of his talent that made you want to immediately hand him the Oscar for Best Picture. Academy rules and Woody forbade marketing this gem.

Woody is not a member of the Academy because he doesn't feel that films should be in competition. He told me, "A statue does not change your life. You still get a cold. You can't get a date. You still have everyday things to worry about". The Academy learned to love him from a distance and gave him best original screenplay as a consolation.

Terrence Malick's long awaited esoteric "The Tree of Life" unveiled at Cannes and won the coveted "Palme d'Or" positioning it for a nomination.

"The Artist", created by the French, shot in Hollywood and about Hollywood was the festival surprise. This charming and oddly original black and white silent entry was introduced by the ringmaster himself, Harvey Weinstein. No one could pronounce or spell director Michel Hazanavicius's name. Jean Dujardin could not speak a word of English and neither could his 10 year old co-star, the Jack Russell Uggie who had been rescued from the pound after two adopters found him too wild. Tragically Uggie developed an undisclosed neurological disorder during production, forcing him to retire at the height of his popularity.

No slam dunk Oscar winner emerged in Cannes. Any future film could easily win.

DreamWorks' "The Help" premiered in LA in August and distributor Disney began propelling the politically correct and socially significant film to box office heaven of \$200 million. Viola Davis and Octavia Spencer were forecast to win Oscars.

In September, the Toronto and New York Film Festivals and Fox Searchlight presented Alexander's Hawaiian family saga, "The Descendants," which broke out of the pack with whispers of winning. Beloved George Clooney, playing a father for the first time was hailed a shoe-in for best actor. Directing "Ides of March" was additional momentum.

Also at New York's festival Marty Scorsese and Paramount sneaked an unfinished cut of "Hugo" in Alice Tully Hall, built for concerts but converted into a 3-D theater. Marty was christened the visionary genius of an innovative costly 3-D masterpiece.

Director Bennett Miller's highly anticipated "Moneyball" for Sony hit a grand slam at its west coast premiere in Oakland aligning the film, it's heart throb star Brad Pitt, Jonah Hill and seasoned writers Steve Zaillian and Aaron Sorkin in play.

Spielberg's epic "War Horse" for DreamWorks came thundering down the pike with a huge premiere back at Alice Tully Hall with posters of Lincoln Center's Tony winning theatrical "War Horse" with their indelible puppets in the background. Steven paid homage to legends John Ford and David Lean and the country fell in love with a horse named Joey and his fourteen stand-ins.

Studios worked their stars to the bone. Ironically, Harvey's independent French talent who lived in Paris were not as available as their competitors, therefore Uggie became a super star igniting a pet war.

Christopher Plummer, who had best supporting actor in the bag promoted his Jack Russell, Cosmo. Diminutive Scorsese was seen on TV on a small couch with his large Doberman, Blackie drooling on his suit. Spielberg never got a chance to trot out his lead horse Joey, previously seen in "Seabiscuit" because his ravishing reddish coat was now darkened for another role.

By December, as film critics bestowed their own awards upon many films, Stephen Daldry struggled to finish "Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close" with a new score. There was buzz Daldry could be editing the winner. Producer Scott Rudin juggled his astounding three films in one year from Daldry, Miller and David Fincher directing "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo."

Daldry had received three consecutive directing nominations. In January, for his fourth film, he received a best picture nomination, for a boy's emotional journey dealing with 9/11, and the nine films were officially off and running. Forty-five film and media groups handed out awards leading up to Oscar night.

Wednesday, February 22

My airplane seatmate to LAX was Sony Classics Michael Barker. The night before Woody Allen had shown Michael "Nero Fiddled", his **latest** film shot in Rome rumored to be his best.

When Woody won the Oscar Sunday night, for a record breaking 23rd overall nomination, he had just finished pasta a Sette Mezzo on Lexington Avenue with art dealer Lorinda Ash and Soon-Yi. He went home and watched the N.B.A. All-Star game. Soon-Yi watched the awards show on a delay in another room. By the time Woody won, he fell asleep and Soon-Yi didn't want to wake him. The next morning he went to the breakfast table alone and read in The New York Times he won. He had to think it was a good omen and he would not catch a cold that day.

Before Michael and I flattened our recliner chairs for the big sleep, I told him I felt confident his Iranian film, "A Separation" was winning best foreign picture. He told me "The Artist" would take best picture and director. Actor was a tight race between Brad Pitt, Jean Dujardin, the "Clooney of France" and the real George Clooney. George was essentially running against a version of himself, which only slightly amused him.

The biggest dilemma was Viola vs. Meryl. Michael picked Meryl as New Yorkers did. "The Help" had taken on a life of its own lead by vivacious Viola in LA. "The Iron Lady", a much criticized film showcased Meryl's tour de force performance. Few knew at the last minute, on President's weekend Harvey's shout out, "She hasn't won in 29 years!" resonated.

An androgynous driver named Monica greeted me at the airport in a black tuxedo that would make Albert Nobbs weep for joy, prompting me to devilishly think of her as "Nobbs" all weekend. She barely recognized me sporting a new Sally Hershberger hairdo, "the yenta with the dragon tattoo."

Checking into the Beverly Hills Hotel I bumped into best actress nominee, Golden Globe and Spirit Award winner Michelle Williams with her daughter Matilda Ledger headed to the swimming pool. Innocently standing there with no makeup she was remarkably the antithesis of Marilyn Monroe. I told her she so deserved the Oscar for her mesmerizing transformation which did not cheer her up knowing the gold was going to Viola or Meryl.

This year there seemed to be more parties than ever. Vanity Fair publisher Edward Menicheschi staged a staggering six nights of "CAMPAIGN HOLLYWOOD." Ermenegildo Zenga and Colin and Livia Firth hosted an intimate dinner at the Chateau Marmont to benefit Oxfam America, Colin's pet charity. Editor Graydon Carter and Edward greeted Cameron Diaz, Kristin Davis, Gary and Alexandra Oldman, Mia Wasikowska. In addition, Livia spoke about her 'Green Carpet Challenge' which uses eco-friendly fabrics for "wear it once" gowns at awards shows. Get it? Go green on red.

It was a busy night at the Chateau as French billionaire investor Nicolas Berggruen hosted his party for young, leggy, breathtakingly beautiful models. Lindsay Lohan was on the loose after a judge having announced she was making great progress. She showed up sober wearing a new face bloated with injectable Restalyne that could only be preparation to portray Elizabeth Taylor in "Liz and Dick", her film for Lifetime. Peter Brant and Stephanie Seymour and Peter Morton and Linda Evangelista joined Josh Harnett and Emile Hirsh under the terrace heaters. The boys were looking for love in all the right places.

Thursday, February 23

Thursday night boasted fifteen events causing party panic. Here is a brief rundown of **seven**.

At The Hollywood Reporters Nominees Night, editor Janice Min and publisher Lynne Segall greeted the power brokers. With ballots in, competing studios cordially mingled in the mayor's backyard. Owen Wilson slipped in the back door and hung with Michael Sheen and producer Letty Aronson. Producers Kathy Kennedy and Frank Marshall chatted with DreamWorks partner Stacey Snyder, producer Graham King and Emily Mortimer. Fox's Tom Rothman and Jim Gianopulos compared notes with Focus's James Shamus. Young directors Drake Doremus ("Like Crazy"), Sean Durkin ("Martha Marcy May Marlene") and Oscar nominee and Spirit Award winner J.C. Chandor ("Margin Call") drank at the bar. Breakout directors Nick Jarecki ("Arbitrage"), Zal Batmanglij ("Sound of My Voice and "The East") and Jay Duplass ("Jeff Who Lives at Home") dreamed about their future nominations. Aaron Sorkin, Piers Morgan and Lawrence O'Donnell handicapped Romney vs. Obama as Brooklyn Decker sashayed by.

Urs Fisher's exhibition Beds & Problem Paintings featured two bed sculptures at Larry Gagosian's Gallery followed by his private dinner at Mr. Chow's. Art lovers Vera Wang, Russell Simmons, Steve Martin, Jean Pigozzi and John Waters attended.

The US-Ireland Alliance honored nominees "Hugo" screenwriter John Logan, "Bridesmaids" star Melissa McCarthy and Michelle Williams at Bad Robot. Logan also wrote "Rango" "Coriolanus", 007's "Skyfall" and "Jersey Boys" for the big screen.

Alfre Woodard hosted a down and dirty girls night out in a rented house above Sunset for Viola Davis and Octavia Spencer.

Universal honcho Ron Meyer hosted a civilized private buffet at his Malibu home for Graydon Carter with Tom Cruise, Leonardo DiCaprio, Barbra Streisand, Tom Hanks and Michael Douglas.

Stunning socialite Betsey Bloomingdale gave a seated dinner at her Holmby Hills home for best friends Nancy Reagan, Wendy Stark, Bob Colacello, Joan Collins and fashion icon Lynn Wyatt.

Tobias Meyer, **auctioneer** for Sotheby's and art dealer Mark Fletcher hosted an open house at their Mulholland Drive home for English **avant garde** photographer Terry Richardson. This is the only pre-Oscar party where a guest dropped his pants and mooned the red carpet and Terry signed a fans breast. Art collectors Bill and Maria Bell, **Todd Eberle, rock singer Jack Donahue and Francesco Clemente schmoozed.**

Friday, February 24

At the BHH I ran into David Heyman, English producer of the "Harry Potter" franchise who was honored at the Publicists Awards lunch at The Beverly Hilton. "Motion Picture Showman of the Year" was the consolation prize for being snubbed by the Academy for visualizing a publishing miracle for children around the world.

"Nobbs" whisked me off to **the British Film Reception hosted by Jeremy Hunt, UK Secretary for Culture and Olympics,** and the British Consul-General Dame Barbara Hay, in her Hancock Park residence. Upon introduction, I blurted out that my friend Lord Astor, was interested in having LA people get to know his son-in-law, Prime Minister David Cameron. As an appointed diplomat she was horrified by my indiscretion and turned to greet the next American idiot. I was just making conversation.

Daldry told Sony's Sir Howard Stringer and astute film CEO Michael Lynton, Kenneth Branagh, Janet McTeer, **and Gary Oldman** that he, as executive producer of the Olympics, was **headed back** to London to **oversee special** events, including the opening ceremony, directed by Danny Boyle.

Victoria Beckham made a dramatic sullen last-minute appearance looking perfectly skinny in her own designed dress.

At the Women in Film party at Cecconi's, **Gwyneth Paltrow, Shailene Woodley, Selena Gomez** and Vanessa Hudgens networked with Jessica, Octavia and Viola now of social stamina fame.

Blythe Danner kissed me at the door as a military type looked on. I kept saying to him, "Where have we met?" Nowhere. He was astronaut Mark E. Kelly who came with Blythe and is married to former congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, Paltrow's second cousin. Only I could mistake an astronaut for a movie marketing guy.

Vanity Fair feted Scorsese and The Film Foundation which has saved 555 films in 22 years. Cocktails were at the restored Bel-Air Hotel. Honorary Jewess Lorraine Bracco ran past me yelling she was late for Ronald Perelman's Shabbat dinner. Three, three-time Oscar winners: composer Howard Shore, costume designer Sandy Powell and editor Thelma **Schoonmaker** were honored. Sir Ben Kingsley, Danny Huston,

Patty Clarkson, Irwin Winkler and Giorgio Armani's niece Roberta Armani with Wanda McDaniels debated best director: Marty or Michel?

"Nobbs" delivered me to WME's Party at kahuna Ari Emanuel's Brentwood estate, where NFL quarterback and new client Tim Tebow was the toast of the party, especially to Taylor Swift who made \$35.7 million this year. Michael Douglas gave me a kiss... **doesn't get any better.** **Lovebirds** Robert Pattinson and Kristen Stewart made a **rare appearance**, glued to each other's hips. They mingled with co-star Taylor Lautner, Miley Cyrus and her "Hunger Games" beau Liam Hemsworth. Meanwhile Charlize Theron, Jack Black, Rooney Mara, Ben Stiller, Barry Sonnenfeld and Larry David talked business with **moguls** **Les** Moonves and Viacom's Philippe Dauman.

Next was UTA Chairman Jim Berkus' soiree that police almost shut down because the DJ got carried away impressing Harrison Ford, Channing Tatum, Jerry Bruckheimer, Tom Freston, Disney's Rich Ross, SNL's Lorne **Michaels** and Oscar show producer Brian Grazer.

Sunset Tower Hotel owner Jeff Klein and producer John Goldwyn hosted a secretive dinner for Anna and Graydon Carter at their Hollywood Hills home with Tom Ford, Mitch **Glazer**, **Fran** Lebowitz, Vito Schnabel, Denise Hale, Lisa and Eric Eisner and VF's Punch Hutton, who is Tim Hutton's sister. **_____**

Last stop was CAA Byran Lourd's "Friday Night Party". "Nobbs" was instructed to drop me off at a neighborhood school where a luxury van transported guests to the stone and glass Bel-Air estate situated on a narrow street. I knew that **guests** **Colin** Firth, Penelope Cruz, Sofia Vergara, Salma Hayek, Sandra Bullock, and Glee's Matthew Morrison did not arrive by bus. Once inside the playing field leveled out and pound for pound there was more famous flesh per square inch than **at** the Oscars themselves.

I huddled with Meryl on the couch and we talked about her race. She thought Viola. I thought Meryl. She didn't know about **Harvey's** last minute "29 year" shout out.

I hugged Bette **Midler**, **flirted** with Jim Sturgess **and Bennett Miller.** **Universal's** Donna Langley, who is overseeing Tom Hooper's production "Les Miserable" mentioned Hugh Jackman's impeccable manners should insure best behavior from Russell Crowe.

I introduced HBO's "Game Change" director Jay Roach who is **an** authority on Hitler, to George Clooney who is writing a thriller about the Nazis stealing art. Clooney whispered, "The Frenchman is winning."

I thanked Bryan Lourd, Kevin Huvane and Richard Lovett, got on the bus and prayed that I get invited back.

Saturday, February 25

I dragged my tired ass to the Academy, as foreign films aficionado Mark Johnson was conducting a symposium on the nominated films, which included Sony Classic's "In Darkness" from Poland, "Footnote" from Israel and "A Separation" from Iran. Israeli and Iranian governments from the other side of the world monitored their directors as the Sony boys kept the peace.

Michael and Tom Bernard invited me to the Independent Spirit Awards at the Santa Monica Pier. Michael hosted his "Take Shelter" nominees Jessica Chastain, Michael Shannon and director Jeff Nichols. Tom held **court** **at** the next table with the entire Iranian cast of "A Separation", which won. Tom

almost had a heart **attack** **when** I threw my arms around Iranian director Asghar Farhadi, which in Iran is unacceptable behavior especially by a Jewish American Princess. Tom wished I had gone to the crowded champagne brunch in honor of Prince Albert and Princess Charlene at the Bel-Air Hotel where Montblanc launched Grace Kelly watches. Simultaneously, TV producer Gary Pudney hosted another secretive lunch which Albert and Charlene actually attended with Graydon Carter, Carolina Herrera, Wallace Annenberg, Bobby Shriver, Bobby Marx, Kathy and Ricky Hilton and Lynn Wyatt. Wolfgang Puck joined them for dessert.

"The French," as the "The Artist" gang was nicknamed, had won six Cesars, France's version of the Oscars in Paris the night before. They flew all night and Harvey's chauffeur arranged a police escort from LAX just in time for them to win four Spirit Awards, cementing the Oscar win.

Back at the BHH, Spielberg was the first to arrive at the tenth annual "Night Before" fundraiser in support of the Motion Picture and Television Fund. Jeffrey Katzenberg had already secured \$200 of a \$350 million fundraising goal that included money from him, Tom Cruise, Steve Bing, Casey Wasserman, Clooney and Spielberg. Every nominee showed up.

Chanel and Charles Finch cooked up their chic soiree at Madeo, where a mariachi band enthusiastically announced everyone's arrival. Bedecked exclusively in Chanel were Diane Kruger, Rose Byrne, Ginnifer Goodwin, **and Rachel Bilson** . Also air kissing were Rachel Zoe, Rosanna Arquette, Alice Evans and Ioan Gruffudd, Zachary Quinto, and Julia Ormond.

Elizabeth Olsen who has six upcoming films, gushed to Dustin Hoffman that "Wag the Dog" was her favorite movie. I sat next to director, Michael Apted who was editing "Of Men and Mavericks," a surfer film he co-directed with Curtis Hanson.

"My Week With Marilyn's" English director Simon Curtis insisted we join Kenneth Branagh at The Weinstein Company's bash at the Soho House in time to hear Tony Bennett sing "Autumn Leaves" to Harvey's surprised 86 year-old mother Miriam, Madonna and Meryl. Jean Dujardin, Berenice Bejo, Michel Hazanavicius and producer Thomas Langmann staggered around completely jet lagged **and** too tired to speak **English** . Uggie on the other hand was the absolute star of the evening as his trainer placed him in everyone's arms for photo two shots. "W.E's" Andrea Riseborough and Abbie Cornish sat next to baseball cap-clad Leonardo DiCaprio as his ex Bar Refaeli kept her distance across the room. Zoe Saldana walked in holding hands with Bradley Cooper. Scarlett Johansson introduced me to her boyfriend Nate Naylor. Katy Perry, Felicity Jones and Malin Akerman circled a refreshed Gerard Butler. The two daughters of New York slain hero cop Peter Figoski, Corrine, 14 and Caroline, 16 who had also been Harvey's guests at the Super Bowl stood in the middle of this circus and just fainted.

Sunday, February 26

I met interior **designer** Nicky Haslam in the Polo Lounge and found Nancy Reagan brunching with Bob Colacello and Carolina Herrera. Nancy knows me as "The DVD Lady." I promised to send her "The Iron Lady". I didn't have the heart to tell her that her husband, who was Margaret Thatcher's best friend, was barely mentioned in the film.

In a Marchesa gown, Dennis Basso fur and Iradj Moini necklace, **I** collected Simon Curtis and headed to the Hollywood & Highland Center. Simon, who has never been to the Oscars before, miraculously scored a front row seat between Michelle **Williams** and Clooney. We pulled up to screams of hysteria at the

mother of all red carpets. We ended up in front of thousands of cameras and I instructed Simon to take baby steps for an hour.

Meryl's publicist Leslee Dart whispered to me. "She is dressed like an Oscar. What do we do if she loses?" Sacha Baron Cohen hilariously guilted the Academy into letting him wear his costume from "The Dictator" and after soiling Ryan Seacrest he went directly to dinner at Vanity Fair. Gwyneth Paltrow won the style award in Tom Ford's white column and Angelina Jolie so successfully invented a new one legged pose in a thigh high slit gown on the red carpet she repeated it for 39.3 million people onstage. Tickets were so tight that I gave my plus one to Penelope Ann Miller because she promoted "The Artist" every day for four months. Seated next to us were co-stars James Cromwell and Missi Pyle.

Billy Crystal made us laugh, Cirque de Soleil made us gasp and most of the wins were expected. Colin Firth crowned Meryl her third win on a record 17 nominations and Harvey beamed.

The Academy was so confident "The Artist" would win; they invited Uggie, who waited in the wings and ran out as Tom Cruise announced the film.

Once the show was off the air, I followed my seatmates to the stage loaded with their programs, wraps and handbags and led the French to the press rooms.

The Governor's Ball was the next stop where the winners got their Oscars engraved. Everyone paid respects to the Academy's Tom Sherak and Dawn Hudson. Stars headed to the Sunset Tower to Graydon's glittering Vanity Fair Oscar bash and their militarized security with micro chipped cards. If your name was not on the list and you were carrying an Oscar, you could walk in. Billy and Janice Crystal were mobbed with well-wishers. Elton John made \$5 million dollars at his 20th AmFar event which also auctioned off two tickets to Vanity Fair's party for \$230 thousand dollars. Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes were thrilled to talk to George Lucas. Gwyneth snuggled with Coldplay's Chris Martin and Jennifer Lopez brought boy-toy Casper Smart. Every major actor previously mentioned was standing in the room. In a sea of celebrity were Tina Fey, David Beckham, Glenn Close, Terry George, Demian Bichir, Claire Danes, Meryl's daughters Mamie Gummer with husband Ben Walker, Grace Gummer, Salma Hayek, Brit Marling, Natalie Portman, Sofia Coppola, Ryan Kavanaugh, Ingrid Sischy, Sandy Brant and Wendi Murdoch with Bingbing Li.

George Clooney threw his own exclusive party at Craig's in West Hollywood for close friends Bryan Lourd, Grant Heslov, Stan Rosenfield, Brad and Angelina, Emily Blunt and John Krasinski, Cindy Crawford, Jimmy Kimmel, Ryan Seacrest and best adapted screenplay winner Alexander Payne. As much as George supported "The Descendants" he and Brad seemed to have cancelled each other out this year with two great performances.

"The French" and their closest 200 threw their own wild celebration at the Chateau, poured champagne down their throats and threw each other in the pool at 3:00am. Nobody spoke a word of English.

By 4:00am Harvey rounded his talent up for a live broadcast on "The Today Show" from The Four Seasons lobby. In disheveled black tie five Oscar winners and Berenice Bejo, who were total unknowns a year ago made Oscar history with the first silent film to win since 1927. This had to be the most exciting

night of their lives. Tomorrow they all go back to **reality** but the glory and the memories will live on forever. As an Oscar winner, **who cares about a cold?**

Uggie was invited to the White House correspondent's dinner as a guest of the Washington Times in April. He hopes to meet President Obama.