

The Snubbies: Best Actor

by Joe Mulder

We return for another week of Snubbies, starting off today with Best Actor. If you missed last week's awards, featuring [Best Supporting Actress](#), [Best Supporting Actor](#) and [Best Actress](#)... well, what are you waiting for? They're still on the internet, get to 'em!

Along we move...

Best Actor

Nominees:

[Jack Black](#), "School of Rock"

[Jim Caviezel](#), "The Passion of the Christ"

[Colin Farrell](#), "In Bruges"

[Paul Giamatti](#), "Sideways"

[Emile Hirsch](#), "Into the Wild"

I just love *School of Rock*, and without Jack Black, there's no *School of Rock*. It was a movie that was essentially crafted by a writer and director specifically for him, as if somebody finally said "this guy's immensely entertaining; now he just needs a vehicle that harnesses every ounce of his talent and wrings it out like a bar rag."

There's admittedly little seriousness or heavy lifting in Jack Black's performance, but I've made my feelings about comedy quite clear (as has the Academy, unfortunately). I'm not sure why anybody thinks that what Jack Black did in *School of Rock* was any easier than what, say, Daniel Day-Lewis did in *There Will Be Blood*. I can confidently say without overstatement that watching *School of Rock* is nothing less than watching a once-in-a-generation master at work. Jack Black at his best and most comfortable is a performer in complete control of every molecule in his body; every line reading, every gesture, every twitch, every blink is effortlessly perfect, yet appears as though it was calculated far in advance by some sort of comedy-optimizing supercomputer.

It's like watching wide receiver Cris Carter catch a pass with his tiptoes inbounds by only a centimeter, or caricaturist Al Hirschfeld capture somebody's very essence with but a few strokes of the pen. It's not that there are perhaps only four or five people on the planet who can do it as well; it's that someone who can do it as well may not come along for several more years.

And you know what? There *is* seriousness in Jack Black's *School of Rock* work, now that I think about it. His Dewey Finn is a disheveled man-child, to be sure, self-consciously goofy and seemingly incapable of living an adult life. Still, his earnest, uncynical affection for classic rock music drives

the admittedly silly plot of the movie, a premise we're willing to accept for an hour-and-a-half because Dewey believes so whole-heartedly in – as he might put it – the power of rock.

I'll be honest with you: I never saw *The Passion of the Christ*. I've seen Jim Caviezel be awfully good in stuff, though, and I assume he was awfully good in this. Good enough for a Snubbie nomination, anyway.

And look: he probably deserves to win this particular award. All I can say is I'm sorry; you can get nominated for a Snubbie for a movie I haven't seen (ask Keri Russell!), but you can't very well expect to win one (ask Keri Russell again). I mean, when you've tracked her down to ask her about the first thing, then just ask her this, as long as you've already found her. No need to make two trips).

Colin Farrell actually won a Golden Globe for his role in *In Bruges*, but it was in the comedy category. It's hardly fair to call *In Bruges* simply a comedy, although I guess if any of the characters in the film or anyone watching the film is allowed to crack a smile at any point, that's close enough.

There are certainly funny scenes in *In Bruges*, which Farrell handles adeptly, but there's also some pretty dark, dark stuff; saddled with a tragic event that touches off the story (though isn't revealed right away) and ordered to cool his heels in Bruges, Belgium with nothing to do but think about what went wrong, Farrell's character exhibits a vulnerability that would undoubtedly be difficult for most young movie star sex symbols to convey believably. He has to be silly, badass, wide-eyed, fragile, and a few more things I'm sure I'm forgetting, and he handles them all.

Oftentimes someone's passion about a given thing can be tremendously interesting, even if that thing is not interesting itself. Such is the case with *Sideways*, at least for me; I don't particularly care for or about wine (I'll have a glass of cabernet now and then, but I'm really a beer guy), but Paul Giamatti as Miles Raymond is so passionate about it that his passion itself becomes compelling.

It would be easy for us to wonder why on earth we're watching a movie about such a poor, sad, divorced, unaccomplished schlub as Miles if Giamatti weren't able to bring him to vivid life whenever he gets going on wine. When it comes to career and when it comes to love Miles is timid and regretful, but when it comes to wine Miles is a *bon vivant*, a regular prince among men. He thinks he wants to be a novelist but, as Giamatti shows us, he *should* want to be a professional wine expert. I don't know if that's actually a

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thing, and unfortunately for Miles, neither does he.

It would be easy for us to be confused as to why a character so knowledgeable and so self-assured in one arena would be so unable to apply those qualities to any other aspect of his life, but Giamatti is completely convincing as a man to whom it realistically may never have occurred to try.

When you're a teenager, you're angry at your parents. That's just the way it is. You're angry at the world, really, but your parents, being the part of the world you see the most, bear the brunt of it.

By the time you reach your early twenties, though, this anger at your parents naturally subsides. If it doesn't, then there's probably something deficient about either you or them. Or possibly both.

The real-life Christopher McCandless, as far as we know, was one such teen, and he grew to be one such young man. And so it was that, armed with self-righteous anger, fanatical idealism and a preternatural sense of wanderlust, McCandless hiked alone into the Alaskan wilderness in the spring of 1992, never to be seen alive again.

Whether you see *Into the Wild's* version of McCandless as a tragic figure or a suicidal dunce – or somewhere in between – probably has a great deal more to do with your own philosophies and preconceptions than anything the movie offers. Emile Hirsch plays the character simply as a bit of a sweet, wounded soul who's not quite mature enough to realize how consumed he is with revenge. Revenge on his parents for his upbringing (as the movie tells it, it's not like he doesn't have semi-legitimate gripes on this area), revenge on his society for not choosing to value the "correct" things; you name it, he's subconsciously trying to get revenge on it.

He'd never say so, though, because he honestly doesn't believe it. He honestly thinks he's on a path toward noble enlightenment of some sort, and hey, if he can make his parents squirm by being unreachable for months or even years at a time, all the better. In his performance Hirsch declines to lionize or to condemn his subject, instead portraying him as he very likely was: simply a tragic young man, unaware that what he's running from he can't escape, and what he's looking for can't be found.

And the Snubbie goes to:

Paul Giamatti, *Sideways*. You need to like his initially unlikeable character to have any chance of liking *Sideways*, and by God, because of Paul Giamatti, you like the poor schlub.