The Snubbies: Best Supporting Actor
by Joe Mulder

Today we continue our Snubbie Awards – recognizing the best performances of the last ten years that Oscar didn't see fit to nominate – with Best Supporting Actor, perhaps the most fun category of this particular project and easily the toughest to whittle down to five nominees. I mean, the likes of John Travolta in *Hairspray*, Tom Hanks in *Catch Me if You Can*, Tom Cruise in *Collateral*, Peter Sarsgaard in *Shattered Glass* and, most painfully for me, Jack Black in *High Fidelity* missed the cut; look at that list, would you? That could have been your field of five Snubbie nominees right there, and nobody would have had any right to complain. But that's not your field! This is:

Best Supporting Actor

Nominees:

Jim Broadbent, *Moulin Rouge*
 Ben Foster, *3:10 to Yuma*
 Zach Galifianakis, *The Hangover*
 Hugh Grant, *Love Actually*
 John Michael Higgins, *Best in Show*

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Jim Broadbent is a rather curious case, as he actually won an Oscar in the same year, and in the same category, for which he's being recognized by the Snubbies. He won the Best Supporting Actor award for 2001's *Iris*, which IMDb.com swears is an actual movie. Evidently Judi Dench and Kate Winslet were nominated for Oscars for that film as well, although Judi Dench and Kate Winslet get nominated for Oscars for their vacation photos so I'm not sure how much can be read into that.

So I didn't see *Iris* – mainly because I suspect it's not even real, but was in fact an elaborate study of the American liberal media elite that was cooked up by a handful of British sociologists who made up a fake movie poster and planted some Oscar buzz with a few well-placed insiders in an attempt to see just how many "prestigious" English actors the flyover-state-resenting, cultural inferiority complex-having, Americana-averse Hollywood crowd would nominate simply because they were terrified of having anybody think they were stupid and uncultured (and the answer to that question, it turns out, is "three") – and I can't say how good Broadbent was in it, but I'd bet just about everything I've got that he wasn't as good in *Iris* as he was in *Moulin Rouge.* And that's because with only a few exceptions, nobody has ever been as good in anything as Jim Broadbent was in *Moulin Rouge.*

His Harold Zidler was an absolute force of nature, a human cartoon, like Jim Carrey in *The Mask* without the special effects, and I'm not sure the movie – which was one of my favorites of the decade – would have really worked without

him. His crazily over-the-top (yet note-perfect) performance grounds all of the other characters in something approaching a semblance of reality, no small feat in a movie that features music video-style editing and modern pop songs being sung by denizens of the turn-of-the-century Parisian cabaret scene.

Yes, he's *that* good... and it's still not enough to win the Snubbie.

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3:10 to Yuma was, at least in my admittedly unsolicited opinion, very long on potential and very short on execution, though one can hardly blame the all-star cast for that. And the standout among the all-stars (and "all-star" is in fact an improper term, if you really think about it; the term comes from the All-Star Game, which is so named because it is a game that – in theory – features nothing but stars, i.e., "all stars." So if you are playing in an All-Star Game you're not technically an "all-star," but rather a "star." Strictly speaking, there's no such thing as an "all-star." But that's not really what we're here to talk about, so let's just move on) was Ben Foster as the flamboyant, murderous Charlie Prince.

Credit should probably to go whomever cast Foster as well, to whomever heard they'd nailed down Russell Crowe as Bed Wade, the baddest, most feared and most notorious outlaw in all of the Old West, and were now looking for someone to play the one guy who maybe scared *him*, to whomever said "yeah, there's this 140-pound, pasty-white kid in his mid-20s who was in *Get Over It" with Kirsten Dunst and Sisqo..."

Credit should go to whomever said that, because Foster nailed the part. As unimposing as his physical dimensions should make him, he nevertheless turned Charlie Prince into one of the scariest, most unpredictable psychopaths this side of a torture-porn sequel. And not that it was a contest, but he outshone the likes of Crowe, Christian Bale and Peter Fonda in the process. In fact halfway through the film, viewers undoubtedly start – as I did – to apply Homer Simpson's list of Poochie suggestions to Foster's Charlie Prince. "One, Charlie Prince needs to be louder, angrier, and have access to a time machine. Two, whenever Charlie Prince is not onscreen, all the other characters should be asking, 'Where's Charlie Prince?'"

You wonder if it wouldn't have been a better movie if Charlie Prince had been the main bad guy instead of Ben Wade.

And yet as good as Ben Foster was in *3:10 to Yuma...* it's still not enough to win the Snubbie.

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As I touched on early, I think a lot of people in Hollywood – and thus a lot of people in the Motion Picture Academy –

have inferiority complexes about their town, their profession, their country, etc., and one of the ways in which this manifests itself is in the Academy's obvious disdain for comedy. "People" like comedy, after all, and people are idiots, right? So comedy must be beneath, must be less than.

As proof, just look at the few comedic films and performances the Academy has chosen to honor in the last 30 years or so: *Annie Hall* won Best Picture, Director, Actress and Screenplay, yes, but then nobody could possibly embody the opposite of the flyover state, flag-waving, red-meat-eating good ol' boy more than Woody Allen. Kevin Kline won as Oscar for *A Fish Called Wanda* playing an American buffoon, the butt of every joke in a movie made by and starring British people. And *Shakespeare in Love,* well... that one pretty much speaks for itself.

Comedies occasionally score a few screenplay wins (like *Sideways* and *Little Miss Sunshine* to name a couple off the top of my head), so at least the Academy occasionally acknowledges that *crafting* comedy is difficult, even if it seems to think that *performing* comedy is a lesser skill, undeserving of recognition.

It's not a surprise, then, that Zach Galifianakis was not recognized by the Oscars for his breakout performance in *The Hangover*. It's not a surprise, but that doesn't make it any less of a disgrace.

Even so... it wasn't enough to win the Snubbie.

Speaking of overlooked comedic performances, Hugh Grant in *Love Actually* would have seemed to have everything going for him at the time. He was a beloved movie star still at the top of his game who had never been nominated (and still hasn't); the Academy loves that. He's British; the Academy loves that. His character – the Prime Minister – even gave a rousing Euro-power, down-with-America speech that made him the most beloved figure in all of England; you better *believe* the Academy loves that!

And yet, nothing. I don't even recall any buzz whatsoever for Grant or for *Love Actually.* In fact, if you Google "Hugh Grant," "Love Actually" and "snub," you won't find anything to do with the Oscars (well, *now* you might, now that what you're currently reading is on the internet. But you take my point, I hope). I'm not sure why; whether singing impromptu Christmas carols for dancing children, telling a constituent that he's "sorry about all the cockups" or memorably dancing through the residence at 10 Downing Street to the Pointer Sisters' "Jump," Grant makes every scene with the Prime Minister a classic.

Sure the movie was fluff, but it was, for the most part, joyous, feel-good holiday fluff, and Grant's romance with a low-ranking staffer (who, amusingly, could literally not have

looked more like Monica Lewinsky) was a high point. It *kills* me to have to leave Jack Black in *High Fidelity* off of the list of five Snubbie nominees in this category, but that's just how good Hugh Grant was.

But he wasn't good enough to win the Snubbie.

John Michael Higgins in *Best in Show* even got snubbed from being snubbed; co-star Fred Willard scored a handful of Best Supporting Actor awards from various critics' groups during the 2000 awards season and was considered a contender for an Oscar nomination. Many considered it a snub when he didn't receive one. Few, apparently, thought the same of John Michael Higgins, even though he somehow manages to steal a memorable and beloved movie filled with exceptional comedic talent (and "scene stealer" can occasionally be meant as a criticism, but not in this case. Higgins' *character* was a scene stealer extraordinaire, so scene stealing was exactly what the role called for). Nobody seems to think John Michael Higgins was snubbed, and that in itself is a snub of the highest order!

Luckily, we here at the Snubbies can set the record straight.

Higgins plays Scott Donlan, a flamboyantly gay dog lover. The character, Scott Donlan, is an obvious stereotype, but in Higgins' able hands he never comes close to being a caricature. Some homosexual men, apparently, *do* happen to be effeminate hairdressers who crack double entendres at parties and dote on their yappy little pets, and what's wrong with that?

Higgins breathes such life into his character, and with such skill, that it's impossible not to be won over. And it's not all mugging and sex-tinged jokes; a scene in which Higgins looks on lovingly while partner Stephan Vanderhoof (Michael McKean) sits on a hotel bed and sings a telephone lullabye to the shih tzu they left back home isn't remotely played for laughs, but rather as a genuine family moment. Scott loves and misses his doggie as much as I love and would miss my children, and whether or not one finds that sort of relationship with an animal particularly healthy and advisable, in that particular scene one can't possibly be cynical about it or deny that it is absolutely genuine.

That's just a very brief scene in a very funny movie, mind you; most of the time Higgins is playing the vibrant, hilarious life of the party, and doing it better than anybody else could have.

Now, it should be noted that when my friends and I saw *Best in Show* at the Sunset 5 in West Hollywood some ten years ago, John Michael Higgins himself was sitting right across the aisle from us with his own party. After the movie, after we all realized we'd seen something truly great, we were walking along in another part of the complex when Higgins

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and his group passed right by us. As they did, friend of PoopReading.com Poppy Durant, new to Los Angeles, gushed out a very enthusiastic "You were so good!" Higgins responded with a genuinely appreciative "Thank you!," and our two groups went our separate ways.

Does he get extra credit in this Snubbie race because of that story? No. As much as I'd like to give it to him, he does not.

But – spoiler alert – he won't need it.

And the Snubbie goes to:

John Michael Higgins, *Best in Show*. A difficult decision in a loaded category; any of the five nominees – and several others, in fact – would have been worthy of the prize, but in the end Higgins and his memorable, scene-stealing performance take home the hypothetical, made-up gold.

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