

The Snubbies: Best Supporting Actress

by Joe Mulder

With the Oscars coming up and with all the films of the "Aughts" behind us, I thought what better way to spend our time than to consider the best performances and films of the decade that did *not* receive Academy Awards nominations. I call them the "Snubbies," because I couldn't think of anything better.

Here's how they work: well, I just told you how they work, now that I think about it. In each of the six "big" categories (Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Supporting Actor and Best Supporting Actress), we'll consider the greatest performances – and, in the case of Best Picture, the greatest movies – that were snubbed by the Academy over the past ten years. Now, we're not talking the best five actors who weren't nominated over that span of time; we're just considering individual performances that didn't get the nod. For instance, Sean Penn was nominated for four Oscars this decade and won two, but would still be eligible for a Snubbie nomination for, say, *21 Grams*, because he wasn't nominated for that particular film.

Also, in the Best Picture category, a movie need only to have been snubbed for Best Picture to be Snubbie-eligible. *Dreamgirls*, which got eight Oscar nominations, didn't get one for Best Picture, so it remains in Snubbie contention.

So now that that's out of the way, let's start handing out Snubbies! We'll cover Best Supporting Actress today, mainly because that's the one I have ready to go, and then we'll figure out the rest of the week as we go along. In any case, check back tomorrow, Thursday and Friday for more hot, hot Snubbie action!

On to the awards:

Best Supporting Actress

Nominees:

Maria Bello, *A History of Violence*
Ellen DeGeneres, *Finding Nemo*
Irma P. Hall, *The Ladykillers*
Catherine Keener, *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*
Catherine O'Hara, *A Mighty Wind*

The only real dilemma when it came to Maria Bello was whether her Snubbie nomination would be for *A History of Violence* or 2003's *The Cooler*, but ultimately *Violence* won out, mainly because it was, in one man's humble opinion, the superior movie. Bello played a Midwestern housewife and mom whose marriage and parenting were typically imperfect, but stable enough. Until, that is, her husband's past starts to come back to haunt the family. Tom (Snubbie

contender Viggo Mortensen), it turns out, used to be quite a notorious badass in the Philadelphia criminal underworld. When he foils a robbery by two murderous thugs and kills them in the process, the notoriety he receives brings unwelcome visitors to his small Indiana town.

Bello's Edie knows absolutely nothing of her husband's past, and perfectly portrays the stress, and ultimately the terror, of a woman who is powerless to stop her life from becoming unglued.

Plus, if none of that grabs you, there's a pretty steamy sex scene featuring her in a cheerleader outfit.

Sure, Ellen DeGeneres only provided the voice of her character; the brilliant animators at Pixar did the rest. Nevertheless, we shouldn't forget that Ellen absolutely nailed the part of Dory, the faithful but forgetful companion of Albert Brooks's Marlin. Ellen was something of a celebrity brand even by 2003, when *Finding Nemo* was released; her presence in the film could potentially have been something of a distraction. Instead, she was hilarious, poignant and wonderful, and it's quite impossible to imagine anybody else having given life to Dory. The Oscars would never recognize a voice-over performance; we all know that. Luckily, the Snubbies are a bit more open-minded.

I get the feeling that most people who've seen it consider *The Ladykillers* a rare Coen brothers miss, but it happens to be one of my favorite movies of theirs (and perhaps one of my favorite movies, period). Do check it out if you haven't; as great as we all acknowledge Tom Hanks is, after seeing *The Ladykillers* I can almost guarantee you'll think to yourself, "Wow, I had no idea Tom Hanks could do *that!*"

The Ladykillers is, in fact, loaded with Snubbie contenders, but the one that stands head and shoulders above the rest – if only figuratively – is Irma P. Hall as the lonely, hard-nosed, devout Mississippi widow who fatefully rents a room to Tom Hanks's scheming "professor," Goldthwait Higginson Dorr.

Hall's Marva Munson is an archetypal black southern lady, wearing big hats to church and praising Jesus, never having spared a rod lest she spoil a child (one eventually surmises). But Hall breathes vitality and verve into a role that could have been secondary and forgettable in what is ultimately a caper movie, and the Coens admirably (and uncharacteristically) refuse to make a joke of her character whatsoever. Marva Munson might not quite be the grandmother we all wish we had, but she's probably the grandmother everybody needs.

POOP READING

I've been blessed in this life with a very astute and disproportionately attractive spouse. She is not, to quote Bart Simpson, "one of those 'don't call me a chick' chicks," but nor would you ever catch her saying "don't ask me, I'm just a girl!" (to use another "Simpsons" reference. You can never have too many).

So when she points out that the female love interests in the mid-to-late decade Judd Apatow and Judd Apatow-esque comedies tend to be dull and rather disappointing, I'm very much inclined to give her opinion added weight.

One character who most certainly did *not* come off like that, however, was *The 40-Year-Old Virgin's* Trish, played by Catherine Keener. Keener has received Oscar nominations for just about every other movie she's been in, but fell victim to the Academy's anti-comedy bias and was left out here (and her role wasn't even really comedic, is the sad part). It couldn't have been easy to create *or* cast the character who would be perfect for Steve Carell's Andy Stitzer, and Carell and Apatow – who share a writing credit on the film – deserve a portion of the credit, but the lion's share must go to Keener. It's a pretty difficult task to make us see that Trish, while not perfect, is perfect for Andy; Keener is more than up to it.

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A Mighty Wind is a silly movie, and I hope that you don't for one second think that I mean that as a criticism. It's also a joyous celebration of artists and artistry, in which Catherine O'Hara in particular stands out as one half of an aging folk duo whose moment in the spotlight – and whose romantic relationship with her musical partner – is well behind her. There's nothing revolutionary going on here; just funny, lovely and sweet.

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And the Snubbie goes to:

Irma P. Hall, *The Ladykillers*. This wasn't a tough decision, as good as all five nominees were. Please, if you haven't, do yourself a favor: see *The Ladykillers*. I guarantee you'll like it, or this particular column is on the house.
