

FEATURES



The big stars went with a clean, sophisticated look on Oscar night, but one-shoulder gowns and chunky necklaces topped the broader fashion trends

BY NICHOLA GROOM
REUTERS, LOS ANGELES

Top looks on the red carpet: *Slumdog Millionaire*'s Freida Pinto, right, made many best-dressed lists at the 2009 Academy Awards in her beaded John Galiano gown with a bejeweled lace sleeve; while fashionistas gave the asymmetrical Roland Mouret dress worn by supermodel Heidi Klum, left, mixed reviews.

PHOTOS: REUTERS

Hollywood's top dogs aren't slumming it

Refined but unapologetically glamorous, Hollywood's biggest stars strode the red carpet at the Oscar awards on Sunday with white dresses, bold necklaces and one-shoulder gowns among the night's top trends.

Despite an economic recession that has many Americans pinching pennies, stars didn't pare back their finery, delivering the glitz for which Hollywood is known.

"If I turn my head, I don't see any change," designer Valentino said on the red carpet, adding that any toning down of Oscar style would be "very, very bad."

Style experts called the night a return to clean, sophisticated Hollywood style, saying actresses such as best actress nominee Kate Winslet and *Slumdog Millionaire* star Freida Pinto went for classic looks.

Winslet achieved her retro look in a grayish blue one-shoulder gown with black details by Yves Saint Laurent that she told reporters was "quite comfortable," a swept-back hairstyle and diamond earrings.

Pinto donned a darker blue beaded one-sleeved gown by John Galiano. Winslet and Pinto stood out for the choice of blue, as many actresses favored white and other light colors.

Pinto's pint-sized *Slumdog Millionaire* co-stars wore custom-made outfits by Brooks Brothers.

Jolie and Brad Pitt looked very much the part of the red carpet's golden couple at the Kodak Theatre in classic, almost retro, styles.

She wore a black sweetheart-neck strapless gown by Elie Saab, accessorized with green drop earrings, and he wore a classic bow tie.

NIGHT OF WHITE

Pinto looked "flawless," said stylist Mary Alice Stephenson. "Everything is right!" But Jolie, Stephenson added, was disappointing. "Angelina Jolie is always beautiful but boring and ho-hum in that black dress. It is just too drab, dull and depressing for the Oscars."

Penelope Cruz, who picked up the best

supporting actress Oscar for *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*, and her fellow supporting actress nominee Taraji P. Henson of *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* wore voluminous strapless white gowns.

Best actress nominee Anne Hathaway also wore a white gown, studded with sequins, that style expert Jennifer Fisher called "perfect Hollywood glamour."

Asked on the red carpet why she had chosen the Armani gown, Hathaway said: "Wouldn't you want to wear this dress?"

Other light-colored gowns included Sarah Jessica Parker's belted light mint green strapless dress by Dior.

Chunky, collared necklaces were also one of the night's big trends, with best supporting actress nominees Henson and Amy Adams of *Doubt*, garnering the most buzz with their Fred Leighton designs.

"Thank God the necklace returns to Hollywood," style expert Michael O'Connor said.

Other necklaces that stood out on the carpet were best actress nominee Melissa Leo's spider-shaped diamond pendant, designed by her friend Katherine Wallach, and best actor nominee Mickey Rourke, who wore a picture of his Chihuahua, Loki, both around his neck and in a pin on his lapel.

"I was going to bring her with me," Rourke said of the dog, who died six days ago. "But she is with me."

Fashion misses for the evening for Fisher included supermodel Heidi Klum's bright red Roland Mouret futuristic gown, which she paired with big, chunky diamond earrings and bracelets by Lorraine Schwartz.

"It looked like it should have been on *Star Trek*," Fisher said.

For O'Connor, best actress nominee Meryl Streep missed the mark with her gray off-the-shoulder gown. "It was just not the right shape for her," he said.

ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY AP

'Slumdog'

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After Penelope Cruz won for best supporting actress for her role in *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*, she gave part of her speech in Spanish — she said backstage it was a dedication to the actors and people of Spain — and then suggested backstage that the movies had to grow beyond the bounds of strictly American stories.

"We are all mixed together, and it has to be reflected in the cinema," she said.

The supporting actress award, the night's first, was presented by no less than five past winners of the prize, Whoopi Goldberg, Tilda Swinton, Eva Marie Saint, Goldie Hawn and Anjelica Huston. The heavy show of star power was meant to make good on a promise that the broadcast would deliver entertainment value that reached far beyond that offered by the nominees.

Heath Ledger, in a widely anticipated development, won the best supporting actor prize for his performance as the Joker in *The Dark Knight*. Ledger died unexpectedly of a drug overdose early last year, before *Dark Knight* was released.

Ledger's parents afterward said his Oscar statuette would be held in trust by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Many other awards also went to those favored in the preshow betting.

Dustin Lance Black won the best original screenplay Oscar for *Milk*. Black, who is openly gay, said *Milk*'s story had given him hope that one day he might "fall in love and even get married."

Beaufoy, whose *Slumdog* screenplay was based on a novel by Vikas Swarup, rattled off a list of places he never expected to be — "the moon, the South Pole, the Miss World podium and here" — as he accepted that award for his work on a film that captured many of the movie industry's pre-Oscar honors and was widely viewed as a preordained winner of the evening's final award, for best picture.

Also in the first wave of awards, *WALL-E* was named best animated film, though it had been denied the best picture nomination that its backers at the Walt Disney Co and its Pixar Animation unit had sought.

Overall, Sunday evening's Oscar show became a struggle between the ambitions of a producing team — headed by the veteran film producer Laurence Mark and the filmmaker Bill Condon — that aimed for an evening full of surprises and the apparent determination of 5,810 voters in the academy to bestow honors largely where they were expected to go.

A much-discussed new format for the show opened with a loosey-goosey showbiz number and proceeded along very self-referential lines, with lots of inside jokes that drew substantial



French high-wire artist Philippe Petit balances the best documentary Oscar for *Man on Wire* on his chin after accepting the prize at the 81st annual Academy Awards on Sunday.

PHOTO: AP

laughs from the crowd inside the Kodak Theater.

Hugh Jackman, the evening's host, started with a very short comic monologue that poked fun at his own failure to get nominated for his performance in *Australia*. He then plunged into a comic song-and-dance number that poked fun at serious movies that were nominated for best picture, including *Milk* and *Frost/Nixon*, and less serious movies that were not, including *The Dark Knight*.

An early appearance by the screenwriting winners helped give the evening a story line of its own: the awards categories were arranged in blocks intended to reflect the process of building a film, beginning, in the first segment, with a blinking cursor tapping out the beginning of a script on a blank screen.

In another departure, the celebrity presenters were not identified in advance, partly in the hope that a larger-than-usual audience would tune in to see who actually showed up.

Last year's broadcast, with the smallest domestic audience in the ceremony's history, had only about 32 million viewers in the US.

The show's stage sets, overseen by the New York architect David Rockwell, were bathed much of the time in blue and included a vast crystal curtain. And the show was punctuated by deliberate references to movies that had played well with ticket-buying audiences last year but were often not in the running for awards, the nominations for which went overwhelmingly to movies that were little-seen.

To some extent, the show's elements collided

with themselves, as songs, cinematic retrospectives and actor after actor working Hollywood in-jokes crowded the screen. One sequence, directed by Bennett Miller, of *Capote*, was squeezed out altogether but was shown to the in-theater audience during a commercial break.

In keeping with the self-referential tone of the night, the best live action short was teed up with a live action short from Judd Apatow, with Seth Rogen and James Franco, in character from their *Pineapple Express* film, in starring roles.

"This is almost a surreal moment to me," said the German filmmaker Jochen Alexander Freydank as he accepted the award for his *Spielzeugland*, which had not much to do with the antics that preceded it.

A reconfigured auditorium made it much easier for the celebrities to mingle during commercial breaks. The mood was lively and chaotic. Rourke sat on the edge of the stage kicking his legs over the side during several breaks, with a stage manager coming to shoo him back to his seat.

Jackman came across less as comic than as cabaret performer. Along the way, he did his best to try and keep the troops entertained during the commercial breaks, serenading his dad in the audience, reading a note from his wife ("you're doing good so far, babe") and even going up and down the aisles handing out cookies.

Still, all the showmanship seemed only to highlight the basic challenge of a ceremony whose producers were hoping to capitalize

on movies' strong commercial appeal: The best picture candidates — *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, *Frost/Nixon*, *Milk*, *The Reader* and *Slumdog Millionaire* — altogether had fewer than half the viewers of *The Dark Knight*, an audience favorite that was praised by many critics but still did not make the cut.

In the end, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, which had been the evening's most-nominated film, with 13 nominations in all, won for its art direction and make-up but not in the crucial acting and directing categories. *Frost/Nixon*, directed by Ron Howard, was the only best picture nominee to come away with no prizes at all.

Slumdog Millionaire, though it had no actors nominated for prizes, swept many awards other than those on the top line, including prizes for cinematography, sound mixing, score and film editing.

Slumdog's eight Oscars was the largest total won by a single film since *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* won 11 in 2004.

Phillipe Petit, the French tightrope walker from *Man on Wire* — which won for best documentary feature — walked into the ceremony on the carpet and said, "I haven't been looking at the red carpet, I've been looking above and thinking of what it would be like to be on a wire above all this."

In one of the night's few surprises, the best foreign language film went to *Departures*, a drama about an unemployed cellist, from Japan. Many observers had predicted *Waltz With Bashir*, an Israeli animated drama about that country's past war in Lebanon, would take that prize.

The glittering event at the Kodak is generally a pretty grown-up affair, but this year children from halfway around the world made a splashy appearance. The kids from *Slumdog Millionaire* had no trouble adjusting to the head-snapping cultural shift from India to the red carpet.

"I want to see Johnny Depp, Robert De Niro, and Jack Nicholson, Robert Downey," said Ashutosh Lobo Gajiwala, who played the young Salim in the film. "Seeing any of them would be cool."

He was surrounded by seven co-stars who played the main characters at various ages. When asked how they felt about their film being among the nominated, they all backed up as if on cue and shouted, "Jai ho," which translates roughly as "victory."

Another child from India was Pinki Sonkar, whose cleft palate repair was the story behind *Smile Pinki*, which won the documentary short film category.

Jerry Lewis, the 82-year-old comedian who has devoted much of his time to raising money for the Muscular Dystrophy Association, received the Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award from Eddie Murphy, who had successfully reprised one of Lewis' most famous roles, *The*

81ST ANNUAL ACADEMY AWARDS WINNERS

BEST PICTURE

Slumdog Millionaire

LEAD ACTOR

Sean Penn in *Milk*

LEAD ACTRESS

Kate Winslet in *The Reader*

DIRECTOR

Danny Boyle for *Slumdog Millionaire*

FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILM

Departures (Japan)

SUPPORTING ACTOR

Heath Ledger in *The Dark Knight*

SUPPORTING ACTRESS

Penelope Cruz in *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*

ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY

Dustin Lance Black for *Milk*

ADAPTED SCREENPLAY

Simon Beaufoy for *Slumdog Millionaire*

ANIMATED FEATURE

Andrew Stanton for *WALL-E*

ANIMATED SHORT FILM

Kunio Kato for *La Maison en Petits Cubes*

ART DIRECTION

Donald Graham Burt for art direction and Victor J. Zolfo for set decoration on *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*

COSTUME DESIGN

Michael O'Connor for *The Duchess*

MAKE-UP

Greg Cannom for *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*

CINEMATOGRAPHY

Anthony Dod Mantle for *Slumdog Millionaire*

LIVE ACTION SHORT FILM

Jochen Alexander Freydank for *Spielzeugland* (Toyland)

DOCUMENTARY FEATURE

James Marsh and Simon Chinn for *Man on Wire*

DOCUMENTARY SHORT

Megan Mylan for *Smile Pinki*

VISUAL EFFECTS

Eric Barba, Steve Preeg, Burt Dalton and Craig Barron for *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*

SOUND EDITING

Richard King for *The Dark Knight*

SOUND MIXING

Ian Tapp, Richard Pryke and Resul Pookutty for *Slumdog Millionaire*

FILM EDITING

Chris Dickens for *Slumdog Millionaire*

ORIGINAL SCORE

A.R. Rahman for *Slumdog Millionaire*

ORIGINAL SONG

Jai Ho from *Slumdog Millionaire*, music by A.R. Rahman, lyrics by Gulzar

SOURCE: REUTERS

Nutty Professor.

"The humility I feel will stay with me for the rest of my life," Lewis said. "To all of you people from the movie business, it is such a joy being part of you and of everything you do."