A look at the top Oscar races in an unpredictable year

BY JENNA LEILY
Varity.com

LOS ANGELES — When “Boyhood,” premiered at Sundance over a year ago, few predicted its strong emergence as the front-runner for the best picture prize. But “Birdman” snatched the PGA, DGA and SAG ensemble prizes and “American Sniper” is burning up the box office. So anything could happen when the envelopes are opened Sunday.

Best Picture

True stories reign supreme this year, with films like “American Sniper,” “The Imitation Game,” “Selma” and “The Theory of Everything” making up half the nominated films. Even those not based on true stories fell oddly personal, from Michael Keaton playing a former superhero looking to make a comeback in “Birdman” to Richard Linklater’s relatable coming-of-age tale “Boyhood.”

Even “Whiplash” was based on writer-director Damien Chazelle’s experiences as a musician. Of the eight, only Wes Anderson’s “The Grand Budapest Hotel” seems to have sprung from nowhere.

Director

Four of the five directors were also nominated by the DGA. “American Sniper” helmer Clint Eastwood was snubbed for Bennett Miller — all the more impressive considering his film “Fondtach” failed to land a best picture nom. Miller is one of only two directors to have been previously nominated in this category; the other is Alejandro G. Inarritu for “Birdman,” previously nominated for “Babel,” Richard Linklater and Wes Anderson have both received screenplay nods before, but soared their first directing nominations for “Boyhood” and “The Grand Budapest Hotel,” respectively. Then there is Morten Tyldum, the quiet force behind “The Imitation Game.” Making his English-language debut, Tyldum managed to best the likes of Eastwood and David Fincher for a spot in this lineup.

Actor

It’s a category full of first-time nominees, with the exception of Bradley Cooper. Please see OACARS, Page C2

Two critically-acclaimed poets from Central Washington University will read their poems and chat with audience members at the Grove Recital Hall on Monday. Katherine Whitcomb is a professor at CWU whose debut release, “Sisters of South Dakota & Other Evens,” was named one of the 2013 Best American Poetry awards. Joseph Powell has published seven books, including five of poetry, one fiction and one screenplay. Powell won a National Endowment for the Arts award in 2009 and taught in the CWU English department for 30 years until his retirement last year.

The event begins with readings at 1 p.m., followed by a book signing and a question-and-answer session until 5 p.m.

Two of the city’s most talented bluegrass quartets from North Carolina have been playing together for more than 10 years. Their latest album, “All the Way,” is a cohesive collection of Americana and bluegrass songs marked by clever writing, sweet and strong vocals and a few guest appearances. Rhonda Vincent (the “Queen of Bluegrass”) has been a show who might not otherwise be able.

Columbia Choral presents “English Choral music” 7:30 p.m. Friday, Grace Lutheran Church, 510 N. 1st, Wenatchee, 663-5256

Lent is a time for reflection within the Christian Church. Sit, reflect and enjoy the heavenly Columbia Choral singers perform music by England’s master composers, with a focus on songs for the Lenten season. Selections will include Passion excerpts from Parts I and II of Handel’s “Messiah,” as well as excerpts from Buxtehude’s “Requiem.”

Reading, book signings and SBA with Katherine Whitcomb and Joseph Powell 1 p.m. Monday, Grace Lutheran Church, Music and Art Center. Info: 663-6420

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