

No Slumming at Oscar Post-Parties after Lackluster Show, Penn on Gay Rights

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A bit of Hollywood magic as stars let their hair down

By Jeffrey Jolson

Oscars still more important than parties but not as fun

HOLLYWOOD, CA (RushPRnews/Hollywood Today) 2/23/09 — Oh boy, the Oscar after-parties were a thrill again as, with a few exceptions; the Academy Awards themselves have seen better evenings according to some vets. Main reason was that the parties were back. Last year, it was the midst of the Writers Guild strike, when party-throwers like Vanity Fair put off their festivities due to the crisis. And while a Screen Actors Guild strike remains a possibility, folks took advantage of a lull in negotiations to party a bit without crossing any major or implied picket lines.

For instance, **Madonna** was her usual star-like self in black velvet and sparkles as she strutted up the carpet to the Vanity Fair party before her private after-hours bash.

The Governor's Ball got an excellent turn-out - actors actually stayed and ate there before going on to other events rather than just doing a cameo there as in past years. Still Uma Thurman, **Mick Jagger**, director Darren Aronofsky and wife Rachel Weisz, even Natalie Portman and Daniel Craig were at the

Vanity Fair Oscar party before the show was even over, according to the LA Times? We don't know, we actually have to work until the show is over...

Elton John's party was the only real competition to Vanity Fair as his AIDS charity event has become a must-do - and he even plays, so you can't beat the show.

Viewing events like Norby Walters' filled the hotels and mansions of Beverly Hills (see related story), so in spite of the economic times, people just needed a night off with a bit of champagne and shrimp.

This was in contrast to the Oscars itself, which was tame in gowns and jewels for the same reason of not showing up looking too rich while others are losing homes. But for the parties, it was like the librarian had taken off her glasses, shook out her hair and turned out to be a wild, beautiful girl - like in many Hollywood a scene.

Best Actor Oscar winner **Sean Penn** for playing gay activist Harvey Milk took a moment at the Governor's Ball to speak up about gay marriage rights, striking out at the churches. saying "Here in California, those who voted against (the losing gay marriage rights act) I think that those who need to the most reflection are those involved in the churches here. And I have great optimism they will be reflective. This is not a human luxury, it's a human need. It is inevitable and it is time they caught up with the human need. Things like this can be helped."

The watch was on at the parties for 40-year-old rocker **Marilyn Manson** and Evan Rachel Wood, 21, who played Mickey Rourke's daughter in "The Wrestler", were an item again, after a break-up some time ago.

E! seemed surprised that **Penelope Cruz** carried her (heavy) Oscar around most of the evening, but that is normal. It is like your backstage laminated pass. If I ever got an Academy Award, I'd make it the hood ornament of my car. But once again, they forgot to nominate me. Maybe next year, if I make movies instead of newspapers.

At Elton's, **Whoopi Goldberg** said she was so pleased to give a little extra recognition to the female nominees with this year's format of past winners speaking about each nominee, rather than a quick reel of performances. "We got to talk to each of them individually. These are actors that worked their butts off. And you get glib about that, and forget all that goes into the performance."

Cross-dressing actor-director-producer **Tyler Perry** may not have had a heavy award to carry around, but he did have a hefty moneybag if \$41 million from "Madea Goes to Jail," the biggest box-office winner of the weekend. He said "I can't even think about it. The fans showed up and connected, Can you believe \$41 million?"

Outside the Governor's Ball, Dev Patel the actor from "**Slumdog**," eight out of 10 awards including Best Picture, said "This was beyond the dream. To walk the Red Carpet and actually being there..." and then stumbled for words. No wonder, 18 years old from a far-away land - and even Tom Cruise has yet to carry an Oscar with his name on it.

Ayush Mahesh Khedekar, only 8, slurped on a can of Coca-Cola at Fox Searchlight's packed after-party Sunday night at ONE Sunset in West Hollywood honoring "The Wrestler" and "Slumdog Millionaire." Filmed in the slums of Mumbai, "Slumdog" snagged eight Oscars, including best picture and director.

Ayush, who lives in India and plays the youngest version of the movie's protagonist Jamal, sat on a sofa at the club, nursing his soda after midnight.

"Very excited," said Ayush, when asked about the wins. "It's unbelievable. I never thought I would get an Oscar. Daniel (director Danny Boyle) told us, 'If you work hard, the Oscar will come to you.' And it came."

Vanity Fair's revived Oscar party was all about A-list camaraderie.

The annual celebrity-stuffed bash, canceled last year before the end of the Hollywood writers' strike, roared back into style, with Oscar winners literally rubbing shoulders at the hilltop Sunset Tower Hotel, a new venue for the party after years at the restaurant Morton's. A tented area outside had a stunning view of Los Angeles.

At 11:30 p.m., Winslet swept in. Clutching her Oscar trophy for "The Reader" in one hand and a glass of champagne in the other, she grinned and hugged admirers left and right. "Great Britannia," said Anthony Hopkins, bearhugging the actress. "Oh my God!" yelled Winslet back to the Oscar-winning actor, later adding, "I was actually very calm ... I got so many text messages."

The party's exclusive, pared down guest list meant that only the cream of Hollywood showed up, from **Jennifer Aniston** snuggling next to her boyfriend **John Mayer**, to **Halle Berry** drinking champagne on a couch and shaking hands with **Russell Simmons**.

Best supporting actress winner Penelope Cruz happily munched on a brownie, later hugging Tilda Swinton. Amy Adams laughed in a tight cluster with Uma Thurman, Jake Gyllenhaal and Reese Witherspoon.

Other guests included **Robert De Niro**, **Tina Fey** and **Josh Brolin**.

Attendees feasted on more working-class offerings like bagel, egg and bacon sandwiches and In-N-Out burgers, according to AP writers, though we saw more fanciful fare.

About the author:

Jeffrey Jolson is Hollywood Today founding editor-in-chief and a RushPRnews partner and contributor since 2006. Jeffrey, of the Al Jolson family, also founded HollywoodReporter.com and Grammy.com. Hollywood Today reporters have written for Vanity Fair, Rolling Stone, Forbes, Variety, The Hollywood Reporter, the New York Times, the Boston Globe, The San Francisco Chronicle, AP, E!, Popular Science and Popular Mechanics.

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