



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on February 27, 2012

Last Night's Academy Awards Proved to be a Night of Firsts

Last night's 84th Annual Academy Awards proved to be relatively entertaining, particularly since there were a number of first-time winners. The iconic Hollywood event was hosted this year by famed comedian Billy Crystal, a nine-time host of the Academy Awards. Eddie Murphy and producer Brett Ratner reportedly quit in November over criticism that Ratner made controversial remarks about gays. Crystal got the show off to an excellent start with a montage full of stars including Justin Bieber and George Clooney, who planted a wet kiss on Crystal. Crystal also did his usual goofy song to introduce best-picture nominees.



Notably, France proved to be a big winner last night. For the first time in Oscar history, a French film and French actor won both Best Picture and Best Actor.

The French film *The Artist* won the award for this year's Best Picture as well as a number of other awards. For Best Picture, *The Artist* edged out other worthy contenders including *The Help*, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, and *War Horse*. A black-and-white silent film, *The Artist* took home a total of five awards, including Best Actor, which went to Jean Dujardin. What's most impressive about Dujardin's victory is that he is typically known for his roles in low-budget spy spoofs, but this year, he managed to defeat the likes of George Clooney and Brad Pitt for their performances in *The Descendants* and *Moneyball* respectively.

"Oh, thank you. Oui. I love your country!" said Dujardin, who plays George Valentin in *The Artist*, a silent-film star who falls on tough times when talking films take over. If Valentin could speak, Dujardin added, "he'd say ... 'Merci beaucoup, formidable!'"

"They must be going nuts in France right now," joked [Crystal](#) after actor [Tom Cruise](#) opened the envelope at the end of the evening to announce that *The Artist* took the coveted Best Picture prize.

French journal *Le Monde* wrote on the event, "Never has a French film won so many US honors."

Likewise, France proved to be a well-received backdrop for a number of winning films. The film *Hugo*, which is set in a Paris train station, received five Oscars, while *Midnight in Paris* earned a number of nominations, including best directing and best picture.

It's worth noting that in addition to the honor the film *The Artist* brought to France, it was the first silent film to win the prize for Best Picture since the 1929 World War I film *Wings*.

Last year, it was England that earned bragging rights, as British film *The Kings Speech* — focused on King George VI's stammering problem — earned a number of awards including Best Picture, Best Director (Tom Hooper), Best Actor (Colin Firth), and Best Original Screenplay.



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Sunday's event proved to be an evening for some of the lesser known Hollywoodites to have their moment in the spotlight, as Michael Hazanavicius beat out big names such as Martin Scorsese for Best Director for his apt direction in *The Artist*.

"I am the happiest director in the world," Havanavicius said, thanking the cast, crew and canine co-star Uggie. "I also want to thank the financier, the crazy person who put money in the movie."

Still, Scorsese's film *Hugo* earned a whopping 11 nominations, and won five Oscars, including cinematography and art direction.

Other big winners included Meryl Streep as best actress for her role as British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in *The Iron Lady*. For Streep, the award was the first Oscar she has received in nearly 30 years, since winning Best Actress in *Sophie's Choice*. Following that win, she lost 13 years in a row.

"When they called my name, I had this feeling I could hear half of America go, 'Oh, no, why her again?' But whatever," Streep said, laughing.

"I really understand I'll never be up here again," she continued. "I really want to thank all my colleagues, my friends. I look out here and I see my life before my eyes, my old friends, my new friends. Really, this is such a great honor but the thing that counts the most with me is the friendship and the love and the sheer joy we've shared making moves together."

Streep beat a number of other remarkable female actresses such as Glenn Close, Viola Davis, Rooney Mara, and Michelle Williams.

Notwithstanding the popularity of the Harry Potter films, the final installment of the film series missed out on its last opportunity to receive an Oscar, despite its three nominations. Previous installments of the film series lost all nine of its nominations.

The Muppets earned the best-song award for "Man or Muppet," the sweet comic duet sung by Jason Segel and his Muppet brother in the film.

"I grew up in New Zealand watching the Muppets on TV. I never dreamed I'd get to work with them," said "Man or Muppet" writer Bret McKenzie of the musical comedy duo "Flight of the Conchords," who joked about meeting Kermit for the first time. "Like many stars here tonight, he's a lot shorter in real life."

Rango, with Johnny Depp providing the voice of a desert lizard that becomes a hero to a thirst-plagued Western town, won for best animated feature, edging out *A Cat in Paris*, *Chico & Rita*, *Kung Fu Panda 2*, and *Puss in Boots*, while Iran's *A Separation* won for foreign language film. *Undeclared*, a portrait of an underdog high school football team, won for documentary feature.

Christopher Plummer earned the award for Best Supporting Actor in *Beginners*, edging out Kenneth Branah in *My Week with Marilyn*, Jonah Hill in *Moneyball*, Nick Nolte in *Warrior*, and Max von Sydow in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. It was Plummer's second nomination in more than 40 years and his first award. He joked while accepting his award, "When I first emerged from my mother's womb, I was already rehearsing my academy speech."

Octavia Spencer won the award for Best Supporting Actress for her winning performance in *The Help*.

Spencer was understandably overtaken by emotions but managed to assert in between sobs and smiles, "Thank you, Academy, for putting me with the hottest guy in the room," referring to last year's supporting-actor winner Christian Bale, who presented her award.



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Woody Allen won his first Oscar in 25 years for original screenplay in *Midnight in Paris*. It's Allen's fourth Oscar, one of which he earned for directing and screenplay on his 1977 best-picture winner *Annie Hall* and for his screenplay and for his 1986's *Hannah and Her Sisters*.

But in Allen's usual fashion, he skipped the awards show, so his award was accepted by the Academy on his behalf.

Some of the most exciting moments of the evening took place on the Red Carpet rather than on stage. For example, controversial comedian Sacha Baron Cohen, who is known for bending all social rules in his comedy, appeared in costume for his role as General Aladeen in his next film, *The Dictator*. Cohen remained in character, even carrying with him what he claimed to be the remains of the ashes of his deceased friend Kim Jong Il. Cohen was seemingly so caught up in his performance on the Red Carpet, however, that he inadvertently spilled the ashes all over the tuxedo of host Ryan Seacrest during their interview.

Photo: Meryl Streep poses with her award for best actress for The Iron Lady during the 84th Academy Awards on Sunday, Feb. 26, 2012.; AP

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