

Wake Us When It's Over...

The highs, lows and snores of the 76th Academy Awards show
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Charlize Theron didn't get the same smooch from Adrien Brody that Halle Berry did last year

Zzzzzzzzzzzzzz. Is it over yet? Despite a triumphant night for "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King," the 76th annual Academy Awards are sure to go down as one of the most boring ceremonies in recent history. To borrow a line from host Billy Crystal, it was "a weapon of mass sleep induction."

It's a shame, too, since this year's Oscars had all the makings of a night to remember, with "Rings" sweeping every category in which it was nominated and tying "Titanic" and "Ben-Hur" with a record 11 statues.

Instead, it was a butt-numbing three-and-a-half-hour snoozefest that featured no major upsets, laundry-list acceptance speeches that included nearly every person in New Zealand, tedious presentations, blah fashions and lackluster jokes.

And did we mention it was boring?

We would have given anything for a moment of unpredictability -- an Uma-Oprah catfight, a Tom and Nicole reunion, even Renee Zellweger tripping over that big-ass bustle on her dress and stumbling down the stairs. Alas, it was not to be.

But while the show may have been weapons-grade dull, it still had its share of highs and lows, if you managed to stay awake for 'em. For those who were resting their eyes during the good parts, here are the best and worst moments from this year's Academy Awards ...

Watch Out, He's Gonna Blow: It was a magical evening for "Lord of the Rings" wizard Peter Jackson, who couldn't have been prouder of his film's clean sweep. "I'm so honored and relieved that the Academy and the members of the Academy that have supported us, have seen past the trolls and the wizards and the hobbits in recognizing fantasy this year," the ungroomed, sartorially challenged filmmaker told the crowd as he accepted the award for Best Film. But while we were thrilled that the One Ring ruled them all, our joy was replaced by worry that Jackson's massively under-pressure shirt would pop its buttons and take down half the Hobbits in Hollywood.

Best Mother-Daughter Moment: Best Actress winner Charlize Theron completed her ascension to the A-list with an emotional acceptance speech that luckily steered clear of Gwyneth-style hysterics. After the "Monster" beauty thanked her lawyer and "everybody in South Africa, my home country," she paid loving tribute to her mom, expressing her gratitude to the woman who "sacrificed so much" so she could come to this country and "make her dreams come true. I love you so much." Charlize, with tears in her eyes, told a little white lie as she concluded, "I'm not going to cry."

Worst Sibling Moment: During his introduction for Lifetime Achievement honoree Blake Edwards, Jim Carrey related a not-so-touching "Pink Panther"-related story from his youth that involved him pulling a prank on his sister while she was in the middle of a private moment with her husband. Classy.

Second Worst Sibling Moment: John Schwartzman not only missed out on the Cinematography prize for "Seabiscuit," but he didn't even make it on screen. Instead, the cameras mistakenly focused on his brother, "Rushmore" star Jason

Schwartzman.

Most Disappointed Loser: Bill Murray, who looked positively crushed when Sean Penn took the Best Actor prize for "Mystic River." After Penn's speech, Billy Crystal told the "Lost in Translation" star, who was apparently trying to make a break for it, "Don't go, Bill! We love you." We couldn't agree more.

Worst Tribute to a Most Deserving Performer: Academy president Frank Pierson proved why the presenting should be left to the pros as he tripped over his tongue multiple times during the introduction to the late, great Gregory Peck. A legend of such "dignity, decency and grace" should have received a tribute befitting his stature. Pierson owes Mr. Peck's family an apology. Far superior were the remembrances to Bob Hope and Katharine Hepburn, presented by bigwigs Tom Hanks and Julia Roberts, respectively.

Most Subtle Political Statement, Part 1: "If there's one thing that actors know, other than there weren't any WMDs [weapons of mass destruction], it's that there is no such thing as best in acting," Best Actor winner Sean Penn told the crowd in a sly anti-war spiel. The grumpy actor even showed his sensitive side, thanking wife Robin Wright Penn for "helping me on this roller-coaster ride I'm beginning to enjoy."

Pretty Songs, Now Pass the Prozac: Alison Krauss' stark rendition of Sting's "My Ain True Love" and Elvis Costello's "Scarlet Tide" from "Cold Mountain" and Annie Lennox's performance of "Into the West" from "Lord of the Rings" plunged us into a deep depression. Thank goodness for Mitch and Mickey (Eugene Levy and Catherine O'Hara)'s "A Kiss at the End of the Rainbow" from "A Mighty Wind" and Benoit Charest's lively "Belleville Rendezvous," which livened things up enough to get our head out of the oven.

Ickiest Pre-Show Moment: Keisha Castle-Hughes, 13, made the mistake of telling the uber-annoying Billy Bush that the one person she really wanted to meet at the Oscars was Johnny Depp because he's a "stud." Bush took it upon himself to introduce the young "Whale Rider" thespian to the Sexiest Man Alive, prompting the normally tasteful Chris Connelly to utter the following: "It's a love connection."Ew. Ew. Ew.

Best Public Service Announcement: The crowd held its breath after "Mystic River" Supporting Actor winner Tim Robbins concluded his kudos but added he had just "one more thing" to say. Here it comes, everyone thought, his controversial political statement. But the actor, who earned his prize for playing the deeply damaged Dave, urged victims of abuse and violence to come forward, saying to loud applause, "It's the strongest thing you can do."

Funniest Political Spoof: Michael Moore poked fun at his headline-grabbing speech from last year's ceremony in Billy Crystal's pretaped "Return of the Host" opener, decrying the battle-weary denizens of Middle-Earth by shouting, "Shame on you, Hobbits! Shame on You!" before getting trampled underfoot.

Least Subtle Political Statement, Part 1: Errol Morris, who won the Best Documentary prize for his Robert S. McNamara bio "The Fog of War," used his time onstage to point out the parallels between Vietnam and Iraq. "Forty years ago this country went down a rabbit hole and millions died. I fear we're going down a rabbit hole once again," he said. "If people can stop and think and reflect on some of this issues in this movie, perhaps I've done some damn good here." After Morris' speech, Billy Crystal said what we were all thinking, namely, "I can't wait for his tax audit."

Sexiest Moment: Angelina Jolie may have looked totally hot when she walked on stage, but judging by her sheer Marc Bouwer gown, it must have been a bit chilly inside the Kodak Theater. Or perhaps the Oscar-winning bombshell was just really, really excited to read off the Best Art Direction nominees.

Least Sexy Moment: Billy Crystal could have used some special effects magic on his less-than-buff body, which he defiantly exposed in several clips during the opening montage. Where was that five-second delay when we really needed it?

Most Subtle Political Statement, Part 2: Adam Elliot, who won Best Animated Short for "Harvie Krumpet," excitedly thanked his boyfriend onstage, though he later admitted that they'd only been dating for two months.

Best Performance by a Presenter: Adrien Brody, who last year smooched Halle Berry on stage to great acclaim, swaggered to the podium to present the Best Actress nominees. Before making the big announcement, the cutie pie "Pianist" star sprayed some breath freshener in his mouth and told the crowd,

"Don't worry, they have me under a restraining order." In a night as deathly dull as this one, it was a much appreciated moment of levity.

Just Give Him His Gift Basket Already: Robin Williams once again worked hard for his freebies, amping up his frantic been-there, done-that shtick by channeling Elmer Fudd, Senor Wences, the French, and a breast-baring Janet Jackson. Yes, we're tired of his routine, but we still laughed when he looked at Billy Crystal and observed, "Look at us, we look like a San Francisco wedding cake."

Most Romantic Moment: Writer-director Andrew Stanton, whose "Finding Nemo" won Best Animated Feature, proved he's a real catch when he told his wife Julie, "I wrote it to you in a note in 8th grade and now I can say it in front of a billion people: I love you." The crowd, along with those us watching at home, simultaneously exclaimed, "Awwwww."

Least Romantic Moment: One of the many winners from "Lord of the Rings" thanked his wife by telling her, "... At the age of 13 I bought two live rats as my first present to you. You're still with me." Live rats as a romantic gesture? Not so much.

Surest Sign of a Successful Speech: Blake Edwards, who received an honorary Oscar, didn't just chew scenery -- he crashed through it. He whizzed across the stage in an electric wheelchair, crashed through a wall, and emerged in a torn suit covered in dust. He then turned to presenter Jim Carrey and exclaimed, "Don't touch my Oscar." Even the dour Sean Penn cracked a rare smile at his antics, which elicited a standing ovation from the crowd.

Paging Gloria Steinem: Bill Murray set the female director movement back 20 years during his introduction for his "Lost in Translation" helmer Sofia Coppola, whom he repeatedly referred to as an American "girl."

Cutest Couples: Forget Will and Jada or Tim and Susan. Our favorite twosomes were funnymen Ben Stiller and Owen Wilson and Jack Black and Will Ferrell, who provided some desperately needed yuks and kept us from nodding off. Cardigan-clad Ben and tuxed-up Owen, who are fast becoming the new George and Gracie, shamelessly plugged their upcoming "Starsky and Hutch," while Will and Jack had us tapping along to their catchy little number about speeches that go on too long: "This is it, your time is through, you're boring ... Look at Catherine Zeta-Jones, she's snoring."

Least Subtle Political Statement, Part 2: "The Academy and the Oscars have been very gracious to me. They let me come and go the past few years. It's kind of like being in the Texas National Guard," joked host Billy Crystal, who also mentioned how Hillary Clinton really enjoyed Quentin Tarantino's "Kill Bill." Bad-da-bump.

Most Overzealous with the Self-Tanner: Charlize Theron, who looked like she soaked in a tub of bronzer before the ceremony. Note to Charlize: You want to look radiant, not radioactive.

Most Overlooked of the Evening, Part 1: Poor Frodo, Samwise, Gandalf, Legolas, Arwen, and the rest of the incredibly talented stars of the "The Lord of the Rings." Not only did the Academy ignore their acting contributions, but the film's many winners chose to thank them with a general "the cast" attribution rather than individual accolades. It's enough to make even Gimli cry like a little girl.

Most Overlooked of the Evening, Part 2: Scarlett Johansson, whose underwear-clad tushie in "Lost in Translation" got a mention from Billy Crystal but who was forgotten by Best Original Screenplay winner Sofia Coppola, who did manage to thank her "muse," Bill Murray.

Worst Jack Nicholson Impression: Michael Douglas, who tried to look cool by wearing his sunglasses inside the theater. It didn't work.

Biggest Red Carpet Diss, Part 1: Nicole Kidman, who blew off Joan Rivers in favor of a BBC interviewer, who lured her with the promise of M&Ms -- and no stupid questions.

Biggest Red Carpet Diss, Part 2: When asked by the gaffe-prone Rivers whether she was just there as a presenter, Julia Roberts needled her by saying, "I could tell you I'm nominated and you would say congratulations."

Best Red Carpet Comedy Routine: Owen Wilson and Ben Stiller rehearsed their onstage antics on the red carpet with pre-show host Maria Menounos. The

bit ended with Owen leaning into Menounos' ample cleavage and asking the question on everyone's mind: "Are those real?" We're still waiting for an answer.

Hair Thee Well: What was up with the art pieces masquerading as art perched atop the heads of several celebs, from Marcia Gay Harden's gravity defying beehive to Liv Tyler's ill-conceived asymmetrical '80s-inspired finger waves?

The Hills Are Alive ... : With the sound of a thousand stylists and fashion watchers screaming the moment Uma Thurman stepped onto the red carpet wearing her bizarre milkmaid-meets-"The Sound of Music" ensemble. It's a rare misstep for the "Kill Bill" beauty, who should give the designer of that dress a serious butt-kicking.

Who Invited the Little Tramp? Diane Keaton channeled Charlie Chaplin (with a little help from Annie Hall) in a strange but oddly fetching pinstripe suit with au courant spectator shoes.

The Hottest Librarian Ever: You can bet guys make passes at girls who wear granny glasses when they look like Liv Tyler, whose smart-girl eyewear contrasted sharply with her Marilyn Monroe-like voice.

Least Important Onstage Announcement Ever: Catherine Zeta-Jones, who felt it necessary to explain to the crowd as she struggled to open the envelope, "I have no nails." We'll alert the media.

Least Convincing Look of Surprise: Despite the oodles of practice she's had at various awards show over the past two months, an "overwhelmed" Renee Zellweger once again acted shocked -- shocked! -- to hear her name called. She speed-talked her way through the endless names on her speech, though she did slow down long enough to tearfully mention her "immigrant mom and dad -- thank you for never saying don't try." OK, that was kind of sweet.

Best Boost for New Zealand Tourism: The "Lord of the Rings" sweep, which resulted in umpteenth Kiwi kudos and prompted Crystal to quip, "It's official. There's no one left in New Zealand to thank."

Oddest Instrumentation: The bicycle in the "Triplets of Belleville" Best Song performance and that bizarre guitar-like thingabob Sting was seductively stroking had us scratching our head.

Ugliest Fashion Trend: Butt-enhancing bustles, which turned up on the curvaceous backsides of everyone from Renee Zellweger to Liv Tyler to Jennifer Garner. While these women are beautiful and shapely enough to carry off such a hideous accessory, the rest of us don't stand a chance.

Worst Onstage Appearance: The final awkward gathering of the winners at the end of the Oscars was just as stilted as the show itself, though we were reassured when Crystal concluded saying, "What happens at the Oscars stays at the Oscars." Phew, 'cause to tell you the truth, if we hear one more "Lord of the Rings" speech, we're going to rip the stuffing out of our Frodo doll.

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