

GUESTWORDS: By Bette-Jane Raphael

Betrayed By Oscar

Unless you've just come out of a months-long coma, you know that the Academy Awards will be presented on television Sunday night.

The buzz leading up to this event has, as always, been impossible to avoid. Although there hasn't been anything as good as last year's story about crates of Oscars being stolen from a California loading dock, articles speculating about who will win and interviews with nominated actors and directors have taken a throttle-hold on the media.

An Oscar pool made its yearly

round of my office this week, and some of my friends are still worrying about which of their friends' Awards-watching parties to attend.

Tuned Out

Not me. At 9 p.m. Eastern time, instead of tuning in to what is happening at the Shriners Auditorium, I'll be ordering dinner at a local restaurant that's usually packed with the East End's contingent of movie folk, but on Oscar night is as empty as a California loading dock.

This will probably make me one of

maybe seven Americans not watching either the Academy Awards or wrestling.

Not that I don't love the movies. I do, and I'm glad there are men and women talented enough to make good ones. Once I was a sucker for the glamour of the Academy Awards, which I had loved since I was a kid, and fantasized about having shoulders as perfect as the ones on which Grace Kelly tied the little spaghetti straps of the also perfect gown she wore to accept her Oscar.

Dawning Realizations

That's why it came as a surprise to me when, several years ago, I started having an adverse reaction to the awards ceremonies. It all began with the reluctant acceptance of a truth I'd been able to keep at bay in my more idealistic youth: that the fact that certain artists or films were honored above others wasn't always the result of a clear-eyed appraisal of their relative creative merits, and that originality often lost out to sentimentality.

If that weren't true, I reasoned, then how could "The English Patient" ever prevail over "Fargo"?

My discomfort was reinforced by the embarrassment I began to feel whenever an honoree looked foolish or spoke foolishly, which seemed to happen more and more often as I matured and lost my appetite for Heep-like humility. This unease escalated to an absolute queasiness when I noticed that the celebrities making the presentations were getting into the habit of introducing their fellow stars as "Mr." or "Miss," as in "Ladies and gentlemen . . . Mr. Charlton Heston."

Misters And Misses

I wondered why they did this. "The Ten Commandments" hadn't starred Mr. Charlton Heston, as far as I could remember the credits. And

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PERISCOPE

Due to an editorial blunder, in last week's "Guestwords" by Bette-Jane Raphael, the Shrine Auditorium was misidentified. The Star regrets the error. Ed.

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Bridg

there is a need for some sort of continuing education course in Jersey geography.

My wife and I drive there every month or so, to visit friends or to shop at Han Ah Reum in Palisades Park, the best Korean supermarket in the metropolitan area, but almost every time we do, I get lost.

Perhaps it's an occult singularity of Jersey topography, or a distortion of the earth's magnetic field caused by the presence of so many refineries and factories, that scrambles one's natural sense of direction.

That might explain why Jersey drivers, when they come here, are always going in circles and signalling left when they are about to turn right.

Or it might be the fact that, growing up in Manhattan as I did, I used to share with other New Yorkers an utter indifference to whatever might lie across the Hudson.

The only time I can recall crossing over, as a child, was when my parents took me to visit their friend Lotte Lenya, the singer. It was not until years later that I became a fan of her recordings, and of the music of her husband, Kurt Weill, although a bit sooner I was thrilled to see her in "From Russia With Love," cast as a viperish Soviet agent with a dangerous kick. At her house overlooking the Hudson, an easy location that must have been why we didn't get lost finding it, she gave me a miniature red iron circus wagon, which I

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New Jersey motorists
k State driving test
George Washington
to venture west,

Guestwords

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I'd never seen a People magazine cover line that read: "Why Mr. Bruce Willis and Miss Demi Moore Called It Quits."

Was this practice an "Alias John Doe" kind of thing, some we're-just-plain-folks business from people who wanted to be anything but? Or was "Mr." a code word, short for "prancing, preening, takes-himself-way-too-seriously, actually dull-witted, mediocre actor?"

All those misters and misses made me dizzy to the point of nausea, especially when mixed in with all the lifetime tributes, all the instant, film-clip mythologizing, all the genuflecting to earlier generations of Academy nobility, all the lionizing and icon-izing and beatifying, all the congratulations the film industry bestows so generously upon itself even as it continues to produce easily as much dreck as gold.

After The Fact

I realize we live in a culture that values entertainment above everything, and movies above all other

forms of entertainment except wrestling. But watching a ceremony celebrating this didn't seem to sit well with me anymore, and in the end, accepting a temporary, self-imposed social isolation, I stopped tuning in.

Now I no longer see firsthand which opening monologues are brilliant and which brittle, which production numbers are stylish and which stilted, who looks amazing and who's had too much surgery, which presenters are heartwarming and which stomach turning, which recipients move you and which make you squirm, who's dressed beautifully and who's been doubly cursed with bad taste and bad advice, who wins and who loses. Now I get it all in the papers the next day.

Too bad there won't be a follow-up story this year like the one last year, when those crates of stolen Oscars were found — opened, untouched, and discarded — in a Dumpster. Now that was heartwarming — almost enough to make you believe life isn't like a box of chocolates, after all.

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