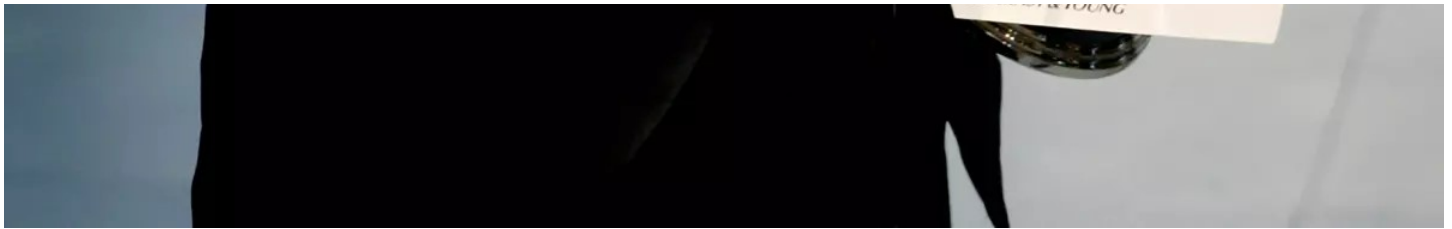




AWARDS

20 years ago at the Emmys: That time two mobsters shook hands on stage





Al Pacino received his first Emmy (on his first nomination) for playing Roy Cohn in the miniseries “Angels in America” in 2004. (Brian van der Brug / Los Angeles Times)

By Randee Dawn

May 29, 2024 5:30 AM PT

Lead actor Emmy Award winners are often veteran actors, but where they earn those veteran acting stripes varies widely. And at the 56th annual Primetime Emmy Awards, held Sept. 19, 2004, at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles, the lead actor winners of the night included one experienced TV favorite picking up his fourth award, one film-turned-TV star earning his first Emmy — and one legendary Oscar winner on his first nomination and win.

Cherry on the top of a long TV run

At the time, Kelsey Grammer was truly a TV titan, having played Dr. Frasier Crane in three separate TV series: “Cheers,” “Wings” and “Frasier” (all NBC). He won four Emmys for playing Crane, in 1994, 1995, 1998 and 2004, the year the series wrapped up (until its 2023 reboot).

Also in the running: Larry David (“Curb Your Enthusiasm,” HBO), who has two Emmys for “Seinfeld” (both 1993) but none yet for “Curb”; Matt LeBlanc (“Friends,” NBC), nominated three times for the role but never won; Tony Shalhoub (“Monk,” USA), who would win in the following two years for that role and once more in 2019 for “The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel”; and John Ritter (“8 Simple Rules,” ABC), who had died in 2003. Ritter had one Emmy for “Three’s Company” from 1984.

The “Frasier” star accepted the award from presenter Conan O’Brien. He started his

speech by saying Ritter would be “missed not only for his kindness but also his work.” He added that “‘Frasier’ was a gift in my life ... and this is just the cherry on top.”

‘Practice’ makes perfect

James Spader got his start in film, but his performance as Alan Shore in “The Practice” (ABC) gave his career fresh life in television. He received his first Emmy nomination and win in 2004, and would go on to win two more for the role (though the other two would be on “Boston Legal” in 2005 and 2007).

His competitors, by contrast, had a raft of Emmy experience: James Gandolfini (“The Sopranos,” HBO) had three Emmys for his role (2000, 2001, 2003); Anthony LaPaglia (“Without a Trace,” CBS) had one win for a guest role on “Frasier” in 2002; Martin Sheen (“The West Wing,” NBC) had one win, for a guest actor part on “Murphy Brown” in 1994; and Kiefer Sutherland (“24,” Fox) won two in 2006 as that show’s Jack Bauer.

Spader accepted the award from presenters Gary Sinise and Melina Kanakaredes with a speech that showed he was riffing: “I should have written something down,” he chuckled. He complimented the audience: “You’ve all made wonderful choices in shoes and dresses tonight” and wrapped by singling out the crew “who do the hair and makeup, I want to thank them most of all.”

Halo to an Oscar winner

“Angels in America” was on a tear that night, ultimately picking up 11 wins from its 21 nominations and sweeping the miniseries or movie acting categories. Oscar winner (1993, “Scent of a Woman”) Al Pacino received his first Emmy (and first nomination) for playing Roy Cohn. He’d go on to win a second Emmy in 2010 for “You Don’t Know Jack” (HBO).

His fellow nominees included Antonio Banderas (“And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself,” HBO), who was on his second Emmy nomination; and James Brolin (“The Reagans,” Showtime), who won his sole Emmy in 1970 for “Marcus Welby, M.D.” (ABC). Yasiin Bey (then Mos Def) was an Emmy rookie, competing against his “Something the Lord Made” (HBO) co-star Alan Rickman, who had one Emmy from 1996 for “Rasputin: Dark Servant of Destiny” (HBO).

Pacino received his Emmy from presenters Edie Falco and James Gandolfini, and in shaking Gandolfini’s hand he made the dreams of mobster-loving film and TV show fans come true. But it was his rambling speech that was an evening highlight: He sent out congratulations to everyone he could think of, adding: “It was long ago and I was a blond; you work on [shows] and then they come out and it’s years [later] but I remember the feeling was really good around there.”

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