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AWARDS

Oscars flashback: Javier Bardem leads Spain to victory





Gwyneth Paltrow presented the Oscar to Spanish filmmakers Alejandro Amenábar, center, and Fernando Bovaira. (Kevork Djansezian / Associated Press)

By Randee Dawn

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The Oscars ceremony may look like a lot of glitter and glam on the surface, but beneath the glossy surface lurks a battle of worldwide proportions! Or maybe it's just the competition for the foreign language film award, which since 2020 has been called the international feature film award. And on Feb. 27, 2005, in Hollywood's Kodak Theatre the battle royale was fought by Spain, Sweden, France, Germany and South Africa ... with Spain emerging as the victor.

A sea of gratitude

Gwyneth Paltrow presented the award to Alejandro Amenábar, the director and co-screenwriter (with Mateo Gil) of “The Sea Inside” (“Mar adentro”). The Javier Bardem-starring film followed the real-life story of Ramón Sampedro, who became quadriplegic after a diving accident and spent nearly 30 years fighting for his own right to die. The film was also nominated in the makeup category, but Jo Allen and Manolo García did not win.

This award is not given to any of the filmmakers, though the director accepts it onstage. Instead, the country that submits the film to the academy is considered the winner. This was the first time Spain had won the Oscar since 2000, when Pedro Almodóvar won for “All About My Mother.”



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As Amenábar said from the stage, “This film is based on a man who, despite his desire for death, spread so much life around him. So, the first third of this award belongs to him, wherever he is. The second third is for Javier Bardem for his outstanding performance and his generosity. And another third part goes to, of course, my friend and producer, Fernando Bovaira, to the fabulous cast and crew for being so focused on this movie since the very beginning. And as for me, I’m just so pleased because it seems that I’m in charge of keeping it in one piece for the rest of my life.”

Spain has won the Oscar four times out of 21 nominations; it’s the fourth-most-winning country, behind Japan (five), France (12) and Italy (14).

Around the world

“As It Is in Heaven,” from Sweden, directed and co-written by Kay Pollak, was also nominated. It was about an internationally famous conductor who retires to his Swedish hometown only to help out with the church choir. Sweden last won an Oscar in 1983, for Ingmar Bergman’s “Fanny and Alexander.”

France also put forward a chorus-focused nominee called, rightfully enough, “The Chorus,” directed and written by Christophe Barratier. In it, Pierre is the orchestra conductor who goes home after his mother dies, then reminisces about his own music teacher. The film was also nominated (as was Barratier) for the original song Oscar, for “Look to Your Path” (“Vos sur ton chemin”). Barratier wrote the lyrics, Bruno Coulais composed the music. France last won the category in 1993, with Régis Wargnier’s “Indochine.”

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Germany's "Downfall," directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel, didn't win the Oscar, but it did go viral — at least one scene. The film focuses on Adolf Hitler's final days in his Berlin bunker, and the scene features Bruno Ganz (as Hitler) having a meltdown, a performance so powerfully off-the-wall it was parodied around the internet. All of united Germany's Oscar wins have come since 2000, with the most recent in 2023 ("All Quiet on the Western Front").

"Yesterday," directed and written by Darrell Roodt, represented South Africa and was the first commercial feature-length production told in Zulu. In the film, the title character learns she has HIV and struggles to live long enough so that her child can attend school. South Africa would win the Oscar the following year for Gavin Hood's "Tsotsi."

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