

'Being nominated truly is an honor'

12-time Oscar nominee Diane Warren hopes for 'awesome' win

LOS ANGELES, April 18, (AP): For a dozen and more reasons, Diane Warren would be overjoyed to win a best original song Oscar for her work in "The Life Ahead" starring Sophia Loren.

A trophy for the Italian-language film's song, "Io Si (Seen)," would be Warren's first after 11 previous Academy Award nominations came up short.

"Yeah, it would be great to win. It would be (expletive) awesome," Warren said. "I feel like a team that's gone to the World Series for decades and decades, and never wins."

A triumph would be especially sweet for the veteran songwriter whose first Oscar bid was in 1988 (for the romcom "Mannequin"). The Academy Awards ceremony, originally set for February and delayed by the pandemic, airs April 25, the birthday of her late father, David Warren, and a coincidence that she calls "so cool."

"He believed in me so much he would take me to music publishers when I was 14 or 15," Warren said. "My mom would be saying, 'Why are you doing it? Why are you encouraging her? She can't make a living off that.'"

Warren, who grew up in Los Angeles, recounted her dad's reply: "She has talent. She really, really wants this."

Her gifts and drive led to success in a range of pop music genres and in film, with her past Oscar contenders including "I Don't Want to Miss a Thing," by Aerosmith and featured in 1998's "Armageddon." It was

a hit tune, one of Warren's many that include "If I Could Turn Back Time" by Cher. Toss out a big name — Beyoncé, Justin Bieber, Lady Gaga — and Warren has likely worked with them.

She's a confessed workaholic who typically writes solo but joined with Common on the 2019 Oscar-nominated "Stand Up for Something" for "Marshall," a biopic about the late US Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall.

"The Life Ahead" brought a new form of collaboration. Warren had written the music and words for the song when director Edoardo Ponti — Loren's son — realized the Italian-language film needed lyrics to match. Italian pop star-songwriter Laura Pausini was brought in for the task and shares the Oscar nomination.

Message

Warren's music and lyrics are "amazing," said Pausini, who recorded "Io Si" for the film. The song and the movie carry the same message, "and that's the goal."

In "The Life Ahead," Loren plays the aged Madame Rosa, a former prostitute and Holocaust survivor who helps sex workers by taking in their children. She reluctantly adds an orphaned, street-tough Senegalese youngster known as Momo to her small brood, and the pair move gradually from distrust to love. Impressive newcomer Ibrahim Gueye, himself an immigrant to Italy from Senegal, plays the boy.

The third movie adaptation of the 1975 Romain Gary novel "The Life Before Us" is a wrenchingly tender story of those who live on the margins of — and largely are invisible to — society, which prompted Warren's approach to the song.

"The first thing I came up with, sitting at my piano, was, 'I want you to know that you're seen,' she said, breaking briefly into an a cappella performance. "It's so simple but it's so profound, because we all want to be seen."

The song became an integral part of the movie, heard in its translated version over the closing scene. Filmmaker Ponti gladly gives credit to Warren, who approached him in 2019 before "The Life Ahead" went into production with Ponti's legendary mother.

"I hadn't even considered having a song in the movie," he said. "She had gotten ahold of the script and something clicked for her. So when something clicks for Diane Warren, you just say, 'Absolutely, I would love a song in my movie because Diane Warren is a great artist.'"

When Warren came to his Los Angeles-area home early last year to introduce her creation, she was wearing a cast from a household accident, recalled Ponti, a writer as well as stage and screen director.

"With her broken hand and her guitar, she sang the song in my living room," he said, recalling it as a "very bright day" in the up-and-down experience of bringing a movie to fruition.

Music

Variety



This image released by A24 shows Steven Yeun, (foreground), in a scene from 'Minari.' 'Minari' is nominated for best picture for the Oscar Awards which will be broadcast on April 25. (AP)

Film

Pandemic has upended the Oscars. Good, producers say

'Oscars telecast will be 3-hour movie'

By Jake Coyle

Ninety seconds. That's how quickly Steven Soderbergh believes the Academy Awards will convince viewers that this year's telecast is different.

The concept for the show, which Soderbergh is producing with Stacey Sher and Jesse Collins, is to treat the telecast not like a TV show but a movie. And he's convinced he's got a doozy of an opening scene.

"We're going to announce our intention immediately," says Soderbergh. "Right out of the gate, people are going to know: 'We've got to put our seatbelt on.'"

Changing the Academy Awards, a 93-year-old American institution, has typically proven an exercise in futility. Tweaks have been tried along the way, yet the basic format has been stubbornly immutable.

But this year, the pandemic has shaken the Oscars like never before. When the broadcast begins April 25 on ABC, there won't be an audience. The base of the show won't be the Academy Awards' usual home, the Dolby Theatre (though the Dolby is still a key location), but Union Station, the airy, Art Deco-Mission Revival railway hub in downtown Los Angeles.

For the producers, the challenges of COVID are an opportunity to, finally, rethink the Oscars.

"At any step in the creative process of making a movie, when I ask a question about why something is being done a certain way and the answer is, 'Because that's the way it's always been done' — that's a real red flag for me," Soderbergh said in a recent Zoom interview with Collins and Sher. "All of us this year have taken advantage of the opportunity that's been presented to us to really challenge all the assumptions that go into an award show."

No matter how good a job they do, ratings are all but certain to fall from last year's 23.6 million viewers. Award show viewership has cratered during the pandemic, and this year's Oscar nominees — while widely streamed and more diverse than ever — lack the kind of buzz generated in a normal year. Soderbergh praises the best-picture nominees as "one of the most auteur-driven sets of films."

"If the teams in the Super Bowl are from small markets, it's still a great game, people still care," says Collins, who produced The Weeknd's halftime show at this year's Super Bowl.

Collins was also a producer of last month's Grammy

Awards, a telecast that drew praise for its personal, jam-session feel. That sense of community is something the Oscars want to exude, too.

"My big thing has always been: It's not intimate. It doesn't feel personal," Soderbergh says. "We're in a COVID world. It has to be that way. Nominees, guests, presenters. That's it. Those are the only people in the room. That was just a weird alignment of catastrophe and my personal preoccupation."

Storytellers

The Oscars, most assuredly, will differ greatly from February's largely virtual Golden Globes. The producers have made a stand against both Zoom and casual wear. This is the Oscars, after all; there will be no acceptance speeches made in a hoodie. The producers pressed the nominees to attend in person, with appropriate safety precautions.

Some bristled at the academy's stance — lockdown regulations are in effect in some countries and cases are persistently high in Europe and elsewhere — leading to compromise. There will be a hub for nominees in London, and, as of late last week, about a dozen remote satellite hook-ups. Some material will be pre-taped; every nominee has spent 45 minutes with the producers.

Soderbergh envisions the broadcast as a three-hour movie, not a webinar. But what does that mean, exactly? If the Oscars are a movie, what kind will it be? From the director of "Ocean's 11" and "Logan Lucky," should we expect a heist film?

"It's going to feel like a movie in that there's an overarching theme that's articulated in different ways throughout the show. So the presenters are essentially the storytellers for each chapter," says Soderbergh. "We want you to feel like it wasn't a show made by an institution. We want you to feel like you're watching a show that was made by a small group of people that really attacked everything that feels generic or unnecessary or insincere. That's the kind of intention when I watch shows like this that is missing for me. A voice. It needs to have a specific voice."

Technically, the broadcast will have a more widescreen look and a more cinematic approach to the music. (Questlove is music director.) Presenters are considered the ensemble cast. One thing you won't see, says Collins, is standard banter before an award is handed out. "When you see cast members go up to give awards,

you'll see a connection," Collins says. "It won't be two people walking up that just met in the greenroom who are struggling to stick with the teleprompter."

It's undeniably a lot to pull off, with ever-fluctuating COVID-19 conditions and restrictions. The logistics are "mind-numbing," Soderbergh says. The egos, a whole other fascinating component. "Oh, it's a chapter for the memoir, for sure," he says. But the show is coming together. "I'm feeling pretty amped," he says.

The role of Academy Awards savior is an unlikely one for Soderbergh, who dramatically bid Hollywood goodbye eight years ago. His criticism then was that the studios weren't innovating and that movies had drifted from the cultural center. But after returning to movie-making in a restless sprint of adventurous, conceptually daring films (some shot on iPhones, one made on an ocean liner), Soderbergh helped lead the industry back to production during the pandemic, mapping out safety protocols — including the kinds of testing and quarantining that will be in effect for attending nominees next week.

The Oscars are an annual meeting, of sorts, for Hollywood — a moment of reflection, aspiration and backslapping for the industry. This year's awards, postponed by two months, follow a punishing pandemic year for the industry that saw movie theaters shuttered and streaming services proliferate. Soderbergh hopes the Oscars will be cathartic, and a shot in the arm for Hollywood.

"The cliché when you go into to pitch a movie is to say it's about hope and scope," he says. "That is kind of what we want to do, to show what's possible."

That includes an affectionate celebration of each category's craft and nominees.

"Snark is something that we didn't want," says Sher, the veteran producer of "Get Shorty," "Django Unchained" and Soderbergh films like "Out of Sight" and "Erin Brockovich." "Instead of looking at it from the outside in with a high degree of cynicism and stark, we're pulling the curtain back and letting them into our community. There are a lot of misperceptions about the business. It's a predominantly blue-color industry, with unions."

On Oscar night, Soderbergh — who typically serves as his own cinematographer under the alias Peter Andrews — plans to be in the production truck alongside the show's director, Glenn Weiss. (AP)

LONDON: Liam Scarlett, a star British choreographer whose career was clouded by abuse allegations, has died. He was 35.

Scarlett's family said Saturday that "it is with great sadness that we announce the tragic, untimely death of our beloved Liam."

"At this difficult time for all of our family, we would ask that you respect our privacy to enable us to grieve our loss," the family said in a statement. A cause of death wasn't immediately given.

Scarlett trained at the Royal Ballet School in London and danced with the company before concentrating on choreography.

He was named artist-in-residence at the Royal Ballet in 2012 and created several acclaimed works, including "The Age of Anxiety," "Symphonic Dances" and "Asphodel Meadows." He created a "Jubilee Pas de Deux" to celebrate Queen Elizabeth II's 60 years on the throne in 2012 and produced a new production of "Swan Lake" for the company in 2018.

He worked around the world, with companies including the New York City Ballet, the Norwegian National Ballet, the Miami City Ballet and Queensland Ballet in Australia. (AP)

PORTLAND, Maine: Twenty-seven paintings by three generations of Wyeths have been donated to Maine's Farnsworth Art Museum, thanks to the late Betsy Wyeth.

The Rockland museum, which plans to display the paintings in a major exhibition beginning May 15, did not disclose the value of the gifts, the Portland Press Herald reported Thursday.

The gift includes "Room after Room" and "Geraniums," a pair of watercolors painted by Andrew Wyeth at the Olson House in nearby Cushing; "Islander," one of Jamie Wyeth's best known paintings; and a trio of paintings by N.C. Wyeth that capture fishing scenes.

The latest Wyeth gift adds to an already substantial collection of Wyeth artwork held by the Farnsworth.

"The Farnsworth is so fortunate to have the ongoing support of the Wyeth family and we are deeply grateful for this treasured gift to the museum's collection," Farnsworth Director Christopher J. Brownawell said in a statement.

Three generations of Wyeths have painted in Maine, starting with N.C. Wyeth in the 1920s. Andrew Wyeth's best known work,

"Christina's World," was painted at the Olson House in 1948. Jamie, son of Andrew and Betsy Wyeth, continues to create art in Maine. (AP)

LOS ALTOS, Calif.: Charles "Chuck" Geschke — the co-founder of the major software company Adobe Inc. who helped



Scarlett



Geschke

develop Portable Document Format technology, or PDFs — died at age 81.

Geschke, who lived in the San Francisco Bay Area suburb of Los Altos, died Friday, the company said.

"This is a huge loss for the entire Adobe community and the technology industry, for whom he has been a guide and hero for

decades," Adobe CEO Shantanu Narayen wrote in an email to the company's employees.

"As co-founders of Adobe, Chuck and John Warnock developed groundbreaking software that has revolutionized how people create and communicate," Narayen said. "Their first product was Adobe PostScript, an innovative technology that provided a radical

new way to print text and images on paper and sparked the desktop publishing revolution. Chuck instilled a relentless drive for innovation in the company, resulting in some of the most transformative software inventions, including the ubiquitous PDF, Acrobat, Illustrator, Premiere Pro and Photoshop." His wife said Geschke was also proud of his family. (AP)

Features

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