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**Jan Chats
about the
2007
Oscar Nominations
with
WRKF Program Host
Jim Engster**

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Jim: A year ago we visited with Chicago Film Critic Jan Huttner, who was not at all happy about the Oscar nominations of 2006; and here is it 2007. Everything went as planned for DREAMGIRLS, except the eight nominations did not include one for Best Picture. We'll talk about this and much more. The Oscar nominations were released a few days ago. Good to have you back on WRKF, Jan Huttner.

Jan: Very nice to be here again, Jim.

Jim: Well, Jan, what happened with DREAMGIRLS and Best Picture?

Jan: Well, you're starting me out on a negative note here and there are so many positive things to talk about, but I have to agree with the voters who made the nominations on this one. I thought DREAMGIRLS was very good, but wasn't quite as good as I had hoped it would be.

Jim: All right, the films that were nominated...

Jan: I'm sorry. We can circle back to that later...

Jim: BABEL, THE DEPARTED, LETTERS FROM IWO JIMA, LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE and THE QUEEN, you think all of those were superior films to DREAMGIRLS?

Jan: Nooo... I didn't say that... I think, I just want to refresh peoples' memory: the reason why I was so upset last year, and many other women were very upset last year as well, is that the five Best Picture nominations last year had no significant parts for women. I'll just refresh people: it was BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN, CAPOTE, CRASH, GOOD NIGHT, AND GOOD LUCK and MUNICH, and in all of those films, there were no significant parts for women. Even in CRASH, which had a lot of women, they were all two-dimensional, from my point of view, and a lot of other women critics and women writers agreed about that.

There was also a problem with respect to the women who were nominated last year for Best Actress, particularly Reese Witherspoon, who did win the Oscar for her performance as "June Carter" in WALK THE LINE. I think, looking at that fairly, that was clearly a supporting role. She had no independent scenes by herself that were not scenes that also involved Johnny Cash, and I think to be fair that really is "The Johnny Cash Story."

So the big news this year is the fact that many of the films on the list have significant parts for women. Obviously THE QUEEN is about Queen Elizabeth. LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE has very strong women's parts for the mother played by Toni Collette and also the daughter who really is the main character, "Olive," played by Oscar nominee Abigail Breslin. And also BABEL, two of the actresses from BABEL were nominated for Best Supporting Actress and Cate Blanchett easily could've been as well if she wasn't already nominated as Best Supporting Actress in NOTES ON A SCANDAL. So the difference between last year and this year is really quite dramatic.

Jim: All right. 297-5633 if you'd like to talk with Jan Huttner, Chicago Film Critic. She's more enthused about the nominees this year than last, and we'll get to the other categories. But in Best Picture, there certainly, at least I don't recall any major roles for women in THE DEPARTED. It's one of the nominees. Should THE DEPARTED have been nominated ahead of DREAMGIRLS?

Jan: Well, in my opinion THE DEPARTED is not a major film, quite apart from the one token woman's role in it for Vera Farmiga. I actually did get a copy of the Hong Kong film INFERNAL AFFAIRS on which it's based, and I watched it, and I just really don't understand the hype about THE DEPARTED. It's a very crude, very violent film, but it's also very long and, I think, pretty over-indulgent. So I really don't understand the hype about THE DEPARTED at all, and I've now seen it three times just to check myself and make sure there wasn't anything I was missing. I didn't like it.

BABEL, I think, is a really superior film; LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE, I think, is a really superior film; and THE QUEEN, for people who haven't seen it, it's actually much more interesting and nuanced and thoughtful than people realize. It really does try to deal not just with the aftermath of the death of Diana, but the whole relationship between politics and media in our 21st Century, and I think it's a very serious, very well-made film. LETTERS FROM IWO JIMA, I just need to point out, it was written by a woman, Iris Yamashita, and directed, of course, by Clint Eastwood. I'm kind of mixed about that one. I saw it on a screener, so I didn't see it on a big screen. It's now playing in a theater in Chicago, and we will go this weekend to see if seeing it on a big screen makes it a more powerful experience than my first impression.

Jim: Well, our local film critic, John Wirt for Baton Rouge Advocate, chose LETTERS FROM IWO JIMA as his best of the year; and he's not alone.

Jan: No, he's not alone, he's not alone.

Jim: I see a lot of people have heavy praise for this picture.

Jan: Right, that's why, as I say, I really, I feel it's very important for me to go see it on the big screen again this weekend and see if... It's, for all of us that watch so much on DVD and home video, it's important to realize that the movies that are made for the big screen really do have the greatest impact when you're watching it on a large screen with a full audio, and with an audience, and the relationship between you and the rest of the audience. So before I say anything definitive about LETTERS FROM IWO JIMA, I really want to reserve the right to see it again on a big screen.

Jim: 297-5633, our guest for a big longer, Jan Huttner, Chicago Film Critic, who particularly surveys how women are treated in the Oscar nominations. The 79th Annual Academy Awards will be featured on February 25th and the Best Picture nominees this year: BABEL, THE DEPARTED, LETTERS FROM IWO JIMA, LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE and THE QUEEN. Jan did not like THE DEPARTED and I see Martin Scorsese, who I don't think has ever won an

Oscar, is nominated again for Best Director for THE DEPARTED. Any chance he'll win this time?

Jan: Well, I think it's quite likely that he will win, because there's so much pressure for him to be recognized. And in all honesty, I thought that GANGS OF NEW YORK, a couple of years ago, was one of the worst films of that year, and I thought that THE AVIATOR had a lot of good things but also was not a complete, fully realized film. So in my opinion, and I've seen almost all of Scorsese films, this is the best one that he's done since GOODFELLAS, which was way back in '91 or '92, I think. So I would be okay with giving him the Oscar for THE DEPARTED this year, if only to just end the question, so that we don't every year have to talk about Scorsese.

Again, I hate to be a downer here, but to me, the best thing he ever did was TAXI DRIVER, and that was way back, I think, in '76 or '75. And just because he's made a lot of films: some of them have been very good; some of them have been not so good. I think THE DEPARTED is good enough to get him over the hump and just put this to bed.

So can I just say one more thing about this? I think it's always important to remember, with respect to the Oscars, you can't just look at who won in any individual year, you have to look at who they were competing against. There's a lot of outcry about the fact that he didn't win for GOODFELLAS, but the film that won that year was DANCES WITH WOLVES, and Kevin Costner won for Best Director. And I really do believe that DANCES WITH WOLVES is one of the great American films, and I'm frankly happy that it was recognized.

Jim: All right. 297-5633 for Jan Huttner, Chicago Film Critic, interesting person. She holds master's degree in psychology from both Harvard and the University of Chicago. David in Lafayette. Good morning David: you're on WRKF.

David: Yes, good morning, just real quick. You mentioned the movie INFERNAL AFFAIRS that, the other movie, THE DEPARTED, was based off of. Now I remember seeing INFERNAL AFFAIRS and there was a significant female role in this movie, if I'm not mistaken.

Jim: He's talking about....

David: Am I mistaken in my recollection?

Jan: In INFERNAL AFFAIRS?

David: Yes.

Jan: There are two minor supporting roles, very minor supporting roles. For those of you who haven't seen THE DEPARTED: it's about two young policeman, both of whom are moles. One is the mole coming from the gangster-land into the police force, and the other one is the mole coming from the police force into the gang. In the original, INFERNAL AFFAIRS, there're actually two minor female roles: one is the girlfriend of the cop, and the other one is the psychiatrist that the mob informer is seeing. In THE DEPARTED, Scorsese and screenwriter Monahan conflate those two roles, and create one female character that plays both roles. In the original, they're separate.

David: Yeah, I hadn't seen THE DEPARTED yet, but they just combined the two?

Jan: Right, they combined the two.

David: All right; appreciate it.

Jim: Thank you David, 297-5633, Jan Huttner, Chicago Film Critic, with us. What about Best Actress? Are you pleased with the nominees in that category?

Jan: I'm extremely pleased with this category. For one thing, they're all very, very strong leading roles. Helen Mirren in *THE QUEEN*, Meryl Streep in *THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA*, Judi Dench in *NOTES ON A SCANDAL*, Kate Winslet in *LITTLE CHILDREN* and Penélope Cruz in *VOLVER*. Now I know that everyone is banking on Helen Mirren in *THE QUEEN*, and she is fabulous, no doubt about it, but frankly the person who just blew me away was Judi Dench in *NOTES ON A SCANDAL*. She is so terrific in that film and ironically she was nominated last year for *MRS. HENDERSON PRESENTS*. I was not pleased with her nomination in *MRS. HENDERSON PRESENTS* because I felt like she could've done that with her eyes closed, whereas, in *NOTES ON A SCANDAL*, she is really very, very, very powerful, and all of these women are lead roles in the films that they're in.

They all have very, very strong, very interesting characters, unlike last year, when I didn't think that they had the best slate. There were very important women's roles that were not included in last year's list, specifically Julianne Moore who gave an outstanding performance in *THE PRIZE WINNER OF DEFIANCE, OHIO*, and Joan Allen, who was just fabulous in Sally Potter's film *YES*.

I thought that Meryl Streep said something very interesting at the Golden Globes the other night. When she picked up her award for *THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA*, which was well-deserved and a terrific part for her, she also said in her acceptance speech that in a way she felt that it was unfair that she was getting the award only because so many of her competitors were in films that no one had had a chance to see. For example, Maggie Gyllenhaal was nominated [for a Golden Globe award] for her terrific performance in *SHERRYBABY*, directed and written by a woman, and almost no one saw that. It's just come out this week on DVD. So, again, she was pointing to the problem that women's films are very difficult to see and don't get the exposure that they need.

Jim: All right. Who's the favorite in this category?

Jan: Well I think the favorite is absolutely Helen Mirren and, again, that would be great. She's terrific.

Jim: Now Meryl Streep's won how many times?

Jan: Meryl Streep has only won twice. She's been nominated, I think, more than anyone else. She won for *SOPHIE'S CHOICE*, and she also won Best Supporting Actress for the role as the wife, oh my gosh, in the Dustin Hoffman movie...

Jim: *KRAMER VS. KRAMER*?

Jan: Yes, exactly, ages ago. So the thing I want to say about *THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA*, and I've written a lot about this this year, the screenplay for *DEVIL WEARS PRADA* was written by Aline Brosh McKenna and it's a fabulous screenplay. In fact, she was nominated in one of the five slots for Best Adapted Screenplay by the Writers Guild of America, and that's usually a good predictor for Oscar nominations. And I think it's a real shame that she was not nominated for an Oscar because, again, Meryl Streep embodies a certain character, but it's important to remember that Meryl Streep did not create that character; the character was created by the screenwriter (Aline Brosh McKenna) and by the director (David Frankel).

Jim: All right, Chicago Film Critic Jan Huttner with us. We'll survey a few more categories and get some other thoughts from Jan before we part company with her. 297-5633; 877-217-5757. Best Actor: Peter O'Toole is on the list; is there a chance that he could win?

Jan: Yes. I think that Forest Whitaker has close to a lock on the category, and the only one who could upset him would be Peter O'Toole. Again, when you look at this issue of who someone competes with, I want to say that of all the films I've ever seen in my life (and that's a lot of films!), my all-time favorite film is LAWRENCE OF ARABIA. And for years and years and years, I thought it was one of the great Oscar travesties that Peter O'Toole did not get an Oscar for his role as "Lawrence of Arabia."

And then I happen to see, again, on cable, TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD, and at the end of TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD, I turned to my husband and I said: "If I had been voter the year that these two were going to head-to-head, I would have voted for Gregory Peck as 'Atticus Finch'." That's such an iconic performance! I think that that might very well be on other peoples' minds; that this might be Peter O'Toole's year... Otherwise Forest Whitaker does have a lock, I think.

Jim: All right; the film that Forest Whitaker is nominated for is THE LAST KING OF SCOTLAND. The other nominees: Will Smith, THE PURSUIT OF HAPPYNESS, did you like his performance?

Jan: I liked this performance, but I had mixed feelings about the film itself. Frankly, I would've been much happier to see Jamie Foxx nominated for DREAMGIRLS. I thought that, really, the lead character in DREAMGIRLS was the Jamie Foxx character in the "Berry Gordy" role, and I thought he was terrific. So Will Smith is one of the nominations that I'm only half-hearted about in the Best Actor category. And I think Ryan Gosling is a terrific actor, but I wouldn't have nominated him for HALF NELSON. The Leonardo DiCaprio nomination, I just want to remind everyone, is for BLOOD DIAMOND, not for THE DEPARTED. And I thought he was absolutely terrific [in BLOOD DIAMOND], and I'm just overjoyed that Djimon Hounsou was nominated, also for BLOOD DIAMOND, in the Supporting Actor category.

Jim: All right, 297-5633. James Gilmore tells me that Ruston in Mid City wants to know why Sacha Baron Cohen wasn't nominated? Now that may sound whimsical to some, but several of your colleagues thought he should've been nominated for Best Actor.

Jan: And I completely agree. He was on my short list. In fact my short list was DiCaprio [in BLOOD DIAMOND], O'Toole, Whitaker, Jamie Foxx and Sacha Baron Cohen. So I think the ability to stay in character, as he does in BORAT, was absolutely astonishing, and I agree that Sacha Baron Cohen would've been on my list if I ruled the world.

Jim: Supporting actress? There is a nominee from DREAMGIRLS and some say the favorite in this category: Jennifer Hudson. What do you think?

Jan: She's my hometown girl! She's from Chicago and, again, it's really painful because it was a great breakout performance. But let me just tell you: I think that there's a scene missing from DREAMGIRLS. You know, the powerhouse performance that she gives in the song "I'm Not Going" depends on you really believing that she had a relationship with the Jamie Foxx character, and, of course, it's proven by the fact that she's pregnant and he's the father of the baby. But for some reason that's not in the film; you don't ever see any intimacy between the Jennifer Hudson character and the Jamie Foxx character. And to me that was a cinematic misstep, and it takes some power away from the power of that song.

Jim: All right, the other nominees, were you impressed with any of those?

Jan: Absolutely, they're all terrific! Cate Blanchett in NOTES ON A SCANDAL; Adriana and Kikuchi, I can't pronounce the names so well, the two women from BABEL, the Mexican woman and the Japanese woman; and then, of course, Abigail Breslin in the role of "Olive" in LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE. They were all terrific. The only one who was left out that was on my short list was Emily Blunt from THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA (who plays the assistant), and she's absolutely fabulous.

Jim: Supporting actor? Eddie Murphy, DREAMGIRLS, is nominated and the veteran Alan Arkin for LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE. That should be a competitive category.

Jan: I think, in fact, this is the most competitive category of the year and this is the one I had the toughest choice with. I will say that I did think that Mark Wahlberg was the best person in THE DEPARTED (his performance and his role), and the most surprising of all the acting roles. And I guess I have to say I was really pleased that people did not nominate Jack Nicholson, because I frankly thought he was over-the-top.

I loved Alan Arkin in LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE, but I have a little disappointment about Steve Carell because, again, he was very surprising in that part of "Uncle Frank." The person who played the pedophile, Jackie Haley in LITTLE CHILDREN, I thought he was terrific, and I was very pleased to see that nomination. I would also have nominated Stanley Tucci in THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA. I think he was terrific and he's another actor who consistently does great work and deserves recognition. But, again, this was the one category where I couldn't pick just five. There were too many great male performances in the Supporting category this year.

Jim: We had a film that was largely filmed in Louisiana, ALL THE KINGS MEN; it's on the list of many critics' 10 Worst of the Year. What did you think of that movie?

Jan: I'm embarrassed to say that I didn't get a chance to see it. I really intended to and I know I have a screener for it, but, you know, I've seen over 300 films this year, and, unfortunately, I just didn't see it yet. And I do apologize to everyone in Louisiana.

Jim: That's all right. So you see about a film a day then? And this one didn't show long because it was a bomb at the box office and most critics didn't like it either.

Jan: Well, you know I don't see a film a day; they tend to come in chunks. Sometimes I will see three a day in one particular day, so they sort of chunk up, especially at awards time. And since I'm a member of the Chicago Film Critics Association, I've now got a mailbox that's flooded with DVDs "for my consideration" so...

Jim: Well, today is the 82nd Birthday of one Paul Newman who played a Louisiana governor on the big screen named Earl Long. It's hard to believe that that's been 18 years since BLAZE was available.

Jan: I liked that a lot; I thought BLAZE was quite a good film.

Jim: But Paul Newman: 82? That can't be, Jan!

Jan: He is a phenomenon, and I'm proud to say that there are a lot of Newman's Own products in my refrigerator and my pantry. I think he's, the combination of Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward, they have done tremendous artistic work, individually and together, and they've been model citizens for Hollywood and the world, and for what it's worth: Paul, I wish you a very happy birthday!

Jim: All right, of course, Joann Woodward, his bride of 49 years, went to Louisiana State University. What's your favorite Paul Newman film?

Jan: Oh, gosh. I have to say I loved them together in *THE LONG, HOT SUMMER* and he's, I think *CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF* was the best thing Elizabeth Taylor ever did, partnered with him. But, you know, the list of Paul Newman movies... I mean you'd have to give me some time to study up before I pick just one. He really is one of the greatest actors ever. I like *ABSENCE OF MALICE* very much too, with Sally Field. I think it's a Sydney Pollack film, and it deals with journalistic ethics, and I think that that one holds up very, very strong.

Jim: It's been 40 years since *COOL HAND LUKE*. That was a good one. "What we have here is a failure to communicate." Was it Strother Martin?

Jan: Well, not you and me! Because, Jim, I have to thank you again for really being interested in this [issue of women filmmakers], and when I was jumping up and down with excitement [on Tuesday AM], I just... Can I just add one more thing?

Jim: Sure.

Jan: We haven't talked about the Best Foreign Language Film category and that was the one that really just sent me off my sofa and flying into the air [on Tuesday AM] because Deepa Mehta's wonderful film *WATER* was nominated. That may be a consequence of the fact that *LETTERS FROM IWO JIMA* was pushed into the Best Picture category leaving a slot free in Best Foreign Language film, but *WATER* is a fabulous, fabulous film. It's the third film in her trilogy *EARTH, FIRE, and WATER*, and I really urge everyone to see it. It's now available on DVD.

Jim: Well, Jan Huttner, nice to visit with you from the great City of Chicago. We noted starting today's show: it would've been the 61st Birthday for Gene Siskel, one of your colleagues, of course, was based in the Windy City. Hard to believe he's been gone almost eight years.

Jan: Absolutely, and my husband and I have been members of the Gene Siskel Film Center (which was formally known as the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Film Center of the School of the Art Institute). It's now been rebuilt and renamed in his honor, and it's called the Gene Siskel Film Center, and when you walk in, the main screen room is called the "Roger Ebert Screening Room." So Gene and Roger have been enormously important to Chicago, and to the whole country in terms of providing the center of the country, getting us a voice that's not just dominated by the thoughts and opinions of the people on the Coasts. But I think what Gene and Roger collectively and individually succeeding in doing was giving voice to the center of the country and that's very important.

Jim: Well Gene Siskel died with a brain tumor, but he worked while he was ill. He even did that television show, and certainly he fought heroically against long odds, and ultimately lost to glioblastoma. But he was a fine man and a brilliant movie critic. I heard he bought the white coat that John Travolta wore in *SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER*. It's probably worth a lot of money today.

Jan: Right. I never knew him personally, unfortunately, and although I've been in the screening room in Downtown Chicago many times with Mr. Ebert, I wouldn't claim any personal acquaintance with him either. They've really become worldwide figures, and I know we have a star in front of the Chicago Theater now in honor of Mr. Ebert, and it's right across the street from the Gene Siskel Film Center. So Mayor Daley and the people of Chicago have been very grateful and very proud that they've represented us so brilliantly.

Jim: Well, thank you Jan. Good to visit with you and we'll reserve a seat next year when the Oscar nominations are announced.

Jan: Thanks so much, Jim. Have a great day.

Jim Engster

Jim Engster is the general manager of the Louisiana Radio Network, which provides news coverage to 82 affiliate stations, including WRKF. In this capacity, he also manages Tiger Rag, "the Bible of LSU Sports." Previously, Engster served general manager of WRKF from 2003 to 2006. "The Jim Engster Show" debuted on WRKF in March of 2004 and has been the place for personalities to converge for discussions related to politics, business, sports and the arts. The program features liberals, conservatives and people of all political stripes and beliefs. Last year, Jim traveled to Israel to broadcast a week of programs from the offices of the Jerusalem Post. His program provides lively exchanges from guests about issues of importance locally and globally.

Jim is the former host of Louisiana Live, a statewide program that was heard on more than 20 stations across the state. It was named three times by the Associated Press as the best public affairs program in Louisiana. Previously, he was news director of the Louisiana Network for eleven years. Jim is a native of New Orleans and a graduate of LSU. He has been a journalist for 27 years. He is a political analyst for WAFB-Channel 9 and writes columns on politics and sports for various publications across Louisiana.

The Jim Engster Show

Jim Engster is a seasoned interviewer who has logged conversations with the famous and infamous. His gallery of guests includes former President Bill Clinton and eight Louisiana governors. Jim has talked to such varied personalities as Larry King, Johnny Rivers and Jack LaLanne. He once moderated a debate about the Clinton impeachment, featuring singer John Fred ("Judy in Disguise") and actor Tom Lester (Eb on "Green Acres") with wildly opposite viewpoints. Some of Engster's guests include writer Ernest Gaines, actress Lynn Whitfield, LSU Chancellors Sean O'Keefe and Mark Emmert and Louisiana Public Broadcasting President, Beth Courtney.

Weekdays after Writer's Almanac at 9 am, newsmakers interact with "the most enlightened audience in radio" to provide a gumbo of information and insight about life in Louisiana. Topics are as diverse as the guests with Baton Rouge as the backdrop. Leaders from business, politics, sports and the arts coverage on The Jim Engster Show. From Jim Bernhard to Ann Coulter to Sidney Sheldon, you never know whose voice you'll hear on this show. Highlights from 2005 include a week of programs in Israel aired from the broadcast studios of the Jerusalem Post.

The Jim Engster Show
Monday thru Thursday
9:00 am - 10:00 am

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