

Roll out the red carpet

Oscars season is upon us in the build-up to the 98th Academy Awards. Hollywood’s most prestigious red carpet ceremony gets underway on 15th March, and it’s set to be a closely fought contest, as Sean Wilson explains

Which movies are likely to lead the Oscar nominations? In the so-called ‘above the line’ categories (Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor, Best Actress and Best Original/Adapted Screenplay), clear frontrunners are starting to emerge. Director Chloé Zhao’s *Hamnet* is a critical favourite, co-adapted with author Maggie O’Farrell from the latter’s acclaimed novel. The film is a speculative blend of fact and fiction, exploring the tragedy lurking behind William Shakespeare’s seminal *Hamlet*, and with Zhao having already banked Oscars for Best Picture

and Best Director (*Nomadland* in 2021), she’s got a clear advantage. Lead actress Jessie Buckley, who plays Shakespeare’s wife Agnes, is a favourite in the Best Actress category, and Best Adapted Screenplay also looks like a dead-cert. Paul Thomas Anderson’s characteristically eccentric *One Battle After Another* will likely be battling *Hamnet* for top honours. Widely ranked as one of the finest films of 2025, *One Battle After Another* is an absurdist political action-comedy that’s loosely adapted from Thomas Pynchon’s novel *Vineland*. The film has been praised for its deft blend of tonal

shifts, ranging from the amusing to the socio-politically pointed, and Leonardo DiCaprio’s central performance as a washed-up mercenary is courting Best Actor buzz. Anderson is regularly praised as one of the finest filmmakers of his generation and yet he’s been a perpetual bridesmaid with Oscar voters, nominated several times in both Director and Original Screenplay categories (including the likes of *There Will Be Blood* in 2007) but with no wins. The Academy love to be seen to be atoning for past ‘mistakes’ (note the sentimental wins for the likes of *Don Ameche* in the past), so this could be Anderson’s year.

Newcomer Chase Infiniti, who plays DiCaprio’s on-screen daughter, has also garnered plaudits and may be in line for a Best Supporting Actress nod. Will she clash with either Cynthia Erivo or Ariana Grande, stars of *Wicked: For Good*? Assuming they even get nominated, it remains to be seen how the Academy will designate Erivo and Grande in the Best Actress/Supporting Actress fields. If acting nominations fail to transpire, the *Wicked* follow-up will surely have a song nod in the bag given the plethora of original creations in the movie. Leonardo DiCaprio may be facing stiff competition from actor Timothée Chalamet. The latter is getting laudatory notices for his full-throttle performance as an ambitious ping pong entrepreneur in Josh Safdie’s *Marty Supreme*. Whereas the former already has an Oscar in the bank, the latter has yet to claim one, which could skew potential Oscar wins either way. Will the Academy go with the established favourite DiCaprio or the rising star Chalamet who, in his own words, is unapologetically aiming for greatness?



Still, when it comes to movies that have defined the cultural conversation in 2025, few can

Far left: Jessie Buckley attends the *Hamnet* screening while left: Jesse Plemons, Emma Stone and Director Yorgos Lanthimos attend the *Bugonia* UK premiere at the 69th BFI London Film Festival at The Royal Festival Hall in October 2025 Above: Leonardo DiCaprio attends the London Premiere of Paul Thomas Anderson’s *One Battle After Another* at Leicester Square last September

top *Sinners*. Ryan Coogler’s sexy, sultry and musically eclectic mix of blues juke joint and vampire myth was a big hit with both critics and audiences, communicating both a sense of artistry and a feel of pureblooded genre entertainment, quite an accomplishment in this post-COVID era of saturated content. Michael B. Jordan’s dual performance, playing twin brothers going to war with the supernatural, may well catapult him to the top of the Best Actor race while Coogler stands a good chance of being acknowledged for Best Director. Or does he?

The Oscars are infamously snooty when it comes to recognising auteur voices in horror movies, recent releases like Jordan Peele’s *Get Out* (2017) aside, so *Sinners* may have a better chance in the so-called technical categories for Ludwig Göransson’s score, cinematography, production design and costume design. One must also look outside the Hollywood eco-system. The Danish/Norwegian production *Sentimental Value* has received unanimous acclaim for its meta film-within-a-film structure as

a legendary filmmaker (played by Stellan Skarsgård) interrogates his own family history. Expect nods for Best Film Not in the English Language, Best Director for Joachim Trier and Best Supporting Actor for Skarsgård who gives a career-best performance. *Sentimental Value* will almost certainly compete with Park Chan-wook’s blackly comic satire *No Other Choice*, which has also emerged as a critical darling, as has Jafar Panahi’s suspenseful political thriller *It Was Just An Accident*. oscars.org ■

