

## Mixed Bag of Quality in ‘Oscar Nominated Short Films 2012’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on February 9, 2012 - 1:18pm

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Rating: **3.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – It’s that time of the year when you can get a leg up on your friends at your Oscar party when the short film categories pop up by seeing “Oscar Nominated Short Films 2012: The Animated” and “Oscar Nominated Short Films 2012: The Live Action,” opening around the country tomorrow, February 10th, 2012, and in Chicago at the Landmark Century Cinema. An expected mixed bag of quality, this year’s line-up of ten shorts in two separate programs is stronger than some years and weaker than others. There are stand-outs in both programs including a new short by Pixar (that will play in front of “Brave” this summer) and a stellar drama starring Ciaran Hinds from director Terry George (“Hotel Rwanda). Overall, the live action program is significantly stronger if you only have time for one.

### **“Oscar Nominated Short Films 2012: The Animated”**

In order of quality:

#### **“A Morning Stroll”**

Playing with form and style, the creators of this clever gem take a story of a man seeing a chicken walk down a city street, knock on a door, and be let in and turn it into a three-part comedy. Basically, the same story of the chicken who climbed the stairs is presented in stick figures in 1959, more detailed animation in 2009, and pure CGI chaos in 2059. It’s fun and very well-made and the reason it stands out in particular is, unlike most of the shorts, the length feels perfect. Too many this year feel a bit too long or too short. “A Morning Stroll” is perfectly timed and it will make you smile without trying as hard to do so as some of the other entries.

#### **“Wild Life”**

The longest of the animated shorts could have been a live-action film but would have cost a fortune and features an enormous cast. It is the story of a man trying to move to a relatively-unexplored section of the world and missing home and battling mother nature. The idea that relatively aristocratic people once had to give it all up to live in log cabins with brutal weather conditions just to “go west, young man” is a clever one for a short film, animated or not, and this one starts somewhat whimsical but gains a high level of melancholy as it goes on. The brush stroke-style animation adds a level of visual art that helps the piece stand out.



Wild Life

*Photo credit: Shorts International*

### **“La Luna”**

Pixar always makes the cut (although it would have been fun to watch the “Toy Story” short in front of “The Muppets” again) but rarely wins. I think that probably changes this year (perhaps due to the “sneak preview” nature of this year’s selection and its international flavor). “La Luna” is a cute tale of three generations cleaning the moon. They head out on a boat, lasso the moon as it gets close enough to the horizon, and clean off the stars that make it shine at night and even dictate the shape it looks to most of us. Very cute if a bit too slight to be my personal favorite.

### **“Dimanche/Sunday”**

Old-fashioned, charming animation that nonetheless left me a little cold. Essentially, it’s a dark little tale about a boy travelling with his father on a Sunday and learning a brutal lesson, I suppose. But it’s one of those pieces where the atmosphere is more important than the storytelling. It’s simple but effective.

### **“The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris”**

This is the only animated short that honestly annoyed me a bit. Yes, on paper, a Buster Keaton-esque protagonist who lives in a world where books come to life and interact and even fly sounds amazing on paper, the result is nowhere near as inspired as it sounds (even if it clearly thinks it’s the smartest kid on the playground). It’s just a bit too twee to watch books dancing to “Pop Goes the Weasel.” A man sleeps on a book, flies through words in another one, and the whole thing plays like a dream sequence within a dream sequence within an animated film. It’s a bit too incoherent and not poetic enough for that to be OK. However, it ends strong, saving its best imagery for the final scenes. Leave ‘em smiling and you have a better shot at an Oscar nod.



The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris  
Photo credit: Shorts International

“Oscar Nominated Short Films 2012: The Live Action”



To be fair, I like elements of all five films, so the ranking here is much closer than above.

“The Shore”

It seems a bit unfair to have such a high-caliber writer/director as Terry George working with the great Ciaran Hinds next to independently-produced fare but no one said the Oscars were fair. And the fact is that Hinds gives a better performance in “The Shore” than at least two of the nominees for Best Actor or Best Supporting Actor. He’s spectacular here as a man returning to Ireland after a quarter-century away. He and George (and the great Kerry Condon deserves praise as well) find a way to be melancholy without being cliched. It’s not your typical coming-home-again story. It’s beautifully shot and performed. Forget the acting categories. This is better than a few of the Best Picture nominees. I’m VERY rarely on the same page as the Academy in these categories, so I can’t say for sure this will win, but I hope so.

“Time Freak”

Since the Academy usually likes whimsy in their shorts, this one seems to have the best shot to dethrone “The Shore” and, unlike some years, I’ll be OK with that. It’s a clever, funny bit about an obsessive personality who finally develops a time machine and, instead of going back to Rome like he planned, begins messing around with every encounter. Feel bad about yelling at the dry cleaners? Go back. Over and over again. Chance encounter with the girl you like? Do it 100 times until you get it right. The idea that humans are such OCD people as a species that we wouldn’t get past the dry cleaners or the girl we want to date even with God-like power is very clever. Funny and well-made.





Raju  
Photo credit: Shorts International

“Raju”

Beautifully shot and heartbreaking, this short film details a couple who go to India to adopt a child. Happiness is replace by fear is replaced by regret in a film that only works if you really know nothing about it so I won’t spoil it here. Two strong central performances anchor it and the cinematography is stellar. It’s a bit too long but very well-made.

“Pentecost”

The concept here is simple but funny — treating altar boys as sports players on the morning of the big game. As a priest gives them the pep talk about communion, how they walk, closing their mouths, the parallel is clear. It’s very funny but a bit too slight compared to the emotion of “The Shore” or “Raju.” Although the Academy often goes funny over sentimental, so nothing would surprise me.

“Tuba Atlantic”

The only live-action that feels too whimsical for its own good is this Norwegian tale of a man spending his last six days (as he tells the doctor, “that’s very precise”) shooting seagulls with a machine gun and blowing them up with explosive-stuffed fish. Did I mention the old man is accompanied by a perky blonde angel of death? The fact that this is my #5 merely shows the strength of the live-action program this year because even this one has its moments. It’s just a bit too long for its own good.

For details on where to see the shorts, including how to buy them online, check out <http://theoscarshorts.shortcuts.tv/> [19]



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