

Go Tell It on the Mountain...Brokeback, That Is

By Brian Scott Mednick

Today *Brokeback Mountain* comes out – forgive the pun – on DVD. Winner of three Academy Awards, including Best Director for the versatile Ang Lee, *Brokeback Mountain* created a pop culture stir due its subject matter – the tortured twenty-year romance between two shepherders who choose the life expected of them instead of following their hearts. The film was simplistically dubbed “the gay cowboy movie,” which makes about as much sense as calling *Fiddler on the Roof* “that show about the dancing Jews” or *The Color Purple* “that film with all the black folks.”

I personally know people for whom the film was something of life changing experience. Sad to say, I also know some otherwise intelligent people who flat-out refused to see the film because of the so-called “ick factor” – they couldn’t bear seeing two men kiss onscreen. Puh-leeze! This is 21st Century New York City – you see men doing things more graphic just walking the streets of Chelsea. This is not a film about sex, it’s a film about love. What are these people afraid of?

The film’s cultural impact was so great that it even managed to make President Bush stutter and stammer (such a rare occurrence, of course) when someone asked him if he had seen it. Typical of the President when asked something he was not prepped for in advance, he nervously hemmed and hawed, saying that he had not. I guess Ennis del Mar and Jack Twist are not the kind of cowpokes the Christian Right approves of. Which brings me to the Oscar travesty. *Brokeback Mountain* seemed to be a lock for Best Picture. It seemed that only Roger Ebert, who never met a racial drama he didn’t like, predicted a *Crash* upset. Maybe he knew that the Academy voters are a group of hypocrites who put forth a liberal persona, pretending to be champions for the repressed and downtrodden. How good they feel when they award a straight actor like Tom Hanks an Oscar for playing a gay man dying of AIDS. They even awarded this year’s Best Actor prize to another brave heterosexual, Philip Seymour Hoffman, for playing Truman Capote. But when it came to the big prize, the Academy shuddered. They had a chance

to make history and instead played into the hands of the Christian conservatives they claim to despise so much.

Jack Nicholson's reaction when announcing *Crash* as Best Picture spoke volumes. Twenty years from now, who will be watching *Crash*? *Crash* will go down as a footnote in film history, remembered only as the movie that stole the Oscar from *Brokeback Mountain*, not unlike *How Green Was My Valley*, the forgotten film that won Best Picture over *Citizen Kane*. How many film schools teach whole classes devoted to *How Green Was My Valley*?

As for the Academy Awards, I don't have to wish I could quit them. I have. I have already made plans for next year's Oscars. I'm going to be watching *Brokeback Mountain*. And if I stem a rose or two during it, so be it. Yeah, I admit it. *Brokeback* got me good.

