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VES' latest special effect: perfect split of top awards

3 nods apiece for 'Kong,' 'Worlds'

By Sheigh Crabtree

The Visual Effects Society's fourth annual VES Awards celebrated the breadth and depth of computer-generated artistry Wednesday night at the Hollywood Palladium.

Peter Jackson's "King Kong" and Steven Spielberg's "War of the Worlds" went neck and neck throughout the evening only to tie by each winning three of the VES' six top awards.

"Kong's" Weta FX teams stormed off with outstanding VFX in a VFX-driven picture; outstanding animated character in a live-action film; and outstanding

created environment in a live-action motion picture for the New York Dawn Attack sequence.

"War's" Industrial Light + Magic crew captured best single VFX of the year for the Fleeing the Neighborhood sequence; outstanding models and miniatures; and outstanding compositing.

The evening's other surprises included the outstanding supporting VFX honors that went to Ridley Scott's "Kingdom of Heaven" and the award for outstanding animated character in an animated movie, which went to "Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit."

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Nick Park's mute clay-animated dog triumphed over the state-of-the-art, computer-generated characters rendered by PDI/DreamWorks in "Madagascar" and Blue Sky Studios/20th Century Fox Animation in "Robots."

But the night really belonged to Pixar Animation Studios' John Lasseter and VES founding member Jim Morris, both of whom received special recognition. Lasseter's voice actors, invited to present the evening's awards, provided much of the evening's entertainment.

John Ratzenberger drew parallels between compositing and compositing, the latter of which, he said, achieves the same results using less electricity. Bonnie Hunt disclosed that she loved Lasseter so much that the two had animated sex the previous night, and Cheech Marin notched a surprise "America's Next Top Model" joke.

During an event that celebrates creative collaboration, the most poignant tribute came when Edie McClurg — who gives voice to

Mini, a Midwestern minivan in "Cars," Pixar's upcoming summer release — talked about the last time she saw Pixar storyman Joe Ranft, who died in August.

Ranft and Lasseter were pretending to be menacing automobiles meant to intimidate Mini during a key sequence. The delight and inspired interaction between Ranft and Lasseter in the recording studio that McClurg recounted brought both the director and his wife, Nancy, to tears.

In accepting his Georges Melies Award, a red-eyed Lasseter recounted his career as a misunderstood animator at Disney, an experimental digital filmmaker at Lucasfilm, a fledgling studio head at Pixar and now the creative chief at Disney and Pixar.

Lasseter said Pixar animated films are an entertainment art form that grew out of computer science, but the films are made by artists with traditional animation and classic filmmaking talents.

Former Lucasfilm head Morris was presented with the Board of Directors' Award for his instrumental work in forming the society. ■