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eye on **the oscars sound & visual f/x II**

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# Craft kudos cast wide net

Going way beyond Oscar's single trophy, fledgling VES Awards gain stature in f/x biz

By **DANIEL FRANKEL**

Applying the scale of human development, Sony Imageworks topper Tim Sarnoff estimates that the visual effects craft and its fledgling trade org, the Visual Effects Society, are in their teenage years.

"Teenagers never feel they're irrelevant, it's the people around them that do," he quips.

Sure, the Visual Effects Society Awards — handed out for only the third time Feb. 16 — don't carry the same kind of industrywide weight that the kudos of other more established trade orgs do. But with 19 trophies honoring everything from visual f/x in TV commercials to those in videogames, they're already very relevant to f/x pros.

"This business is filled with hundreds of people who've spent years of their lives doing this," Sarnoff says. "It's hard to be cynical about this (awards show). It has the potential to be great."

Actually, it's more than hundreds of people. Currently, the 8-year-old VES has 1,150 members, up 22% since veteran Los Angeles city politico Eric Roth took over as executive director of the society in the middle of last year.



**ROTH**

Armed with a small staff of mostly interns and the "rap" befitting a former Los Angeles City Hall chief of staff, Roth has spent his time barnstorming film festivals, screenings, and just about every other networking function imaginable. Part of the job is teaching the industry at large common industry terms such as "compositing" and "matte painting," but also to hammer home the message that "a larger percentage of every entertainment dollar is going into visual effects these days."

As a society with no guild-like intention of getting involved with any kind of organized labor movement, establishing standards and practices for the developing f/x industry is among the VES' core tasks. But promotion of the industry in general is Job 1.

"The organization was going through some growing pains, and they asked me — someone with decent management skills — to take it to the next level," Roth says.

Of course, building up the kudos fits in with that agenda.

"The awards are fast becoming the most easily recognized event the society conducts," adds Roth, who often recounts a trip last year to George Lucas' Skywalker Ranch, during which he saw the "Star Wars" creator's VES lifetime achievement award prominently displayed.

As it does with every other craft, Oscar still rules in the visual effects world. Mimicking the

Academy's January bakeoff — a public event in which reels of contending films are presented to voters — the VES conducted its first "Big Reveal" several days later at the Skirball Cultural Center.

The Jan. 22 event drew reps from most of the big f/x shops and studios, but overall attendance was still less than half of what the Jan. 19 bakeoff received.

Still, Sarnoff says the VES' diversity of kudos — what other event honors *supporting* f/x in a motion picture? — offers something Oscar can't.

"They can get down to the granularity that exists in something like effects," he explains. "More than three people should be honored."

In terms of honoring visual f/x, one of the most well received decisions the VES has made is to separate f/x-heavy action, science-fiction and fantasy films from pics for which effects use is

much more subdued.

This year, the VES' best "visual-effects-driven motion picture" category is similar to the Academy's, with "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban" and "Spider-Man 2" making both lists. For its third nom, the Academy's visual f/x branch chose "I, Robot," while the VES went with "The Day After Tomorrow."

However, in its "visual effects in a motion picture" category, the VES also tapped "The Aviator," the kind of film in which the f/x don't take center stage, but are acclaimed nonetheless — and exactly the kind of pic most often overlooked in Oscar's f/x race.

## Tip sheet

**WHAT:** Third annual VES Awards

**WHEN:** Feb. 16

**WHERE:** Hollywood Palladium



### VES NOMINEES



**The Day After Tomorrow**



**Stargate Atlantis**



**The Aviator**

#### VISUAL EFFECTS IN AN EFFECTS-DRIVEN FILM

##### **The Day After Tomorrow** (Fox)

Karen Goulekas, Mike Chambers, Greg Strause, Remo Balcells

##### **Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban** (Warner Bros.)

Roger Guyett, Tim Burke, Theresa Corrao, Emma Norton

##### **Spider-Man 2** (Sony)

John Dykstra, Lydia Bottegoni, Anthony LaMolina, Scott Stokdyk

#### SUPPORTING VISUAL EFFECTS IN A FILM

##### **The Aviator** (Miramax)

Rob Legato, Ron Ames, Matthew Gratzner, Pete Travers

##### **Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind** (Focus)

Louis Morin, Mark Dornfeld

##### **Troy** (Warner Bros.)

Nick Davis, Chas Jarrett, Jon Thum, Gary Brozenich

#### SINGLE VISUAL EFFECT

##### **The Aviator** "Hell's Angels,"

Rob Legato, Ron Ames, David Seager, Peter Travers

##### **The Day After Tomorrow** "Tidal Wave,"

Karen Goulekas, Mike Chambers, Chris Horvath, Matthew Butler

##### **Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban**

Bill George, David Andrews, Sandra Scott, Dorne Huebler

##### **Spider-Man 2** "Clock Tower,"

John Dykstra, Lydia Bottegoni, Dan Abrams, John Monos

#### ANIMATED CHARACTER IN A LIVE-ACTION FILM

##### **Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban** "Hippogriff,"

Michael Eames, David Lomax, Felix Balbas, Pablo Grillo

##### **Hellboy** "Sammuel" (Sony)

Dovi Anderson, Todd Labonte, Sven Jensen, Paul Thuriot

##### **Lemony Snicket... "Sunny"** (Paramount)

Rick O'Connor, Martin Murphy, Indira Guerrieri, Sam Breach

#### ANIMATED CHARACTER IN AN ANIMATED FILM

##### **The Incredibles** "Bob Parr/Mr. Incredible" (Disney)

Craig T. Nelson, Bill Wise, Bill Sheffler, Bolhem Bouchiba

##### **The Polar Express** "Steamer" (Warner Bros.)

Michael Jeter, David Schaub, Renato Dos Anjos, Roger Vizard

##### **Shark Tale** "Angie" (DreamWorks)

Renee Zellweger, Ken Duncan

##### **Shrek 2** "Puss in Boots" (DreamWorks)

Antonio Banderas, Raman Hui

#### VISUAL EFFECTS IN A TV SERIES

##### **Stargate Atlantis** "Rising" (syndicated, MGM)

John Gajdecki, Bruce Woloshyn, Jinnie Pak, Tara Conley

##### **Stargate SG-1** "Lost City, part 2" (syndicated, MGM)

James Tichenor, Shannon Gurney, Craig Van Den Biggelaar, Bruce Woloshyn

##### **Star Trek Enterprise** "Storm Front, part 2" (UPN)

Ronald Moore, Daniel Curry, David Takemura

#### LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

**Robert Zemeckis**

#### BOARD OF DIRECTORS AWARD

**Don Shay**

#### GEORGES MELIES AWARD

**Robert Abel**

The rest of this year's VES noms can be found on the Web at [www.vesawards.com](http://www.vesawards.com)