

## Toronto: What Oscar Clues Are Wrapped In Today's Massive Announcement Of TIFF Films?

By PETE HAMMOND | Tuesday July 22, 2014 @ 10:48am PDT

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Well, they are coming hot and heavy now. With [Toronto International Film Festival](#) announcing 13 Galas and 46 Special Presentations this morning in what is really just the first wave of their upcoming lineup, and on top on New York Film Festival's confirmation of their Opening ([Gone Girl](#)), Centerpiece ([Inherent Vice](#)) and Closing ([Birdman](#)), BFI London's opener of *The Imitation Game* and Venice Film Festival's opener (also *Birdman*) the awards season landscape is starting to fill in a bit more significantly. Venice in fact will

announce their entire lineup tomorrow but today's TIFF list gives us some further clues as to how the Oscar game is being played on the fest circuit. Of course Telluride is another factor, but they won't officially announce *anything* until their fest begins just before Labor Day weekend.

One player that I hear won't be going to Telluride this year, or it seems Venice, is Warner Bros which has used both fests significantly in the past (Warners had Oscar winners *Argo* and *Gravity* at the past two Tellurides and *Gravity* opened Venice last year). But, as predicted here, they are going to Toronto in a BIG way with World Premieres of three of their Fall films, [The Judge](#), [This Is Where I Leave You](#) and [The Good Lie](#). Will TIFF mean the launch of an Oscar campaign for the trio, or is it just an effective way of getting the most media bang for your buck in releasing these early Fall titles?



Certainly *The Judge* would seem to have acting potential for star Robert Downey Jr. and supporting candidate Robert Duvall. I have seen Shawn Levy's highly entertaining dysfunctional family dramedy *This Is Where I Leave You* with a great ensemble of actors including Jason Bateman, Jane Fonda, Tina Fey and Adam Driver and it has to be included on any list particularly since it gives Fonda her juiciest screen turn in a long while.

And Alcon's *The Good Lie*, which screenwriter Margaret Nagle has been nurturing for the better part of a decade, offers star Reese Witherspoon one of her stronger roles, but so does Fox Searchlight's *Wild* in which she plays a woman who sets out on a 1000 mile-plus journey after the breakup of her marriage. TIFF looks to be a 2014 Oscar race coming out party for Witherspoon who already has a statuette for *Walk The Line*. I am betting Searchlight also takes *Wild* to Telluride, despite the well-reported rivalry between the two fests. Interestingly, though *Birdman*, with a strong Michael Keaton Best Actor-buzzed role, will be opening Venice and closing New York, it wasn't among the titles on today's TIFF list. I also suspect it will play Telluride so could that mean it is skipping Toronto, much like Telluride favorites *Nebraska*, *All Is Lost* and *Inside Llewyn Davis* did last year to go straight to New York?



Of course a smart strategy is everything (well, a movie has to actually be *good* too) and Toronto, which generally runs about 250 to 300 movies over the course of the fest can't have everything, but it seems more than ever that distributors are carefully picking their battlefields. Though Warners is taking that trio of movies to TIFF, they chose New York for Paul Thomas Anderson's much-anticipated *Inherent Vice*, just as they did last year for Spike Jonze's *Her* which went on to be a major player at the Oscars. However the studio also used Toronto's vast media access to gain attention for *Her* by doing a clip show, Jonze Q&A and reception to whet appetites for his film. Will they do that again this year with Anderson and *Vice*? The film, a December release like *Her* was, is completely finished and has been showing to select media types. There was a small screening last week at the Steven J. Ross theatre on the Warner Bros lot in Los Angeles.



The Weinstein Company has always been a big presence at TIFF . Last year they had many films there including World Premieres of *August: Osage County* and *Mandela* that the company later publicly had second thoughts about rushing. It might have hurt both ultimately in their Oscar quest. It appears this year Weinstein is taking it a lot slower with only their November 21 release, *The Imitation Game*, which TWC picked up based on 20 minutes at Berlin and hoped for the best. By all accounts they got it and I predict this one will be their major player all through awards season – and they seem to know it from what I've heard from insiders at TWC. It could put stars Benedict Cumberbatch and Keira Knightley in the acting races too. Though, as noted, it has been announced as the



opener for BFI London in October, its Toronto launch should give it a significant boost just as TIFF did for *Silver Linings Playbook* two years ago. Among other TWC awards season titles like *St. Vincent*, *Suite Francaise*, *Big Eyes*, *Paddington*, *Macbeth* there still is no buzz that these are going to show up on the fest circuit yet, but stay tuned. *The Disappearance Of Eleanor Rigby*, a September release played Toronto last year as a two-part movie and Cannes in May as the single version that will be released first to theaters so don't expect that again in Toronto – unless the fest wants to be a completist.



Looking down the list at other potential Oscar titles, Mike Binder's *Black And White* which is going to be one of the Galas, stands out. Though still officially without a distributor (I hear Lionsgate/Roadside could possibly be a contender), the expectation is that this will open for Oscar consideration by the end of the year. And it should. Kevin Costner, who also produced, has never been better and he's matched by co-stars Octavia Spencer and Anthony Mackie in a strong drama dealing with family, race, addictions and other things that

could be catnip for Academy voters. Liv Ullmann's *Miss Julie*, Jason Reitman's *Men, Women And Children*, Jon Stewart's directorial debut *Rosewater* and particularly the Stephen Hawking biopic/love story, *The Theory Of Everything* which stars Eddie Redmayne and Felicity Jones in what look to be Oscar-magnet performances are other titles Oscar-watchers will have their eyes on at this year's TIFF.

And then the movies we *already* know to be Oscar-bait out of Cannes will also be on display including Galas for Bennett Miller's *Foxcatcher* and Canadian fave David Cronenberg's *Map To The Stars*, along with special presentations of *Force Majeure*, *Mr. Turner* and *Whiplash*. And as always with TIFF there are many more announcements waiting in the wings.

Still no mention anywhere of Christopher Nolan's biggie, *Interstellar* but we will keep watching the skies – and the fests – for continuing developments in the nascent race for Oscar 2014.

