

Motion picture academy honors nerds of filmmaking

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Actress and host Elizabeth Banks arrives at the Scientific and Technical Academy Awards in Beverly Hills, Calif. on Saturday, Feb. 20, 2010. (AP Photo/Dan Steinberg)

(AP) -- Forty-five men you've probably never heard of were honored with an Academy Awards ceremony of their own that recognized scientific and technical achievements in moviemaking.

The engineers behind the latest in ambient occlusion, digital intermediate processing, sub-pixel offsets and micro-positioning platforms were celebrated at a Saturday night gala at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel, presented by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and hosted by a very unscientific Elizabeth Banks.

The 36-year-old actress joked that she would "read - yet not fully understand - our journey through the scientific and technical awards."

Wearing a sparkling white gown and standing in front of four giant Oscar statues, Banks presented 15 plaques and certificates to scientists from Germany, Sweden, Austria, England, New Zealand, Hungary, Denmark, Japan and the United States.

The men were honored for developing systems to improve color on film, advancing performance-capture technology, creating new means to light actors in computer-generated scenes and building high-tech scanners used in modern filmmaking. You may have seen the results of their work in films such as "King Kong," "The Lord of the Rings," "Spider-Man 2" and "Iron Man."

While the March 7 Academy Awards ceremony will be all A-list glitz and televised glam, the Sci-Tech Awards are an off-camera, low-key event, with one humble scientist after another taking the stage and nervously thanking his family and colleagues.

Double-winner Tony Sedivy, who helped develop a film scanner and a 3D hardware system, said receiving the academy honors was "the highlight of my life."

Another honoree, Richard Kirk, clutched his golden plaque with a tiny Oscar on it and said, "I only hope one day I can be as awesome as my friends and family will think I am with this."

A jazz quintet played as winners pushed away from their filet mignon and Chilean sea bass dinners to accept their awards on stage. One tried to explain the genesis of his invention to Banks, who shrugged and smiled playfully.

The star, whose credits include "Seabiscuit" and "The 40-Year-Old Virgin," effortlessly discussed film emulsion technology, spectral response and point-based color bleeding for indirect illuminations as she presented the awards with a lot of help from a teleprompter.

Academy president Tom Sherak praised the actress for her flawless handling of the high-tech jargon - whether or not she fully understood it.

Banks called the Sci-Tech ceremony "a great reminder of everything that goes into the finished product we see in movie theaters."

"I applaud your nerd-dom," she said.

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