

After Roma swept the Oscars, Steven Spielberg seeks to block streaming films

Enlarge / Like some other industry figures, Spielberg doesn't seem to like where Hollywood is going.

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A spokesperson for Amblin, the production company run by director Steven Spielberg, has told IndieWire that Spielberg plans to support an effort to change the rules of the Oscars to bar some films primarily distributed via streaming platforms like Netflix from nomination for Academy Awards.

"Steven feels strongly about the difference between the streaming and theatrical situation," the spokesperson told the publication. "He'll be happy if the others will join [his campaign] when that comes up [at the Academy Board of Governors meeting]."

The conversation in Hollywood about the legitimacy of films made for streaming has been fierce since critical darling *Roma*—a Netflix-backed film from *Y Tu Mamá También*, *Children of Men*, and *Gravity* director Alfonso Cuarón—took home Best Director, Best Foreign Language Film, and Best Cinematography in an unprecedented sweep for a streaming film. However, *Roma* lost Best Picture to controversial film *Green Book*, which Spielberg backed.

Some industry figures have proposed a requirement that films run in theaters for at least four weeks before they can be considered for Oscars. Others have said they believe the amount of money Netflix spent lobbying for *Roma* (estimates range from \$25 to 50 million—much more than is common, IndieWire reports) was unfair. But there is not yet any consensus on which specific changes to the rules will be proposed or potentially ratified.

When asked in an earlier interview with ITV News whether streaming is a threat to cinema, Spielberg provided this answer:

It is a challenge to cinema, the same way television in the 1950s pulled people away from movie theaters and everybody stayed at home cause it was more fun to stay at home and watch, you know, a comedy on television in the 1950s than it was to go out to see a movie. So Hollywood's used to that. We are accustomed to being highly competitive with television.

The difference today is that a lot of studios would rather just make a branded, tentpole—you know, guaranteed box office hits from their inventory of branded, you know, successful movies than take chances on smaller films. And those smaller films the studios used to make routinely are now going to Amazon, Hulu, and Netflix. And that's where—and by the way, the television is greater today than it has ever been in the history of television. There's better writing, better directing, better performances, better stories are being told. Television is really thriving with quality and art, but it poses a clear and present danger to filmgoers.

Further in the conversation, he explained his reasoning for why films released primarily on Netflix or the like should not be candidates for the Oscars:

Fewer and fewer filmmakers are going to struggle to raise money or to go over to compete in Sundance and possibly get

one of the specialty labels to release their films theatrically, publicly. And more of them are going to let the SVOD businesses finance their films, maybe with the promise of a slight, one-week theatrical window to qualify them for awards as a movie.

But in fact, once you commit to a television format, you're a TV movie. You certainly—if it's a good show—deserve an Emmy. But not an Oscar... I don't believe that films that are just given token qualifications in a couple of theaters for less than a week should qualify for the Academy Award nomination.

Historically, TV movies have not attracted the kind of filmmaking talent and production values that films on Netflix or Amazon do now, and this has created a point of contention in the industry when it comes to classification. Later, Spielberg reiterated the point while accepting an award from the Cinema Audio Society:

I hope all of us really continue to believe that the greatest contributions we can make as filmmakers is to give audiences the motion picture theatrical experience. I'm a firm believer that movie theaters need to be around forever... The sound is better in homes more than it ever has been in history, but there's nothing like going to a big dark theatre with people you've never met before and having the experience wash over you. That's something we all truly believe in.

Currently, films do not need to run exclusively in theaters to qualify for Oscars, but they must play for one week in New York and Los Angeles and receive reviews in print newspapers—qualifications *Roma* met. (In fact, *Roma* played for as long as three weeks in some theaters, and it ran in theaters outside of New York and LA as well.)

The Academy holds a post-Oscars meeting every year. Spielberg reportedly will seek to promote the changes at that meeting.

The Academy gave a comment acknowledging that it would discuss the issue of streaming: "Awards rules discussions are ongoing with the branches. And the Board will likely consider the topic at the April meeting."

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