

## From devil in Prada to Oscars diva?

By SAMANTHA CRITCHELL  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

### NEW YORK

Meryl Streep will again walk the red carpet Sunday at the Academy Awards as a nominee for best actress.

This time will be different from the other 13 times she's been nominated for an Oscar: She's representing "The Devil Wears Prada," a film full of style, glamour and super-chic clothes.

But Streep's own style is usually somewhat lower key than that of imperious fashion editor Miranda Priestley, whom Streep portrayed in the film.

"Meryl is the total opposite of the role she played. She was really acting. Meryl is more earthy," said Christine Schwab, author of "Style for Grown-Up Girls" (HarperCollins). "I wish she'd incorporate a little more of Miranda's style on the red carpet."

So what is a red-carpet outfit worthy of Miranda, editor of the fictional Vogue-like magazine Runway?

If Streep really were the most powerful woman in fashion, she'd wear a one-of-a-kind dress, not even couture but something made especially for her, says Mary Alice Stephenson, a celebrity stylist.

Stephenson hopes Streep developed a taste for high fashion making "Devil," and that designers also are more aware of Streep as a red-carpet beauty. "She is having a moment," she said.



Two-time Oscar winner Meryl Streep arrives for the Academy Awards in 2006. This year she's a best-actress nominee.

# Exploring real-life Effie



Oscar nominee Jennifer Hudson stars as Effie in "Dreamgirls." The character is modeled after a real-life Supremes singer, the late Florence Ballard.

## Oscar-nominated movie renews interest in singer

By SVEN GUSTAFSON  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

### DETROIT

Like Effie, the "Dreamgirls" character which drew from her life, Florence Ballard had a triumphant return to the stage after her fall from grace from The Supremes.

Singing at Ford Auditorium in Detroit on June 25, 1975, Ballard shook off years of drinking and other troubles and put on a dynamic performance that drew wide acclaim and revived interest in her career.

"She was a wonderful singer," said Martha Reeves, Ballard's former Motown labelmate.

But unlike Effie, Florence Ballard's road to a comeback didn't go much further than that night. In 1976, Ballard, one of the original Supremes, died of a heart attack at age 32, almost 10 years after she was kicked out of the legendary girl group.

While Diana Ross remains an international icon and Mary Wilson continues to perform nationwide, Ballard is known, if at all, as a tragic figure.

But with the release of the movie "Dreamgirls," and Jennifer Hudson's Oscar-nominated performance in the role based on Ballard, Ballard's family is hoping it will provide a new opportunity to let the world know about the real Florence.

"I thought that Jennifer Hudson did a great job," Maxine Ballard, Florence's sister, said in an interview at her suburban Detroit home.

But she summarized the Effie character, which originated in the Broadway version of "Dreamgirls" in the early '80s, as "a very mild Florence Ballard because there would have been some slaps and some bops or whatever and somebody would have been picking themselves up off the floor."



The Supremes, pictured in 1966, included Diana Ross, on top of the slide, Mary Wilson, on the stairs, and Florence Ballard. "Dreamgirls" and Jennifer Hudson's Oscar-nominated performance in the role based on Ballard highlights the singer's contributions to the group.

"I'm just telling you how the real Florence Ballard was."

Maxine Ballard has penned a yet-to-be-released book titled "The True Story of Florence (Blondie) Ballard" (the nickname references the hair color she inherited from an Irish ancestor).

Florence was the ninth of 15 children born to Jesse and Lurlee Ballard. Her father, who worked for General Motors, played steel guitar, sang the blues and loved to tell stories to his kids. Florence, Maxine and most of the rest of the younger siblings grew up singing in the choir at a local spiritualist church, Ballard said.

"She always had drive and passion about everything," Ballard said of her sister. "My father named her

The Flying Red Horse because she couldn't sit still."

Florence was approached one day sitting on the steps of her home in a Detroit housing project by Milton Jenkins, the manager of a pre-Temptations outfit called the Primes. He was looking for an accompanying act, and he asked her to lead the Primettes.

Rounded out by Ross, Wilson and Barbara Martin, who quickly left the group, the Primettes became The Supremes, and made their debut on the Motown label in 1961.

Ballard initially sang lead on at least some songs, but after the sweet-sounding, glamorous Ross was given the lead spot, the group recorded five consecutive No. 1 singles from 1964-65,

## Top performances forgotten by Oscar

By JAKE COYLE  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

When the Oscar nominations were announced weeks ago, they omitted some of the year's most fun and lively performances.

Among them:

**Daniel Craig, "Casino Royale":** No performance was more anticipated last year than Craig's entry into the 007 canon, and the consensus was clear: the blond Bond more than met expectations.

Craig's nuanced performance came in that dirty genre ("action movie") and therefore isn't suited for the Oscars, even though they share the same taste in attire (tuxedos).

**Jack Black, "Nacho Libre":** As a wannabe luchador wrestler, Black's insanity leaps off the screen in the sometimes too-

precious "Nacho Libre."

Whether in his red and aqua suit or simply curly-haired and mustachioed, seldom has a movie character ever been so funny simply by appearance.

**Dave Chappelle, "Block Party":** It's true that "Block Party" is a documentary, but don't let that fool you: Chappelle is most certainly playing a part.

As a mix of comedian, musician and social do-gooder, Chappelle hosts the concert he always wanted to see. He's at his best doing his James Brown impression, explaining the power of "Hit me!"

**Rob Brydon, "Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story":** If one pays attention to Michael Winterbottom's uneven film-within-a-film, it's clear all the best parts feature Brydon, especially his conversations with co-star Steve

Coogan that bookend the movie.

While the credits roll, he discusses the influences on his craft: "I look for truth, and that's why I go to Pacino. That's why I go to Hopkins. ... I go to Streisand."

**Kevin Kline, "A Prairie Home Companion":** Kline is clearly having fun in bringing to life Guy Noir, the recurring '40s-style private eye character in Garrison Keillor's beloved radio program.

**Ken Davitian, "Borat":** Yes, he's actually an actor. Of all the things in Sacha Baron Cohen's film that one questions as real or fake, you don't for a minute doubt Davitian as Azamat Bagatov, Borat's (mostly) loyal sidekick and manager.

Without speaking a word of English, Davitian transformed into Bagatov as much as Baron Cohen did Borat.

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