

New York critics pour on the praise for 'Milk'

Their gala gets awards season going

By Kelly Carter
Special for USA TODAY

NEW YORK — The New York Film Critics Circle kicked off the annual race toward Oscar Monday night with a gala honoring its picks for 2008's tops in film.

"January is award season, and everybody is into it," *Milk* supporting-actor winner Josh Brolin said. "(*Milk* co-star) Sean (Penn) and I came in the same car, and I am very moved," Brolin said of *Milk*'s awards. "I think it's a wonderful thing to be able to get, because they are real critics."

Brolin praised Penn on the red carpet. "He's an incredible actor. I definitely look up to him. I can because he's older than I am."

Penn later presented Brolin with his award: "Had (the NYFCC) only given it to me, I would have gotten so much grief. ... Josh and I promise that we will not repeat the fact that you're giving these awards to two surfers from California."

Supporting-actress honoree Penelope Cruz (*Vicky Cristina Barcelona*) said she was "surprised and happy" when she learned of her award. "It's a tough crowd that I really respect," Cruz said. "We didn't expect it, so I'm very honored and grateful."

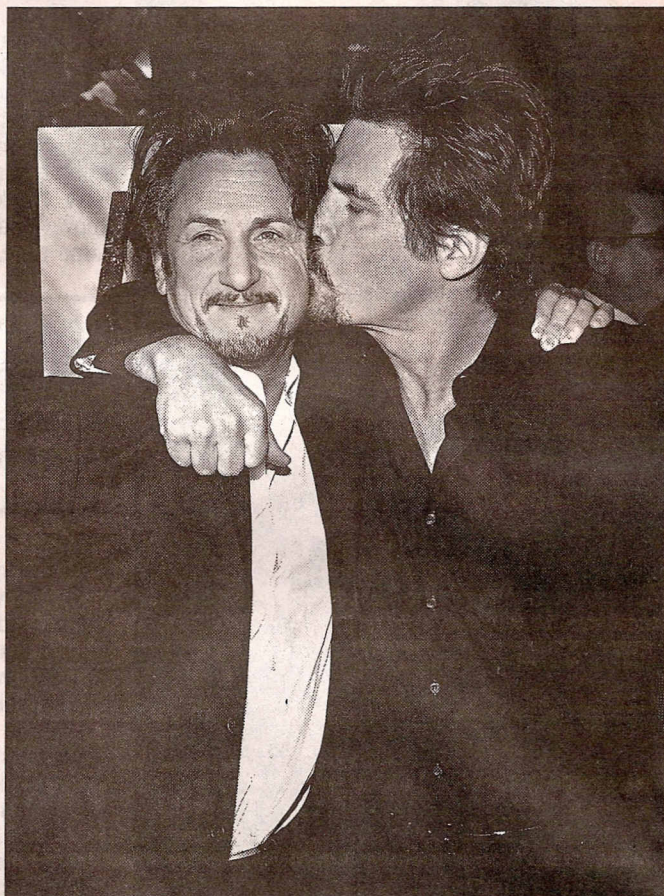
Happy-Go-Lucky star Sally Hawkins called being honored by the Circle "phenomenal."

"I'm so proud to get this support from these people who really know film," she said. "It's a small film and doesn't have a huge budget, and it's made quite uniquely."

Milk director Gus Van Sant shared Hawkins' sentiments. "The New York literary scene and newspaper scene is the center of the world. It sort of overpowers everything else as far as the opinions, so it's important."

Jenny Lumet, who was honored for writing the *Rachel Getting Married* screenplay, joked that she's not personally highbrow, but she was happy to receive a "very highbrow" award.

"New Yorkers know their movies, and to have a New York critic pat you on the back is huge," she said.



Photos by Evan Agostini, AP

A kiss between co-stars: *Milk*'s Sean Penn, left, and Josh Brolin, both winners at the New York Film Critics Circle event.



"It's a tough crowd": But Penelope Cruz won them over in *Vicky*.

2008 New York Film Critics Circle winners

Film: *Milk*

Actress: Sally Hawkins, *Happy-Go-Lucky*

Actor: Sean Penn, *Milk*

Supporting actress: Penelope Cruz, *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*

Supporting actor: Josh Brolin, *Milk*

Director: Mike Leigh, *Happy-Go-Lucky*

Foreign-language film: *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*

First film: Courtney Hunt, *Frozen River*

Animated film: *WALL-E*

Cinematographer: Anthony Dod Mantle, *Slumdog Millionaire*

Screenplay: Jenny Lumet, *Rachel Getting Married*