

Film REVIEWER'S picks ... Top 10 Best Movies of 2016

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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It has been another fascinating year filled with plenty of memorable titles. Here's a list of some of my favorites over the past 12 months. You may not feel the same way about them as I did, but there may be a few here that you haven't seen and may make an impression.

1. Hell or High Water

This topical, Texas set crime drama about a pair of desperate bank robbers rang true with its current and relevant themes. Filled with wonderfully eccentric characters from the leads to the small town clerks and waitresses, not to mention thrilling heists with unpredictable complications, it's both exciting and a commentary on the troubles facing many rural families today. This feature moves like a bullet and always rings true.

2. Manchester by the Sea

Grief is the subject of this downbeat character study. Casey Affleck gives a marvelous performance, playing a man dealing with multiple tragedies and trying to hold his emotions in check. This is the type of film that could have become overly ponderous and pretentious, but there's a steady dose of dark humor between the lead and his nephew as they attempt to cope with a terrible situation. As bleak as it is, this effort is memorably compelling and heartbreaking.

3. Hunt for the Wilderpeople

This hilariously quirky comedy from New Zealand managed to be both silly and sentimental without veering too far in either direction. Young star Julian Dennison holds his own as an awkward, rap-obsessed teen alongside grizzled vet Sam Neil as the two travel through the remote bush. They make for an unusual and thoroughly entertaining misfit pairing and the laughs never cease from the opening credits to the close.

4. April and the Extraordinary World

There were several solid animated films this year, but the one that keeps sticking in my brain is this visually spectacular France/Belgium/Canada co-production set in a twisted future where coal is the only means of power. It's a blazing adventure flick that features a subtle environmentalist theme as well as slipping in commentary on the importance of science and technology between the inventive, wild images.

5. Lion

Often, film critics complain about clichés and predictable story lines. Despite having plenty (if not all) of the familiar elements, this Australian effort still managed to shine. This tale about a boy from India searching for his lost family was so good at bringing the elements together that the end result still resonates emotionally. The performances, music and cinematography were so strong that even a hardened individual like myself couldn't help but get teary-eyed.

6. Nocturnal Animals

Here's a movie that falls into the category of love it or hate it. It effortlessly integrates three separate tales within one framework and asks the viewer to figure out the connection between the lead character, her relationship with an ex-husband and a fictional novel that he has written. It gives no straight answers and keeps your brain searching for meaning in the events. Whatever you make of it, this is another movie filled with exceptional performances and a unique narrative.

7. Sing Street

This Irish 80s set coming-of-age comedy/drama exudes pure charisma. It's a movie about music and how it relates to discovering one's identity. Populated almost entirely with high school kids, the acting is surprisingly consistent and exceptional across the board; the infectious tunes and music-related talk are nothing short of a blast to take in. As little independent efforts go, this one doesn't get any sweeter or more enjoyable.

8. Christine

Some films get lost in the awards shuffle. This underrated one deserves more attention. It's a true story and character study about a television news reporter suffering from deep depression. Rebecca Hall gives a stunningly authentic and believable performance as a woman uncomfortable in her own skin. Her mannerisms and at times contradictory behavior feel true and communicate the feeling of utter helplessness of one suffering from such a condition better than any other film that I can think of.

9. Moonlight

This heavy drama makes a powerful impact thanks to its impressive ensemble, seamlessly following its lead character through a troubled and tumultuous youth into adulthood. It's a quiet and powerful film that presents a different kind of coming-of-age story, helped by several memorable performances and images that linger in the brain long after the credits roll.

10. La La Land

Making a film entirely fashioned after musicals of the 40s is no easy chore, and the fact that this effort turned out as well as it did is remarkable in and of itself. Filled with impressive and elaborate dance numbers captured in expansive long takes, several memorable melodies and a sweet, endearing love story, this effort may be gimmicky, but is filled to the brim with old-fashioned magic.

And there were plenty of other winners. The sci-fi drama *Arrival* also landed a powerful emotional blow. If you can get on its wavelength,

The Lobster

ended up being one of the most original (and bizarre) eccentricities of the year. Speaking of the oddball,

The Dressmaker

is one of the quirkiest movies in some time; it's also very funny. The French adventure

Long Way North

was another strikingly animated film that stayed with me.

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Eye in the Sky offered a chilling look at the moral and ethical questions faced by military forces, while the thriller *Remember* offered a different take (as well as a shocking finale) on the revenge picture. *The Nice Guys* was one of the most entertaining buddy pictures in some time, filled with amusing banter between the leads. And for horror fans, things didn't get any more tense and chilling this year than the unsettling moments delivered in *Green Room* and *Don't Breathe*.

By Glenn Kay

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