

Top 10 films of the decade

Contributed by Trent Daniel
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In making my list of the Top 10 films of the decade, I must admit that I have not yet seen certain films that have garnered much praise and attention (films such as 21 Grams, The Hurt Locker, Up, Waltz with Bashir and The White Ribbon). I will also not even pretend my list is the definitive Top 10 for the decade. Still, if I can get at least one reader to consider viewing each of these outstanding films, my attempt has served its purpose.

1) Mulholland Drive-Lynch, 2001

I selected Lynch's erotic masterpiece as the best film of the decade simply because it continues to amaze and confound me with every viewing. Save for perhaps Lynch's own Eraserhead and the masterworks of Bunuel, no film has come as close to capturing the actual tone and texture of a dream. Each viewing presents a new clue, a different way to view the mystery that was not noticed before. It features great acting, with Naomi Watts giving one of the great acting performances of the decade. Equal parts erotic, funny and scary as hell, it's about all I could want out of a movie.

{moseasymedia media=http://www.youtube.com/v/E8j1hHnFJZo}

2) The Dark Knight-Nolan, 2008

The blockbuster of the decade is also one of the best films of the decade. It is the film all blockbusters and superhero films will be measured against from now on. [[Heath Ledger]]'s legendary Joker, arguably the performance of the decade, is its great triumph, followed closely by its impressive feat of actually telling a story with brevity and depth, for it is so easy for a blockbuster to sacrifice story in the name of cramming as many special effects as possible on the screen (see any [[Michael Bay]] movie). The Dark Knight takes the time to examine the moral choices a superhero must make (we all must make) on a daily basis-as well as what we would be willing to sacrifice for the perceived greater good.

3) No Country For Old Men-Coen, 2007

The Coen brother's triumph might turn out to be the only successful attempt to bring the brilliant but challenging prose of [[Cormac McCarthy]] to the screen (though an attempt to bring his gruesome horror western Blood Meridian to the screen is currently in the works). Upon examination, the story is startlingly simple-a character who is pure evil is placed in a simple plot involving the lost loot of a drug deal gone bad, while other characters react off of him. Perhaps the ending angered so many people at first because it was too honest: life is harsh and sometimes the bad guys do win.

4) Best in Show-Guest, 2000

In a decade filled with memorable, trend setting comedies, this was still the funniest for me. The journey to and proceedings of various bizarre characters at a national dog show is at turns hysterical and surprisingly suspenseful. There is a subtle message of our "win at all costs" society undercutting the film, yet Guest wisely does not let any sort of message get in the way of the hilarity. My favorite character: Parker Posey's borderline psychotic yuppie wife from hell ("Busy Bee!!!")

5) Pan's Labyrinth-del Toro, 2006

A truly great, visually stunning fantasy film, Pan's Labyrinth seamlessly and brilliantly meshes the fantasy world of a young girl with the decidedly grim real world of the Spanish Civil War. Her "real world" is dominated by her stepfather, a cruel officer in Franco's army. She escapes at night into a fantasy world with a faun-like creature as her guide. The faun tells her that she is a princess, but must prove who she is by surviving three challenging, bizarre and frightening tasks (the middle task is one of the scariest scenes in movie history). It took an amazing tightrope act on the part of del Toro to keep the worlds separate, yet integral to the overall story-one that boils down to how our lives are about choices, even when we are young.

6) The Lord of the Rings Trilogy-Jackson, 2001 to 2003

This trilogy was clearly the blockbuster of the decade before The Dark Knight surpassed it. The trilogy must be looked at as a whole, in my opinion, though I feel the 2nd and 3rd installments are slightly inferior to the magnificent first installment. Still, the trilogy is a triumph for special effects, yet does not smother Tolken's tale with them.

7) Let the Right One In-Alfredson, 2008

Readers of some of my previous lists already know I consider this gem to already be one of the greatest vampire films ever made. It is an outstanding, haunting film that works, both as a horror film with some genuine scares and as a painfully accurate portrait of a lonely 12 year old boy in desperate need of a relationship-and finds one, in the form of a forever adolescent vampire girl. The film is beautifully structured so that when various haunting shots and "scare" scenes do occur, they are given even more power and meaning. Among my favorites are when we are given brief glimpses of Eli's frightening supernatural powers, such as when her eyes glow in the dark, or a truly haunting shot where it seems that Eli's "true" age is revealed for a moment. This classic shows that the horror genre can indeed have depth when a film makes the effort, as this one does.

8) A History of Violence-Cronenberg, 2005

Cronenberg's film is one of the most perceptive studies of violence and its effect on the human condition since [[Sam Peckinpah's Straw Dogs]] (1971). A seeming act of heroism reveals that one Tom Stall, an ordinary man living a Rockwellian life with a perfect family in a perfect middle American town, has been concealing a dark secret for 20 years (to reveal more would be unthinkable for those who haven't seen it). This film asks some tough questions: Even in our so called civilized society, is it still survival of the fittest? Is peace at home earned through bloodshed elsewhere? I will add that William Hurt has a brief, 5-minute performance near the end of the film that is so extraordinary that he garnered-and deserved-an Oscar nomination.

9) Happy Go Lucky-Leigh, 2008

This romantic comedy features a charming character named Poppy (Sally Hawkins) who retains her cheerfulness and free spirit, even when she encounters a few hard life lessons along the way, as well as some decidedly un-cheerful characters, most notably her borderline psychotic driving instructor. Importantly, Poppy is not naïve. She is quite aware there is sadness and darkness in the world and she encounters some of these moments a few times in this film. What is different about Poppy (and what makes the film special) is that she deals with these rough moments, but does not let them beat her. She genuinely likes people, likes her life and, most importantly, likes herself. Unlike too many people, she chooses to be happy.

10) The Pianist-Polanski, 2002

The film is based on the autobiography of Wladyslaw Szpilman ([[Adrian Brody]]), a Polish Jew and classical musician who survived the Nazi occupation of Warsaw less through heroism than through the grace of God (with help from the Polish resistance), yet it could also mirror much of the experiences of Polanski himself, who lost his mother to the Holocaust. In a strange way, the character's aloofness and stoicism helps save and shield him from the horror all around him. Though Schindler's List is deservedly praised, The Pianist is a sobering reminder that most Jews did not survive the Holocaust-and most who did owed their survival not to the heroism of others, but to sheer fate.

10 honorable mentions

- Oldboy (Park, 2003)

- Kill Bill Vol 1 and 2 (Tarantino, 2003, 2004)

- Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (Gondry, 2004)
- The Incredibles (Bird, 2004)
- Napoleon Dynamite (Hess, 2004)
- Cache (Haneke, 2005)
- Munich (Spielberg, 2005)
- Inside (Bustillo and Maury, 2007)
- There Will be Blood (Anderson, 2007)
- Inglorious Basterds (Tarantino, 2009)