

Five Years of Great Film...

The internet (for better or worse) burst open the barricades and extended the accessibility of motion pictures that would otherwise be unattainable. All that is needed for one to enjoy an obscure or limited-release feature is the click of a mouse. While this diminishes the theatrical experience to a degree, it is comforting that the “luxury” of viewing quality cinema is easier to attain.

The damaging side of this practice is that major studios are discovering more justifications to keep these treasures from theaters. Grand spectacle events and kid-fare presentations have their place, but it is unfortunate that more modest—yet no less visually absorbing—efforts are reserved for smaller screens via On Demand, NetFlix, iTunes, Amazon Instant Video, etc.

Most of the outstanding films comprised in this list—choices from a five year period: 2009 - 2014--are those that fell through the cracks and have appreciated minor audience. All titles are available on home video and streaming services. Not to be bested by outshone endeavors, there is a comprehensive list following these commentaries that includes more mainstream films.

***A Separation* (2011) [Iran] D: Asghar Farhadi. 123m (PG-13)**



Gently poignant account of an Iranian couple in disagreement over their child’s welfare. Director and scriptwriter Farhadi wrestles various subjects ranging from parental guidance, religious fundamentalism, and everyday responsibilities with a sure hand. Earnestness is sustained by the two leads, played remarkably by Peyman Moadi and Leila Hatami.

***In Darkness* (2011) [Poland] D: Agnieszka Holland. 145m (R)**

Obdurate and unflinching portrait of Leopold Socha, a man barely commendable of sainthood, who forfeited self and family for harboring Jews--in a



sewer--throughout German occupied Poland. That an unappealing figure could command such onscreen presence is verification to the skill of Robert Wieckiewicz who is magnificent as Socha. One of the best films on the Holocaust.



Blue Is The Warmest Color (2013)
[France] D: Abdellatif Kechiche.
179m (NC-17)

Tenderly captured character study of two French women fiercely in love. Léa Seydoux and Adèle Exarchopoulos stunningly expose their elations and torments amid an onslaught of raw emotion. A dreamlike and spellbinding feast for the senses.

Tucker & Dale vs. Evil (2010) D: Eli Craig. 89m (R)

Unique and completely disarming spin on slasher films, this frenzied horror/comedy about two hillbillies trapped in a cabin where “evil” shenanigans abound is—without a doubt-- the pinnacle of its kind. Grisly, repulsive at times, but fiendishly



clever and uproariously comical; the infectious charms of Tyler Labine and Alan Tudyk help propel this unusual film into top tier entertainment.



The Wind Rises
(2013) D: Hayao Miyazaki.
126m (PG-13)

Hayao Miyazaki’s swan song--a romanticized biopic of airplane designer Jirô Horikoshi—is a visually breathtaking and emotionally satisfying escapade into the art of engineering. Modest and leisurely-paced; an

exultant valediction to one of the greatest filmmakers of all time.

District 9 (2009) D: Neill Blomkamp. 112m (R)

Intelligent, fresh, and unnerving science-fiction of a beleaguered alien civilization settled in Johannesburg, was the sleeper hit of 2009. Bold and ambitious, director Blomkamp and actor Sharlto Copley add flesh and blood to cutting-edge special effects. A rare and thrilling gem.



Fruitvale Station (2013) D: Ryan Coogler. 85m (R)



Director and screenwriter Coogler's potent and distressing anecdote of the events leading up to the demise of Oscar Grant III—disgracefully slain on video by policemen in 2008—bares an intense sense of urgency despite our knowing the outcome (the film opens with the actual video as preface). Relevant and required.

Other notable films of 2009 – 2014:

Argo (2012) D: Ben Affleck. 120m (R)
Avatar (2009) D: James Cameron. 162m (PG-13)
Boyhood (2014) D: Richard Linklater. 165m (R)
Gravity (2013) D: Alfonso Cuarón. 91m (PG-13)
Hurt Locker, The (2009) D: Kathryn Bigelow. 131m (R)
Kids Are All Right, The (2010) D: Lisa Cholodenko. 106m (R)
King's Speech, The (2010) D: Tom Hooper. 118m (R)
Life Of Pi (2012) D: Ang Lee. 127m (PG)
Lincoln (2012) D: Steven Spielberg. 150m (PG-13)

Marvel's The Avengers (2012) D: Joss Whedon. 143m (PG-13)
Nebraska (2013) D: Alexander Payne. 115m (R)
Silver Linings Playbook (2012) D: David O. Russell. 122m (R)
Social Network, The (2010) D: David Fincher. 120m (PG-13)
Star Trek (2009) D: J.J. Abrams. 127m (PG-13)
Tangled (2010) D: Nathan Greno, Byron Howard. 100m (PG)
Zero Dark Thirty (2012) D: Kathryn Bigelow. 157m (R)

--Mark Whelan, January 14, 2015