



OUR FAVORITE MOMENTS IN CINEMA

For those first few months following any calendar year, the film industry is abuzz for what is referred to as *awards season*. With Hollywood's biggest night, the Academy Awards ceremony here and gone, we here on the board of the Bay Area Film Society wanted to get in the spirit of the season.

While the Oscars aim to celebrate what its voters deem to be the best of the previous year based on technical merit, BAFS board members wanted to share with you those movie-things (be they entire films, specific performances, or cinema-adjacent moments) that were just our plain favorites.

Without further ado, these are the BAFS Board Favorites in Film for 2023:

Steve Birenberg - Sponsorships/Proud Papa - Bottoms:

Yes, my son Leo scored Bottoms, so it was going to be on my top ten list regardless. But, it's also a fun and well done movie delivering a good message in a different way.



Peggy Smith - Sponsorships/Definitely Not the Target Demographic - *Godzilla: Minus One*:

Godzilla Minus One is worth the extra effort needed to view it on the big screen! Poignant story and spectacular effects make this 70th anniversary classic a winner - again.

Paul Gordon - Data Management/Not a Romantic - *Past Lives*:

I have often thought at the end of a romantic movie: "How long before these people grow tired of each other?" *Past Lives* is a wonderful defense of ordinary, messy love over grand gestures. It does a wonderful job of showing the moments in Nora and Arthur's life that built their love. Nora describes her relationship with Arthur in the beginning as two trees trying to grow in the same pot. "Our roots needed to find their place." The movie shows in a very unsentimental way how all those moments gave their roots that room.



Dani O'Brien - Northland College Liaison/Keeper of Secrets -

The last scene of *Past Lives*: My favorite film moment of 2023 was the final scene of *Past Lives*. I don't know how to write about it without giving anything away...

Isabella Stone-Dahl - Internal Communications/Lobbyist for

"Big Tissue" - *Past Lives*: Out of all of the movies that came out in 2023, and of the ones I have seen, I'd have to say *Past Lives* is my favorite. It is a beautiful film, and made me cry.

Lisa LePlavy-Jablonski -

**President/Amateur Talent Scout –
Charles Melton’s performance
in *May December*:**



I loved the heartfelt performance of Charles Melton in *May December*. As the overlooked piece of the triangle that includes the powerhouse actresses Natalie Portman and Julianne Moore, Melton’s performance builds throughout the movie. I am a huge fan of the director Todd Haynes and went into the film ready to watch the sparring actresses and was completely caught off guard by Melton’s quiet and moving performance. The awkward scene between Melton and his son on the rooftop sharing a smoke struck me as both tender and sad. At first you feel the buddy vibe until you realize they are father and son—a childhood lost for Melton. His love of butterflies almost mirrors his own life as he finally is able to break out of his cocoon and reveal himself as a grown man at the end of the film. He is the invisible heart and soul of the film and I cannot wait to see what film choices he will make in the coming years.



Hannah Sorensen - Social Media/Girl Power Advocate - *Poor Things* :

Emma Stone’s portrayal of Bella Baxter in *Poor Things* is a wonderful example of a woman finding both her empowerment and her discovery of self worth despite patriarchal prejudice.

Trey Sorensen - Secretary/Resident Snob - The cinematography of

Anatomy of a Fall: Think of camera-handling on a spectrum from “still” to “shaky.” Still shots—say, ones with a wide lens—generally could be said to present their action “as-is” or “in total,” suggesting an *objective* perspective. The farther we move along to shaky shots—maybe we put the camera over one of our character’s shoulders or we revolve around their face and expressions—the more the cinematographer tries to induce a *subjective* perspective of that character’s experience. Objectivity and subjectivity are major themes in *Anatomy of a Fall*, with expert witnesses providing their (subjective) testimonies to reconcile the (objective) facts of hard evidence—but these general impressions of their corresponding camerawork seem to be reversed. Instead, still shots, out of the nature that they are *staged*, frame those actions and those characters in the film that embellish or at best extrapolate from the true circumstances of Samuel’s death. Meanwhile, the embattled Sandra, whose perspective is the closest we will have to the truth, is often shot “imperfectly.” The camera jitters, the lens flares, windows are blown out with light, and she is even sometimes slightly obscured by things cutting into frame. We therefore experience her as honestly as the camera does:
straightforward; blemished; raw.

Filmmaking is an art of the camera. For director Justine Triet to so well synthesize her script’s themes with this quality that is inherent to cinema is the biggest reason why *Anatomy of a Fall* was one of my favorite films of 2023, and why it may endure to be one of the best films of the millennium yet.

Heather Neumann - Distributions/Big Softie – Paul Giamatti and

Alexander Payne reuniting for *The Holdovers*: Twenty years ago, in 2004, while living in Omaha, NE, I took in a viewing of the film *Sideways* and, enduringly, I would never look at a bottle of Merlot the same way again, and I would forever be enamored by the character of “Miles.” The director of *Sideways*, Alexander Payne, was born and raised in Omaha and often filmed his movies in his hometown. There was always much fanfare in Omaha when a new Alexander Payne movie was being released or being made. *Sideways* introduced me to the actor Paul Giamatti, who played the character “Miles” in the film. Miles became one of my most favorite movie characters of all time. I found the character to be beautifully flawed, and beautifully human. Because of Giamatti, the character of Miles was strangely relatable to me, and the film left me filled with a sense of wonderment and hope.

Fast forward 20 years, and the team of Alexander Payne and Paul Giamatti was alive again this year in the film *The Holdovers*. This time, Paul Giamatti played the character “Paul.” Giamatti’s brilliant performance once again breathed vivid life into yet another wonderful character—an imperfect and deeply marred character. Giamatti’s ability to make me laugh aloud one minute and become emotionally ravaged the next was again on full display in *The Holdovers*. How a curmudgeon, and just plain cantankerous character could leave me feeling such sentimental warmth through the film is a tribute to Giamatti.

Now, were either of these films what I would consider to be the best films of 2004 and 2024, respectively? Personally, I would say “no”... but were they two of my favorite films? *Yes.*



This was a great year for movies, folks. We would have shared plenty more, but that's all for now until next year. See you at the movies!

