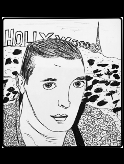


Best Films of the First Half of the 2020s

Selections by Vince LePlavy

When people look back on the 2020's, what will they remember? I think the significance of the answer is not *WHAT* they remember but that they simply *REMEMBER*. Film has always been a way to capture the memory of the past in order to inform a vision of the future. The murder, sex and corruption that hallmarked films of the 30's and 40's were produced in the shadow of a depression and a world war. The New Hollywood burst onto the scene in the late 60's with vigilante anti-heroes that were in direct response to The Vietnam War and the growing counterculture movement. Even the neo-independent film revival of the 90's was a stark reply to the desaturated melodramatic offerings of Reagan-era Hollywood. The first half of this chaotic decade has followed suit with these past times of turmoil: providing hard-hitting, visceral films that may be divisive but stick in your gut and have something to say. You can't help but remember how they made you feel, remember a moment in time where a certain film was the thing that got you through or perhaps made you see the world in a different way. We all need those moments in our lives and with half a decade to go, one must have faith that art will respond to life as it's always done. And while we may not know what the future holds, we can surely revel in the fact that these films just might point us the way. Here's my favorite twenty-five of the past decade; happy watching!

25. Summer of Soul (...Or, When the Revolution Could Not Be Televised) (2021)

This Academy-Award winning documentary captures the 1969 Harlem Cultural Festival and its impact on social activism, music and culture.

Directed by: Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson

24. Mank (2020)

The making of the classic 1941 film *Citizen Kane* through the eyes of its screenwriter Herman J. Mankiewicz.

Starring: Gary Oldman, Amanda Seyfried, Lily Collins

Directed by: David Fincher

23. Saltburn (2023)

A down-and-out Oxford undergrad cozies up with his wealthy classmate and his eccentric family at their estate for the summer.

Starring: Barry Keoghan, Jacob Elordi, Rosamund Pike

Directed by: Emerald Fennell

22. Men (2022)

A grieving widow absconds to a quiet countryside cottage only to be tormented by the many men that populate the surrounding village.

Starring: Jessie Buckley, Rory Kinnear, Paapa Essiedu

Directed by: Alex Garland

21. Glass Onion (2022)

Benoit Blanc is back on the case! This time around he's invited to a lavish island party thrown by a tech billionaire and a slew of questionable invitees.

Starring: Daniel Craig, Ed Norton, Janelle Monáe

Directed by: Rian Johnson

20. Last Night in Soho (2021)

An aspiring fashion student moves to London and encounters a gateway to the Swinging Sixties of the past.

Starring: Thomasin McKenzie, Anya Taylor-Joy, Matt Smith

Directed by: Edgar Wright

19. Conclave (2024)

Cardinals of the Holy Catholic Church gather to elect a new pope and uncover secrets and scandals as a handful of shady successors step forward.

Starring: Ralph Fiennes, Stanley Tucci, Isabella Rossellini

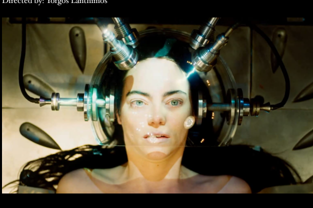
Directed by: Edward Berger

18. Poor Things (2023)

A dead woman is brought back to life and finds her self-liberation in an alternative version of Victorian-era London.

Starring: Emma Stone, Mark Ruffalo, Willem Dafoe

Directed by: Yorgos Lanthimos



17. Beau Is Afraid (2023)

A paranoia-ridden young man embarks on a bizarre quest to make amends with his mother.

Starring: Joaquin Phoenix, Patti LuPone, Parker Posey

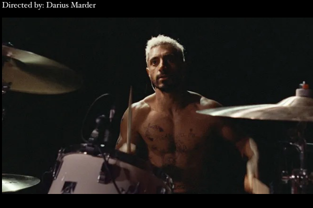
Directed by: Ari Aster

16. Sound of Metal (2020)

The drummer of a metal band must grapple with an uncertain future when he starts to lose his hearing.

Starring: Riz Ahmed, Olivia Cooke, Paul Raci

Directed by: Darius Marder



15. The Banshees of Inisherin (2022)

Two lifelong friends find themselves at a crossroads when one abruptly ends the relationship with the other.

Starring: Colin Farrell, Brendan Gleeson, Barry Keoghan

Directed by: Martin McDonagh

14. Nope (2022)

A brother-sister stunt team must defend their family legacy when an extraterrestrial force threatens their ranch.

Starring: Keke Palmer, Daniel Kaluuya, Steven Yeun

Directed by: Jordan Peele

13. Sing Sing (2024)

A group of incarcerated men create a sense of community amongst each other by putting on theatrical stage productions through a prison rehabilitation program.

Starring: Colman Domingo, Clarence Maclin, Paul Raci

Directed by: Greg Kwedar

12. Babylon (2022)

The rise and fall of a dreamer, an actress and a producer during Hollywood's transition from silent to sound films in the Roaring Twenties.

Starring: Brad Pitt, Margot Robbie, Diego Calva

Directed by: Damien Chazelle

11. Empire of Light (2022)

A lonely theater manager connects with a youthful ticket taker during turbulent times amidst a small coastal town in early 80's England.

Starring: Olivia Colman, Micheal Ward, Colin Firth

Directed by: Sam Mendes

10. The Fabelmans (2022)

A young boy uses the power of filmmaking to see the dysfunctional workings of his family and the life around him.

Starring: Gabriel LaBelle, Michelle Williams, Paul Dano

Directed by: Steven Spielberg

9. Another Round (2020)

Four high school teachers remain drunk on a daily basis in order to boost their quality of life with varying results.

Starring: Mads Mikkelsen, Thomas Bo Larsen, Magnus Millang

Directed by: Thomas Vinterberg

8. The Holdovers (2023)

A curmudgeonly history professor must connect with a deserted youth and a grieving school cook when all three find themselves with no home to go back to during the week of Christmas.

Starring: Paul Giamatti, Da'Vine Joy Randolph, Dominic Sessa

Directed by: Alexander Payne

7. The Last Duel (2021)

A knight challenges his former friend to a deathly duel after his wife accuses the latter of raping her.

Starring: Jodie Comer, Matt Damon, Adam Driver

Directed by: Ridley Scott

6. The Batman (2022)

Batman teams up with Catwoman to take down the sadistic Riddler who's targeting the rich and wealthy of Gotham City.

Starring: Robert Pattinson, Zoë Kravitz, Paul Dano

Directed by: Matt Reeves

5. Drive My Car (2021)

A meticulous theater actor struggles to adapt a play for the stage while mourning the death of his wife.

Starring: Hidetoshi Nishijima, Tōko Miura, Masaki Okada

Directed by: Ryusuke Hamaguchi

4. Licorice Pizza (2021)

A wayward young woman and a child actor fall in and out of love in the summer of 1973.

Starring: Cooper Hoffman, Alana Haim, Sean Penn

Directed by: Paul Thomas Anderson

3. Perfect Days (2023)

A Tokyo toilet cleaner finds purpose and beauty in life through routine, dedication and appreciation.

Starring: Koji Yakusho, Aoi Yamada, Tokio Emoto

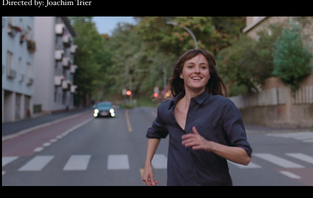
Directed by. Wim Wenders

2. The Worst Person in the World (2022)

A young woman navigates love and life as she attempts to forge a successful career in photography.

Starring: Renate Reinsve, Anders Danielsen Lie, Herbert Nordrum

Directed by: Joachim Trier



1. TÁR (2022)

A world-renowned conductor falls from grace when a new understudy, her peers and the general public turn on her.

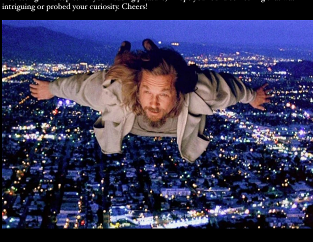
Starring: Cate Blanchett, Noémie Merlant, Mark Strong

Directed by: Todd Field

And to end on that note...

Spring is here and with it comes the end of yet another successful BAFS season! I'd like to take the time to thank the organization for all it's done for the local community and the exposure it's given to all the amazing films shown throughout the season. *Sugarcane, Robot Dreams*, *Anora, I'm Still Here, The Brutalist* & *Flow* all received some Oscar love while *Thelma* & *Kneecap* brought in droves of moviegoers seasoned and new. It's vital that we continue to bring these important and entertaining movies to the Bay Area and give the public the chance to see something new and exciting. Shout out to the Bay Theater for being a hub of cultural relevance in the downtown district and providing a historic venue for BAFS to show films. I'd also like to recognize Northlake Capital, Honest Dog Books, Black Cat Coffeehouse and Play Unplugged as our main season sponsors. Thank you so much for supporting your local arts; your partnership is much appreciated! And finally a massive thanks to YOU! Without your support and love of cinema, BAFS wouldn't be what it is so thank you for coming out and catching some truly awesome movies!

After writing for BAFS for the past two years, I've decided to take an indefinite break as a contributor for the foreseeable future. It's been an honor to write for the BAFS website as well as the incoming BAFS Letterboxd (more details on that in the near future!). Thanks to the board for giving me the opportunity to seek out obscure, weird and interesting films topics for your reading pleasure; I hope you found something that was intriguing or probed your curiosity. Cheers!



'Til next season, man!

BAY AREA FILM SOCIETY