

Top 10 films of 2023

By  Daniel Derksen

28 Dec 2023

Film culture has never been more prevalent than now! Its rampant invasion has infiltrated the lives of people from all over the world, becoming accessible to anyone in cinemas and streaming platforms. If a film opens somewhere on the globe, it can be viewed immediately by anyone no matter where they are.



Here are my Top 10 films of 2023:

1. *Killers of the Flower Moon*

Crafting a story of crime and racism that speaks both to a nation's past and its future, Martin Scorsese's epic masterwork speaks to the heart and soul.

Scripted by Scorsese and Eric Roth, based on David Grann's best-selling book, real love crosses paths with unspeakable betrayal at the turn of the 20th century, when oil brought a fortune to the Osage Nation, who became some of the richest people in the world overnight.

The wealth of these Native Americans immediately attracted white interlopers, who manipulated, extorted, and stole as much

Osage money as they could before resorting to murder.

Based on a true story and told through the improbable romance of Ernest Burkhart (Leonardo DiCaprio) and Mollie Kyle (Lily Gladstone).

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2. *Sound of Freedom*

Sound of Freedom is based on an incredible true story and shines a light on even the darkest of places. After rescuing a boy from ruthless child traffickers, a federal agent learns the boy's sister is still captive and decides to embark on a dangerous mission to save her.

With time running out, he quits his job and journeys deep into the Colombian jungle, putting his life on the line to free her from a fate worse than death. Directed and co-written by Alejandro Monteverde, it features a powerful performance by Jim Caviezel.

3. *The Banshees of Inisherin*

Martin McDonagh's *The Banshees of Inisherin* is funny, sad, dark, and full of humanity. Set on a remote island off the west coast of Ireland, it follows lifelong friends Pádraic (Colin Farrell) and Colm (Brendan Gleeson), who find themselves at an impasse when Colm unexpectedly puts an end to their friendship.

A stunned Pádraic, aided by his sister Siobhán (Kerry Condon) and troubled young islander Dominic (Barry Keoghan), endeavours to repair the relationship, refusing to take no for an answer. But Pádraic's repeated efforts only strengthen his former friend's resolve and when Colm delivers a desperate ultimatum, events swiftly escalate, with shocking consequences.

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4. *A Man Called Otto*

A relevant story about human connection, *A Man Called Otto* is based on the # 1 New York Times bestseller *A Man Called Ove* and tells the story of Otto Anderson (Tom Hanks), a grump who no longer sees purpose in his life following the loss of his wife.

Otto is ready to end it all, but his plans are interrupted when a lively young family moves in next door, and he meets his match in quick-witted Marisol – she challenges him to see life differently, leading to an unlikely friendship that turns his world around.

A heartwarming and funny story about love, loss, and life, *A Man Called Otto* shows that family can sometimes be found in the most unexpected places.

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5. *Beau Is Afraid*

Beau Is Afraid is an unforgettable character study about an un-lived life. Dense with meaning and aimed squarely at confronting the emotional chaos and collective uncertainty of our present day, writer-director Ari Aster's mind-blowing odyssey follows one man's odyssey through the depths of the end of history, finding horror and humour at every turn.

From the creator of *Hereditary* and *Midsommar* comes a crack-pot vision of control, inheritance, and escape—the world as experienced by the unforgettable Beau Wassermann, who lives alone in a downtown apartment building where every moment is a waking nightmare.

From one of the most inventive cinematic minds working today comes the story of a man who sets out to visit his mother and discovers a world of malevolent forces and unseen eyes tracking his every move.

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6. *Barbie*

Barbie is a rich layered story, with humanity and heart that profoundly turns the battle of the sexes and male and female sexually inside out. To live in Barbie Land is to be a perfect being in a perfect place, unless you have a full-on existential crisis, or you're a Ken.

Writer-director Greta Gerwig, who has established herself as one of Hollywood's most important voices. "Barbie has so much recognition, so much love, and of course a 60-plus-year history, which was exciting for me. As with *Little Women*, *Barbie* is a property we all know, but to me she felt like a character with a story to tell, one that I could find a new, unexpected way into, honouring her legacy while making her world feel fresh and alive and modern."

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7. *Nyad*

Nyad is a remarkable true story of tenacity, friendship, and the triumph of the human spirit. It poignantly recounts a riveting chapter in the life of world-class athlete Diana Nyad.

Three decades after giving up marathon swimming in exchange for a prominent career as a sports journalist, at the age of 60, Diana (four-time Academy Award nominee Annette Bening) becomes obsessed with completing an epic swim that always eluded her: the 110 mile trek from Cuba to Florida, often referred to as the “Mount Everest” of swims.

Determined to become the first person to finish the swim without a shark cage, Diana goes on a thrilling, four-year journey with her best friend and coach Bonnie Stoll (two-time Academy Award winner Jodie Foster) and a dedicated sailing team. .

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8. *Punch*

Punch is a film about loyalty, love, and liberation from New Zealand writer and director Welby Ingis. It tells two, interwoven love stories; one between a father and his son and the other between two young, New Zealand gay men. These characters are flawed but despite their clumsy handling of relationships with each other, they are all in essence, good men.

In this film, the gay bashing, the alcoholism, the local boxing fights, the silenced rapes, the tentative outreach of the medical

profession, and the transition from sex to love ... to letting go, all happen. Such things are specific but universal.

As a pushback against a climate where being gay is now seen as relatively normalised, Welby used recent, true incidents to peel back the veneer to expose what can lie just below the surface.

Other gay-themed films that deserve a mention are *Red, White & Royal Blue*, an LGBTQ+ rom-com with an unabashed celebration of the genre. The South African *Runs In The Family* is a positive relationship between a father and a young trans man. *Heartstopper* Season 2 sheds a positive light on teenage gay culture. *The Inspection* is an astonishing portrait of survival and one man's unforgettable journey for acceptance and love. *The Whale* is a soaring story of a gay man's transformation and transcendence.

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9. *Talk To Me*

Talk To Me is a high-concept horror that reflects current society with a classic lens. In *Talk To Me*, a group of friends discover how to conjure spirits using an embalmed hand, they become hooked on the new thrill, until one of them goes too far and opens the door to the spirit world, forcing them to choose who to trust: the dead or the living.

The real-world horror in the film stems from the consequences of reckless behaviour as an outlet, and the supernatural horror stems from the fallout of repressed feelings breaking free. Also worth mentioning is Scott Derrickson's *Black Phone*, fearfully awakening the senses of those who indulge in the Supernatural and Uncanny realms.

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10. *Oppenheimer*

Oppenheimer is an epic thriller that chronicles the life and legacy of the father of the atomic bomb.

The films of Christopher Nolan have pushed the limits of cinematic storytelling to tell epic stories about unlikely heroes and audacious schemes that examine the necessity, morality, and hubris of ambitious endeavors.

Now, he brings to screen his most ambitious and urgent movie yet, a sweeping, epic thriller that delves deep into the psyche of a singular American mind: the brilliant scientist behind the world-shattering invention that represented the total sum of human ingenuity, an invention that would remake civilization, even as its very existence threatened the future of mankind.

Inspired by the Pulitzer Prize-winning book *American Prometheus* by Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin, it features stellar performances from Cillian Murphy as J. Robert Oppenheimer, Matt Damon as the director of the Manhattan Project, and Robert Downey, Jr. as a founding commissioner of the US Atomic Energy Commission.

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ABOUT DANIEL DERCKSEN

Daniel Dercksen has been a contributor for Lifestyle since 2012. As the driving force behind the successful independent training initiative The Writing Studio and a published film and theatre journalist of 40 years, teaching workshops in creative writing, playwriting and screenwriting throughout South Africa and internationally the past 22 years. Visit www.writingstudio.co.za

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