

John Raiz chooses the Ten Best Films and also the Ten Worst Films of 1979

by John Raiz

When it comes time to select my favorite films at year's end, I usually have to scratch around to find the final two or three movies to complete my ten best list. Some years—1977 for example—I had to dig a bit deeper than usual. For the first time since 1973, my ten best list consists entirely of good movies. Even though 1979 produced an above average number of enjoyable films, it still failed to unveil an outstanding movie.

A number of critics have selected their favorite films of the decade. At some point during the year I plan to join their ranks and publish my own list of best and worst films of the 70's.

In addition to selecting my favorite movies of 1979, I have also listed a Consensus Top Ten based upon a tally of 22 film critics (from newspapers, magazines, television and radio). Two movies ended in a tie for first place, a very appropriate placing, because the two films split the two most prestigious awards: New York Film Critics Award and National Security of Film Critics.

Ten Best Movies of 1979 (In Reverse Order)

10. THE MUPPET MOVIE works splendidly because Jim Hanson's animated "puppets" look better on the silver screen than they do on television. Like all good children's film, **The Muppet Movie** can be enjoyed by not only children, but by any adult who still keeps a youngster locked away in his or her soul.

9. ESCAPE FROM ALCATRAZ is expertly directed by Don Siegel; marvelously photographed by Bruce Surtees; Richard Tuggle's truncated script is ideally suited for Clint Eastwood's monosyllabic responses and his screen persona.

8. THE DEER HUNTER, directed by Michael Cimino, is a brilliantly staged and acted reflection of working-class Americans and their daily rituals which form the basis of their daily lives. Forget the second half of the film with its politically muddled Vietnam message; to ignore **The Deer Hunter's** many virtues (DeNiro and Walker, for example) and its portrayal of male bonding is political myopia of the highest order.

7. MAX HAVELAAR, directed by Fons Rademakers, is a sweeping view of the impact of Dutch colonialism of the Javanese people. The film an exquisite travelogue and a full-bodied

adventure story. Peter Faber, as Max Havelaar, exhibits an extraordinary sense of presence in the title role.

6. NORTH DALLAS FORTY is a savagely amusing movie about the pain, comradeship, and the importance of winning in professional football. Ted Kotcheff (director) opened his movie with a riveting montage that immediately sets the tone and comic style he hopes to achieve; it's the best opening of the year. Nick Nolte, Mac Davis, Bo Svenson and John Matuszak are sensational.

5. NORMA RAE, directed by Martin Ritt, could have been one of America's most outstanding films in years had it overcome two or three basic shortcomings. Nonetheless, it is still one of the better movies of the year. Ron Leibman, who plays a liberal union organizer, is completely disarming; Sally Fields as Norma Rae is very good, but the role pleads for a great performance. Sorry, Fields' work falls far short.

4. THE CHINA SYNDROME is the finest thriller I've seen since **The French Connection**. The film is perfectly paced and brilliantly staged with the best use of simulated "Cinema Verite" in a suspense movie that I've ever seen. And, of course, the ghastly real life irony adds an unprecedented cinematic dimension. Jack Lemmon and Jane Fonda are top notch as the two principals.

3. KRAMER vs. KRAMER is impeccably cast and wonderfully acted. Dustin Hoffman, Meryl Streep, Jane Alexander and Justin Henry are sensational. The pure acting involved is so marvelous that there is almost an unendurable pleasure derived from merely watching the four principals perform. Robert Benton directed and Nestor Almendros photographed **Kramer vs. Kramer**.

2. THE TREE OF WOODEN CLOGS, directed by Ermanno Olmi, is an extremely well-crafted film that had the possibility of being a masterpiece. Olmi set lofty goals for himself. Despite its glaring flaws (several of the non-professional actors in key roles are inadequate), the film is powerful in the engraving of everyday living on a sharecropper farm. Olmi's color photography is quite effective. **Tree's** is an often powerful, occasionally touching but always interesting film.

1. BREAKING AWAY is enormously funny and refreshing; a true classic sleeper. The film is not only a marvelous examination of the often unrecognized class differences that do exist in our "classless" society, but

also a humane study of friendship and claustrophobic fatherly love. Peter Yates (director), and Steve Teisch (scriptwriter) have a film that achieves this with good, humorous touches, exemplary economy of means and an unwavering sympathy. The entire cast is splendid.

Honorable Mention [best]
The French Detective, El Super, Being There, In-Laws, Voices and Between Miracles.

CONSENSUS TOP TEN (based on the choices of 22 Film Critics)

1. **Breaking Away** tied with **Kramer vs. Kramer**
3. **Apocalypse Now**
4. **China Syndrome**
5. **Manhattan**
6. **Norma Rae**
7. **The Tree of the Wooden Clogs**
8. **The Marriage of Maria Braun**
9. **Hair**
10. **All That Jazz** tied with **Being There**

HONORABLE MENTION
The Electric Horseman
La Cage Aux Folles
Escape From Alcatraz
The Black Stallion
Starting Over

Ten Worst Movies of 1979

1. MEETINGS WITH REMARKABLE MEN, directed by Peter Brooks, is an unendurable mixture of meaningless religious "profundities", impenetrable nonsense and laughable acting from beginning to end. It also gets my vote as the slowest moving movie of 1979.

2. LUNA is directed by one of the kingmakers of awful movies. Bernardo Bertolucci. He has made my 10 worst list on at least two or three previous occasions. This bloated work is completely mindless. It is laden with operatic opulence, silly melodrama, and pretentious artiness.

3. PICNIC AT HANGING ROCK, directed by Peter Weir, is a sensuous tease delicately placed under layers of "Elvira Madigan", like loveliness wrapped in a gauge of tantalizing sexuality. Even the resolution to the paltry mystery is one huge tease.

4. HURRICANE gets the nod for my annual Big Bomb of the Year Award. (Last year's winner was **The Wiz**.) Everything about the movie is either awful (dialogue), boring (the unending storm scene), or battering (Nino Rota's musical score). Tearful note: **Hurricane** is

directed by Jan Troell, the fine Swedish film maker.

5. THE VILLAIN, directed by Hall Needham and starring Kirk Douglas, contains fewer laughs than any comedy of 1979.

6. THE CHAMP, directed by Franco Zeffirelli (**Romeo and Juliet**), doles out mountains of vulgar, dishonest sweetness. His exploitation of sentimentality is unforgivable. In eight-year old Ricky Schroder, Zeffirelli has found his perfect skill.

7. PLAYERS combines the pure trash of Harold Robbins with the foolish milieu of Jacqueline Susann. Director Anthony Harvey treats the sleazy project so seriously, he completely removes any possibility of fun. **Players** features Ali McGraw as the "older" woman.

8. THE FISH THAT SAVED PITTSBURGH has the honor of receiving my award for being the silliest film in 1979. It is filled with astrological jibberish, raucous disco sounds, stupid ethnic humor, and poorly executed basketball scenes. The picture showcases Julius Erving.

9. ROLLER BOOGIE lost a photo finish for the silliest movie of the year (see #8). It stars a bloated Linda Blair who desires to win a Roller Boogie contest before moving on to Juilliard to study the flute. How does that grab you for a plot!

10. AMERICATHON, the basic premise of the film is dreadful; the execution of the idea is even worse. Fortunately, I never wasted my time seeing Neil Israel's previous effort, **Tunnelvision** (1976).

Dishonorable mentions:
Remember My Name, Han-over Street, Dawn of the Dead, More American Graffiti, The Magician of Lublin, Each Other, Winter Light and Natural Enemies.



Births

MUSSER, Mr. and Mrs. Gerald (Regina Baker), Mount Joy R2, a daughter at the General Hospital.
WALTERS, Mr. and Mrs. Daniel (Elaine Goetz), 754 Farmdale Road, Mount Joy, a son at the General Hospital.

NOTICE

Effective February 4, 1980

All Marietta Home Building and Loan Accounts will be processed at the new Marietta office located at

Rt. 441 & Colebrook Road Marietta, PA

Savings insured to \$40,000

Does your subscription run out with this issue??

Are you overlooking what you should be looking over?



RENEW TODAY!!!!

Please send me the SUSQUEHANNA TIMES weekly (52 issues per year) for:
Lancaster County—1 year—\$6.00
(outside Lancaster County)—1 year—\$6.50
Mail to: SUSQUEHANNA TIMES, Box 75-A, R.D.#1, Marietta, PA 17547.

Name.....

St. & No. or R.D. No.....

City or Town

State Zip

If this is a gift subscription, bill to:

Name

St. & No. or R.D. No.

City or Town

State Zip

Name of person to receive subscription renewal notice.