

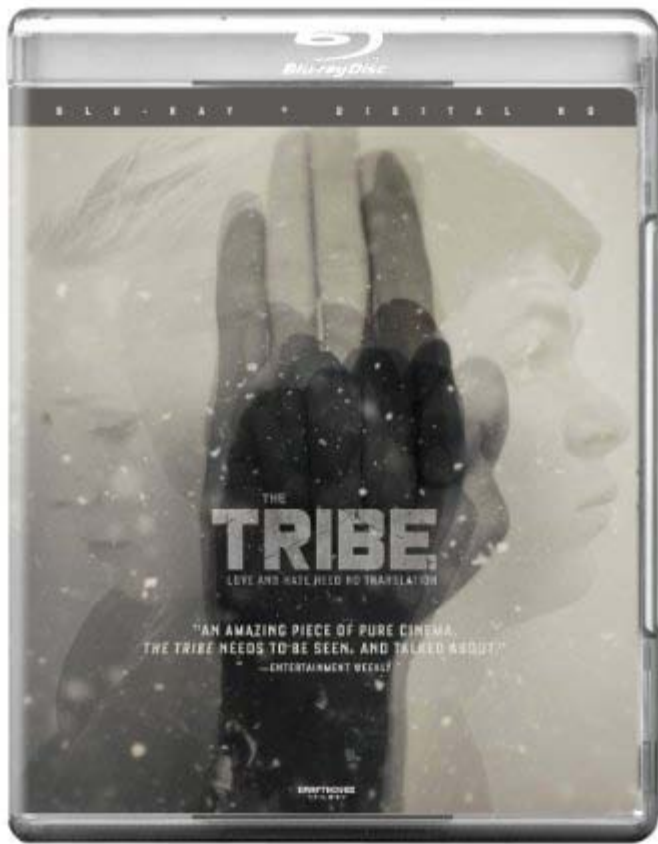
THE BLOG 03/18/2016 01:46 am ET | Updated Mar 18, 2017

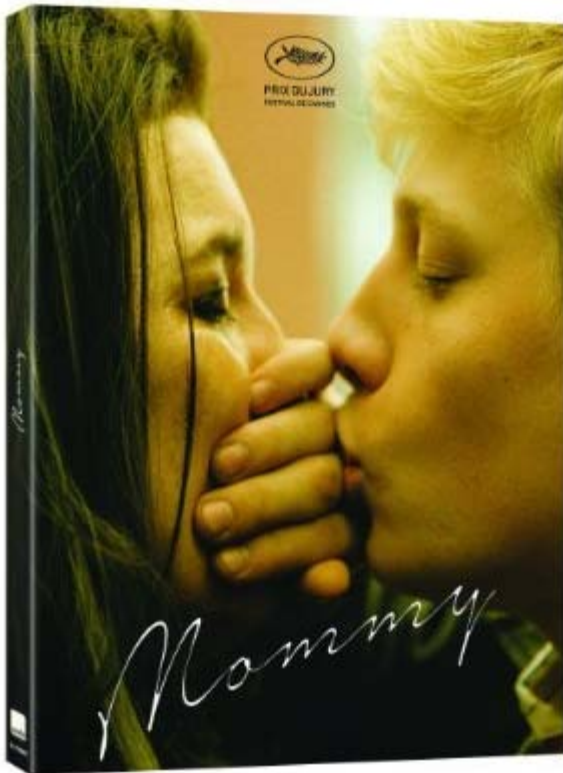
DVDs: "The Tribe," One of the Best Movies of 2015; Plus "Carol," "Creed," "The Big Short" And More



By Michael Giltz

The Oscars are over, but you still don't know what the best movies of 2015 really are. Why? One, you probably haven't watched a lot of the smaller, critically acclaimed films yet that are vying for that honor but flying under the radar. Two, you haven't read up on the 41st Annual IRA Awards. That's a group of film fanatics that have been gathering in New York City since the mid-1970s, voting on their favorite movies, mocking the picks of their friends, debating the finer points of cinema and generally having a grand old time. Not coincidentally, the IRAs keep these movie lovers committed to checking out the best new movies each year, a task and pleasure which gets harder and harder as work, family and life in general intrude on your passions. I've been a member since the early 1990s and the IRAs has worked like a charm for me. My day job is books books books! If I wasn't a member and determined to be prepared for the big night of voting, I might have completely missed *The Tribe*, a remarkable Ukrainian film set at a school for the deaf. Check out all the winners and a deeper summary of the IRAs and who they are. Below, you'll find four of the top vote getters kicking off this week's column. Enjoy!





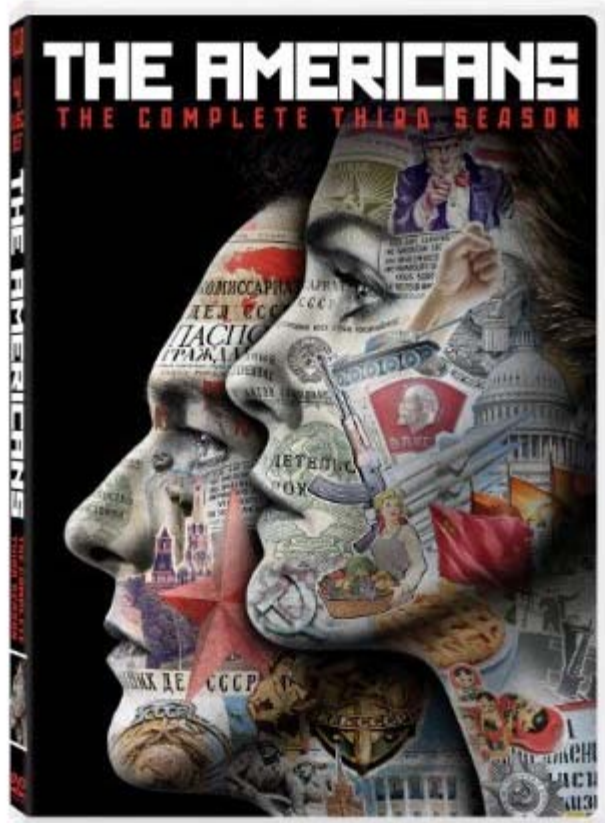
THE TRIBE (\$29.93 BluRay; Cinedigm)

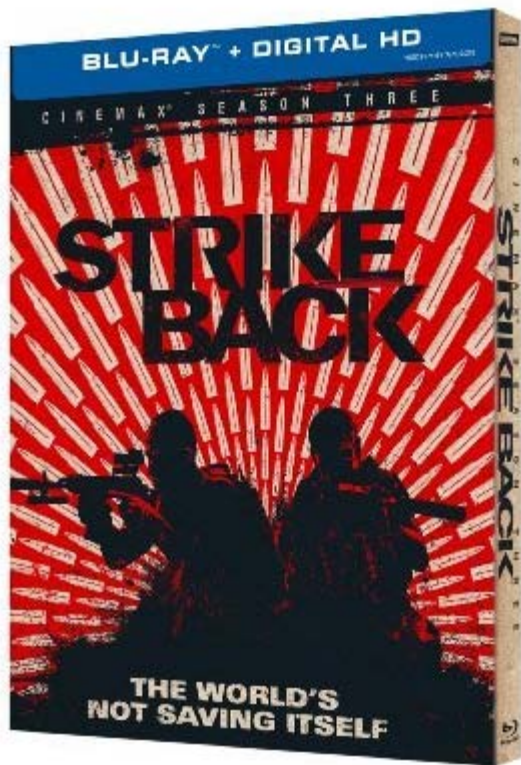
TANGERINE (\$29.98 BluRay; Magnolia)

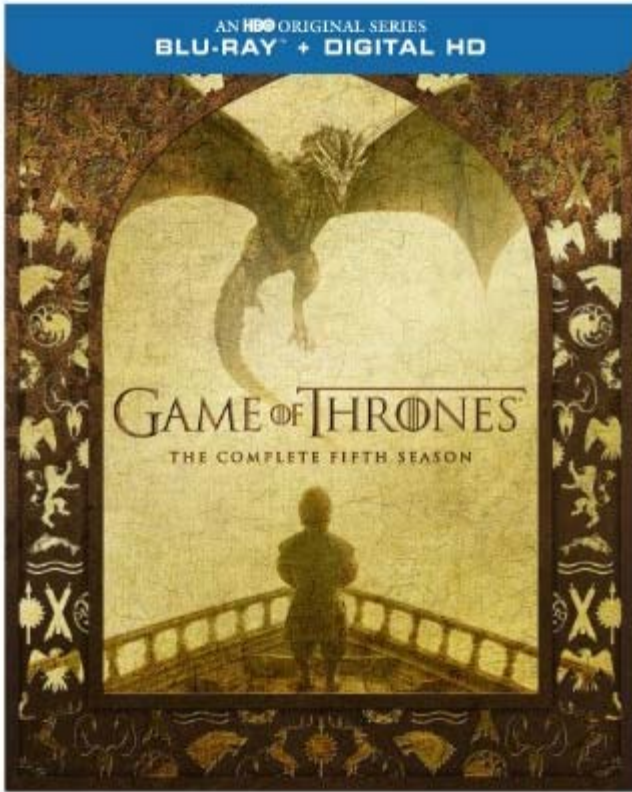
MOMMY (available in used copies or streaming on various outlets)

THE DIARY OF A TEENAGE GIRL (\$34.99 BluRay; Sony)

These four indie films were among the big winners at the 41st Annual IRA Awards, the final, most prestigious and certainly most mysterious film awards of the year. (Get more info here.) All of them are worth checking out if you have any sort of passion for great cinema. I've covered three of them before so today it's the turn of *The Tribe*, which is just out on BluRay. A huge success when it debuted at the Cannes Film Festival, this is a very notable debut from writer-director Miroslav Slaboshpitsky. It's set in a school for the deaf and -- rather remarkably -- the entire film is performed in Ukrainian Sign Language. There is essentially no spoken dialogue, no subtitles, no explanatory text and no voiceovers. And yet, even casual viewers can follow the storyline of brutal initiation, gang violence, pimping, budding romance, betrayal and more. (This particular school for the deaf is a crumbling, bleak affair, more *Lord Of The Flies* than a learning institution.) I've always found sign language to be beautiful and expressive and here I realized exactly how expressive. While not being remotely fluent, I could grasp the personalities of the people talking, the essence of what they were saying and even feel impatient with some who kept going on and on when unnecessary. Hypnotically shot in the now almost cliched style of Eastern Europe (lots of long tracking shots and very few edits), *The Tribe* is simply an engrossing story, with some piercing scenes (such as an abortion) I won't soon forget. It's also a remarkable accomplishment in pure cinema, given how this story was told. And it's truly an exceptional debut.







- THE AMERICANS SEASON 3** (\$39.98 DVD; FOX)
- STRIKE BACK SEASON 4** (\$34.98 BuRay; HBO Studios)
- THE FALL SEASON 2** (\$39.99 BluRay; Acorn)

GAME OF THRONES SEASON FIVE (\$79.98 BluRay; HBO Studios)

MANHATTAN SEASON 2 (\$34.97 BluRay; Lionsgate)

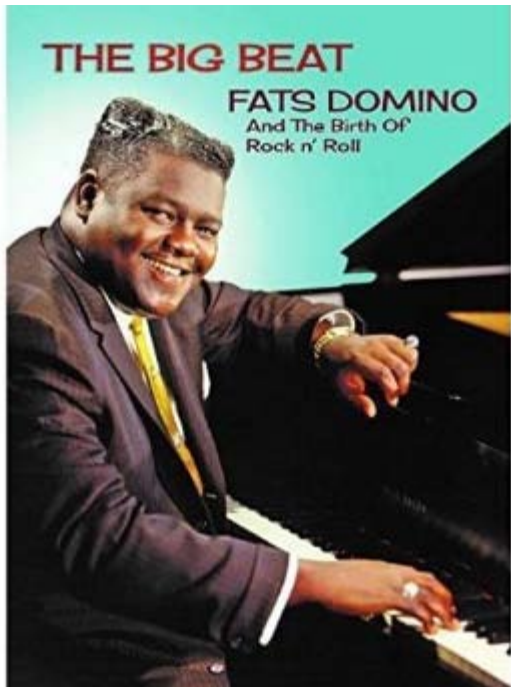
It's true: movies can't hold a candle to TV when it comes to great narrative storytelling. TV is where the action is, so much so that even great work is becoming lost in the shuffle. Case in point: *The Americans*. Praised by the critics, bizarrely ignored by the Emmys and with a small but devoted audience. The fourth season just launched and the reviews insist this drama about undercover Soviet agents in Reagan's America is better than ever. So what are you waiting for?

Strike Back isn't high art, just great fun. But you know what? The movies are dropping the ball even with delivering popcorn fare that should be their bread and butter. This is the finale to the show and if you wanna get your *24* mojo back, start right here.

Certainly most didn't think the cliff-hanger revival of *The X-Files* did that iconic series justice. (Surely they'll come back and hopefully get it right next season.) Still, it's always a pleasure to see David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson on screen. You'd be hard pressed to say which actor has enjoyed more success post-*X*. Obviously, they've both done great. But my money is on Anderson, doing great work in film and delivering on TV, especially British fare from the usual Charles Dickens adaptations to the grim thriller *The Fall*. Jamie Dornan of *50 Shades* shows here he might actually be worth paying attention to. Yet Anderson dominates in a show that -- while no *Prime Suspect* (nothing is) -- can hold its head high in the very crowded field of solid British crime shows. Clearly, they know a talent when they see one. Onstage, on TV and on film, Anderson has flourished in the UK. For all I know, she's also doing great work on radio.

Of course, *Game Of Thrones* has it all: the huge scope of the movies, the complex plotting of a multi-volume work of fantasy, and the leisure of a TV series to tell the tell right. I always thought the only way they could do justice to *The Lord Of The Rings* would be a TV miniseries (and probably animated), never anticipating a three film series stretching to ten hours. This drama goes from strength to strength and the spare no expense dictum of HBO is a damn lucky thing here since the story gets bigger and bigger. True, George R.R. Martin has a tendency to kill of my favorite characters (don't you dare touch Arya, Mr Martin!). Otherwise, it remains a landmark work of television, the first serious stab at fantasy on TV if only because it never had the resources to do fantasy before. The only suspense now is when it will end, how far it will veer from the future novels and whether one of the most successful TV shows of all time will finish on TV or at the movies.

So how sad to note these shows that have hit four or five seasons in good shape while *Manhattan* has to say goodbye after just two? It suffered only from being on WGN, an almost invisible network. The show is about the Manhattan Project, the WW II endeavor to build an atomic bomb in Los Alamos. (Spoiler alert: they succeeded.) It had a great cast, great reviews and a not so great audience. But it put WGN on the map, allowing future series like *Outsiders* and *Underground* (about the Civil War movement to help slaves achieve freedom) to build on that success and get that much closer to actual commercial success. It's a bittersweet two seasons for Manhattan. You can watch it, appreciate it and mourn what might have been. Because unlike, say, *Freaks & Geeks*, there's no feeling of completion to mask the fact it's gone too soon.



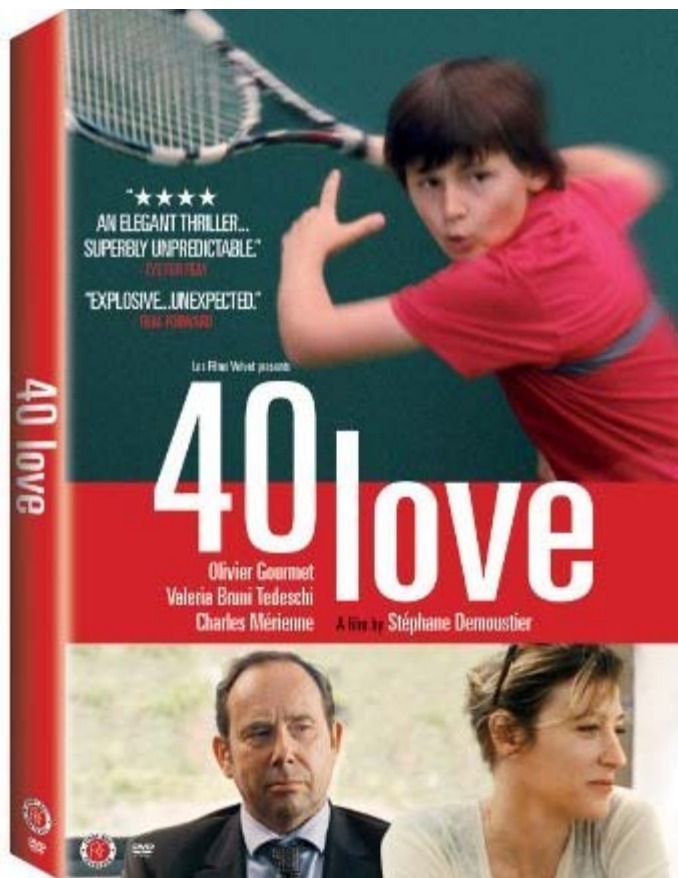
MICHAEL JACKSON'S OFF THE WALL (\$26.99 CD/BluRay; Sony Legacy)

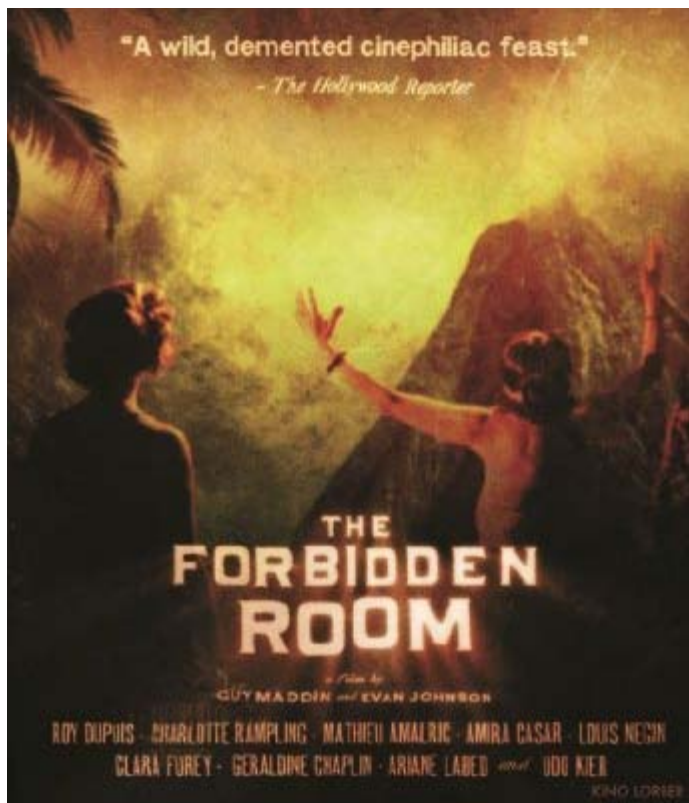
THE BIG BEAT: FATS DOMINO AND THE BIRTH OF ROCK 'N' ROLL (\$19.99 DVD; Shanachie)

I am so ready to dive back into my love of Michael Jackson's music again. This reissue of his first mature album -- *Off The Wall* -- is beautifully done. It's got a classy cover, the original album is remastered to perfection and best of all is a feature length documentary by Spike Lee that describes the making of the album, its place in popular culture and its impact on Jackson's career. As a making-of bonus feature found on the reissue of a blockbuster album, it's tremendous. Judged by the standards of Lee as a director (he's made some brilliant documentaries, after all, not to mention classic films), it unquestionably falls short. The film tosses in too many celebs who have nothing to add (like Kobe Bryant), brushes past the weaker material on

the album in a rush when it deserves more balanced criticism and simply doesn't look that good visually. It's a fine companion piece to the documentary Lee made about *Bad*. But here's praying he gets a more substantial budget and does a deep dive on *Thriller* that does that album and Lee's passion complete justice. I liked a lot of it: this documentary takes its time telling the story of the Jackson 5 and Michael's tentative steps into his solo career. I hadn't realized how key *The Wiz* was to getting Jackson and Quincy Jones together and certainly didn't know Jackson had to fight to get Q as his producer. One clear indication Lee took his time and gave this album full respect: we don't even get to the first song on the album and that famous squeal of "Ooo-oooh!" that opens it until the halfway mark. The best parts include fellow musicians breaking down tracks and getting specific when talking about what makes the songs and production innovative and unique. I suppose it's no surprise they rush through most of side two since that's notably weaker than side one. Still, I learned a lot and just know Lee could do much, much more if he gets the time and cooperation and resists the easy appeal of talking heads blathering on about how much Michael meant to them. Give that about two minutes of the next film in a quick montage, please. Then get to the music.

Fats Domino certainly deserves the American Masters treatment and he gets it here in *The Big Beat*. This documentary which aired on that PBS series gives Fats his due, reminding us how extraordinarily popular he was in the 1950s and how influential on the development of rock n roll. The film is not visually impressive but it gets the job done. The big problem is that the life of Fats wasn't terribly dramatic. He was a huge star, very nice and with very little drama of the troubled demon variety. Everyone liked him; everyone liked his music. But anyone who wants to learn more about the early days of rock n roll will undoubtedly enjoy this and soon be downloading or streaming his songs, some of the most enduring tunes in popular music.





40 LOVE (\$24.95 DVD; First Run Features)

COMING HOME (\$34.99 BluRay; Sony Pictures Classics)

THE FORBIDDEN ROOM (\$34.95 BluRay; Kino Lorber)

The Dardenne brothers are one of the current giants of cinema, turning out masterpieces beginning with 1996's *La Promesse* right up to this year's *The Unknown Girl*, which I pray will open in Cannes so I can see it in America this fall. Any Dardenne film is an event. I trust them so much that any film with their stamp of approval is one I'll seek out. Hence my interest in *40 Love*, a movie they produced and which stars Olivier Gourmet, the star of another masterpiece of theirs, *The Son*. This film marks the debut of director and co-screenwriter Stéphane Demoustier and it's intriguingly low key. Reviews keep calling *40-Love* a thriller, which will puzzle the heck out of most viewers. But it is tense and surprising as the story veers from a father who has lost his job and desperately needs to reinvent himself to an 11 year old son that proves a tennis prodigy. Being a fan of tennis and having observed countless examples of parents living through or simply overwhelming their children with pressures and dreams the kids don't really feel, this is familiar territory to me. It's a credit to the film that they captured the scene well as the son hopes to land a slot in a prestigious clinic at Roland Garros. Not a thriller by any definition, but a very solid debut.

Director Yimou Zhang once strode the international stage with the same authority as the Dardennes. His great work came in the 1980s and 1990s, peaking with the sublime *Raise The Red Lantern*. Since then, his best directing came at the Olympic Opening Ceremony, which is no dig: that truly was an astonishing bit of television. Zhang continues to make films but they often feel more soapy than sophisticated. *Coming Home* -- a tale of a couple separated by the Cultural Revolution -- is no exception. But he's too fundamentally solid to ignore and the addition of his muse Li Gong makes most anything he does worth watching. I'm not sure he's right for the spectacle of the upcoming would-be blockbuster *The Great Wall* starring Matt Damon. On the other hand, his usual fare isn't setting the world on fire, so why not?

Meanwhile, critics darling Guy Maddin keeps going on his merry way, never commanding the attention of the Dardennes or crossing over into big budget spectacles like Zhang. Instead, he continues to plow his quiet corner, obsessing over silent movies and faded film stock and mythologizing Canada like no one before or since. Co-directed with Evan Johnson, these stories within stories echo everything from Baron Munchausen to the short stories of Italo Calvino. (Actually, Madin would be IDEAL for directing *Invisible Cities* or *Cosmicomics*.) Describing how the tales of *The Forbidden Room* leap from a submarine to a lumberjack to the mountaintops is pointless. Either you're down with Maddin's delight in creaky film conventions and the artistic possibilities lost when sound intruded. Or you'll turn it on for few minutes and think WTF? Do you dare?

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CHRISTIAN
BALE
STEVE
CARELL
RYAN
GOSLING
BRAD
PITT

AN ADAPTATION OF
**THE
BIG
SHORT**

THIS IS A TRUE STORY

FROM THE AUTHOR OF
'MONEYBALL'
AND
'THE BLIND SIDE'

BLU-RAY™ + DIGITAL HD

4 ACADEMY AWARD™ NOMINATIONS
BEST PICTURE

WINNER GOLDEN GLOBE™ BEST ACTRESS - BRIE LARSON

**"BRIE LARSON WILL TAKE
YOUR BREATH AWAY."**

-TIM O'HEIR, PAPER

**"ONE OF THE BEST
MOVIES OF THE DECADE?"**

-ROBERT WHITNEY, EW.COM

**"LIFE-AFFIRMING
AND AWE-INSPIRING"**
-THE NEW YORK TIMES

**"INSPIRES AND
ULIFTS THE SOUL"**
-THE WASHINGTON POST

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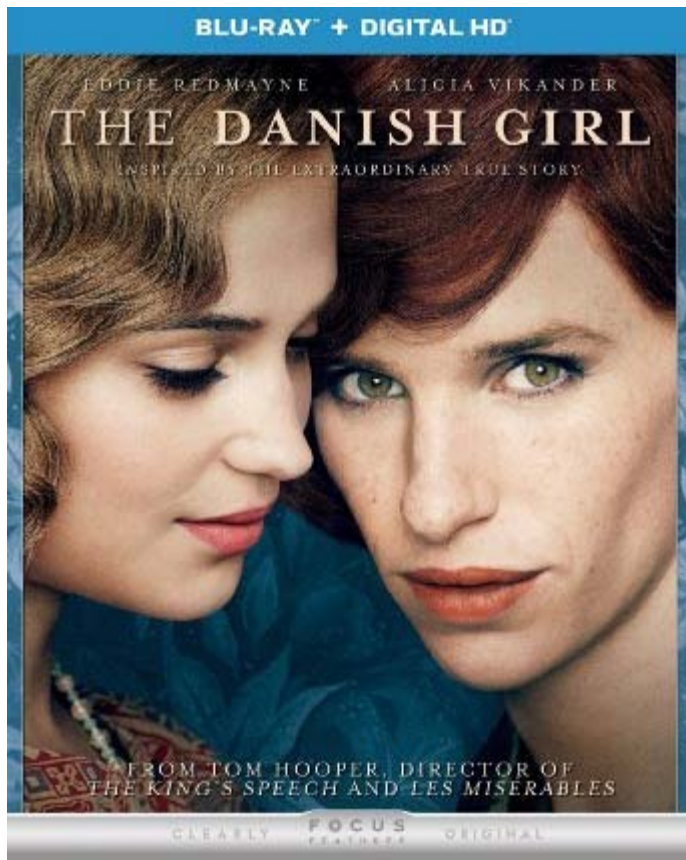
CATE BLANCHETT
ROONEY MARA

CAROL

6 2015 ACADEMY
AWARD
NOMINATIONS

- BEST ACTRESS
- BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS
- BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY
- BEST COSTUME DESIGN
- BEST ORIGINAL SCORE
- BEST ADAPTED SCREENPLAY

DIRECTED BY TODD HAINES
SCREENPLAY BY PHYLLIS NAGY



- THE BIG SHORT** (\$39.99 BluRay; Paramount)
- ROOM** (\$24.99 BluRay; Lionsgate)
- CREED** (\$35.99 BluRay; Warner Bros.)

CAROL (\$34.99 BluRay; Anchor Bay)

THE DANISH GIRL (\$34.98 BluRay; Universal)

BROOKLYN (\$39.99 BluRay; FOX)

Ok, the Oscars are over so here come the big guns, hoping to capitalize on wins or at least all the attention they've been receiving in the past few months. Honestly, none of these six movies are on my list of the best films of the year. But they're all intelligently done and worthy projects, even if they didn't quite make the cut in my own personal fiefdom. The Oscars rarely name my favorite movie of the year the actual Best Picture of the year. Heck, they almost never even nominate my favorite movie of the year for the top honor. But I don't want to be churlish. If you call yourself a movie buff, you should see these films.

I wasn't one of the people who thought the book *The Big Short* was an unlikely film. The Michael Lewis work was compelling and fun and told a little known story about guys who took a huge gamble that paid off with extravagant wealth. What's not to like? Oh, the fact that they were betting the world economy would collapse? Sure, there's that. But they didn't make it collapse? They just saw it was happening! I like the big cast, especially Christian Bale and Steve Carell. I appreciated the gambit of having celebrities pop up onscreen to explain some of the more obscure financial concepts at play in the movie. However, I didn't actually think those celebrity tutorials worked. Margot Robbie sat in a bubble bath but all she really got across was the idea that when you hear the words "sub-prime" (as in sub-prime loans) you should think "shit." Sub-prime equals shit. It was a lot of bother for very little and anyone could have said that idea and gotten it across. The Selena Gomez scene at a casino explaining how one person can place a "bet" and others can bet on whether they'll triumph and still others can bet on whether the people who bet on them will triumph seemed pretty effective in showing how risk can multiply dangerously. But it seemed to befuddle most people I spoke to. And the Anthony Bourdain segment was dreadful. He compared a somewhat complex product with selling fish at a restaurant. If the fresh fish doesn't sell that first night, you don't throw it out: you toss it into a pot, make fish stew and sell that the next night or two. That's fine...except the product being chopped up -- sub-prime loans -- was actually crap from the start. What Bourdain would do with fish is perfectly legitimate and avoids waste. The comparison would only work if the fish had gone bad BEFORE he tried to sell it. Anyone who bought the fish got sick. And anyone who bought the stew over the next few nights got violently ill or died. Why am I going on? Because this was supposed to be the shining, clever example of how the film explained what happened. And here they got it absolutely wrong, the Gomez one wasn't very helpful and the Robbie one boiled down to one line. Beyond that, I hated the cut-aways to real people facing devastation, as if the film didn't trust us to understand that real people were affected by the meltdown. And the righteousness at the end spoiled the snarky, nerdy white-hot anger of Carell, Brad Pitt and Bale that had already made the point for us earlier. And yet I was still pleased the movie was a hit. Go figure.

Not to get all "I liked her first" but I thought Brie Larson was superior in *Short Term 12*. In *Room*, the horrific story of a maniac holding a woman and her son hostage for years on end, I thought she and co-star Jacob Tremblay were very good. I don't quite know why, but I lost interest halfway through when they escaped. Other people felt the opposite: they were bored until she escaped. In any case, it felt more contrived than the book since we couldn't escape into her mind the way the author Emma Donoghue allowed us to and that felt less interesting. As a showcase for two actors, it's certainly worth your time.

Doesn't everyone realize *Creed* is pure formula, B movie hokum? Sure, director Ryan Coogler classed up the joint. Star Michael B. Jordan is the real deal. And watching Sylvester Stallone struggle to get up those famous steps he ran up back in the 1970s is enough to make any man's man choke up a little. (My older brother

teared up in the cinema when I saw it with him!) But it's still just going through the *Rocky* paces. Yeah, it's the best *Rocky* movie since *Rocky 2* but it's not within miles of the original. There's no shame in that -- hey, my heart started beating faster when they finally trotted out the theme song. And those fight scenes are very well staged. But they didn't transcend the *Rocky* flicks the way some of the reviews suggested. Nonetheless, I'm delighted both Coogler and Jordan will get more and more chances to deliver on the promise of their superior collaboration *Fruitvale Station*.

Carol is a beautifully crafted work on every level. But actress Rooney Mara is no match for Cate Blanchett as Carol. Mara is the object of her affection, which is fine. But this film would have us believe they are struggling to accept an earth-shaking love when I can't believe the timid, uninteresting character Mara plays is anything other than a toy for the bored, coolly manipulative Carol to play with. Every too-brief scene between Blanchett and Sarah Paulson (who plays her former lover and best friend) crackles with the intensity and complexity so lacking in the scenes with Mara. Even Blanchett and Kyle Chandler as her understandably frustrated husband have more passion. For me, it's a simple case of casting, chemistry and the tepid character of Therese perhaps as written that keeps this impeccably made Todd Haynes film from catching fire.

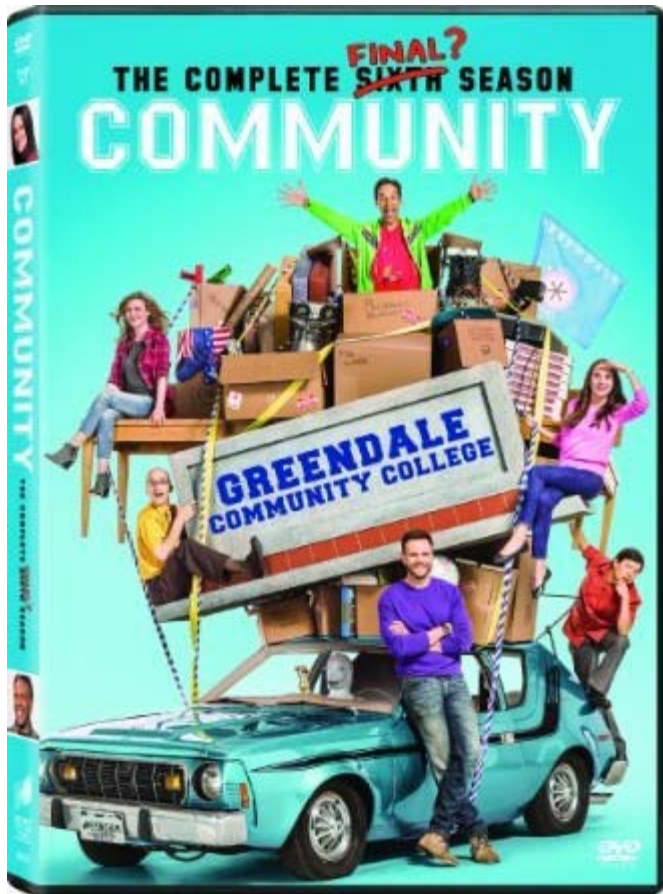
Similarly, I'm not a fan of *The Danish Girl*. Eddie Redmayne won an Oscar for his portrayal of Stephen Hawking in *The Theory Of Everything*. That film was all mawkish sentimentality so I expected little here, despite Redmayne's technical skills in that part. In fact, this film was much better. Not good, precisely. The character of Lili that Redmayne plays -- one of the first women to undergo what was then called gender reassignment surgery -- still feels hopelessly old fashioned in the doomed but noble way of classic Hollywood bio-pics. But there's a level of decency here that avoids sensationalism and truly the oddly pretty Redmayne is almost perfectly cast as a person who has the body of a man but realizes her authentic self is as a woman. "It could have been worse" is hardly praise to make an artist's heart beat faster. But it could have been.

I feel in love with actress Saoirse Ronan early on in *Brooklyn* when her character Eilis was at a dance and feeling like a wall-flower. For a minute, she had no dialogue and just stood there, emotions subtly flashing across her face. I felt such empathy for this young woman, such respect and fascination about what would happen to her -- and she wasn't saying or doing a thing. It's a marvelous piece of acting, one she sustains throughout this fine adaptation of the excellent novel by Colm Toibin. Ronan plays a young Irish woman who feels trapped in her small town and takes the grand and perilous plunge of moving to America. The movie shortchanges her story in ways that make Eilis's story too typical. But for what is there, it's lovingly done and quite satisfying. I also fell in love with Emory Cohen as her would-be American boyfriend, even though I couldn't tell if Cohen was playing a young man who was aping the mannerisms of Brando and Dean or was in fact an actor doing his damndest Brando and Dean. In either case, I found him charming indeed. Julie Walters was casually great as a landlady, a relief after her scenery chewing in the TV series *Indian Summer*. It's good and I hope after you watch it you'll read Toibin's book and indeed everything by that great writer.



THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING (\$24.98 BluRay; Video Services Corp)

Climate change really does change everything. In this documentary film companion piece to Naomi Klein's impassioned book, director Avi Lewis builds on her argument that the only rational response to the crisis is a paradigm-changing rethinking of the world and our place in it. (The same might be said for the rise of technology, which will eventually be able to do most low-paying work such as truckers, taxi cab drivers, cashiers, waiters and on and on.) They make the case for change and then they go around the world, looking at activists who have devoted themselves wholeheartedly to making that change happen. Every monumental shift in society has seemed quixotic and nutty until it actually takes place. Then it seems inevitable and obvious, whether it's the rise of democracy, women's rights, the Industrial Revolution, science rather than magic and most anything else of world-beating impact. Lewis looks at activists everywhere from the heart of Montana to smog-filled Beijing. An audience favorite at Toronto, this is not a work of art for the ages; it's a passionate flier, messily designed and then hurriedly photocopied and passed around to anyone and everyone to get the word out.



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TINA FEY

AMY POEHLER

SISTERS

UNRATED



COMMUNITY: THE COMPLETE SIXTH SEASON (\$45.99 DVD; Sony Pictures)

HOGAN'S HEROES THE COMPLETE SERIES (\$79.99 DVD; Paramount/CBS Video)

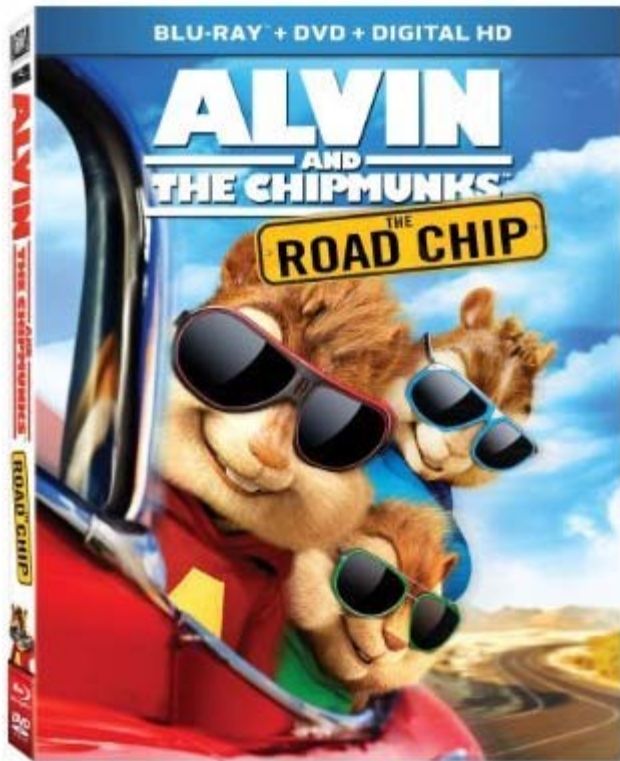
SISTERS (\$34.98 Bluray; Universal)

I wasn't one of the cult-ish fans of *Community*. But I loved their appreciation for a show that was clearly oddball, eccentric and engagingly strange whenever I dipped into it. This is the sixth and -- as the box art puts it -- final (?) season of the show that would not die but eventually did. Hey, it was a good run and now maybe the rest of us can be sucked into their world one by one. Just watch an episode, they'll say, like a crack dealer peddling their wares. It's fun! And then you're hooked.

In contrast, *Hogan's Heroes* was a big fat mainstream hit, hitting the Top 10 in its first season, the Top 20 in its second and soon fading but remaining on the air for six seasons in all. It's surely one of the most unlikely network sitcoms in TV history: a goofy, broad comedy set in a German prisoner of war camp during World War II that began airing just 20 years after the war had ended. Hey, *MASH* was set in Korea but aired during Vietnam, the war it was really commenting on, so maybe it's not that strange. Perhaps there wouldn't have been a *MASH* without the more humor-challenged *Hogan's Heroes*, a show I watched on a loop as a kid and could identify individual episodes in seconds. (Oh, that's the one where LeBeau goes to town!) The Nazis were all played by Jewish German actors and famously insisted they always look like complete idiots. It relies on taglines ("I know nothing!" "Who IS this man?"), repetition and the unspoken weird tension between the real dangers such a situation would actually entail and the actual non-existent dangers the characters actually faced. It's presented here in a complete edition with all 168 episodes on tap, though I can't imagine anyone actually watching all 168 anymore. But if like me you have a childhood-induced fondness for this nonsense, it's an inexpensive way to indulge yourself.

No, *Sisters* isn't a TV sitcom. But it has the more banal aspects of bad network TV: a bland premise executed with competent actors who milk what they can out of the situation. In this case, the situation comedy is two sisters looking at have one final blow-out party in the house their family once lived in. Tina Fey and Amy Poehler goof around and the real-life friendship that informs their onscreen repartee is by far the best aspect of this modest affair. Director Jason Moore has delivered box office hits with both this and *Pitch Perfect*. Now when is he going to get a project worthy of his talents?





THE PEANUTS MOVIE (\$39.99 BluRay; FOX)

ALVIN AND THE CHIPMUNKS: THE ROAD CHIP (\$39.99 BluRay; FOX)

What do *The Peanuts Movie* and *The Danish Girl* both have in common? The fact that "it could have been worse." *Peanuts* is made in 3-D, leans too heavily on the Red Baron (does ANYONE care about the Red Baron?), recycles Charlie Brown's crush on the little red-haired girl and generally feels like a retread rather than a revival. Still, it's a retread that kind of tries to stick to the spirit of the original, though the rounded characters feel too smooth and soft in their visual conception here.

But then you watch something like *Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Road Trip*. The fourth in a franchise that is definitely due for a rest, this is banal fare indeed. You might think, hey, the kids will be amused for a few hours. I'd rather freak the tykes out with *Mad Max: Fury Road*. And I LIKE Jason Lee and thought the first movie was, you know, *okay*. Not *good*, but *okay* and better than a gimmicky novelty record deserved. I mean, it's not like *Alvin and the Chipmunks* were ever good. So yeah compared to this *The Peanuts Movie* seems like manna from heaven. On the other hand, the original comic strip by Charles Schulz and that first brilliant *Peanuts* TV special are some of the most enduring art of the 20th century. So they deserve better. It's a lose-lose all around, I fear and your perspective depends on whether you're noting how far the *Peanuts* have fallen or how much worse it might have been.

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Sandbox, a weekly pop culture podcast that reveals the industry take on entertainment news of the day and features top journalists and opinion makers as guests. It's available for free on iTunes. Visit Michael Giltz at his website and his daily blog.

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Michael Giltz □

Freelance writer