



TRANSCRIPT

Cinema Review – The Year in Review

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Broadcast Monday 14 December 2009 at 8.30pm

Repeat broadcast Friday 18 December 2009 at 9am

The other day a friend handed me an item by a movie critic which he had read in a highly-regarded British journal. In this article, the critic took the line that one of the reasons that there are so many bad movies around these days is that the availability of cheaper technology has meant that movies can be made more cheaply than ever before. Hence there are more of them and many of them should not see the light of day let alone the hallowed ground of a darkened picture theatre.

To support his viewpoint, the critic went on to say that in the month of September, 40 films were released and that at least half of these were, to paraphrase him, rubbish. While it didn't surprise me very much to read this dire assessment of the state of affairs confronting the British cinema-going public, what *did* cause me a twinge of sympathy for this man was the realisation that, as a critic, he had it seems, been obliged to view, at least in part, all forty of the newly-released movies.

Apparently those are the rules under which British critics are required to function. I shuddered at the thought and, once again, thanked my stars that the good people at PBA FM do not have such rules and, instead, give me free reign to pick and choose what I wish to see and review.

This freedom is blissful for me but it is also, I believe, of considerable benefit to you, dear listener, because my reviews come from the heart and are free of the constraints, provisos and compromises which, I believe, weigh upon the commercial reviewer. Thus, as we come to the end of another year, and I look back over the movies I have chosen to review, I find that most of them have been good and the odd one has been outstanding.

So what I would like to do now is to flip back over this year's crop in the hope that I may be able to help you make up your mind about which DVD's to put under the Christmas tree this year – and, perhaps, which ones to avoid.

I found my way to quite a few four-star movies during the year and that's a good thing because movies that rate in this category are satisfying, involving and very good entertainment. Looking back over the five in this group I find that the themes of all of them were thoughtful and powerful but that they were all somewhat dark. The first of these is a French movie called *I've Loved You So Long* in which British actress Kristin Scott Thomas gives an outstanding performance in an emotionally searing story of pain and loss. It's a great movie – but don't give the DVD to anyone unless you give them one or two boxes of tissues to go with it.

At the Academy Awards the Anglo-Indian drama *Slumdog Millionaire* took out the Oscar for Best Picture and thoroughly deserved it. It's a difficult movie to categorise because it is a mixture of

comedy and tragedy. However, the closing message is quite joyful and you are left in an upbeat mood despite some of the horror you have witnessed along the way. I gave it four and a half stars.

Good old Clint Eastwood released two more triumphantly fine movies during the year. *Gran Torino* – which Eastwood both starred in and directed - told the engaging story of a grumpy, bigoted old codger who turns out to have a heart of gold. I gave it four stars but I gave four and a half stars to *Changeling* which he also directed. I guess that what made this rather terrifying movie even more gripping was the knowledge that it was based on the true story of a mother's unrelenting search for the truth about her kidnapped son.

The last of my four star allocations went to the outrageously-misspelled *Inglourious Basterds* - Quentin Tarantino's fantasy epic set in occupied France during the Second World War. The movie is awfully violent and somewhat too long but it's a masterclass in the creating of dramatic tension and it features some superb performances from a very strong – but largely unknown – cast.

There was a significant Australian component in my selection of movies for this year, including both of my three-star ratings, *State of Play* and *The Boys are Back*.

State of Play stars Russell Crowe in a very good conspiracy-theory yarn which keeps you on the edge of the seat for much of the way. The opening ten minutes or so features one of the best action sequences you are ever likely to see and, this on its own, is worth the price of the DVD.

The Boys are Back may even still be running at a theatre near you and it's well worth a visit. It's a touching, finely-told tragi-comedy about a single father's struggle to connect with his two sons. For South Australians, there's a bonus in recognising parts of Adelaide and the beautiful Fleurieu Peninsula in the midst of a golden summer.

British actor Clive Owen stars in *The Boys are Back* but he also features in one of this year's less worthy offerings, *Duplicity*. This movie was a tedious non-event and even though I gave it one star during the year I can no longer remember why I did that much.

This year's Dan Brown disaster, *Angels and Demons*, was almost as bad as *Duplicity* but, in a weak moment, I gave it one and a half stars because it had some quite good second-unit images of Rome and some good music by my favourite movie-music composer, Hans Zimmer.

Now, finally, was there a movie this year that rated the ultimate accolade of five stars? Well, yes there was. And it was an unusually fine combination of an Australian production with an international theme. *Mao's Last Dancer* is a wonderful movie which brings together some great Australian talent in the telling of the emotionally-charged story about the struggle and triumph of a young Chinese ballet dancer. It's probably too soon to find a DVD of this for the Christmas tree but you can give someone you care for a ticket to go and see it. They won't be disappointed.

Well, that's it for this year. Just remember that the best place to escape the summer heat is a nice cool picture theatre. Good bye for now – I'll see you in the back stalls next year.