



## TRANSCRIPT

### **Cinema Review – The American – and the year's round-up.**

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This year has rocketed past with something like Star Trekian wharp speed and we find ourselves with my final review for the year - so, in a little while, I will have a look back over the best and the worst of this year's movies.

However, before that, a quick look at the latest release featuring George Clooney – a movie called *The American*. Poor old George Clooney has, in my opinion, one major problem. He might be Hollywood's most handsome Leading Man – very credibly carrying on the tradition set a long time ago by the likes of Clark Gable and Cary Grant – but, when it comes to selecting roles in non-comedy movies he seems prone to make very misguided choices – and he does this time after time.

Glancing back over this past decade we find a string of duds: *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind*; *Syriana*; *The Good German*; and *Burn after Reading* - to name but a few. A litany of box office disasters like that within one ten year period would probably be enough to destroy the career of a person with less charisma than the man known as Gorgeous George.

Why *does* he insist on locking himself into really bad movies? It's hard to answer this question. One possible explanation is that he is, reputedly, a generous sort of fellow and perhaps sees opportunities to do a favour for a lesser-known writer or director by lending his audience appeal to an otherwise lifeless project. Whatever the reason I wish he wouldn't do it because I – like almost everyone else in the world – am drawn to the man and, over a number of years, this has caused me to waste a great deal of time waiting for something to happen in a lot of awful movies.

And the movie called *The American* is just the latest of these. This is a creaky movie with an old-fashioned feel about it. So little happens that time seems to stand still for much of its over-long duration. Just occasionally – perhaps on the positive side – it reflected something of the pacing of the works of the great Italian master of the 1960s, Michelangelo Antonioni. But, much as I used to love allowing myself to succumb to Antonioni's hypnotic inaction and somewhat bewildering plots, that was the sixties...not *now*. To attempt to re-produce an experimental style of movie-making that dates from over forty years ago just does not make any sense. It's clearly some kind of experiment in itself by Dutch-born director Anton Corbijn in only his second attempt at a feature movie.

The plot could have been cobbled-together by shuffling the story-board cards from any number of westerns or film-noir gangster flix: a gunman – played by Clooney – has to hide out anonymously while he waits for directions from his long-distance controller who will instruct him about his last job – after which he can retire. While he waits – and waits and interminably waits he forms a bond with a local prostitute with a heart of gold played by a buxom lass called Violante Placido. This is

just one of the many cliches and other predictabilities that burden the plot with more dead weight than the typical business flyer's carry-on baggage.

The whole thing is dreary, boring and devoid of credibility. It's called *The American* and if you see it coming just run a mile in the other direction. I gave it one star – I guess because it made me think of Antonioni and reminded me of the provocative, stylish movie structure which he developed and which intrigued audiences more than forty years ago.

Now a quick look back over the rest of this year's crop of new releases. Of the dozen I chose to select for review there was only one that stood out – head and shoulders above the rest – and I will come to that shortly.

The war in Iraq continued to spawn edgy, analytical and essentially anti-war movies.

*The Hurt Locker* won the Oscar for Best Picture not because it really *was* the best picture – which it wasn't - but because of the wave of anti-war sentiment sweeping Hollywood. Another Iraq movie, *Green Zone*, was a better crafted picture and, while it too did not deserve any Oscars, it applied the action-adventure style to taking a broader look at the war and the indefensible issue of the so-called “weapons of mass destruction”. I thought it was a more successful and watchable movie than *The Hurt Locker*.

The year saw the release of first two of the trilogy of Swedish movies about *The Girl ...* based on a phenomenally successful series of novels. The first of these, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, introduced the strong pivotal character, the sexually-abused street-wise young feminist who, it turns out, has the savvy and the survival skills of a pint-sized James Bond. I was rather dismissive of this movie largely because of its tendency to wallow in images of violence and sexual depravity – a tendency which I will always regard, censoriously if you like, as irresponsible movie making because of the likelihood of such images triggering-off copy-cat behaviour amongst the unstable ghouls lurking in the anonymous darkness of any given movie theatre.

The second episode of the trilogy was called *The Girl Who Played with Fire* and came to the screen just a few months later. I felt this was a better movie than its predecessor, firstly because it was far less gruesome and, secondly, because it allowed the interesting, multi-layered central character much more room to develop. This avenging angel has now fully spread her wings, so I am quite looking forward to the final episode in which she, as the title states, “kicks the Hornets' nest”.

In sharp contrast to all of these rather stressful movies the charmingly chuckly screwball comedy *Date Night* made a pleasant antidote. In this movie a suburban married couple, played with skilful deadpan by Tina Fey and Steve Carell, are seeking to inject a little spark into their humdrum marriage so they set out to have a night on the town. In a case of mistaken identity they soon find themselves fleeing for their lives through the night-time streets of New York pursued by lethal – but somewhat bumbling - baddies and corrupt policemen. *Date Night* is a lot of fun and I highly recommend it.

However, there was *not* much to recommend in the action-adventure bracket this year – even *Iron Man Two* let me down somewhat in contrast to its splendid predecessor.

Russell Crowe's adventure with *Robin Hood* was just plain misguided and Angelina Jolie's *Salt* had lots of action but a very weak plot.

Rounding out my reviews in the ho-hum basket were the following: *Inception* in which director/auteur Christopher Nolan tried his best to re-awaken the ghost of Stanley Kubrick but succeeded only in stringing together an endless succession of elaborate computer graphics and giving us all a very boring time of it; *The Ghost Writer* almost worked but, in the end, it ended up far off target. Another couple of re-writes – by a *real* writer, not a *ghost* writer – might have turned it into quite a good flick; and the last of the also-rans was *The Social Network*. I was not engaged by this gabble-fest and felt it did not make the grade as persuasive drama.

The outstanding movie of the year was light years ahead of the rest. This was, of course, *Avatar*. Not only did *Avatar* tell a wonderful story – a parable about how man should be a *part* of the ecology rather than setting out to destroy it – but it related this story in three-D and with filmic technology that seamlessly blended computer graphics and live action in a manner that has set new standards for movie making.

If you haven't seen it already I hope you can get to see it one day – preferably in a theatre in proper three-D. It's a wonderful experience.

Finally, a note about two Adelaide theatres. Happily the good old Chelsea appears to have been saved and we take joy from that.

Unhappily, though, Adelaide University's Union Hall is lost. When I last saw it, it was partly torn down and looked like an image from the aftermath of the Blitz.

A lot was written about the Union Hall in its dying months but not much was said about its use as a picture theatre. Amongst its many other functions, this superbly-designed building could – at the touch of a button – be transformed into a well-equipped picture theatre. It had a range of projection equipment and a wide-aspect screen that could be dropped down at the front of the stage.

For many years the Adelaide University Film Society held regular lunch-time screenings in the Union Hall and programmed an interesting and eclectic range of movies. When your program host Tony Ryan and I were located at the ABC offices in Hindmarsh Square, we often strolled down to the 50cent lunch time flicks at the Union Hall. The irreverent banter of the student audience gave the experience an extra dimension of fun.

Ah well...that's the price of progress ..... according to some people.

Well, best wishes for the summer, dear listener.  
I'll catch you in the back stalls again next year.