

Spring 2022

FILM TRaC*

*teen reviewers and critics





REVIEWS

The Horizon

(2021, dir. Émilie Carpentier)

As the ending of the film crept up on audiences from the dark crevices of the screening room, *The Horizon* left audiences doe-eyed and silent with its final message.

Right in the midst of the climax of the story, we see Adja passionately speaking about the injustices against her people, the injustices against young people, Black people, and her generation as a whole. Not an eye could tear away from this heart-wrenching performance as Adja pleads with the police to let her innocent brother

free and not kill him, as we've seen time and time again with many Black youth. She threatens to jump off the roof if they take another step towards her, tearful in between shuddered breaths and sobs. She screams not only for her life, but for the life of her brother, and Black people. Using her voice as a siren, simply not loud enough for society to hear, in her emotional state, she quietly and slowly throws her fist in the air. The camera then pans up, as one by one each of the protagonists throw their fists up in solidarity, hoping for their silence to speak to the words that escaped from their tongue. The words that are far too small for society to grasp. In my interpretation, they are saying "Black Lives Matter" in their



silence, and the audience is left to decipher their own meaning of the gesture.

Throughout the film we see themes of friendship, faith, love, and activism as each person navigates their journey of self-discovery. Accurately depicting the current climate of the world through the lens of teenagers, we join Adja blossoming into her consciousness, Adja embracing activism and its benefits, finding purpose and love in standing up for what you believe in, and truly making a change. Falling in love with not only the chaos of life, but also the romance of helping communities.

Throughout the film, we watch her brown eyes fill with a hopeful promise under the glistening sun rising above to

the new day. A new day for fighting, and laughing, loving, and living.

Athaliah Elvis

■

Late into *The Horizon* there is a scene that succinctly summarizes the film's strengths and weaknesses. Adja (Tracy Gotoas) is on the phone with her mother, who is visiting their ancestral village back in Senegal, while simultaneously teasing and berating her brother for having his girlfriend over over. The strong chemistry between the actors hints at a compelling familial dynamic that will play a larger role in the story. However, like a lot of potentially interesting plot points in *The Horizon*, the film refuses to properly develop them, weakening its overall impact.

The film follows Adja as she becomes involved with a local environmentalist group protesting the development of a new shopping mall. Through her interactions with the group she gains a greater insight into the effects climate change has on her community and family as well as the constant barriers in place that prevent any significant action from being taken.

Despite the topical nature of the premise, the film's dramatic power is weighed down by a myriad of subplots. It seems the filmmakers wanted to check off every Y.A. trope they could fit. Contemporary political issue? Check. Unnecessary romance with underdeveloped pretty-boy love interest? Check. Best friend *and* family drama? Check and mate. Every time it seems like *The Horizon* has found its focus and is about to connect the dots between its disparate storylines, another one gets piled on, slowing whatever momentum the story had.

Unlike other recent films about young women of color in France such as *Divines* or *Girlhood*, there is a



lack of attention paid to fleshing out the protagonists' interior lives and community. Late into the film we're told of how people in their neighborhood, which is populated primarily by African immigrants and their children, have been impacted by declining federal investment. But, instead of having the intended effect, the moment feels hollow: why should we care about what happens to this community if we barely even see it?

The Horizon isn't without its pleasures. The cast of young actors is generally solid, interjecting a sense of realism, the film is well shot, and director Émilie Carpentier does show a willingness to confront ongoing issues without giving into glib cynicism like other recent films such as the satire *Don't Look Up*. If only she could work with a tighter script.

Joseph Hillyard



Portrait of A Lady on Fire (2019, dir. Céline Sciamma)

During its opening minutes, it seems like *Portrait of A Lady on Fire* will fit neatly into period drama convention. Young artist Marianne (Noémie Merlant) arrives by boat to a small French island for a single purpose: she has been commissioned to paint Héloïse (Adèle Haenel) before her marriage to a Milanese nobleman. In the hands of a different filmmaker this premise could be a simplistic rummage on the well-worn subject of arranged marriage and an excuse for crafting some beautiful images. However, writer-director Céline Sciamma, the same filmmaker who reinvigorated the coming-of-age narrative with *Girlhood* and took an unconventional look at grief with *Petite Maman*, is much more adventurous.

It's soon revealed that Héloïse has no idea she's being painted and believes Marianne to be her new walking companion. The two soon form a bond, the enigmatic Héloïse slowly opening up to the

more worldly Marianne as the relationship between painter and muse slowly blossoms into a passionate love affair.

Although the slow burn approach employed by Sciamma may seem monotonous at first, it pays off in creating well-rounded and fully developed protagonists. The film subtly builds both romantic tension and camaraderie among the characters through their interactions, be it the three women debating the signification of Orpheus and Eurydice, or Marianne showing Héloïse the beauty of music.



As their relationship transitions from flirtation to intimacy, the director's gentle approach adds another layer of empathy to the characterizations: Marianne takes

pleasure in the limited freedoms she is afforded as a painter from a respected family of artisans, while Héloïse must grasp the reality that she and her family's future is contingent upon her ability to marry, even though she finds arranged marriage repulsive.

The affair between the two acts as an escape from each of their respective circumstances, until the cruel reality sets back in. Parallel to their plight, Sophie, the most vulnerable of the three women, must grapple with an unwanted pregnancy in an era where safe, reproductive healthcare is

delivering moving performances that enliven scenes that may otherwise seem out of place or tedious. When the film reaches its inevitable climax, the result is a heartbreaking, emotionally devastating conclusion that is so impactful because of how well the characters are drawn.

Joseph Hillyard

■

Opening with scenes of silence, accompanied only by the breathing of



severely limited.

The strong chemistry between actresses is a key part of what makes *Portrait of A Lady on Fire* so compelling, each

the camera following the faces of young women, this film leaves the viewer entranced. While the camera pans in on the tense face of Marianne, a question is posed not only to Marianne, but the

audience: what is this painting? *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* follows the budding love story between two women destined to not be together, two women, like the constellations of the skies, so far apart, yet aligned with one another.

Marianne, a professional painter, was hired on the condition of capturing Héloïse, as she refuses to be painted by the many men that have sailed to her family's home along the islands. At first, Marianne goes about capturing pictures of her face in secret, taking her on excursions along the open land, but eventually confesses, which leads to the two having a relationship. They sleep together, staying up through the hours of the night eager to learn about the other.

Desperately and hopelessly in love with one another, we are shown the "honeymoon" of their romance as the two confess their feelings for one another and begin to embrace this dream-like sequence of "what is," rather than "what could be,"

for the two have only 3 days to embrace one another before they must revert back to their respective realities.

This film follows a love story between two people who can't be together, but work with what little time they have. There are scenes of vulnerability, as there are shots of the women completely bearing themselves emotionally and physically. The camera work doesn't follow the physical sexual element of the movie, but merely alludes to them getting intimate. It shows the sexual attraction of being seen, and understood, and loved for who you are.

And as the clock strikes down on them, hailing thunder to their parade, the element of a different type of love appears. A love that is so great, you must let it go, not for the sake of yourself, but for the person in front of you. A love that needs not be tended to daily, for its power is so strong that it will always live inside you over the many courses of your life.

A tragedy, much like the legend of



Eurydice and Oedipus, which shows to be a persistent theme between the women in the movie. In a mystical mirage, Héloïse is shown as Eurydice, glowing in a white gown, whisked by the winds of a milky haze, tempting Marianne, who would play Orpheus, to turn around one last time. To turn around and come back. To turn around and listen to the calls of her dear lover.

The women have developed such strong feelings for one another in such a short period of time, it's hard to believe that this only takes place in 3 days time. They will always cling to their memories of one another, not in a grieving way, but a blessing to have experienced a love like that in this lifetime, bringing tears to my eyes. And so as the camera cut off abruptly, leaving me tearful in the dark, I too, clung to the memories of them.

Athaliah Elvis

■

Heavenly Creatures

(1994, dir. Peter Jackson)

Based on a notorious New Zealand murder, *Heavenly Creatures* depicts the tumultuous adolescence of two teenage girls, Juliet Blume (Kate Winslet) and Pauline Parker (Melanie Lynskey), as their relationship accelerates from budding friendship to toxic obsession. The key things that elevate this film above typical teen murder stories (if such a genre exists) are the strong chemistry between the leads and director Peter Jackson's imaginative visuals.

While Winslet is more

recognizable to contemporary audiences (Titanic came out a few years after her debut here) and gives a strong performance as the emotionally damaged Juliet, Lynskey is the real draw here. As the film's narrator and point of view character, she is tasked with keeping the narrative on track despite its tonal shifts.

Being a teen herself when she was cast in the role of Pauline, her transformation into a ruthless murderess is all the more horrifying because just looking at her, she is a perfectly normal teenager.

Introverted and ridden with angst, yes, but starkly human. Perhaps, if things had been different, she would have been capable of living a normal life, making it all the more horrifying when she becomes consumed with this unhealthy obsession.

In *Heavenly Creatures*, Jackson created a psychological drama that succeeds not just because of its intense thrills but because he was able to find humanity where others may have sought sensationalism.

Joseph Hillyard

■

Bringing a dark twist to the beauty of friendship, the introductory set-up to the tale of Pauline and Juliet plays a trick on the viewers in more than one way. Initially many are led to believe this is possibly a sappy story on the effects of war on the townspeople, innocent to the changes of their world. Then, with shots of racing school shoes stained by blood accompanied by shrieking screams, we are led to believe it's now a horror movie. And finally, as we are shown the two girls reconciling with 'their parents,' we are led to believe it's now a story on the friendship between two sisters. With each scenario, I was proven wrong.

The New Zealand film *Heavenly Creatures* follows the story of two girls who have developed a love so strong for one another it quite literally sends their worlds crashing down. Pauline, an aesthetically



darker and more sour girl, befriends Juliet, and the two hit it off on opposing their strict teacher and sending the class into a frenzy.

Adored by each other's mysteriousness and the allure of something opposite to what they've known, each slowly begins to incorporate this profound happiness into their lives. Like a drug to one another, neither can stop, as the rush of love that comes from simply thinking of the other is too much. Addicted to the thrill of drafting dreams and escaping to worlds exclusive to only each other, the film follows their dramatized dreams as they lose conscience of their realities. Soon, both see their real lives as something to dread, like a jail, as they're trapped in their respective worlds, which seem to darken more and more as the days go on.

Throughout the film, their feelings intensify, scaring their parents. The girls are confronted with their biggest fear: separation from one another, as speculation from both the parents and outside sources grow. Almost like Romeo and Juliet, the two yearn for each other, despite the world insisting they stay separate.

This film captures the darker essence of friendship and love: the feeling that, despite there being millions of inhabitants of the world, no one quite gets you like your best friend. You love them so much you couldn't function without them, much less live. You'd kill just to be in their presence a little longer.

This film shows the lengths the world goes to keep women, specifically younger women, in this endless cycle of unhappiness. It strips away any and everything that young women can find joy in, joy to be themselves, to have friends, and be their unique selves. It forces them to assimilate and conform to the norms of society and ultimately dim their own light to make others comfortable.

Athaliah Elvis

Petite Maman

(2022, dir. Céline Sciamma)

Early into *Petite Maman*, Nelly (Joséphine Sanz), a young girl mourning the loss of her grandmother, meets a stranger in the woods. After some initial awkwardness, the two end up playing and she learns the other girl's name: Marion (Gabrielle Sanz). This is a surprise to young Nelly, since that is the name of her mother. Soon the two realize that through the magic of plot Nelly has been put in contact with a younger version of her mother, a revelation that might be treated as earth-shattering in another film, yet here is accepted without much fanfare. This moment sets the tone for the rest of *Petite Maman*, a dreamy little film that confronts the looming specter of death and grief through the eyes of its child protagonists.

Like her other films, *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* and *Girlhood*, Sciamma successfully fleshes out the characters and gives them a sense of authenticity, from the moment where the girls joyously make crepes to staging their own play, complete with costumes and melodramatic plots fit for any top-quality soap opera. It is in these little moments that both the young actresses and the film itself really get to shine, capturing the innocence of childhood while refusing to ignore the less gentle reality of the situation.

While full of wonderful little moments, the film never fully comes together and as a result feels a lot less impactful than it could have been. The short runtime is definitely a negative here since more time could have been spent developing supporting characters who loom large in the narrative yet never feel



fully present. Despite being well acted and charming on its own terms, *Petite Maman* never reaches the emotional heights that it clearly aspires towards.

Joseph Hillyard

■

Delayed Mourning

Petite Maman is a film about the relationship between a grandmother, mother and daughter.

The beginning of the film starts out with a girl named Nelly in the nursing home that her grandma once lived in, waiting for her mom as she was clearing out her grandmother's room after she passed. They then drove to Nelly's grandmother's house to meet her dad and to clear out her home.

neighborhood, until, one day, out in the forest, Nelly found a girl her age making a fort, just like how her mother used to.

Her name was also Marion, like her mother, and she looked just like Nelly. When Nelly told Marion her name she learned that it was the same name as Marion's grandmother.

As they continued to play together, they eventually realized that child Marion was Nelly's mother. This did not faze them, they were too young to think any deeper about this. They continued to play together but they did not tell anyone about this connection they had. As time went on, they got closer, and occasionally bonded over this connection and briefly talked about how grown up Marion was grieving, and, finally, when child Marion had to leave, Nelly was finally able to say



Marion was in mourning throughout this, so it was a long process.

Nelly was bored and didn't know what to do or who to play with in this rural

her final goodbye to the younger version of her grandmother. At the very end of the movie, when adult Marion reunited with child Nelly after she took some time

to grieve alone, they said each other's first names to the other as if they acknowledged what had happened, and they hugged.

This movie was a very natural-looking, and quiet movie. It was very calm and light, there was not much depth to it. They used lots of muted and desaturated colors, which mixed very well with they nature they were surrounded by throughout this film. This film focused on the two eight-year-old girls and their point of views. This movie displayed grief, final goodbyes, and childhood. I recommend this to anyone looking for a short and sweet multiverse movie.

Layla Grant-Simmonds

■

Serendipity

(2001, dir. Peter Chelsom)

While many may shy away from the frivolous adventures and mishaps that make up the world of romantic comedies—or “rom-coms” as they are more affectionately known—I embrace them head-on. Rom-coms are meant to be cheesy, insufferable, ridiculous, and unrealistic. However, they all appeal to our inner hopeless romantics who want to feel safe and loved, making the 90+ minutes of

miscommunication or cringy encounters bearable. My go-to comfort movie is the greatest rom com of all-time: *Serendipity*.

Serendipity follows two star-crossed lovers, Jonathan and Sara, who meet while Christmas shopping at Bloomingdales. Their undeniable tension is obvious from their first encounter when they both reach for the final pair of black gloves on display, which they intend on giving to their respective significant others. However, since they are both in a relationship, they decide not to act on their chemistry. Instead, they decide to leave it all up to fate: Sara writes her contact information in a copy of “Love in the Time of Cholera” and sells it, hoping it will somehow make its way to Jonathan; Jonathan writes his name on a flimsy \$5 bill and spends it, hoping it will somehow make its way to Sara. With a copy of “Love in the Time of Cholera” and a \$5 bill out in the wild, viewers are tasked with figuring out how both artifacts somehow make their way back to the couple. While receiving help from surprising sidekicks—like their respective ex-fiancés, Jonathan’s and Sara’s best friend, and an eccentric, moody Bloomingdales salesman—the road to love is anything but predictable and stress-free.

Serendipity is a heartwarming watch that grabs a hold of our most vulnerable





organ: our heart. Every scene pulls at your heartstrings; missed encounter after missed encounter, viewers experience frustration, anticipation, glee, and sadness. But since the couple's chemistry is incredibly strong—almost otherworldly—I could not stop watching.

The characters are bathed in warm, enveloping tones that make each scene like an ancient artifact from your parents' past, an embodiment of the trials and tribulations they went through back in the day to find a type of true love that no longer exists in the modern world of dating. The final scene utilizes the simplicity, gentleness, beauty, and purity of winter snowflakes to create a winter "loverland" (haha) that would out-compete any childhood fairytale/castle fantasies.

The final frame made me squirm, squeal, and sigh in happiness, rebranding the overused kissing-in-the-rain scene to the much better, in my opinion, kissing-as-it-gently-snows scene. It was serendipitous that I found this movie on one random Sunday afternoon, but as the title implies, so are the best and loveliest things in life.

Ava Rem

The Love Witch

(2016, dir. Anna Biller)

As the lights of my bedroom dimmed, and the movie title, *The Love Witch* danced along the screen, I was immediately drawn into the film by its gothic, yet contemporary setting, and quite literally felt the magic seep into my soul.

The Love Witch is the ultimate occult horror fanatic fantasy, as it travels themes of feminism, sexuality, witchcraft, love, and the bewildering, yet bewitching philosophy of life.

Sublime, and seducing as she is, Elaine just can't get a man to fall eternally and irrevocably in love with her. From her Victorian apartment, which leaves your eyes in complete awe, Elaine casts spells and leaves a long line of broken, undead hearts in her trail. Her spells work, and she ultimately gets her every desire, but she quickly gets bored with them as no man lives up to her perfect ideal, or the prophecy seen along her apartment walls in a beautiful tarot card art style. Hopping from lover to lover, each man dies from their incapability to be "perfect," or at least a suitable suitor to Elaine. She's beautiful, smart, and "every man's fantasy," a fantasy that proves to be too great for them.

Elaine lives her life for men, she dresses

and acts a certain way to simply be loved by them with the idea that once she is loved she will forever hold power over a man, subjecting him to her every desire. We see the themes of femininity pointing fun at the patriarchy that dominates the world today. I loved this theme as it not only invoked such invigorating and realistic topics, but also shed light on conversations the world fears so greatly today: the power of women. Love is a feeling too great for men, and so they shame women for their ability to wield and hold this power to their will, ultimately submitting themselves to an uneventful life.

Scene by scene, and shot by shot, *The Love Witch* holds your attention and truly makes you think about “what’s next?” The film also shot and edited in a grainy, vintage way, leading the viewer to believe this is an old film. The scenes are set in a lurid, but luminous universe, making the storyline all the more compelling. Not a moment went by where I wanted to look away. Costumes, make-up, and the dialogue also add to this, making this film a masterpiece.

Athaliah Elvis

■

Ninotchka

(1939, dir. Ernst Lubitsch)

These days, thoughtful dark comedy can seem like a lost art form.

For every brilliant one like *The Death of Stalin* or the gloriously foul-mouthed TV series *Veep* (both helmed by Armando Iannucci) there are five desperate flops made by people who confuse vulgarity for charm and half-baked social commentary for relevance. Thankfully, Ernst Lubitsch was not a man of cheap tricks.



Before Lubitsch showed that he had the chutzpah to take shots at Nazis with *To Be or Not To Be*, the acclaimed director turned his satirical eye towards another authoritarian regime: the USSR.

Ninotchka is the story of a Soviet diplomat Nina “Ninotchka” Yakushova (Greta Garbo) who meets an American lawyer Count Leon d’Algout (Melvyn Douglas) in prewar Paris. They are at odds at first due to their clashing ideological leanings, however, over time, her steely Soviet resolve melts, revealing the fun-loving comrade underneath.

A key aspect of the film’s success is the wry chemistry between Garbo and Douglas. Although this film is best known as the actress’s first foray into comedy (the tagline used by advertisers was “Garbo Laughs”) her performance is so exceptional that it’s hard to imagine that she hadn’t done this many times before. Her dry, deadpan delivery of well-placed jabs at Soviet Russia (“The last mass trials were a great success. There are going to be fewer but better Russians.”) is endlessly funny. Douglas isn’t that far behind her, giving a restrained performance that holds its own charms as his playboy lifestyle is upended by this mysterious





foreigner.

The leads are complemented by a lively cast of supporting players, from Ina Claire as the scheming Grand Duchess who seeks to disrupt the couple's budding relationship, to the various character actors who show up in funny bit parts as Parisians, Soviet bureaucrats, and underlings.

The lively first half is somewhat undermined by a meandering final act as the narrative begins to lose steam and the jokes become less frequent. The strong chemistry between the two leads makes these latter sections more tolerable, but it is disappointing to watch a film with such a compelling, subversive premise march to a very predictable conclusion.

So while *Ninotchka* doesn't reach the height of other dark comedies, the effortlessly charming cast and witty script make a fun, albeit short, romp with a satirical bite.

Joseph Hillyard

■

La Mami

(2019, dir. Laura Herren Garvín)

To Make Ends Meet

La Mami is a documentary film that takes place in a bathroom and changing room in a club in Mexico City, where the women who work for this club get ready.



The type of club they work at is one where men pay women to dance and drink with them.

This film starts out with La Mami burning sage around the dressing room and bathroom before all the women come in that night to get ready. You start out only hearing her breathing and seeing her slowly walk and wave towards the room. When she finally sits in her go-to seating position where she stays all night, she lets out the sage and waits for the working women to start flooding in.

As they flood in, they take out their makeup bags and short dresses. As they catch up and laugh and shout, they quickly (but not quick enough according to Mami) get dressed for their shifts. After each of them got dressed they started to aggressively and quickly pack on their (and their borrowed coworkers') makeup. Despite their speed, they all seemed relaxed. All but one.

One woman looked sad and tired with her eyes red from crying. She was the new girl. This woman was dreading having to start working. She, like many others, took this job out of necessity. Her story that she explained to La Mami and some of the other girls was that she had to take her son to Mexico City to admit him to a good hospital to treat his cancer. She got this job to pay for the treatment and surgeries her son had to endure. This was not her first

choice of job: she, like many of the other women, was a single woman in her 30s or 40s, just trying to make ends meet. Despite their desperation and their dislike for their jobs, they still showed respect for themselves and for each other for taking this job.

As the film went on, she and La Mami especially got closer and bonded over their same love for their kids. La Mami was older than all of them, but she later opened up

and explained she worked the same job as them at their ages.

Each night, all of these women had to get drunk and dance with these men, they often had unpleasant experiences that they would come back and tell La Mami during their quick bathroom breaks. La Mami, every time, would sympathize with them, but continue to push them to get back out there, because that was their job.

La Mami showed tough love to each and every one of them, even the newer and younger girls that later came in. When they showed disrespect for this career, she stood up for the other girls and explained to them the hard work these girls do everyday to survive. She shows her love in a way that a loving but tough mother would.

If you like more personal and raw documentaries, you should watch this film. It displayed so much struggle and trauma. Though it was long, this film was worth every minute of it.

Layla Grant-Simmonds



Everything Everywhere All at Once (2022, dirs. "Daniels")

From the stark realism of a career criminal pondering the reality of the American dream *In A Most Violent Year* to the darkly humorous and heartbreaking story of a family that refuses to inform their matriarch of her cancer diagnosis in *The Farewell*, A24 has in recent years become haven for unique and genre-bending films that might not have found a home elsewhere. With *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, they add another oddball film to their resume.

In simple terms, the film centers around Evelyn Wang (Michelle Yeoh), a Chinese immigrant who runs a laundromat with her husband Waymond (Ke Huy Quan) and daughter Joy (Stephanie Hsu). In the opening minutes of the film it seems like everything is falling apart; Evelyn's being

audited by the IRS after incorrectly filing her taxes, her husband seems increasingly detached from reality and her demanding father Gong Gong (James Hong) has just arrived from China bringing a lot of emotional baggage with him.

While on the way to her appointment with IRS inspector Deirdre Beaubeirdra (Jamie Lee Curtis), an already unpleasant day takes a sharp turn for the bizarre. Evelyn is suddenly sucked into the multiverse and is set on a journey where she'll fight against a black hole that looks like an everything bagel and experience alternate versions of herself that range from a movie star in kung fu films (insert *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* joke here) to a world where everyone's fingers are hot dogs, each trip bringing her closer to unraveling the mystery of why this all happening in the first place.

Everything Everywhere All at Once manages to ground its increasingly absurd plot in the human story of a family that is attempting to stay together despite mounting pressures. Michelle Yeoh's performance is the glue that keeps the film together. The premise allows her to



inhabit a wide variety of personalities, which she handles with aplomb, showing off her impressive martial arts skills in one scene, making us laugh in the next, and consistently finding the emotional truth in every moment she has onscreen.

Writer-director duo the Daniels display an astounding amount of creativity



Spider-Man: No Way Home (2021, dir. Jon Watts)

This review requires some context: It was December 18th, 2021. That night, I was at the AMC Lincoln Center to see Steven Spielberg's spectacular adaptation of *West Side Story* with my family. At the time, I felt fairly confident in my decision, *West Side Story* was a film I had been anticipating for months, nervous that one of my favorite movie musicals would fall victim to the trend of terrible modern reimaginings. Glancing at social media, I saw that many of my classmates were out seeing *Spider-Man*.

It would be safe to say that most of the people at the theater that night were there to see *Spider-Man*, supported by the fact that it is now one of the highest grossing films of all time, whereas *West Side Story* unfortunately underperformed. Regardless, I stood my ground. Having finally seen *Spider Man: No Way Home*, after months of people hyping it up and breaking all sorts of box office records, I remain confident in my decision.

The film follows the aftermath of the last installment where Spiderman had his identity exposed as Peter Parker and has been falsely blamed for the murder of the villain Mysterio (typical teen stuff). On top of all this he has to confront another evil: college admissions! Hoping that the Sorcerer Supreme can get him out of this jam, Parker seeks the assistance of Dr. Strange to undo the damage these revelations had on his personal life. However, things escalate quickly, and soon villains from alternative dimensions are coming for Spider-Man's head.

As someone who has enjoyed much of the MCU, especially as the franchise has gotten more adventurous in its storytelling, this entry very much feels like a step backwards. Unlike *Shang-Chi*, which added new wrinkles to the traditional Marvel

throughout. Just when you think they've run out of ideas, the filmmakers throw another curveball at the audience and take full advantage of the possibilities offered by the premise, such as an inventive sequence where Evelyn faces off with a slew of henchpeople, using the abilities she's learned from versions of herself scattered throughout the multiverse.

The film is ambitious, perhaps a bit too ambitious for its own good. Occasionally the plot can feel overstuffed and the attempts at philosophical musings more meandering than meaningful, slowing the pace down significantly. The jokes can at times be hit-and-miss. More than once, a bit was stretched out long after it had stopped being funny or even amusing. But even as the film threatens to collapse under the weight of its own ambition, Michelle Yeoh is here to save it.

She and her highly capable supporting cast help steer the film through even misplaced or unnecessary scenes. The result is a film that is endlessly creative and a lot of fun to watch.

Joseph Hillyard



formula, and pushed the franchise in a new direction, *No Way Home* remains trapped in the past. The multiverse gimmick isn't really used in an interesting way beyond providing cheap nostalgia in the form of cameos from pre-reboot Spider-Man films, and it gets boring fast.

The film is at its most engaging when it focuses on the coming-of-age narrative, the strong chemistry between Tom Holland, Zendaya and Jacob Batalon breathing some life into proceedings. These bright spots are few and far between as the multiverse plot sucks up all the energy in the room. It's far from the worse MCU has to offer, but, given that it involves one of the franchise's most memorable characters, it's very disappointing.

Joseph Hillyard



The Batman

(2022, dir. Matt Reeves)

The Batman is a film about Bruce Wayne, a superman whose philosophy is wreaking vengeance. This three-hour-long movie followed Batman's sad and lonely life in a fictional city called Gotham, a very capitalist, lonely, and crime-filled city, where other heroes and villains like Catwoman and the Riddler live. This film goes through Bruce's journey of learning about himself and catching bad guys.

The Batman has this moody and dark feel: it could be compared to New York City

on a rainy cold night. The setting is very gray and dreary. As the movie progressed, and as the storyline became more complex, the mood of the film became darker with more blue tones, although, whenever there were many villains involved with the scene, it gave off more of a yellow-ish gold mood.

The Batman was very worth the wait. With Bruce Wayne played by Robert Pattinson, Zoë Kravitz playing Catwoman, Riddler played by Paul Dano and Jeffrey Wright playing officer James Gordon, this was the best Batman movie I have seen in years, and the best cast for Batman and Catwoman especially. The ways in which Pattinson acted, portraying such complex emotions with very minimal lines, added to the mood of this film.

I feel like if I did not know as much about DC Comics, I would still have enjoyed watching this film on its own. I would pay to see this even if I was not a Batman fan, it was very

entertaining. This movie really grabs your attention and is worth sitting through all three hours of it.

Layla Grant-Simmonds

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Molly's Game

(2017, dir. Aaron Sorkin)

For anyone who enjoys crime dramas and thrillers, this film is definitely a must-watch. Starring Jessica Chastain as Molly Bloom, *Molly's Game* follows a lost 25-year-old who doesn't know what to do with her



The Bubble

(2022, dir. Judd Apatow)

Another addition to the burgeoning genre of pandemic-themed films that have attempted to grapple with or satirize our new reality, *The Bubble* is another disposable, big budget Netflix original that will likely vanish from the minds of viewers not long after watching it. The film follows a film crew working on the latest installment in a long running franchise as COVID

outbreaks, and pressure from money-hungry studio executives and those inhuman monsters called actors threaten to derail the production.

The Bubble is one of those movies where there was a germ of a good idea somewhere but it got lost in an overstuffed screenplay. After a promising opening that playfully skewers the state of the entertainment industry during COVID the film descends

life. Like anyone who doesn't know what to do with their life, she starts the biggest game of poker only for high rollers.

The film may seem like a basic plot, but it's the exact opposite. The film has suspense and keeps you at the edge of your seat. The acting is more than superb by Jessica Chastain; she definitely fits into the role as Molly, and the film digs deep into Molly's emotions and you can feel Molly's anxiety just by how its filmed.

The director Aaron Sorkin lets you make the decision whether you feel bad for her, or if you think she's just another criminal. You can also feel like you're in the poker games with her.

For a film only following one person and her journey, it might be too long of a film for some people. Some parts feel too stretched out, but what makes this film amazing is the acting by Jessica Chastain: she perfectly captures how Molly Bloom felt. For that it is worth the watch on Netflix!

Elias Youngelson



into a series of predictable and repetitive jokes that get progressively less funny as the film unravels (did we need three nose swab jokes!?) The cast, made up of many capable performers who have proven themselves to be very funny on many other occasions (if you haven't seen Guz Khan in the British television series *Man Like Mobeen* you are missing out), are left flailing by Judd Apatow's confused direction and aimless script.

Joseph Hillyard

MOVIE SUMMARIES

The Horizon

(2021, dir. Émilie Carpentier)

A brilliant depiction of the struggles between past and present generations over social justice, and how to feel useful and helpful in a world in dire need of care and attention. Actress Tracy Gotoas uses a simple blink or an almost imperceptible nod to convey a plethora of confusing, conflicting, and frustrating emotions—emotions targeted at the injustice towards the environment and those fighting for its longevity. -ar

Heavenly Creatures

(1994, dir. Peter Jackson)

After moving from England, Juliet meets Pauline at Juliet's new school in Australia and they bond from the start: both of the girls like to play, make believe, run around and have fun. Their parents become wary of this friendship, worried that it could now be more than a friendship, but the two will do anything to stay together. They make it clear that nothing will get in the way of their friendship. You couldn't ask for better acting from Melanie Lynskey and Kate Winslet. Their friendship captivates the audience. -ey

Portrait of A Lady on Fire

(2019, dir. Céline Sciamma)

A young French painter, Marianne was hired to paint a portrait for a girl named Héloïse, who was soon to marry a Milanese nobleman whom she had never met. The story follows Marianne getting to know the emotional and romantic side of Héloïse while struggling to paint an emotional but still image of her. -sl

Ready Player One

(2018, dir. Steven Spielberg)

A feel-good movie starring Ty Sheridan as Wade Watts, a young man who uses the metaverse to escape from reality. He's on a mission to find three eggs that claim ownership over the metaverse and make someone a trillionaire. Directed by world-class director Steven Spielberg, this film presents a dystopian future where reality is not fun anymore and everyone escapes to a virtual world called The Oasis. The film pushes the limits of imagination. Although the film's plot was lacking, the acting was superb, and the fantasy world felt so real, almost like it was actually the real world. -ey

French Connection

(1979, dir. William Friedkin)

A fast-paced and well-thought-out crime thriller about two nosy and persistent cops trying to bust a heroin deal. While watching this film you are at the edge of your seat. You definitely do not want to miss out on anything, every detail the film maker puts in is important for every scene. If you're into thrillers, this is definitely a film for you. -ey

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