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Movies part of season

By Christopher Blair
 Emerald News Editor

Whether they use Christmas as merely a setting or as their reason for being, several movies have become an integral part of the holiday season.

Most film critics either give it four stars or have it on their "ten greatest movies of all time" lists: Frank Capra's 1946 classic *It's a Wonderful Life*, starring Jimmy Stewart, Donna Reed and Lionel Barrymore.

Most of the movie does take place at Christmas, but the movie's "what if I hadn't been born?" romp at the end is a fascinating bit of storytelling, and the ending is enough to put even a satanist in the holiday spirit.

One of the few Christmas movies that is as good as *It's a Wonderful Life* — and probably the only one that gets played more often between Thanksgiving and the end of December — is *Miracle on 34th Street*, starring Maureen O'Hara, an eight-year-old Natalie Wood, and Edmund Gwenn as Santa Claus.

For literature buffs, any of the ten or so movies based on Charles Dickens' holiday ghost story *A Christmas Carol*

should be a staple of holiday video rental. Two, one made in 1938 and the other in 1951 with Alastair Simm in the title role, are regarded by many as the best.

Another classic is *The Bishop's Wife* (1947), starring Cary Grant as an angel who helps Loretta Young and David Niven raise money to build a new church.

A newer movie, 1983's *A Christmas Story*, is a hilarious look at the splashy, sometimes tacky, holiday Christmas has become. The nostalgic Norman Rockwell-esque look at the holiday can be defined as a family film, but that doesn't keep it from being funny.

Every year, the airwaves are swamped with an annoying assortment of kiddie Christmas cartoons. Only one, Dr. Seuss' *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, is worth the time of kids over the age of 18.

The dastardly Grinch, starring the voice of Boris Karloff, is the ultimate Scrooge, and the "real meaning of Christmas" message at the end is pleasant without being syrupy.

All of these films are currently on heavy rotation on television, especially on cable. If not, they are available at your local video store.

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