

My Top 10 Films of 2016

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Frame and the Portland International Film Festival. It invites you

to travel for awhile with a talented black woman, Samantha Montgomery, who channels her yearning to be a singer into videos post-

ed on YouTube. The filmmaker set out to make a film about YouTube users and ended up stumbling on a goldmine; Montgomery's raw authenticity and hope will inspire you, as it did the Israeli music



Samantha Montgomery in "Presenting Princess Shaw," an inspired film about a talented singer who becomes an Internet sensation after toiling in obscurity for years.

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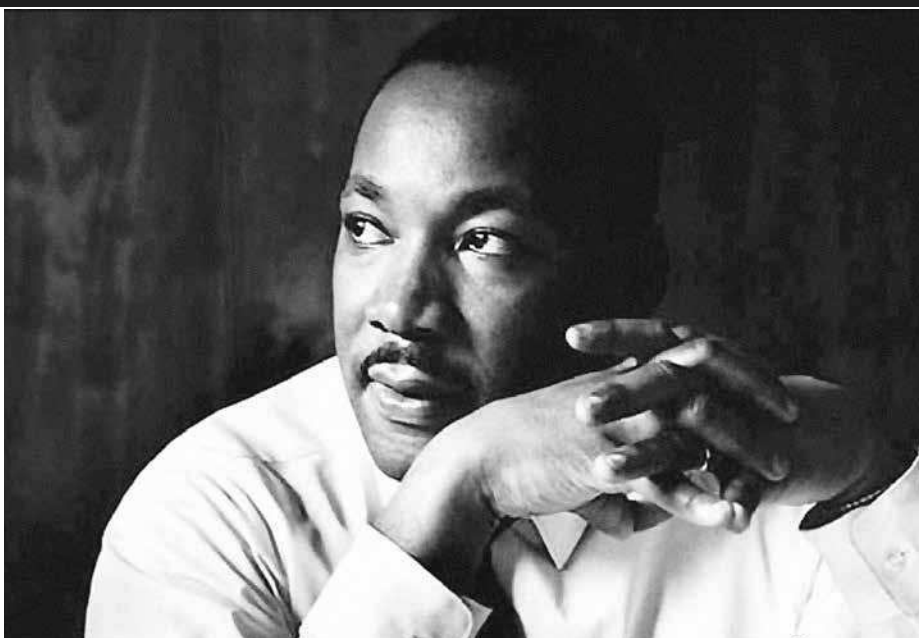
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producer who found her and built some amazing recordings around her work using the work of other YouTube musicians. The process and the result resonate profoundly of all the voices who never rise above obscurity because of their social locations; this buoyant voice, who fought so valiantly to be heard, deserves a listen. The film is available by streaming. [Not rated; should have been nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature; on at least one other critic's top 10 list.]

"Zootopia" is one of the best animated films I have ever seen. It combines a very engaging story and lots of clever elements with a remarkably solid illustration of the principles of equity and inclusion, all without feeling the least bit preachy or forced. I was shocked to find that a group of eight people are credited with the screenplay; usually that results in a studio product with no emotional core. Not so here; even in a fantasy world where animals live together in harmony, the story aspires to demonstrate what it might look like to actually do the work of creating a society that creates space for each person to succeed as themselves. It also illustrates the challenges of doing so. I literally have been referring people to this film for some good instruction on what equity looks like practiced well. I love the idea that this film is sewing the principles of equity into the minds of children everywhere. Brilliant. [Rated PG for some thematic elements, rude humor and action; nominated for, and should win, the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature; should have received a nomination for Best Original Screenplay (eight writers); on at least 26 other critics' top 10 lists.]

"Loving" beautifully tells the story of the couple who successfully challenged miscegenation laws all the way to the Supreme Court and won. It's important that stories like this are told, and told well, and writer-director Jeff Nichols does so here with emotional honesty and restraint that befits its subjects. Ruth Negga deserves the accolades she has received for her performance as the gentle Mildred Loving; both she and Joel Edgerton capture the dignity of this couple and the courage

it took them to simply love each other. [Rated PG-13 for thematic elements; nominated for, and should win, the Academy Award for Best Actress (Ruth Negga); should have received nominations for Best Picture and Best Director and Best Original Screenplay (Jeff Nichols); on at least 24 other critics' top 10 lists.]

"Paterson" manages to capture something quite profound about the importance of poetry and contemplative practice. Its protagonist, a bus driver poet beautifully played by Adam Driver, inspired me with his mindful approach to living, aligning with a rhythm that hums around us but that most of us ignore. Even watching this film helped me to slow down and savor a sense of flow, and I appreciate writer-director Jim Jarmusch's relentlessly intuitive approach to the artistic process. [Rated R for some language; should have received Academy Award nominations for Best Picture, Best Director and Best Original Screenplay (Jim Jarmusch), and Best Actor (Adam Driver); on at least 69 other critics' top 10 lists.]

And finally, "Aquarius" offers an all-too-rare opportunity for in-depth exploration of the vitality and complex perspective of an older woman. Clara, played by the great Sonia Braga (who deserved an Oscar nomination for Best Actress), is a widow, a grandmother, a charming friend, a doting mother and aunt, and also a formidable person who insists on standing her ground in a fight that she is unlikely to win. In a time when fighting corruption feels especially vital but also often hopeless in the short term, Braga and writer-director Kleber Mendonça Filho give us a uniquely Brazilian story which also contains real and universal wisdom about the dynamics of standing up for one's own truth. [Not rated; in Portuguese; should have received nominations for Best Foreign Language Picture, Best Original Screenplay (Kleber Mendonça Filho), and Best Actress (Sonia Braga); on at least 5 other critics' top 10 lists].

Darleen Ortega is a judge on the Oregon Court of Appeals and the first woman of color to serve in that capacity. Her movie review column Opinionated Judge appears regularly in The Portland Observer.