

'Get Out' Best Film of 2017

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nese immigrants in New York. An absorbing film and a perfect case study.

7. *"Call Me By Your Name"* fully deserves the rapturous response it got from audiences and critics. Italian director Luca Guadagnino has not only created a heartbreakingly beautiful gay love story; he has captured the ache of longing and falling in love more profoundly than I can remember seeing on film. I caught myself holding my breath several times while watching it -- even without narrating the thoughts of Elio, the 17-year-old boy at the center of this story, Guadagnino (and Timothée Chalamet, in an astonishing performance) make you feel the push-pull of fascination and obsession and irritation and urgency that drive him in the weeks that Oliver, a 24-year-old grad student, is living in the home he shares with his very groovy academic parents in Italy. And while the story is told from Elio's point of view, Armie Hammer's Oliver is compelling and gorgeous and diffident and yet believably vulnerable too. I appreciated the gentle way in which such passionate love was portrayed and how the film did not solve the discomfort we might feel with the difference

in age between Elio and Oliver. Michael Stuhlbarg as Elio's father also is especially wonderful and delivers one of the most moving speeches ever uttered on film by a father to his son, words not just for Elio but for so many others who never otherwise would hear them. In the end, so much is packed into so few words and images that you leave feeling like you understand something essential about these two men in the fullness of their lives, and hold the mystery of what it means to experience a love that, however fleeting, changes you forever.

8. *"I, Daniel Blake"* ought to be required viewing for everyone in the U.S. and other industrialized countries. The great British director Ken Loach does his best work here depicting the title character's Kafkaesque experiences navigating the British social services system. Blake is a 59-year-old carpenter who recently suffered a heart-attack; his doctors tell him he's not ready to go back to work, but his benefits have been cut off and his fight to get them restored would provoke a health crisis in just about anyone. This is not a documentary, but its dramatic rendering of the dehumanizing experience of obtaining help from the government is imparted with empathy and wisdom, aided by

an utterly believable and absorbing performance by Dave Johns as Blake, and by an equally excellent supporting cast.

Although this film won the prestigious Palme D'Or at the Cannes



A Chinese immigrant family fights to defend themselves and the legacy of their Chinatown community bank in the new documentary *"Abacus: Small Enough to Jail."*

Film Festival in 2016, it received no Academy Awards notice. The Hollywood establishment has neither the clarity of vision nor the guts to honor stories like this, let alone to produce them.

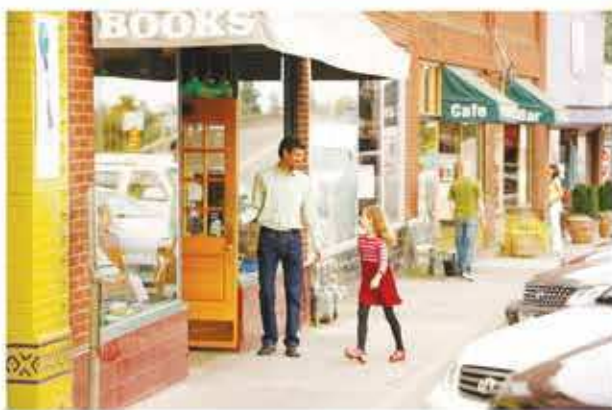
9. I was quite stunned by how deeply *"A Quiet Passion"* affected me. Period pieces are very tricky; filmmakers often have a hard time letting go of a desire to beautify according to current standards, and the main character, here, Emily Dickinson, is an indis-

putably brilliant poet who lived a very quiet life. But director Terrence Davies has found a way to present Dickinson, in her time, in a way that illuminates how a radical woman thinker could manifest in a time when it was not possible for a woman to be a radical thinker. As played by Cynthia Nixon (who

deserves the Academy Award for Best Actress), Dickinson speaks in measured tones and is devoted and respectful to her father, and yet she is funny and fierce and questions everything. Traversing her life from age 16 to her final years of seclusion before her death at age 55, this film captures what it means to operate far far ahead of one's time, and promotes a much deeper respect for an iconoclast who lived without appreciation or recognition until her death.

10. Actress Sally Hawkins has justly received recognition for her role in *"The Shape of Water,"* but I think she is even better in *"Maudie,"* the surprisingly effective homage to folk artist Maud Lewis. Disfigured by what appears to have been juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, Lewis was entirely self taught and lived in extreme poverty in Nova Scotia for most of her life -- and yet bright, colorful scenes of trees and cats and flowers flowed out of her onto just about every surface she encountered. She mostly painted them for herself until, at the end of her life, she enjoyed a surprising celebrity. This film treats her with consummate respect and is largely devoted to exploring her relationship with her husband Everett (Ethan Hawke, too handsome, but surprisingly effective), who hired her as his housekeeper and then married her. Their relationship is troubled and disturbing in many ways -- but the film treats them both with appropriate dignity and real insight. Whether or not the details are true, this film is true in the ways that are deepest and most important.

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