

2020 in Cinema: The size of a screen and the scale of the story

By Tyler Collins

How could anyone begin to try and describe the legacy of the last twelve months? That's a grander challenge than merely describing the world of entertainment. There is a commonality, though: the scope and scale of how we tell a story, both in real life and on the silver screen, has forever been changed.

Change, size, and the relationship between them...this is the starting point as I reflect on the last year that was. In my introduction to last year's essay, I began by saying "Finality and summaries were a big thing this year," including "the hint of bigger things to come."

While it's arguable that almost no country in the world was prepared for a lengthy pandemic even a fraction of the size that COVID-19 has become, it's a definite conclusion that nothing truly could have prepared Canada, North America or even the global population for the sheer, brute conquest the virus has become. Nothing could have prepare us for the most demanding and significant crisis and social change since the second world war.

But think back to the beginning of the pandemic in mid-March 2020, just weeks after the 2019 edition of my annual essay. When the world shut down, we turned to artists and their digital works, led by the movies, to weather the beginning of this storm. It's the clearest evidence I've ever seen that art is an invaluable, required profession.

There is a mammoth conversation to be had about the future of movie-going: what will the exhibition experience become long-term? Is it possible for streaming at home and cinemas in person to live in harmony? How has business - the pure business of creating film - made distribution and access to movies better and worse this year?

Cinema will always need cinemas; they will always need to be exhibition houses. But there is no denying the way people access the work of artists, documentarians, storytellers and filmmakers has permanently changed. That languishing of what we lost and what we are making, both artists and audience, is part of COVID-19 forcing our world to change forever.

Adaptation and resilience have been the two defining themes of 2020, and both came to be because the scale of humanity's story has exploded beyond anything beyond reasonable, rational description. The size of the screens people are watching things on, fictitious and real, have on average become smaller.

Therein lies the continued necessity for both film and all art: it is the work they present that comes closer than anything else to making sense of the world we are in, the world we had, and the world to come.

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One thought that has stuck with me especially in the last six months, as movie theatres in Canada face the darkest chapter of their histories, is a lyric sung by Neil Patrick Harris at the 87th Academy Awards in his opening number: Movies “may not be real life, but they show you what life really means.”

The world and business of going to the movies is currently going through a conflicting yet fascinating change of size. This is the third essay in a row where that’s become unavoidably clear. But this year I propose the changes imposed by a health pandemic should not be used as framework in a long-term plan; let’s first survive so we can earn the right to thrive.

Decisions about who gets to tell their story and who gets to be part of the movie industry is expanding just as rapidly as change is coming to how we watch them. I’ve always believed the world is a more exciting place when everyone has a chance to not just tell their stories but also to have them be seen.

Even I, as a reporter/professional audience member, see the benefit these opportunities allow to artists and citizens alike. The chance to expand what we think the world looks like to what it can be on the silver screen broadens our horizons. And that horizon is a world far more important than the world of scale currently limited by a global health pandemic.

We will come out of the COVID-19 pandemic stronger on the other side. It will take even more resiliency, fortitude and creativity than most artists and business owners have already been displayed in a year defined by changes to how we tell stories and how we see them.

But change is exactly what’s defined so many of the iconic movies this year. Fern in *Nomadland*, Ruben in *Sound of Metal* and the Yi family in *Minari* all began new careers and new lifestyles. Perspectives large and small were focal to both *Soul* and *The Trial of the Chicago 7*. Isn’t it ironic that *The Father* found conflict in staying home? That *Palm Springs* and *Tenet* were about the value of time and how we use it?

The questioning of where and how we learn information, and what we do with it, was a central idea in *Promising Young Woman*, *Never Rarely Sometimes Always* and *Judas and the Black Messiah*. Most importantly, how we tell our stories against all odds defined *Hamilton*, *The Personal History of David Copperfield* and *David Byrne’s American Utopia*.

I set a new record this year for most movies seen, breaking 250 titles in one year for the first time. It’s given me a mountain of sources to examine and refine into this, my seventh annual essay about the state of movies in the world today. I sincerely hope you enjoy reading through my notes and observations as much as I had writing them for you.

What lies ahead for the world? Adaptation and varying size will continue defining 2021 as the pandemic continues ravaging the world against a prolonged recovery. We’ll sum this up at the end. Before we get to that, let’s look at a year that found people watching more than ever before.

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PART ONE - A SHORT HISTORY AND RECOUNT OF THE LAST TWELVE MONTHS

2020 was the sixth year I maintained records of my movie-watching habits, which began with keeping movie ticket stubs in a binder. This year I continuing the revised system I started using in 2018, using blank, white business cards to organize information about the movie - titles, dates, where and with who I see them.

This system allowed me to track between 5-10 films per page as opposed to three, greatly saving space in the journal. I've known for some time that I needed to start thinking about my future bookshelves, but started this year my catalogues are being digitized to space paper and space.

You know what else is helping digitize the system? There's fewer ticket stubs to keep so far. In the continuing pandemic, theatres are closed, and almost all films I see are streamed at home, even if other audiences are seeing them at cinemas in other parts of the world.

Like the last three years, most of 2020 was based in Oakville, Ontario (just outside Toronto, where I live.) 2019 had the highest concentration of locally seen movies, but 2020 was a whole other ballgame. Aside from some September visits in Toronto for TIFF 2020, all films I saw from mid-March to the end of the year were in Oakville, and an overwhelming number were at home.

While I still made some shorter trips to several locations in the greater Toronto area, almost all of them were before the COVID-19 pandemic began. Why? Early in 2020 I began a project hoping to see 365 movies in the year; one per day. It was an exciting start, giving me a chance to visit cinemas in several cities in Southern Ontario: Hamilton, London, Guelph, Vaughan, and Kitchener/Waterloo. (Amazingly, I also saw one film in Miami, USA on a well-timed vacation.)

Sadly, that project was abandoned at the end of March when it became clear the "three-week" shutdown would last much longer. I hope to try this project again another year, but the first 80 films I saw were all in the first 90 days of the year.

Normally I take a paragraph to talk about all the exciting new places I saw new movies in, but above those I've already listed, most travel this year was outright cancelled from the pandemic.

What has continued in the local GTA market is how business strategies are changing. Some venues are skyrocketing in price and lowering customer service, while others are lowering prices and offering different films with better staff.

I've noticed the growing difference between corporate chain cinemas and independent venues over the last few years, but when dynamic pricing came into effect for big releases in 2019 at Cineplex (such as *Avengers* and *Star Wars*), it really started to annoy customers. And Cineplex's revenues, in turn, have taken their worst hit in a decade.

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That problem only got worse in 2020, as the return of cinemas in the summertime (Ontario's prolonged, four-month first closure lasted until late July) meant heavy capacity limits crippled multiplexes. That combined with the fervour and needed momentum in small and local business movements meant this was the time to shine for smaller, family-run venues.

Once theatres reopened, I resumed my regular business, visiting in-person cinemas between three and five times per week, seeing almost every new title being released. Then in September, something special happened.

My movie going expanded this year like never before during the 45th Toronto International Film Festival. I was granted press access for the first time this year, and I set a wild mission for myself to see all 57 feature length films featured in the program.



I did the same thing with little effort at the Oakville Film Festival in June 2020, but that was eight features in five days...while TIFF amounted to nine days to see 57! I would've loved to also see the short film programs and three television offerings, but there just simply wasn't enough hours in the day. (My longest day was 18 hours straight of movie watching!)

Of course, I most memorably held a poster for three hours before finally getting a ticket to see *Ammonite*.

The success of this project and the colossal planning it took to finish it was insurmountable; but I loved every second of it. I loved seeing all the titles and would do this again in a heartbeat. If you want to see a full archive of the reviews I did for all 57 movies, it's available online here:

<https://www.2020incinema.com/tiff-reviews-2020>

September also marks my work anniversary as the film critic and arts reporter for Oakville News, but this year also saw a big change in early summer. After nearly four years on writing staff, I was promoted full-time to become the publishing assistant. It's meant I get to do more long-form projects, and also means I've returned to writing a weekly film column.

After an early year surge and mid-September marathon, the rest of the year was comparatively less intense, averaging three movies per week. (Much slower than my usual consistent pace of four or five!) This became more difficult while balancing a work schedule, but the grand total amounted to a record-setting number of movies seen this year. Without a second job, the holidays were also twice as concentrated with movie watching as 2019.

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Lastly, one of the things I badly missed this year were the special events normally featured in cinemas, such as live broadcasts, sports and screenings of older films. I deeply look forward to hopefully having these back in 2021.

Yes, 2021 will be a whole new ballgame with my an uncertain timeline for seeing movies again. But that irregularity and its inflicted impact will be a story for next year.

PART TWO - THE NUMBERS AND STATISTICS, PREFERENCES, AND COMPANIONS

Listed below are some of my habits and small details I found interesting from the year. To save some space and not bore you with overly specific statistics, I have stuck to the standout points and general comments. It should be also noted special events on screen and repeat viewings of the movies are not included in this set of data.

This is an account of the two hundred and fifty-eight (258) different films I saw this year.

My two-year trend of seeing fewer films obviously ended, as this year's total was almost double 2019. As described in part one, that's largely due to the added time a pandemic offered - but also from the January to March marathon.

But thorough records have made writing this section easier. All the facts and statistics come from my saved movie tickets and journals I collected from the year's experiences. I'm also bringing back a few tidbits I left out last year, but in less detail from whence it began.

Let's start with days of the week. For three years running Tuesdays have been my most common day of the week, driven largely by discount Tuesdays. This year, with almost half of the last year closed to in-person screenings, that number was slashed and became far more equitable.

Instead, THURSDAY and SATURDAY became the most common days. Thursday is when I commonly work to review films for the news, and Saturday is the most common day seeing films for leisure. (My girlfriend and I have only one day off together, and Saturday night is it.)

My pattern of attending less-seen showtimes, such as weekday morning and afternoons, continued this year, but the average time for streamed films (which made a majority this year) was later in the evening.

For the last three years, my most common genre seen was Drama, with almost one-third of all movies falling into this category. But with more streamed films and an influx from film festivals, this year's winner was Documentary. Fifty-nine of the 258 films were documentaries - a whopping 23% of all the movies! Nearly one-quarter of films fell in this category. Drama, the long-running champion, came in second at just over 20%

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Like 2019, Comedy and Family were the next most common. Categories starting with the letter “A” were also very common and over 15%: Adventure, Animation and Action.

Two genres that continue to rise year-over-year are Horror (of which I’m seeing more as I get better acquainted and comfortable with the genre) and, as noted above, Documentary. We really are living in a golden age of documentary filmmaking, with every topic imaginable being covered and done in creative, authentic ways. Streaming also makes it easier than ever to access terrific documentaries.

MY PERSONAL RATINGS

After my initial viewing of each film, I would grade them on a scale between zero and four stars, going up in half star increments. This is the same rating scale used by many acclaimed journalists, including the late Pulitzer Prize winner Roger Ebert, hailed perhaps as the greatest movie writer in the history of film.

While I did catalogue the films this way, I also scored films on a more specific scale of 0 to 100 at five point increments. Why? I knew with this many movies, I would need a more specific way of comparing them all. So this year the breakdown of scores among all movies is on a scale of 0 to 100, itemized by the tens column digit of the number score.

Here I also have a confession to make: I ran out of time to also compare them on a four star scale. Writing and editing this essay takes weeks, and this year I simply didn’t have time to do this added, new statistical breakdown. Hopefully there will be more time next year - Sorry!

| | 100 | 95 or 90 | 85 or 80 | 75 or 70 | 65 or 60 | 55 or 50 | 45 or 40 | 35 or 30 | 25 or 20 | 15 or 10 | 5 or Zero |
|---------|---------|-------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Rating | Perfect | Nearly Perfect | Excellent | Great | Good | Okay | Forgetful | Bad | Very Bad | Dreadful | Brendan Fraser |
| Total | 4 | 29 | 39 | 48 | 44 | 28 | 29 | 17 | 12 | 7 | 3 |
| % | 1.55% | 10.46% | 15.11% | 18.60% | 17.09% | 10.85% | 11.24% | 6.58% | 4.65% | 2.71% | 1.16% |
| Up/Down | — | 0.9 | — | -2.8 | 1.1 | -4.1 | 5.5 | -1.3 | 2.2 | -0.2 | -1.3 |

These, obviously, aren’t perfect comparisons because the scale this year is different. But what remains the same is films in the “good” category remain the largest group, even if by smaller margins. For some reason, the proportion of bad or exceptionally bad films had small drops this year, perhaps just because the number of terrible films I saw stayed the same while great films were increased. It’s also because I prioritize seeing films I have better senses (or reviews) will be good movies as opposed to those that...well, stink.

I hope this scale will get easier to compare as the system continues in years to come.

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SHOWTIMES

Another major detail I take note of is the time of day when I watch these movies - specifically, the start time or showtime. This gives me a better sense of when in the day I'm typically watching movies. Changing from previous years, I've once again changed the categories to best reflect various times of day for shows to start. The four new categories are as follows:

| | | | |
|--------------------|------------------|------------|--------------------|
| MORNING/FIRST SHOW | Before 2pm start | AFTERNOON | 2-5:55pm start |
| EVENING/PRIMETIME | 6-8:55pm start | LATE NIGHT | 9pm or later start |

My goal was to even out the categories best I could, but also generally split the times proportionally to when most movies play a 4-show day: 1pm, 4pm, 7pm and 10pm.

Last year the difference between first place, second place and third place were amazingly all within ONE showtime of the next on the list with morning showtimes before 2:00pm taking the crown. But this year was the exact opposite: late night was the runaway winner, with viewing often coming after work obligations or as I reviewed films overnight to meet a deadline.

Why else would there be such a radical change? It's all that small screen viewing; with streaming content dominating the list (in terms of percent) it makes sense more titles would start after 9:00pm. Because I don't have press access to most streaming services, unlike big screen releases, I have to rely on midnight or 3:00am showings to meet publishing deadlines. More streaming? The average start time gets later and later. I also had a lot of drive-in showtimes, which can't start until after dark. And in the summer, that's always after 9:00pm.

Morning shows, however, continue becoming more popular in Canada on the whole. There are reliably smaller crowds and sometimes discounted prices. I noted this trend was growing in last year's essay too, and this is becoming a more regular thing in the GTA. The statistics between in-person shows and home viewing, as you might have guessed, are wildly different.

For the fifth year in a row, the most common showtime was between 7:00pm and 7:30pm. This is because so many event screenings and special preview shows for new releases (one of my favourites to attend) typically have a start time in this window. But it's also when scheduled digital events commonly start.

PEOPLE AND VIEWING COMPANIONS

I don't like sharing names here, but frankly, stay-at-home orders and quarantines meant my list of all viewing companions was half of 2019's list. Almost everyone I saw a movie with this year was someone I lived with. The few exceptions happened in the first three months of the year or were socially distant in the second half. But when I lived with my parents, I watched movies with parents. I moved to an apartment with roommates in July, and afterwards, they became frequent partners too.

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But the most common companion to the movies was my new girlfriend whom I met in early April 2020 (yes, at the start of the pandemic!) and we've seen dozens of movies since. She is the best movie-going buddy - I love her very much and look forward to hundreds more titles to come in the future. In fact, that's why she's now my fiancée!

The only person close to the fiancée's total is a close friend of mine who's now a roommate. I've always called him the generic "Chris" - but longtime readers and fans of this annual report, if such a thing exists, will know he was the #1 winner for the first five years I wrote this.

One thing that hasn't changed since 2016 is the proportion of how many movies I see by myself. About 65-70% of my visits are alone, without a companion I've invited or I plan to see movies with. Part of that, yes, is due to the irregularity of my movie watching schedule. This year I also saw three movies **TOTALLY** alone - literally without another person in the cinema.

Over the course of this year, I saw a movie with only ten different people - a lost half of the 19 different names on last year's list. Normally my social gatherings are with friends when we're all going to see a movie I've likely already watched for work. With no social gatherings...you get it.

Those are the practical numbers and technical data of my movie-going from the past year. Now on to the fun part...which ones were the best.

PART THREE - MY FAVOURITE MOVIES, AND WHAT I THINK ARE THE BEST

The first part of this section is my list of this year's best movies; including any movies I gave my highest score to (4 of 4 stars; a 95/100 or higher.) Following that is my Top Ten List of the ten best movies from 2019.

Before we go too far, a brief note for 2020: some films eligible for Oscars this year I don't count as 2020 because they had no wide, public release to reasonably classify them as a 2020 film. Two examples are *Judas and the Black Messiah* and *The Father*, neither of which could be seen by members of the public until February or March 2021, way too late to be a film of the previous year. We'll talk more about this later, but there are some great films that you'll see omitted in part three and that's why. (We'll get more into it when it's part four - the Oscars.)

FOUR STAR MOVIES

When reviewing my list of the movies I've seen and my scores from this year, I always look to see what movies I had - upon my initial viewing - deemed worthy of a perfect score. This doesn't mean they were the best movies of the year, but simply that I reviewed them at four stars out of four. This also doesn't mean movies with a lower rating may be inferior. Again, to calculate four stars on a four star scale, that's an equivalent score of 92.5 out of 100 points or higher.

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Throughout the year, I usually see fewer bad movies than I do commonly recommended and/or acclaimed ones. I understand, however, with the greater quantity of films I see both good and bad, the majority of them are either good or merely average ones.

It's also true that as Hollywood releases an increasing total number of new movies, the number of good and bad movies will also increase proportionally. Each year sets new records, and despite the pandemic, the second highest number of films ever were released in 2020.

While I enjoyed many movies this year, and saw almost double the number of movies this year as opposed to last, my number of four star films rose is down to 11 from last year's 12. This is, curiously, the same number that appeared each year from 2015-2017. My total of 3 1/2 star films, however, increased dramatically, almost doubling (along with the total number seen.).

The movies are listed below in chronological order of their wide release date from the past year. These are my four star movies for 2020. (A * marks a Best Picture nominee. An unbelievable occurrence this year is, upon first review, only one Best Picture nominee made this list.)

PORTRAIT OF A LADY ON FIRE
NEVER RARELY SOMETIMES ALWAYS
HAMILTON
THE PERSONAL HISTORY OF DAVID COPPERFIELD
INCONVENIENT INDIAN
THE NEW CORPORATION: AN UNFORTUNATELY NECESSARY SEQUEL
David Byrne's AMERICAN UTOPIA
NEW ORDER
PALM SPRINGS
SOUL
NOMADLAND*

There were particular qualities of each that earned them the designation here, but all listed showed a number of exemplary qualities. They were entertaining, engaging, important, poignant, palatable and well produced motion pictures, and I'm glad to have seen all of them.

You may notice, incredibly, only one of those titles are among this year's Best Picture nominees. I liked all of them, but *Nomadland*, noted here, I believe to clearly be the best. This sets a new record low of titles matching the Oscar candidates and my list four star movies, though it should be noted I rated the seven other nominees as 3.5/4.

(Another reason is some of this year's nominees weren't released until notably into the year 2021, and they'll be counted in next year's list. Again, *The Father* is a great example - having come out in the last week of March 2021, it is unquestionably a 2021 release, even though its eligible for this year's awards.)

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In previous years, I've also listed broadcasts, plays, events, and special screenings I gave a perfect score to in this section. Because of the pandemic, I barely got to see any of these events this year, and many of the ones I saw at home were of events from years past merely being re-broadcast or released. One exception was an event from National Theatre Live (one of my favourite media organizations) and their late January screening of *All My Sons*. by Arthur Miller, starring Bill Pullman and Sally Field. It was a remarkable staging and fabulous production that was expertly filmed, and more than deserves a 4/4.

TYLER'S TOP TEN FAVOURITE MOVIES OF 2020

This is it. The best of the best. Factoring skill, art, enjoyment, quality, technique, and legacy thus far, these are what I believe to be the best movies of the year. This accounts for extreme preferences and opinions that may skew my ratings or thoughts in movies. This was an ongoing list I kept, adjusted, and changed as I saw new movies throughout the year.

Here are my ten favourite movies of 2020.

1. Nomadland
2. Portrait of a Lady on Fire
3. Never Rarely Sometimes Always
4. Soul
5. The Trial of the Chicago 7
6. Ma Rainey's Black Bottom
7. Palm Springs
8. Tenet
9. Inconvenient Indian
10. The Personal History of David Copperfield

Honourable Mentions: (Movies that almost made Top 10, alphabetically)

Ammonite, Boys State, City Hall, Da 5 Bloods, First Cow, Mank, The New Corporation: An Unfortunately Necessary Sequel, Promising Young Woman

Special Mentions of Stage/Concert Film: David Byrne's American Utopia, Hamilton

A staple fixture of anyone writing about movies is their annual Top Ten List. These lists are commonly the most concise and straightforward way to talk about the best movies of the year. It's easy to compare lists side by side, it's fun to look for similarities and differences, and it's equally exciting and challenging to effectively create the list year after year.

Having now done this several years, it's fun going back and looking at my previous lists and how they've held up. For the time being, I don't like to think about how the list might look in the future. What's more important is how I feel about them now and how I felt right after watching them for the first (and sometimes the second) time.

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Since 2017 I've written only one definitive list. In previous years, this list appeared with either two or three different versions, but as I've gained confidence publishing and writing about my observations in film, I now believe myself qualified to write one concise list.

Choosing my #1 film this year was, like last year with *Parasite*, simpler than usual: *Nomadland* is truly outstanding in its entertainment value, wisdom, beauty, nuance and soul. What else can I say? My original review from September 2020 does the work much better justice than I can re-iterate in one paragraph: <https://oakvillenews.org/reviews/nomadland-tiff-review/>

Next come two films from earlier in the year: some consider *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* to be a 2019 release since it premiered at Cannes almost two years ago, but the general public didn't have any means of seeing it until release in February 2020 for Valentine's Day. It was followed just two weeks later by Eliza Hittman's *Never Rarely Sometimes Always*, tragically playing in theatres for just 11 days before COVID-19 ended its run.

Both films are masterpieces of experience that use clear details to shape high-stakes conflict that has me rooting for the women at the centre of both of them. Both lost their thunder due to the pandemic, but both are masterpieces justified among the year's best.

Next come three conventional choices to those familiar with the Oscar season this year: *Soul* and *Ma Rainey* to me are obvious misfires in not being nominated for Best Picture this year (despite a combined nine other nominations between them!) but they were ousted merely because the eligibility field is wider, so they were bumped by two 2021 titles.

Chicago 7 was fiercely enjoyable with firecracker showmanship, dialogue, editing, structure, and Aaron Sorkin really coming into his own as a director. I got to see it socially distanced on a big screen last October and the film really popped. And that cast? Wow! Not a single weak player.

Next on the list are two commercial hits that are quirky, confusing and both extremely innovative. *Palm Springs* is funny and heartfelt, while *Tenet* is complex and awe-inspiring. Both are sci-fi stories that use time very different, yet pose the same question: what would you do with another chance, and how can you use it to make a better future for those we love?

Finally, the bottom two entries are two films tragically seen by very few people. *David Copperfield* got a full release, and (while my fiancée didn't like it) I thought it was the funniest and sharpest movie of the entire year. Lavish production value and a quartet of fabulous centre performers made it charming from start to finish.

One last note about *Inconvenient Indian*. Even after winning People's Choice Documentary and Best Canadian Film, it isn't okay if director Michelle Latimer lied about her ancestral roots. For now, we don't know the truth in what's going on. What I do know is she is only one of the *hundreds* of Indigenous voices in the film that are verified, authentic, and make the film great.

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There will almost definitely be more to say on *Inconvenient Indian* as history evolves, and in the meantime (as the film's distribution is suspended while the director is investigated) I would highly encourage those interested in the subject [to read Thomas King's source book](#).

What stands out to me most about this top ten list is how multi-disciplined each title is. All of them are stories with multiple and often juxtaposing genres, but that makes it all the more exciting to watch them and see what happens next. I sourced this quality as a defining feature in the top three of last year's list, but this hopeful individualism carries through *all* of 2020's list.

The best movies have the same emotional connection and appeal that the best stories have - but they can go one step further, because we can see, hear and feel the human experience on screen. These ten titles don't just make us feel something - they make us feel *everything*.

Finally, there are two unorthodox honourable mentions this year: *David Byrne's American Utopia*, which is a concert film and *Hamilton*, a filmed stage performance edited specifically for the screen. Both belong around #3 and #5 on the top ten; they are among the best films ever made in these styles.

THE ACTORS

Next up is my list specifically about acting. This is the area I have the most insight in, having worked for years as a performer and actor myself. Because casts are often one of the largest departments in a movie, there's often the most worth mentioning here than any other job. (Movies, for instance, need one director. They need a lot of actors.)

There is no maximum, minimum, ranking, order, or restriction to this list. Any actor whom I found exceptional, noteworthy, memorable, or worth making an effort to see I've included below. Each of these is organized into one of five categories - lead and supporting roles for men and women, and then cameo appearances (smaller, memorable roles.)

I also like to include a list of "Winners" and "Losers" - these are actors from multiple projects this year who featured in either two or more great titles...or multiple bad movies. You'll find both examples later. (Of note: If they are listed in these sections, those names are omitted from the regular lists of individual performances. If a specific name feels missing, check p.18 first.)

One thing that helps considerably is keeping an ongoing list throughout the year. I've reviewed my choices more recently to make my final list from all the suggested names I noted in my, well, notes, throughout the year. (This year was especially challenging, as sometimes I had to go back and think about actors from 15 months ago!)

Everyone listed below has more than earned their right to be featured, and some are overdue for their unrecognized talent. You can see all the names, characters, and the films they come from below. These are my favourites of the year, listed and organized alphabetically.

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***Special note for 2020:* Because of the sheer number of films I saw, this section is longer than usual and there wasn't a creative way to format these lists. So just for this year, every category gets its own page. Sorry about the white space.

LEADING ACTOR

Ben Affleck as Coach Jack Cunningham (*The Way Back*)
Riz Ahmed as Ruben Stone (*Sound of Metal*)
Fin Argus as Zach Sobiech (*Clouds*)
K. J. Apa as Jeremy Camp (*I Still Believe*)
Mamoudou Athie as Elijah (*Uncorked*)
Chadwick Boseman as Levee (*Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*)
Chris Cooper as Col. Jack Hastings (*Irresistible*)
Kotaro Daigo / Brandon Engman as Hodaka Morishima (*Weathering with You*)
Pete Davidson as Scott Carlin (*The King of Staten Island*)
Salim Daw as Issa (*Gaza Mon Amour*)
Ajay Devgn as Tanhaji Malusare (*Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior*)
Pierfrancesco Favino as Tommaso Buschetta (*The Traitor*)
Winslow Fegley as Timmy Failure (*Timmy Failure: Mistakes Were Made*)
Lance Henrikson as Willis Peterson (*Falling*)
Martin Lawrence as Det. Lieutenant Marcus Burnett (*Bad Boys for Life*)
Delroy Lindo as Paul (*Da 5 Bloods*)
Bill Murray as Felix (*On the Rocks*)
Nathaniel McIntyre as Theo (*Magic Camp*)
Mads Mikkelsen as Martin (*Another Round*)
Liam Neeson as Tom Thompson (*Ordinary Love*)
Leslie Odom Jr. as Aaron Burr (*Hamilton*)
Gary Oldman as Herman J. Mankiewicz (*Mank*)
Antoine Olivier Pilot as Daniel Léger (*Target Number One*)
Dev Patel as David Copperfield (*The Personal History of David Copperfield*)
Alexander Petrov as Alexander "Sasha" Gorin (*Ice 2*)
Eddie Redmayne as Tom Hayden (*The Trial of the Chicago 7*)
Jay Reeves as Ray McElrathbey (*Safety*)
Seth Rogen as Herschel Greenbaum / Ben Greenbaum (*An American Pickle*)
Andy Samberg as Nyles (*Palm Springs*)
Vince Vaughan as the Blissfield Butcher (*Freaky*)
John David Washington as The Protagonist (*Tenet*)
Saul Williams as Akilla Brown (*Akilla's Escape*)

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LEAD ACTRESS

Maria Bakalova as Tutar Sagdiyeva (*Borat Subsequent Moviefilm*)
Millie Bobby Brown as Enola Holmes (*Enola Holmes*)
Lana Condor as Lara Jean (*To All the Boys: PS I Still Love You*)
Sidney Flanagan as Autumn Callahan (*Never Rarely Sometimes Always*)
Sibil Fox Richardson as Herself (*Time*)
Alaya Furniturewala as Tia (*Jaawani Jaaneman*)
Betty Gilpin as Crystal Creasey (*The Hunt*)
Ana Golja as Mina (*The Cuban*)
Dakota Johnson as Maggie Sherwoode (*The High Note*)
Vanessa Kirby as Martha Weiss (*Pieces of a Woman*)
Honor Kneafsey as Robyn Goodfellowe (*Wolfwalkers*)
Ophelia Lovibond as Patty Failure (*Timmy Failure: Mistakes Were Made*)
Lesley Manville as Joan Thompson (*Ordinary Love*)
Frances McDormand as Fern (*Nomadland*)
Noémie Merlant as Marianne (*Portrait of a Lady on Fire*)
Cristin Milioti as Sarah (*Palm Springs*)
Nana Mori / Ashley Boettcher as Hina Amano (*Weathering with You*)
Elisabeth Moss as Cecilia Kass (*The Invisible Man*)
Hiromi Nagasaku as Satoko Kurihara (*True Mothers*)
Kathryn Newton as Millie (*Freaky*)
Jo Ellen Pellman as Emma (*The Prom*)
Kangana Ranaut as Jaya Nigam (*Panga*)
Margot Robbie as Harley Quinn (*Birds of Prey*)
Rachel Sennott as Danielle (*Shiva Baby*)
Madeleine Simms-Fewer as Miriam (*Violation*)
Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers as Áila (*The Body Remembers When the World Broke Open*)
Charlize Theron as Andromache of Scythia (*The Old Guard*)
Grace VanderWaal as Susan “Stargirl” Caraway (*Stargirl*)
Geraldine Viswanathan as Lucy Gulliver (*The Broken Hearts Gallery*)
Kate Winslet as Mary Anning (*Ammonite*)
Liu Yifei as Hua Mulan (*Mulan*)

If you think someone deserving is missing, remember to check Winners and Losers first on page 18.

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SUPPORTING ACTOR

Sean Bean as as Bill Goodfellowe (*Wolfwalkers*)
Kenneth Branagh as Andrei Sator (*Tenet*)
Jim Carrey as Dr. Ivo “Eggman” Robotnik (*Sonic the Hedgehog*)
Ice Cube as Jack Robertson (*The High Note*)
Prabhu Deva as Ram Preshad / “Anna” (*Street Dancer 3D*)
Daveed Diggs as Marquis de Lafayette and Thomas Jefferson (*Hamilton*)
Arun Dravid as Guruji (*The Disciple*)
Zorion Eguileor as Trimagasi (*The Platform*)
Will Forte as Christian Winter (*Extra Ordinary*)
Louis Gossett Jr. as Luis Garcia (*The Cuban*)
Stephen Graham as Lt. Commander Charlie Cole (*Greyhound*)
Hugh Grant as Fletcher (*The Gentlemen*)
Lil Rel Howery as Milton Weaver (*Clouds*)
William Hurt as Thomas Tully (*The Last Full Measure*)
Keegan-Michael Key as Gustafson (*Jingle Jangle: A Christmas Journey*)
Frank Langella as Judge Julius Hoffman (*The Trial of the Chicago 7*)
Hugh Laurie as Mr. Dick (*The Personal History of David Copperfield*)
Damian Lewis as Mayor Rob Ford (*Run This Town*)
Bill Nighy as Mr. Woodhouse (*Emma*)
Pedro Pascal as Maxwell Lord (*Wonder Woman 1984*)
Clarke Peters as Otis (*Da 5 Bloods*)
Jamil “Mil” Prattis as Paris/Himself (*Concrete Cowboy*)
Paul Raci as Joe (*Sound of Metal*)
Kadeem Ramsay as Samson (*Lovers Rock*)
Craig Robinson as Mr. Jenkins (*Timmy Failure: Mistakes Were Made*)
Richard Roxburgh as Patrick (*Go Karts*)
Julian Rozzell Jr. as Old Head (*The Inheritance*)
Mark Rylance as William Kunstler (*The Trial of the Chicago 7*)
Alex Sharp as Rennie Davis (*The Trial of the Chicago 7*)
Jeffrey Tambor as Roy Preston (*Magic Camp*)
Bryan Tyree Henry as George (*Superintelligence*)
Zhang Yi as Old Abacus (*The Eight Hundred*)
Marlon Wayans as Dean (*On the Rocks*)
Hubie’s Thermos (*Hubie Halloween*)

2020 in Cinema: The size of a screen and the scale of the story

SUPPORTING ACTRESS

Shohreh Aghdashloo as Aunt Bano (*The Cuban*)
Anastasia Bampos as Mandy Zeta (*Go Karts*)
Maria Bonnevie as Trine (*Another Round*)
Ellen Burstyn as Elizabeth Weiss (*Pieces of a Woman*)
Glenn Close as Bonnie “Mamaw” Vance (*Hillbilly Elegy*)
Chloe Coleman as Sophie (*My Spy*)
Dominique Fishback as Robin (*Project Power*)
Renée Elise Goldsberry as Angelica Schuyler (*Hamilton*)
Madison Iseman as Amy Adamle (*Clouds*)
Allison Janney as Miss Massey (*Troop Zero*)
Vitaliya Kornilenko as Nadya Gorina (*Ice 2*)
Alice Krige as Holda / The Witch (*Gretel and Hansel*)
Eponine Lee as Mona (*Queen of the Morning Calm*)
Aju Makita as Hikari Katakura (*True Mothers*)
Kelly Marie Tran as Dawn Betterman (*The Croods: A New Age*)
Margo Martindale as Enid Nora Devlin (*Blow The Man Down*)
Alexandra Masangkay as Miharū (*The Platform*)
Honoka Matsumoto as Yoko Hinageshi (*Ride Your Wave*)
Gugu Mbatha-Raw as Vera (*Summerland*)
Niecy Nash as Sylvia (*Uncorked*)
Bel Powley as Kelsey (*The King of Staten Island*)
Abigail Pniowsky as Talulah (*The Rest of Us*)
Talia Ryder as Skylar (*Never Rarely Sometimes Always*)
Shanina Shaik as Naomi (*Greed*)
Iliza Shlesinger as Cissy Davis (*Spenser Confidential*)
June Squibb as Agnes (*Godmothered*)
Tilda Swinton as Betsy Trotwood (*The Personal History of David Copperfield*)
Dianne Wiest as Susan (*Let Them All Talk*)
Samara Weaving and Brigitte Lundy-Paine as Theodora “Thea” Preston and Wilhelmina “Billie” Logan (*Bill and Ted Face the Music*)
Kristen Wiig as Barbara Minerva / Cheetah (*Wonder Woman 1984*)
Helena Zengel as Johann Leonberger / Cicada (*News of the World*)

If you think someone deserving is missing, remember to check Winners and Losers first on page 18.

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CAMEO APPEARANCE

Angela Bassett as Dorthea Williams (*Soul*)
Danielle Brooks as Evette (*Clemency*)
Steve Buscemi as Papa (*The King of Staten Island*)
Lynda Carter as Asteria (*Wonder Woman 1984*)
Kate del Castillo as Isabel Aretas (*Bad Boys for Life*)
Anna Cathcart as Kitty (*To All the Boys: PS I Still Love You*)
Kelly Chapman as Social Worker (*Never Rarely Sometimes Always*)
Gwendoline Christie as Jane Murdstone (*The Personal History of David Copperfield*)
Gabriele Cicirello as Benedetto Buscetta (*The Traitor*)
Charles Dance as William Randolph Hearst (*Mank*)
Snoop Dogg as The Performer (*The Spongebob Movie: Sponge on the Run*)
Ricky Gervais as The Cat (*The Willoughbys*)
Jonathan Groff as King George III (*Hamilton*)
Justin Hartley as Shane (*The Hunt*)
Tiffany Haddish as The Sound of Exploding (*Phineas and Ferb: Candace Against the Universe*)
Eddie Izzard as Dan Deakins (*The High Note*)
Angelina Jolie as Stella (*The One and Only Ivan*)
Michael Keaton as Ramsey Clark (*The Trial of the Chicago 7*)
Tzi Ma as Hua Zhou (*Mulan*)
Morgana Mogent as Janie (*Clouds*)
Thelonius J. Monkfish as Blueberry the Fish (*My Spy*)
Rob Morgan as Isaac Jefferson (*The Photograph*)
Bill Nye as Upton Sinclair (*Mank*)
Molly Parker as Eve Woodward (*Pieces of a Woman*)
Justus Richardson as Himself (*Time*)
Jenny Slate as Vanessa (*On the Rocks*)
Ben Stiller as Hal L (*Hubie Halloween*)
Holland Taylor as Stormy (*To All the Boys: P.S. I Still Love You*)
Van Veronica Ngo as Hanoi Hannah (*Da 5 Bloods*), also as Quayhn (*The Old Guard*)
Amanda Warren as Tonya McElrathbey (*Safety*)

2020 in Cinema: The size of a screen and the scale of the story

THE ENTIRE CAST

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Another Round (Drük) | Misbehaviour |
| Birds of Prey | Palm Springs |
| Clouds | The Personal History of David Copperfield |
| Da 5 Bloods | Pieces of a Woman |
| David Byrne's American Utopia | Promising Young Woman |
| The Gentlemen | Tenet |
| Hamilton | Timmy Failure: Mistakes Were Made |
| Jingle Jangle: A Christmas Journey | The Trial of the Chicago 7 |
| Let Them All Talk | The Willoughbys |
| Ma Rainey's Black Bottom | |

WINNERS

Saif Ali Khan (Tanhaji: The Unsung Warrior, Jaawani Jaaneman)
Sacha Baron Cohen (The Trial of the Chicago 7, Borat Subsequent Moviefilm)
Kyle Bornheimer (Timmy Failure: Mistakes Were Made, Onward, The Lovebirds)
Viola Davis (Troop Zero, Ma Rainey's Black Bottom)
Jamie Foxx (Just Mercy, Project Power, Soul)
Tom Hanks (Greyhound, Borat Subsequent Moviefilm, News of the World)
Aldis Hodge (Clemency, The Invisible Man, Magic Camp, One Night in Miami)
Samuel L. Jackson (The Last Full Measure, The Banker)
Julia Louis-Dreyfus (Downhill, Onward)
Tuppence Middleton (Disappearance at Clifton Hill, Possessor, Mank)
Leslie Odom Jr. (Hamilton, One Night in Miami)
Brooklynn Prince (The Turning, The One and Only Ivan)
Issa Rae (The Photograph, The Lovebirds)
Phylicia Rashad (A Fall From Grace, Black Box, Jingle Jangle: A Christmas Journey, Soul)
Phillipa Soo (Hamilton, The Broken Hearts Gallery, The One and Only Ivan, Over the Moon)
Dan Stevens (The Call of the Wild, The Rental, Eurovision Song Contest: The Story of Fire Saga)
Courtney B. Vance (The Photograph, Uncorked, Project Power)
Donnie Yen (Ip Man 4: The Finale, Mulan)

LOSERS

Demián Bichir (The Grudge, The Midnight Sky)
James Corden (Trolls: World Tour, Superintelligence, The Prom)
Jacob Elordi (The Kissing Booth 2, 2 Hearts)
Ryan Hansen and Jimmy O. Yang (Like a Boss, Fantasy Island)
Anne Hathaway (The Last Thing He Wanted, The Witches)
Michael Pitt (The Last Days of American Crime, Run with the Hunted)
Amanda Seyfried (Scoob!, You Should Have Left, A Mouthful of Air)
David Thewlis (Guest of Honour, I'm Thinking of Ending Things)
Jacki Weaver (The Grudge, Never Too Late, Stage Mother, Penguin Bloom)

2020 in Cinema: The size of a screen and the scale of the story

As much as I've enjoyed the movies I've seen in this year, not all of them were enjoyable. I've listed below what I think are the ten *worst* titles of 2020 alphabetically. The titles in bold are ones I'm expecting to win at least one Razzie Award for the worst movies of the year. (Those with a * beside their names are films that, if eligible, I suspect would also win a Razzie or two.)

Keep in mind, I tend to avoid movies I know will be dreadful unless required, saving my money for better ones. That being said, I saw a long lost of astonishingly terrible movies this year.

2 HEARTS

ANIMAL CRACKERS

ARTEMIS FOWL

BERNIE THE DOLPHIN 2*

FANTASY ISLAND

THE LAST DAYS OF AMERICAN CRIME

SCOOB!

SECRET SOCIETY OF SECOND BORN ROYALS*

SUPERINTELLIGENCE

THE TURNING

Some honourable mentions among the worst films this year include *A Perfect Plan*, *Dolittle*, *The Grudge*, *The Rhythm Section* and *Summer of 85*. While not in my personal list of worst ten for the year, I also suspect *Dolittle* will win at least one Razzie Award.

Speaking of bad movies, there's one other local filmmaker I usually like to mention right about now. Five years ago I was lucky to discover the hilariously awful Frank D'Angelo. He's the Tommy Wiseau of Canada; a Toronto producer of the worst independent films made today, but so hysterically compelling his films are unmissable for true fanatics.

Since the unfortunate death of his primary investor, Barry Sherman, his future releases are somewhat in question. He had two very limited releases in 2019, but his latest film slated to start production, *Bless Me Father for I Have Sinned*, has stalled partially due to COVID-19 and partially due to financing. I sincerely look forward to his next film and hope I can report on it in next year's essay.

THE BEST SCENES

Part three, as usual, concludes with my ten favourite scenes from movies this year. These are listed alphabetically, and chosen for various reasons described underneath each one.

It's these kind of breathtaking moments ranging across the emotional and thematic spectrum that makes going to the movies so satisfying. Sometimes a scene is striking and compelling beyond reasonable explanation to just me, but others are universal.

2020 in Cinema: The size of a screen and the scale of the story

This is always one of the hardest sections to edit every year because it's so darn difficult to choose just ten, and that task only gets harder as my total number of seen films grows longer.

For the sake of showing diversity across the landscape, only the best scene from any one film is listed. If I liked more than one from the same film, second or thirds were omitted from the list. And for a couple of movies, that was really tough.

Before those scenes, I'm (like the last two years) including some honourable mentions that I will simply name and not describe. I'd encourage you to try some of these films to see what surprises they have to offer. Again, with just so many movies seen this year, my list of honourable mentions couldn't be cut shorter than 16 (and still another dozen just barely missed the cut.)

Honourable Mentions:

"Who Do You Vote For?" from *Another Round*

"7:17 p.m." from *Bill and Ted Face the Music*

"El Guitarista and His Instrument" from *The Cuban*

"Black GI" from *Da 5 Bloods*

"Attending Your Own Funeral" from *Dick Johnson is Dead*

"Magicians in the Diner" from *Disappearance at Clifton Hill*

"The Ritual Must Be Completed" from *Extra Ordinary*

"Press the Spacebar" from *The Gentlemen*

"The Broken Projector" from *Jaawani Jaaneman*

"A Cappella" from *Lovers Rock*

"Who could take the Lunatic Seriously?!" from *Mank*

"What a Nice View That Is" from *Misbehaviour*

"Jim Doesn't Move the Desk" from *One Night in Miami*

"No Tube" from *One Pandemic Day*

"Noticing Muffled Noise" from *Sound of Metal*

"These are Their Names" from *The Trial of the Chicago 7*

Picking this list gets tougher every year. Without more delay, here are the year's ten best scenes.

WARNING: The description of these scenes may include major spoilers about the movies they mention, and some describe graphic, intense, or disturbing events. To skip this list and move on to part four, read ahead to midway point on page 22.

"Fun House Fight"

Birds of Prey (and the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn)

The movie as a whole is chaotic and nihilistic, but this brawl in the fun house has some terrific props and even more amazing fight choreography. The colossal smackdown is full of non-stop action and amazement for nearly ten minutes. When the titular "birds of prey" finally come together, they don't just fly - they soar.

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“Daughter at the Doctor’s”

Borat Subsequent Moviefilm: Delivery of Prodigious Bribe to American Regime for Make Benefit Once Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan

When Borat brings his daughter to the doctor, it’s because she accidentally ate a plastic toy from atop a cupcake. But when explaining the mistake, the misunderstanding only gets hilariously worse and worse. It’s one example among many from a movie filled with brilliantly designed scenes that create a masterful whole. This one film has honourable mentions: the Wuhan Flu song? Or the jaw-dropping end scene twist? A big win for a movie that now holds a Guinness World Record for “Longest Title of an Oscar Nominated Film.”

“Hell You Talmbout”

David Byrne’s American Utopia

The climactic musical number, written by Janelle Monae, is a powerful requiem for those killed for no reason. It’s especially powerful in its release in the months following last summer’s Black Lives Matter movement, but then Spike Lee’s editing adds another layer with more power to create a rousing, catchy, dynamic song.

“Escaping the House”

The Invisible Man

The opening sequence is full of tension, suspense and horror that’s just the right amount of scary. Watching Cecilia executing her plans to escape and knowing one small sound could come at the cost of her life - you’re holding your breath, hoping she makes it out without being attacked. Elisabeth Moss works scary magic here with otherworldly focus.

“The Questionnaire”

Never Rarely Sometimes Always

Autumn has to answer some devastating questions when she finally gets her appointment. Sidney Flanagan’s work in the scene is so good it almost doesn’t feel like you’re watching a movie. It’s so heartbreaking in fact it’s enough to make the fiction feel fully realized. That’s great acting.

“Jaya and Prashant’s Love Story”

Panga

A scene from a little known Bollywood sports movie, this extended scene is the best on-screen love story since 2009’s *Up* - seriously. Prashant recalls the story of he and Jaya to their son, telling the story of how they fell in love in a dialogue-free montage showcasing dazzling chemistry and unbridled heart. You haven’t rooted for a young couple like this ever before.

“Martha’s Labour”

Pieces of a Woman

The signature scene and inciting incident of the film. A twenty minute, continuous take shows Martha’s home birth with incredible realism and sky high stakes. What really grabs you is how it suddenly begins and ends; it has the dynamism of a real labour. The trio of actors in it do wonders, but Vanessa Kirby as Martha is a marvel.

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“Repeat After Me”

Soul

Talking with your parents is never easy, but it’s even harder when another non-being suddenly takes possession of your body. So when Joe finally talks to his mother in the tailor shop, they each suddenly have a new insight into how they see each other and how they see Joe’s passion.

“The Oslo Rescue”

Tenet

All is not as it seems inside a rescue mission that takes place in Oslo. Seeing John David Washington’s The Protagonist fighting a threat is one matter, until you see what he’s fighting for. It’s a great example of how inverting time is playing a clever trick on the audience, and once you realize what’s really going on...when I first saw it, I literally began to applaud.

“They Died of Cancer”

There’s Something in the Water

An eye-opening scene from a documentary that premiered on Netflix in March 2020 with little fanfare. But I can’t stop thinking about it; it’s heartbreaking listening to Louise as she gives her tour of Shelburne, Nova Scotia. While driving around, she shows Elliot all the homes where someone died of cancer because of their untreated water. House after house after house, it’s soon clear there’s a lot more danger and pain in the town than meets the eye.

And now, finally, for the last part of the essay, and the cheat sheet that’ll help you win the Oscar pool contest this weekend against your friends (even if the pool is online!)

PART FOUR - ROAD TO THE OSCARS, AND PREDICTIONS

I would argue there’s, however local the show truly is, still no prize more prestigious in entertainment than the Academy Awards. While the organization’s annual award show is historically underwhelming, the awards themselves are the benchmark for movies around the world and the prestige alone opens doors and opportunities for the winners. And more often than not, they reflect wise choices in honouring the best in the art and science of movies.

For the third consecutive year, the show has wisely foregone a host, but it’s a darn shame the producers work so hard to make the show relentlessly dull. Who knows what this year’s “It-will-feel-like-watching-a-movie-on-TV” production style will actually translate to? It sounds weird, and with pandemic boredom intensifying, this will surely be a one-time gimmick.

So what’s the best way to revamp the ceremony long-term? That’s a question the Academy has been wrestling with for years as viewership continues to plummet. Something drastic needs to change to keep the public interested in the accolades the institution has to offer.

2020 in Cinema: The size of a screen and the scale of the story

Most of this year's reduced 23 categories I think are relatively easy to predict, but those are famous last words. Picking winners requires looking at some preferences and gut instinct over what's been popular in the last six weeks. Research and popular opinions, however, have fewer contenders and almost no spoiler effect because of the apathy this year's festivities have.

An arduous, extended Oscars season this year hasn't really had much of an impact beyond a few surprise nominations based on the extended eligibility period. But there will be fewer surprises when it comes to the actual winners.

Here I've listed my complete predictions for all 23 categories, including three distinct marks: Who Will Win, Who Should Win, and Who I Want to Win. These three sometimes overlap, and sometimes they directly oppose each other. While I give clear ideas in each category, there have been dozens of cases where the Academy surprises even me by actually awarding the Oscar to who should or I want to win instead of who is widely expected to.

I explain my choices and background for all categories, and ultimately choose my official predictions for the 93rd Academy Awards. Many will be easier to guess than last year, but there are a couple of real nail-biters. Let's just hope nobody's too disappointed there's now only one category dedicated to sound.

BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR

WHO WILL WIN: Daniel Kaluuya - *Judas and the Black Messiah*, as Fred Hampton
WHO SHOULD WIN: Daniel Kaluuya - *Judas and the Black Messiah*, as Fred Hampton
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Daniel Kaluuya - *Judas and the Black Messiah*, as Fred Hampton

Daniel Kaluuya has skyrocketed into popular culture in the last four years since his big break in *Get Out* (which he was also Oscar-nominated for) but Fred Hampton is a full, marvellous transformation for him. He's a very deserving winner and aside from an early fall campaign from Leslie Odom Jr., there's no competition. If there's a surprise, I'd also love seeing Paul Raci win.

BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS

WHO WILL WIN: Youn Yuh-jung - *Minari*, as Soon-ja
WHO SHOULD WIN: Youn Yuh-jung - *Minari*, as Soon-ja
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Maria Bakalova - *Borat Subsequent Moviefilm*, as Tutar Sagdiyev

Youn Yuh-jung won hearts of many as grandmother Soon-ja. She and her grandson are the true heart of *Minari*, but Maria Bakalova's improvisation and commitment to character made *Borat 2* something really special. I'd also, just for the beautiful coincidence, would've love to see Glenn Close win for both Best Supporting Actress at the Oscars *and* worst of the year at the Razzies. But as Close lost at the Razzies, so like all of *Hillbilly Elegy*, it's no longer relevant.

2020 in Cinema: The size of a screen and the scale of the story

BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY

WHO WILL WIN: Emerald Fennell - *Promising Young Woman*
WHO SHOULD WIN: Aaron Sorkin - *The Trial of the Chicago 7*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Emerald Fennell - *Promising Young Woman*

This is the one category that's a near-lock for *Promising Young Woman*, as Emerald Fennell's creative fiction is a funny, well-paced thriller story with several really great lines. I'd love to see her win, but if I'm being fully honest, the script of *The Trial of the Chicago 7* was better. Writer (and here director) Aaron Sorkin really is a master of screenwriting and he deserves to win.

BEST ADAPTED SCREENPLAY

WHO WILL WIN: Chloé Zhao - *Nomadland*
WHO SHOULD WIN: Chloé Zhao - *Nomadland*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Christopher Hampton and Florian Zeller - *The Father*

Beyond being *Nomadland*'s first win of the night, it will also be Chloé Zhao's first. I'm predicting she'll win three in total, but of her predicted wins this is the most precarious. Writer Florian Zeller is very popular in Europe, where many Academy voters live, and his script adapting his own play *Le Père* into *The Father* is carefully constructed and spellbinding.

BEST DOCUMENTARY FILM

WHO WILL WIN: *My Octopus Teacher*
WHO SHOULD WIN: *Time*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: *Time*

Indiewire's David Erlich, who now famously creates a video countdown of his 25 favourite movies every year, named *Time* his #1 pick for best film of the year. I agree it's a dynamite documentary that takes an unflinching look in what sacrifices it really takes to keep a family going when affected by the racial inequity of the American justice system. Sadly, this excellent film is going to lose to a merely good one about a guy who's really good friends with an octopus.

BEST DOCUMENTARY SHORT SUBJECT

WHO WILL WIN: *A Love Song for Latasha*
WHO SHOULD WIN: *A Love Song for Latasha*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: *A Love Song for Latasha*

Continuing on the theme on American justice inequities, the subject matter of imaging the possible life of a girl shot by a convenience store owner 30 years ago, will likely elicit votes for this technically 2019 film based on its topic, merit, and possibly white guilt of some older voters.

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BEST LIVE ACTION SHORT FILM

WHO WILL WIN: *Two Distant Strangers*
WHO SHOULD WIN: *Two Distant Strangers*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: *Two Distant Strangers*

Netflix is going to likely have mixed feelings about the Oscar results this year. On one hand, their big films *Mank* and *Chicago 7* are best-case scenario only going to win one or two awards each, if even that. On the other hand, I'm predicted Netflix shorts will sweep all three short film categories, including *Two Distant Strangers* for the usually least interesting live action category.

BEST ANIMATED SHORT FILM

WHO WILL WIN: *If Anything Happens I Love You*
WHO SHOULD WIN: *If Anything Happens I Love You*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: *Burrow*

It's a big gamble for me to bet against Pixar in this category; any year an original Pixar creation is in animated short it's almost guaranteed to win. But this year Netflix came up with *If Anything Happens I Love You*, a heartbreaking short about parents grieving after losing a child to gun violence. It's expertly made and sure to engage audiences - and maybe that's enough of a good reason to be deserving of the award. But Pixar's *Burrow* is just more creative.

BEST ANIMATED FEATURE FILM

WHO WILL WIN: *Soul*
WHO SHOULD WIN: *Soul* OR *Wolfwalkers*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: *Wolfwalkers*

Poor Cartoon Saloon - they're a studio in Ireland with amazing movies like *Secret of Kells* and *The Breadwinner* to their name. *Wolfwalkers* is their best film yet and would win nearly any other year. It and *Soul* have been in an aggressive competition since December last year, but *Soul* is so beautifully magnificent and profound it's hard to see it losing. I'm happy with either winning, but even though *Soul* is a better film, *Wolfwalkers* really needs this win.

BEST INTERNATIONAL FEATURE FILM

WHO WILL WIN: *Another Round* (Denmark) in Danish
WHO SHOULD WIN: *Another Round* (Denmark) in Danish
WHO I WANT TO WIN: *Another Round* (Denmark) in Danish

Denmark gets a lot of nominations in this category but not many wins. This dark comedy from Thomas Vinterberg and a gleeful Mads Mikkelsen is a shoo-win; it's the easiest pick of the night.

2020 in Cinema: The size of a screen and the scale of the story

BEST VISUAL EFFECTS

WHO WILL WIN: Scott Fisher, Andrew Jackson, David Lee, Andrew Lockley - *Tenet*
WHO SHOULD WIN: Scott Fisher, Andrew Jackson, David Lee, Andrew Lockley - *Tenet*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Scott Fisher, Andrew Jackson, David Lee, Andrew Lockley - *Tenet*

Another easy choice. The other nominees are lame and don't feature nearly as many demanding shots and complex sequences as *Tenet*. Even though there's only 300 or so VFX shots (low compared to some of Nolan's other works) the stunts and effects are integral to the plot and showcasing how the "time inversion" element works.

BEST FILM EDITING

WHO WILL WIN: Mikkel E.G. Nielsen - *Sound of Metal*
WHO SHOULD WIN: Alan Baumgarten - *The Trial of the Chicago 7*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Alan Baumgarten - *The Trial of the Chicago 7*

This one hurts a bit, but I could likely be wrong here. *Sound of Metal* has been winning editing prizes at other shows, even though *Chicago 7* is the favourite to win here. In a weird case, this could be *Chicago*'s only win of the night, but my suspicion is *Sound of Metal* will pull an upset.

On another note, this is one of Chloé Zhao's four nominations for *Nomadland* tonight, and this is the one category I'm betting she'll lose. But if she does miraculously win it, along with the other three she's up for, she'll be the first woman ever to win four Oscars in one night.

BEST SOUND MIXING

WHO WILL WIN: Nicolas Becker, Philip Bladh, Carlos Cortés and Michelle Couttolenc - *Sound of Metal*
WHO SHOULD WIN: Nicolas Becker, Philip Bladh, Carlos Cortés and Michelle Couttolenc - *Sound of Metal*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Nicolas Becker, Philip Bladh, Carlos Cortés and Michelle Couttolenc - *Sound of Metal*

Most people don't know the difference between this what used to be the Sound Editing and Mixing awards. The Mixing prize went to the best actual mix - the blending of audio tracks to create a product. Sound Editing, on the other hand, has nothing to do with mixing. This is the actual art of creating sound effects in unorthodox ways so the sounds you hear in movies sound like how audiences suspect they should.

This year, likely to mitigate confusion amidst the public, the two sound awards have been combined for all years moving forward. The technical achievement in *Sound of Metal* makes this an easy prediction, and having the word "sound" in the title will help, too.

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BEST ORIGINAL SONG

- WHO WILL WIN: “Speak Now” by Sam Ashworth and Leslie Odom Jr.
- *One Night in Miami*
- WHO SHOULD WIN: “Speak Now” by Sam Ashworth and Leslie Odom Jr.
- *One Night in Miami*
- WHO I WANT TO WIN: “Speak Now” by Sam Ashworth and Leslie Odom Jr.
- *One Night in Miami*

This is one of the hardest categories to pick this year because there’s no clear winner. It would be really fun if “Husavik” from *Eurovision Song Contest* won, but a live-action comedy film has never won Best Song for a song actually in the screenplay. With that off the table, “Speak Now” has a slight edge over the others.

But I feel bad for Diane Warren - she has her 12th nomination this year for "Io sì (Seen)" from *The Life Ahead*, and all her nominations are in this category. She’s the most losing-est woman in Oscar history and she’s probably going to lose again.

BEST ORIGINAL SCORE

- WHO WILL WIN: Trent Reznor, Atticus Ross and Jon Batiste - *Soul*
- WHO SHOULD WIN: Trent Reznor, Atticus Ross and Jon Batiste - *Soul*
- WHO I WANT TO WIN: Trent Reznor, Atticus Ross and Jon Batiste - *Soul*

Like last year, this category is almost surely a lock. Reznor and Ross shook up the music branch when they won exactly ten years ago for *The Social Network*, fusing classical music with soft piano and hard electronic sounds. Their work on *Soul* is equally inventive, but when you add the secondary punch of Jon Batiste’s ethereal jazz compositions (that are also vital to the plot) you have a two-pronged effect that voters can’t ignore. Three well deserving winners here.

BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY

- WHO WILL WIN: Joshua James Richards - *Nomadland*
- WHO SHOULD WIN: Erik Messerschmidt - *Mank*
- WHO I WANT TO WIN: Dariusz Wolski - *News of the World*

A three-way split here, as all the nominees are very well deserving of the prize. The variety and haunting beauty of *Nomadland*, added with the buzz around the film, will likely be a win for cinematographer Richards. But I also really appreciate the level of detail in *Mank*’s framing, and the same skilled beauty of the American West, I’d argue, is captured equally as well in Paul Greengrass’ *News of the World*, another under appreciated film this year.

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BEST PRODUCTION DESIGN

WHO WILL WIN: Donald Graham Burt and Jan Pascale - *Mank*
WHO SHOULD WIN: Nathan Crowley and Kathy Lucas - *Tenet*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Donald Graham Burt and Jan Pascale - *Mank*

Tenet's enormous sets including cities from around the world are clearly the most creative, detailed, and award-worthy productions of the year - not to mention the *real* airplane they crashed on purpose for a scene! Hollywood, however, will always love looking at itself, this is the one place they can easily give a prize to *Mank*, which is the most-nominated film of the year.

We saw this same "future vs. old" fight last year in *1917* vs. *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*. And can you guess who won? It won't surprise you, but...yes, *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*. That's the same reason *Mank* is going to win tonight, even though it will probably be its only award for the whole night.

BEST COSTUME DESIGN

WHO WILL WIN: Ann Roth - *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*
WHO SHOULD WIN: Ann Roth - *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Trish Summerville - *Mank*

Mank's costumes had a lot of exciting pieces, but since so many of them are suits, it's hard for most people to get excited. I'm not upset that *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* will likely take a win here, in its first of three wins. The real story here is just how much of a sin it is that *Ma Rainey* will likely be the night's second biggest winner when it somehow missed out on a Best Picture nomination. It's just ridiculous.

BEST MAKEUP AND HAIRSTYLING

WHO WILL WIN: Sergio Lopez-Rivera, Mia Neal and Jamaica Wilson
- *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*
WHO SHOULD WIN: Sergio Lopez-Rivera, Mia Neal and Jamaica Wilson
- *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Sergio Lopez-Rivera, Mia Neal and Jamaica Wilson
- *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*

The easier win for *Ma Rainey*, and its only true locked-down category is Makeup and Hairstyling, if only for the work they did on Viola Davis alone. Her Ma is a great character design, and as we saw with Gary Oldman becoming Winston Churchill in *Darkest Hour* a few years ago, one great character is enough to win this category.

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BEST ACTRESS

WHO WILL WIN: Carey Mulligan - *Promising Young Woman*, as “Cassie” Thomas
WHO SHOULD WIN: Vanessa Kirby - *Pieces of a Woman*, as Martha Weiss
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Vanessa Kirby - *Pieces of a Woman*, as Martha Weiss

Where to start? Best Actress is by far the most competitive award of the night. Tragically, the most deserving nominee is Vanessa Kirby as Martha, the woman grieving her child, and she’s the only one with no mathematical chance of winning just because it’s a less-seen film.

So who will take it? Andra Day’s Billie Holliday is a great part in a bad movie, so that leaves a three way tie for first between Carey Mulligan, Frances McDormand and Viola Davis. McDormand could steal because of *Nomadland*’s hype train and Davis could win for playing a title character with gusto. But my money is on Mulligan - she’s the only leader who hasn’t already won an Oscar and her movie, *Promising Young Woman*, won’t win as many awards as the other two. I want it to be Mulligan for a true leading performance, but truthfully? This could go to any of the top three ladies.

BEST ACTOR

WHO WILL WIN: Chadwick Boseman - *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*, as Levee Green
WHO SHOULD WIN: Anthony Hopkins - *The Father*, as Anthony
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Chadwick Boseman - *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*, as Levee Green

One of the truly gripping moments about movies this year was losing Chadwick Boseman to cancer. He really was a marvellous actor, and Levee Green is a swan song with flair to cap a career of truly great characters he played. His likely win tonight is equally for his work in *this* film as it is the legacy and his whole filmography that he left behind. Anthony Hopkins’ dominating role in *The Father* is actually a better single performance and he could possibly win. But look for a fitting tribute and rare posthumous Oscar win tonight for a man we lost too soon.

BEST DIRECTOR

WHO WILL WIN: Chloé Zhao - *Nomadland*
WHO SHOULD WIN: Chloé Zhao - *Nomadland*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: Chloé Zhao - *Nomadland*

This will be the second of Zhao’s three predicted wins tonight, and it’s not a hard one to guess. The other directors did a fine job, and it’s great to finally have multiple women nominated in this category at the same time, but this race is Zhao’s to lose. *Nomadland* truly is her project and her singular efforts have driven the van (ha, get it?) to get the movie to where it is today.

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BEST PICTURE

WHO WILL WIN: *Nomadland*
WHO SHOULD WIN: *Nomadland*
WHO I WANT TO WIN: *Nomadland*

I'll be the first to admit: I'm notoriously bad at predicting Best Picture. I've incorrectly guessed the top prize winner four years in a row now - it started with the *La La Land / Moonlight* snafu and continued the last two years when I hoped *Green Book* and *Parasite* would win but didn't think they'd get enough first place votes.

I have 70-87% accuracy rates in predicting the Oscars overall. But especially since preferential voting was introduced, this category is still a doozy to guess. I'm knocking on wood, but I really believe this is the year that will finally break my bad streak and bring me a win.

Nomadland, truly, I believe to be the year's Best Picture. It won the Golden Lion in Venice, People's Choice in Toronto, the BAFTA, Golden Globe and PGA awards. It's swept Best Picture prizes everywhere it goes and it will be the big winner again tonight.

Final Thoughts for the Year

One, among many, of the things I've reckoned with in the last year is how to get as excited about watching more movies at home in dull circumstances and promoting film enthusiastically when the best screen I can see them on is a laptop screen...or worse, a cell phone. (Cue shuddering.)

How can I get excited about these artworks clearly designed to be shown in dark theatres and on massive screens being relegated again and again *and again* to half-hearted home releases? Where's the glamour and the excitement? I'm not saying every movie justifies a trip to the cinema, but having it be 100% home viewing takes away some of the magic.

That's been a core theme in COVID-19: we as people can survive, but often the arrangement to abide in this weird period of human history means compromising in uncomfortable ways. Let's not kid ourselves; the way we do things now just feels odd by its very nature.

So it's true that some of the magic of the movies left in 2020. But there is a silver lining: the magic that left was that of the experience - not of the actual movies themselves.

The craftsmanship, artistry, excellence and excitement of watching a movie didn't lose its lustre this year. Even when being condemned to a small sized screen, the scale of the story wasn't lost in the process. We as audiences have found ways to experience and continue experiencing movies in all new ways. New films, new services, supporting new entertainment businesses and old cinemas getting by - all that determination? That's magical too.

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It's true there will be a reckoning when it comes to the business strategy of the pandemic, including whether shuffles in schedules were wise choices or not.

Disney, for example, has been particularly bad at sending titles to Disney+ for exorbitant and expensive "Premiere Access" fees; but the movies they choose to do this too all come at the expense of letting audiences see them. It's sad to me the first four movies they did (or will do) this to are *Mulan*, *Raya and the Last Dragon*, *Cruella* and *Black Widow* - all movies starring women. Even worse, the first two were highly-touted films with Asian leads.

The sidelining isn't equitable; nothing in this pandemic has been. If Hollywood really wants to be accountable for its choice and how it shapes public perception, it's got to stop making greedy mistakes. Call me naively optimistic, but I really believe this is possible.

The eventual end of how Hollywood is going to change or not is sourced from the financial trends of what people *do* in entertainment. The money really *does* talk. We as audiences have the power to decide what the scope and scale of the story will become next.

Five years ago I shared my desire to make this a permanent fixture in my life; getting to talk about and share movies to a larger audience. I'm sincerely grateful I've been able to do so, and I keep telling myself how lucky I am to have my job as an arts reporter, especially these days when that line of work is scarce.

I'm also so deeply grateful for everyone who read my reviews, stories about the movies, and this annual essay. For everyone who takes the time to read this, thank you. I can't tell you how special and fulfilling it is sharing my work with you.

The list of great movies I encourage audiences to see only grows over time. These movies are the stories that share human life and extend empathy to the furious world we live in. For those the movies you may have already seen, I hope you enjoyed them as much as I did. I'm eager and desperately excited to see what next year has to offer.

I believe it's true that all opportunity comes and goes in the right timing of things. There are continual opportunities come when we change the way we decide to look at things, but there are even more when we learn to accept and adapt to changes presented to us.

Ending this crazy year, I leave you with one last thought: the size of a screen, big or small, will never represent the impact a great story can have.