



AUGUST 2019 NEWSLETTER

Hello to all our members,

This will be a pretty long issue, as there is quite a bit of important news to cover regarding the Annual General Meeting, the complete Starbox results for the Warburton Film Festival and the process of choosing next year's general and Mini Film Festival programs.

A further reminder: August's film will be *The Italian Job*, not *Local Hero*, as the local-region Blu-Ray of *Local Hero* will not be released in Australia until September. **Local Hero** will now be screened in December.

There will be no Alternative Film Spotlight in this issue, as much of this issue features my response to Indiewire's list of the 100 best films of the 2010s. My response endorses several of their picks, disputes some of them, strongly disputes a few, and offers my own picks for some of the best films of the decades.

I hope you enjoy my analysis, and I hope you enjoy the films we have scheduled for the remainder of the year.

PART 1: THE GOOD

On July 22 2019, the film analysis site Indiewire released their list of the 100 best films of the 2010s.

The list is engaging, well-argued and demonstrates a diverse, international taste in film among the staff writers.

I've seen 33 out of the 100 films (which I think is a decently respectable score), and I agree with the inclusion of most of these films.

We Need To Talk About Kevin (88) is a gripping, extremely suspenseful portrait of a young sociopath and the stigma her mother experiences from his horrific actions.

Kumiko the Treasure Hunter (79) is a bleak yet strangely charming and visually arresting drama about obsession and modern cinema as myth.

Inside Out (78) is a wonderfully quirky, honest film about the value of sadness.

Star Wars: The Last Jedi (74) was a controversial pick for many readers (and I myself thought it had a serious lack of meaningful character development by the end), but I thought this film had an extraordinarily strong, well-defined thread of dramatic tension running through it.

Inception (63) is a tightly-produced thriller with a surreal framework involving dreams.

Black Panther (60) is a vibrant, compelling superhero film and a triumph for black representation in Hollywood.

Parasite (48) and *Dogtooth* (15) are both ingenious, darkly funny satires: Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* skewers South Korea's rigid class system, while *Dogtooth* (by Greek filmmaker Yorgos Lanthimos, who directed *The Lobster* and *The Favourite*) is about a young woman adapting to an oppressive system and using its own rules to resist it.

Hereditary (46), *The Babadook* (39) and *Get Out* (21) are chilling, superbly-directed horror films with timely themes such as the rigours of parenting and entrenched suburban racism.

Only Lovers Left Alive (35) is an elegant, dream-like film about a glamorous vampire couple rendered apathetic by immortality and struggling to survive.

Leviathan (14) is an unrelentingly grim drama about corruption.

Mad Max: Fury Road (9) may have the best pacing of any action movie I've ever seen.

YRFS PROGRAM UPDATE

Since *Local Hero* (August's intended film) won't be released on Blu-Ray in Australia until September, we have swapped a couple of the films in the remainder of the program.

Local Hero will now be playing in **December**, and *The Italian Job* (December's intended film) will now screen next month (in **August**).

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting (AGM), which is open to all Film Society members, will be held at the **Upper Yarra Arts Centre** in Warburton on Tuesday **October 8**, before Warburton's Film Society screening.

More detailed timing will be revealed soon.

NEXT YEAR'S PROGRAMS – HEALESVILLE MINI AND GENERAL

The committee is close to finalising the program for next year's Healesville Mini Film Festival – very likely a trilogy of films from the French Film Festival – but we are still eager to hear your ideas. We're interested in strong themes or common ideas to bridge the films.

Regarding next year's general screening program, start thinking about the films you want to see with us next year.

Members will be able to write down their suggestions at September's screenings (**September 10 at Warburton**, and **September 17 at Healesville**), but we invite you to send us your ideas by email.

There will be a closed committee meeting at Oscar's on September 25 to decide next year's program, based on your online and in-person suggestions.

Please email your ideas for the Healesville Mini Film Festival and next year's program to:

info@yarrarangesfilmsociety.org.au

PART 2: THE NOT-SO-GOOD

I think some of Indiewire's picks are overrated.

Zero Dark Thirty (42), *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (32), *The Wolf of Wall Street* (11) and *Carol* (7) are all engrossing, well-directed films; they just didn't leave much of an impression on me.

Inherent Vice (100), *The Tree of Life* (13), *Inside Llewyn Davis* (5) and *Under The Skin* (2) hamper their intriguing themes and strong performances with languid, aimless pacing – especially *The Tree of Life*, which is heartbreakingly beautiful and has a solid philosophical core but is very unfocused.

The Great Gatsby (98) is visually stunning and Leonardo DiCaprio was born to play Jay Gatsby, but it misses the point of F. Scott Fitzgerald's source novel by making Gatsby's life seem genuinely desirable and somehow making the scumbag character Tom Buchanan sympathetic.

La-La Land (73) is a sweet, uplifting film, but the dance numbers are stilted and it's just not my taste (I hate jazz); I also think director Damien Chazelle's subsequent film *First Man* is far better.

Melancholia (65) is half an engaging, bleak drama about a depressed woman who heals amid the end of the world, and half a really tedious set-up; I know stories about depression should generally be slow-paced, but *Melancholia* goes a little too far and becomes tiresome.

Shoplifters (62) – which played at the Warburton Film Festival this year – has great performances, a very authentic feel and fascinating moral nuance (thematically, in its focus on good people using unscrupulous methods to survive, it's similar to *Parasite*), but it's at least 45 minutes too long.

Spring Breakers (36) is an audacious neon-tinted film about carefree teenage frivolity and rule-breaking taken to a dangerous extreme, but the characters are hollow and it's a sleazy, intensely unpleasant film.

The Master (8) is an enthralling character study about a charismatic religious leader (clearly based on L. Ron Hubbard in the early days of Scientology) being swept up in his own out-of-control movement, but it's told through a boorish, annoying secondary character as the focal point.

These films I'm disputing are all still good, or at least stylish, ambitious or memorable.

I just don't think they're among the best of the decade.

STARBOX RESULTS FOR THE Warburton Film Festival

<i>Backtrack Boys</i>	4.7
<i>The Insult</i>	4.6
<i>Beast</i>	3.8
<i>Leave No Trace</i>	4.3
<i>Shoplifters</i>	4.2
<i>Can You Ever Forgive Me?</i>	3.7
<i>Timbuktu</i>	4.3
<i>Wajib</i>	4.0

FRITZ'S POEM

The King's Choice

August 2019

It was a cold winter's night and a movie of war.
I'd seen more people in the cinema before.
I learnt a few things, I must admit,
Like that politics and reality do not fit.
That in negotiations the only trick
Is that you carry a very big stick.
That a young lad who wants to have fun
Can be compelled to shoot his gun.
That people in power think "me-me-me"
And a bit about their legacy.
But that even then, what little children do
Has an effect on the thinking too.
'The King's Choice' – very good, but on the other hand,
I'd like to see how they did it in Switzerland.



F.R.

PART 3: THE BAD

There are only five picks in Indiewire's list that I actively disagree with.

Screenwriter Greta Gerwig has a talent for witty, introspective dialogue, but her character in *Frances Ha* (55) is so aimless yet in such denial about it (and the pacing also meanders along), I found this film more frustrating than anything else.

Cold War (54) is an elegant period drama about a young woman in mid-twentieth century Europe who cannot escape oppression, whether political or personal, but the other characters are underdeveloped and the pacing skips over too much time and space. This results in a disjointed flow and prevents us from fully investing in the main characters' situation or holding onto a sense of tension.

I know *Boyhood* (24) is a darling of so many people (our Vice-President Keith included), but I think it's a massively overrated film. The protagonist becomes mopey and less interesting as he (literally) grows up, the characters bluntly state the film's themes of maturity and dissatisfaction of life (which is lazy screenwriting), and the titular boy's character development is very slim. I generally like slow, meditative, character-focused

films that feel like we're watching a life unfold (such as *We Need To Talk About Kevin*, *Only Lovers Left Alive*, *Leviathan*, *Melancholia* and *Shoplifters*), but I found *Boyhood* boring. It also seems like some of *Boyhood*'s fans are taking its central gimmick – a single narrative shot across 12 years with the same cast – far too seriously. It's not even a unique gimmick: long-running film series such as *Harry Potter*, classic soap operas like *Home and Away* and *Roseanne*, and especially the *7 Up* documentary series have achieved roughly the same thing already.

Toni Erdmann (19) sucks. It's an overlong, obnoxious film, and the narrative fails to justify the protagonist's goofy interfering actions. Winfried / "Toni"'s daughter Ines may be unfulfilled and stagnating in her business consultant career, but it is not Winfried's damn place to intervene (even as her father), especially in a deceptive disguise. Moreover, Ines would have very likely turned her life and career around herself, as she is shown to be an assertive, focused businesswoman adept at negotiating to get what she wants. Winfried's interference is therefore disrespectful **and** narratively unnecessary. While Ines commits to it with gusto, the scene of Winfried forcing her to sing at a party was totally disgusting. *Toni Erdmann* aims for a whimsical, altruistic mood, but feels arrogant (and like *Shoplifters*, it's *way* too long).

Holy Motors (6) is also atrocious. I usually hate the word "pretentious" – like with "entitled", "elitist" and "virtue signalling", it's often used to stamp out legitimate discussion – but *Holy Motors* has so many sloppy layers and is so obsessed with making a point that it forgets to build any dramatic tension. Oscar, the protagonist, is revealed to be an actor taking on elaborate, strange public roles in vignettes for unseen cameras and audiences; on some level, the narrative is acknowledging *us* as viewers in the interludes. I generally enjoy media that acknowledges the audience or its own fictional nature, which is known as 'breaking the fourth wall': *Deadpool* is loads of fun, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* has a classic fourth wall-breaking joke involving stage-lights, and the outstanding 1984 Doctor Who serial *The Caves of Androzani* has the villain Morgus address the audience with his scheming monologues. I can accept the above narratives, despite their characters sometimes acknowledging the audience (and therefore indicating the fakeness of their world), because the characters are well-defined, face palpable hardships and have something to lose. Fourth wall-breaking and dramatic tension are not mutually-exclusive. But in *Holy Motors*, Oscar is shot and stabbed in a couple of the sequences, but is fine in the next sequence. With every sequence more-or-less explicitly staged for audiences within the film's world, and everything in turn staged by director Leos Carax for *us*, nothing in *Holy Motors* is "real" or carries any dramatic weight. *Holy Motors* has a couple of brilliant sequences, namely the mob hit and the motion capture action/sex scene, but the overall film is pretentious and bereft of tension, and the sequence in which Oscar, as a goblin-like man, abducts, strips and degrades a passive model, is repulsive.

STAR RATINGS AND REVIEW FOR *THE KING'S CHOICE*



4.3 from Healesville

4.5 from Warburton's viewers

4.4 overall

The King's Choice is a poignant, riveting historical drama about the creeping spectre of war and holding onto one's principles in the darkest of times.

The film has a sturdy foundation of engrossing characters and phenomenal dramatic tension.

During the opening, the fear of the Norwegian soldiers is palpable, and the dim lighting and deep sound design makes the advancing German battleship seem like a massive beast stalking through the night.

King Haakon (Jesper Christensen), his family and Cabinet must be constantly on the move to evade the Nazis: the stress of this ordeal weighs heavily upon everyone involved, and both Haakon and his son Crown Prince Olav (Anders Baasmo Christiansen) struggle under their feelings of powerlessness.

The film superbly balances internal and external conflict. The Norwegian royal family's flight from the Nazis provides the film's primary forward momentum, with planes stalking ominously overhead and stark battle sequences highlighting the threat to their lives. Haakon and Olav's loyalty to their nation, despite intense resistance, forms the film's intimate personal conflict.

The film has bleak atmosphere and ever-tightening tension, but ends on an optimistic note, as Haakon nobly refuses to capitulate to the occupying Nazis and pledges to abdicate if his Cabinet endorses Quisling's puppet government. Even with the enemy in his lands, the King refuses to sell out his people.

The King's Choice is an extremely suspenseful film with outstanding character development, and is one of my favourite films from this year's program (just under *The Death of Stalin*).

PART 4: MY SUGGESTIONS

Here are my suggestions for some of the best films of the 2010s.

A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night (2014) is a minimalist yet stylish and fun feminist take on a vampire story.

Annihilation (2018) is a poignant, visually-stunning exploration of how we deal with trauma.

Take This Waltz (2012) is an achingly moving examination of modern relationships and the subtle yet strong impact of depression – incidentally, director Sarah Polley's documentary *Stories We Tell* is #34 on Indiewire's list.

Predestination (2014) may be the most tightly-written, compelling time travel film ever made.

Snowpiercer (2013) is a gloriously demented thriller about a class war among the last people on Earth, and it deftly blends sensitive pathos, visual creativity and gut-wrenching violence. YouTuber Rhino Stew has also shown that *Snowpiercer* may be a stealth sequel to 1971's *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*.

Despite some big historical inaccuracies, *Argo* (2012) is a taut, incredibly suspenseful film about the Iran Hostage Crisis.

Train to Busan (2016) is a relentlessly scary zombie film full of deep, engaging characters.

Kaboom's (2012) plot is ridiculous, but it's an endearing film with positive portrayals of LGBTQ+ identities and relationships.

The Hunt (2012) is a soul-crushingly depressing film, but it's a harrowing, superbly-acted drama about the runaway effect of rumour and how viciously public opinion can turn on people.

The Villainess (2017) may be ostensibly a South Korean remake of Luc Besson's *Nikita*, with little added or changed to the plot, but it has some of the most jaw-dropping action sequences of the decade (many rendered in astonishing single-takes).

Raw (2016) is a funny, confronting and grotesque film about repressed feminine sexuality and the cruelty of fraternity culture, with cannibalism as a grisly metaphor for the protagonist's sexual awakening.

Steve Jobs (2015) is a riveting, even-handed biopic about Apple's complicated co-founder, and has incredibly tight pacing and brilliant dialogue.

Cloud Atlas (2012) is a remarkably ambitious, resplendent tapestry of genres, time periods and multiple age, sex and race-bending roles for every cast member, and is a rare case of the film adaptation being better than the source book.

Blade Runner 2049 (2017) is a tense sci-fi noir mystery with deeply moving performances and some brilliant plot twists, and is a rare case of the sequel being better than the original.

With the 2010s rapidly coming to an end, and film fans and critics taking stock of the past decade's cinema, which films do you consider the best of the decade? Do you agree with Indiewire's picks? Do you agree with my suggestions, or disagree with my criticism of some of Indiewire's choices?

Please let me know.

AUGUST'S SCREENING

The Italian Job

1969 British comedy / crime Rated PG 99 minutes (approx.)



The Italian Job is a classic comedy about a recently-released crook, played by Michael Caine in an iconic early performance, orchestrating a traffic jam in Turin in order to steal a shipment of gold ingots.

WARBURTON SCREENING: Tuesday August 13

HEALESVILLE SCREENING: Tuesday August 20

SEPTEMBER'S SCREENING

Youth

2015 Italian comedy-drama Rated MA15+ 124 minutes (approx.)

WARBURTON SCREENING: Tuesday September 10

HEALESVILLE SCREENING: Tuesday September 17