

Film Feature: The 10 Best Overlooked Films of 2011

Submitted by [mattmovieman](#) [1] on December 28, 2011 - 4:22pm

- [A Summer in Genoa](#) [2]
- [Buck](#) [3]
- [Ceremony](#) [4]
- [Certified Copy](#) [5]
- [Circumstance](#) [6]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [7]
- [Into the Abyss](#) [8]
- [Life in a Day](#) [9]
- [Like Crazy](#) [10]
- [List](#) [11]
- [Margaret](#) [12]
- [Margin Call](#) [13]
- [Matt Fagerholm](#) [14]
- [Meek's Cutoff](#) [15]
- [Rebirth](#) [16]
- [Super](#) [17]
- [Tomboy](#) [18]
- [Trust](#) [19]
- [Win Win](#) [20]

CHICAGO – Some films never get a fair shot with audiences. They open in a handful of art house theaters scattered throughout the country before inconspicuously landing on DVD. Passionate movie lovers are left with the task of championing these unjustly obscure titles and helping them to acquire the audience they deserve.

Before I reveal my picks for the top ten Best Overlooked Films of 2011, here are the ten runners-up:

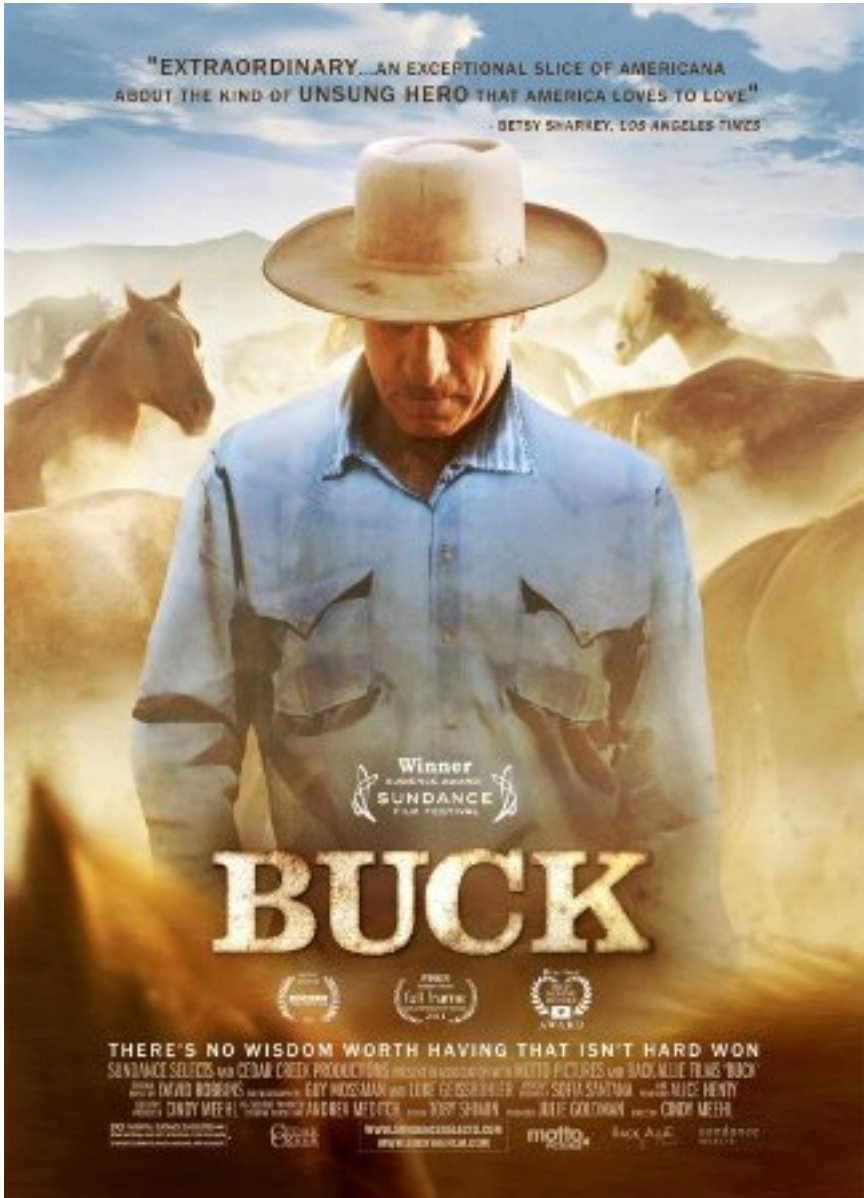
“Autoerotic”



Autoerotic

While Steve McQueen’s magnificent art film, “Shame,” plunges into the dark depths of sexual addiction, Joe Swanberg and Adam Wingard’s “Autoerotic” takes a decidedly more playful approach to similar material. Though Swanberg has made a series of uncommonly intimate films about the sex lives of twentysomething Chicagoans, he’s never attempted a film as overtly comic as this one, and Wingard proves to be an ideal collaborator. “Autoerotic” is easily Swanberg’s most accessible film to date, and will hopefully introduce more viewers to one of Chicago’s most gifted and prolific filmmakers. The 72-minute film consists of four somewhat interconnected short subjects about couples who find unusual ways to deal with ordinary problems. One man goes to extreme lengths to make himself more well-endowed. Another makes an outlandish request of his ex that proves he’s more interested in genitalia than whatever is connected to it. The most memorable vignette features Frank V. Ross and Kris Swanberg, who seem to be reprising their roles from Swanberg’s excellent web series, “Young American Bodies.” As is usual of Swanberg’s honest and unflinching work, the sex scenes are explicit but never exploitative, while revealing a surprising amount of insight into modern relationships.

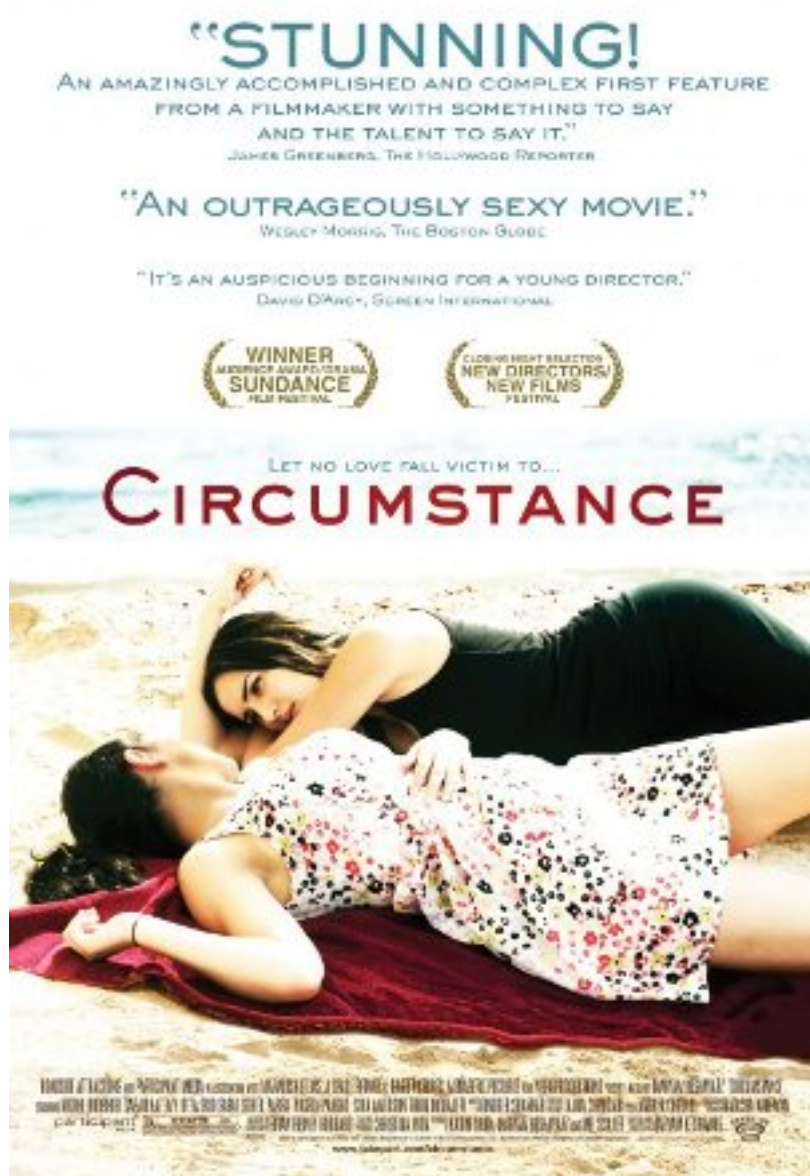
“Buck”



Buck

There's a striking early moment in Cindy Meehl's documentary where horse trainer Buck Brannaman slows the speed of his walking to demonstrate how he might move as an old man. His horse observes this change and adjusts its movement accordingly by following its owner at a slower speed. It becomes quickly apparent that Brannaman has somehow created a silent language with horses that allows him to calm and navigate their minds. As one of the nation's most respected practitioners of the "natural horsemanship" method, Brannaman spends the majority of his time on the road, holding clinics at various locations throughout the continent where he's gradually built a base of avid participants. Meehl's film becomes an extension of Brannaman just as his horses become an extension of him. It's a stripped-down and straightforward portrait with a great deal of depth and wisdom that applies to life beyond the stable. The structure he imposes on the horses is mirrored by the structure provided by his own rigid schedule, which may function as a form of protection. Brannaman's need for order in his life seems to have sprung directly from his troubled upbringing. At a time when America's divisive culture is anchored by shouting matches with the power to drown out all common sense, I suspect every person could benefit from emulating Brannaman's serene, no-nonsense approach to dealing with conflict.

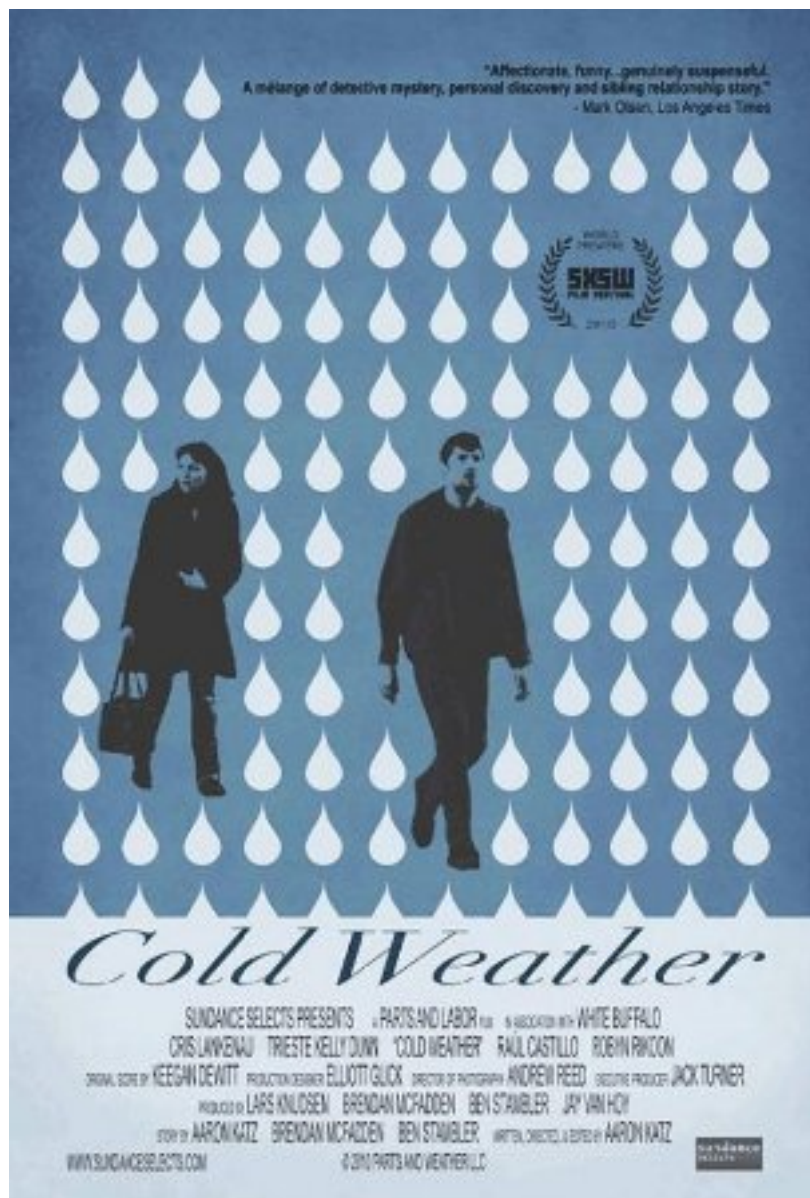
“Circumstance”



Circumstance

Filmmaker Maryam Keshavarz's elegantly lensed, viscerally effective feature debut made headlines earlier this month when its producer, Karin Chien, criticized the Producers Guild of America for deeming it a "foreign language film," despite the fact that it was financed in the U.S. It's the latest ill-conceived effort to categorize films by their dominant language as opposed to their country of origin. "Circumstance" is clearly the work of an Iranian American attempting to portray the repression of her native country from a clear-eyed perspective. This is a passionately observed tale of star-crossed lovers that delivers a real erotic charge. Beguiling newcomers Nikohl Boosheri and Sarah Kazemy star as two teenagers who keep their shared attraction a secret while dreaming of life in a more enlightened land. Reza Sixo Safai plays Boosheri's older brother, a troubled man still living on his parent's allowance, who starts clinging to fanaticism and sexual obsession in order to construct an "adult" life for himself. Safai's actions in the film are reprehensible, but he is suffering under the same repression. Since the characters can't display their passion in public, it's externalized through deftly executed fantasy sequences. Keshavarz's extreme close-ups of lips and fingers create more sexual tension than any amount of nude scenes ever could. She is a filmmaker to watch.

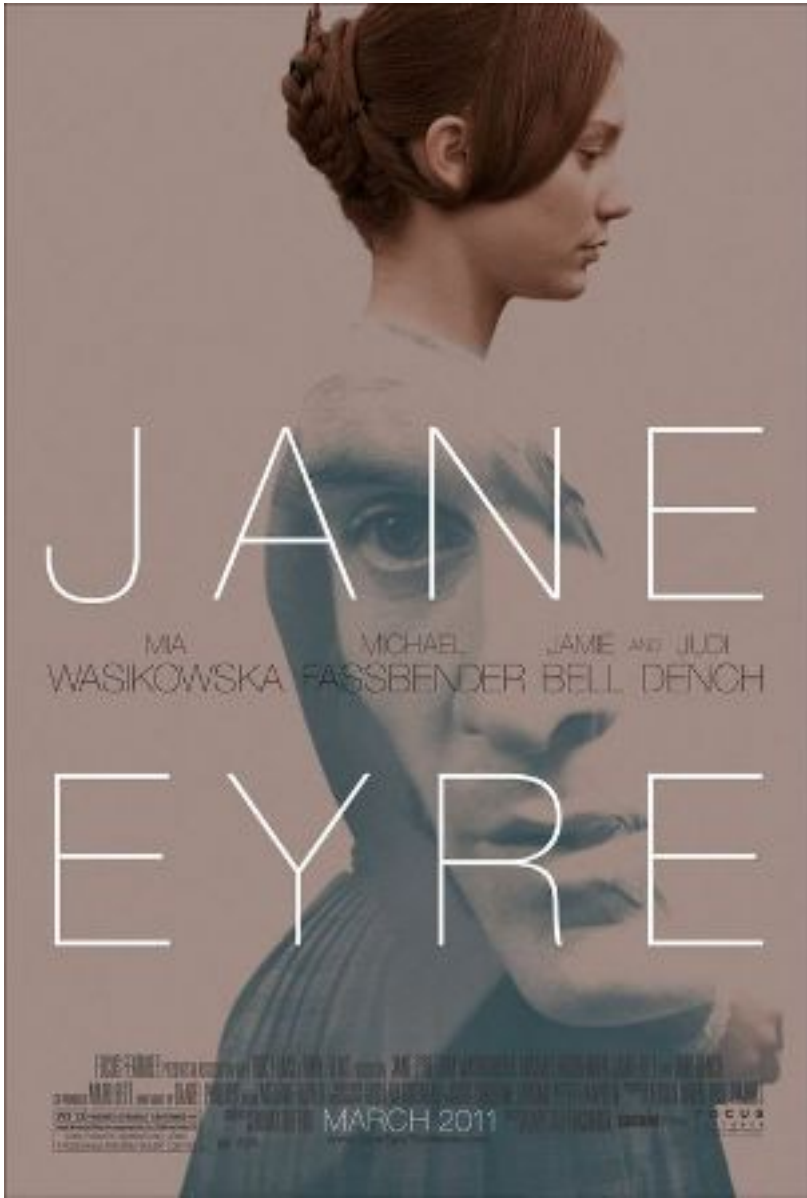
"Cold Weather"



Cold Weather

This is the sort of film that Video On Demand was made for. It doesn't require a big screen or surround sound to fully envelop the audience into its story. Director Aaron Katz's longtime collaborators, cinematographer Andrew Reed and composer Keegan DeWitt, impeccably set the mood and tone for an overcast Oregon-set noir from the very first frame. The effortlessly natural Cris Lankenau (star of Katz's "Quiet City") plays Doug, a young slacker who initially fits the profile of many a mumblecore protagonist: single, unemployed, and seemingly aimless. During the film's first 40 minutes, it appears that "Weather" will be yet another brooding, blue-tinted relationship drama from the Sundance labs. But Katz stealthily builds tension throughout the first act until the picture emerges as a low key yet no less infectious variation on Woody Allen's underrated 1993 farce, "Manhattan Murder Mystery." Devoid of distracting punchlines, Katz's film is ultimately more gripping and leads to a genuinely tense climax. By viewing the plot purely through the limited gaze of its innocent protagonists, the film succeeds in making the viewer feel like a participant in the unfolding story rather than a detached observer. Reed's elegant imagery brings a haunting intrigue to the most mundane spaces. This may be the most visually poetic American indie since Bradley Rust Gray's "The Exploding Girl."

"Jane Eyre"



Jane Eyre

Ever since she materialized on the first season of HBO's masterful series, "In Treatment," Mia Wasikowska has quickly emerged as one of the most magnetic actresses of her generation. She's blessed with the sort of face that's impossible to look away from. And in Cary Fukunaga's sublime adaptation of Charlotte Brontë's gothic melodrama, Wasikowska proves to be a hypnotic beauty. Fans of Fukunaga's galvanizing debut film, "Sin Nombre" may initially regard "Eyre" as a giant departure, yet both films are not without their similarities: ravishing photography, impeccable production design and a story anchored in the arduous coming-of-age journey of a strong female protagonist. Amelia Clarkson is also a standout as the young Jane who grows up to be a governess for the formidable Mr. Rochester, played by the tirelessly versatile Michael Fassbender. Rochester's hopeless infatuation with Jane leads to a series of complications, and the 12-year age difference between Fassbender and Wasikowska make their romantic entanglements more than a little unsettling. Yet it's a testament to both actors' skills that their romance registers as touching rather than creepy. Brontë's novel has received an endless array of screen adaptations, but few have felt as authentic and heartfelt as Fukunaga's overlooked gem.

"Like Crazy"



Like Crazy

“Please, please tell me what they looked like,/Did they seem afraid of you?/They were kids that I once knew.../They were kids that I once knew...” And so go the lyrics of the Stars song, “Dead Hearts,” that poignantly plays over the end titles of Drake Doremus’s remarkable romance. It won the Grand Jury Prize at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival, as well as snagged an award for its radiant leading lady, Felicity Jones, but didn’t receive the attention it deserved during its limited theatrical release. What makes the picture such a stand-out is its structure. As the helmer of indie gems “Spooler” and “Douchebag,” Doremus has a background in crafting intricately layered character studies on a tight budget. While so many studio films leave their most interesting moments on the cutting room floor in order to advance the narrative, this film plays like an assortment of deleted scenes. The script, co-authored by Doremus and Ben York Jones, is more interested in exploring key nuances than hitting expected plot points. Scene after scene depicts the push and pull of a long distance relationship struggling to stay alive against all odds. There are times when British college student Anna (Jones) and Jacob (Anton Yelchin) feel the need to move on but are entirely unable to let their connection die. Both stars deliver their best work to date, while cinematographer John Guleserian proves to have a masterful eye for detail. Though the film clocks in at a brisk 90 minutes, it overflows with moments of painful recognition for anyone who’s ever been haunted by a relationship that was—for one reason or another—unsustainable.

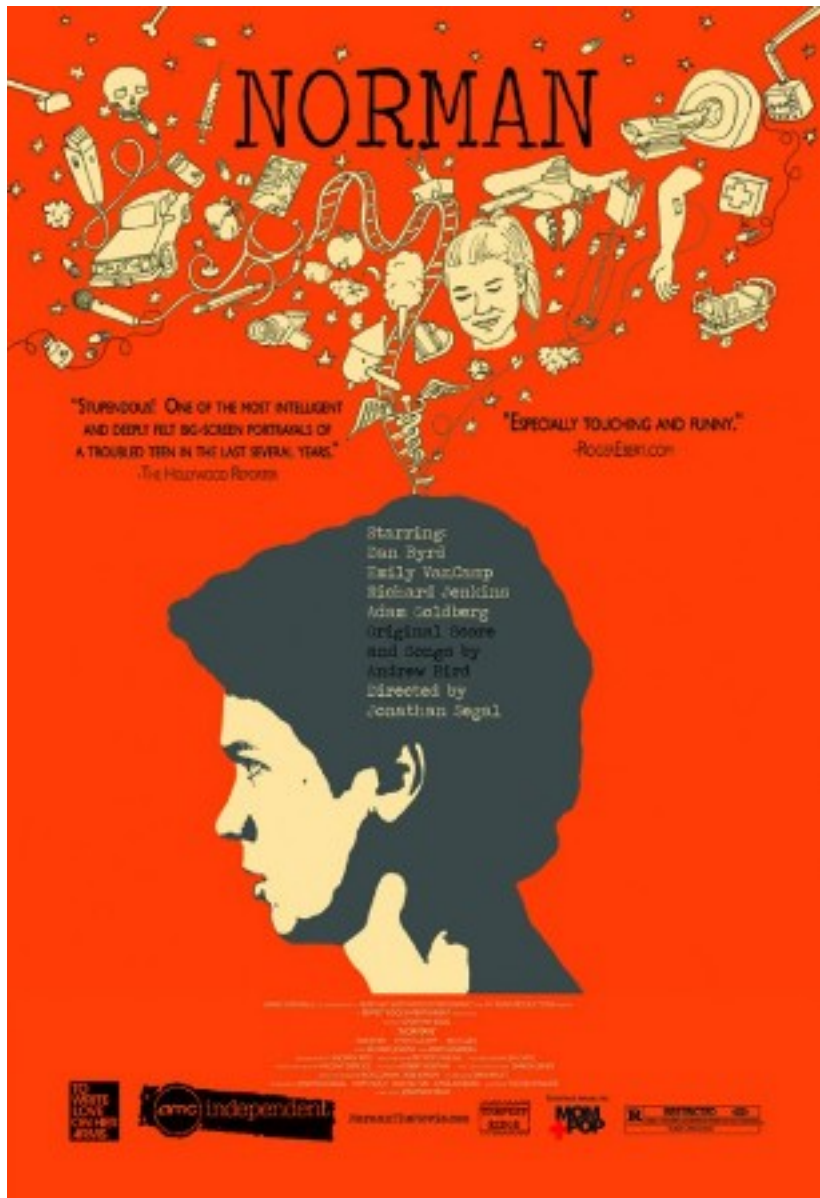
“Margaret”



Margaret

With a running time clocking in around two and a half hours, this barely released curiosity from Fox Searchlight still plays like a work in progress. Tonally conflicting scenes careen into one another as if large chunks of the narrative had been plucked out altogether. A longer cut edited by Martin Scorsese and approved by the film’s director Kenneth Lonergan (“You Can Count On Me”) has yet to be screened, but what remains in the theatrical version is far more interesting than countless completed pictures. It’s a fascinating mess that actually works in spite of itself, with a messy structure that mirrors the turbulent inner life of its central heroine, played in a breathtaking performance by Anna Paquin (prior to “True Blood”). Her performance embodies female adolescence stripped of all clichés. There isn’t a trace of romanticism in the scene where Margaret (Paquin) loses her virginity to a casual acquaintance. Her angry altercations with her workaholic mother, stage actress Joan (J. Smith Cameron), resonate on an entirely authentic level. And when a friendly yet careless exchange with a bus driver causes him to fatally strike a pedestrian, Margaret reacts in a way any blindsided teenager would. She initially reports that the accident was no one’s fault, but nagging guilt causes her to seek justice. Her compulsive need to bring about an ideal ending to this tragedy conflicts with the mundane contradictions of the real world. Yet this straightforward premise doesn’t even begin to convey the audacity and complexities of this picture. Lonergan may be biting off more here than he can possibly chew, but even with its running time slashed, this film is alive in a way that few films are. John Cassavetes would’ve loved it.

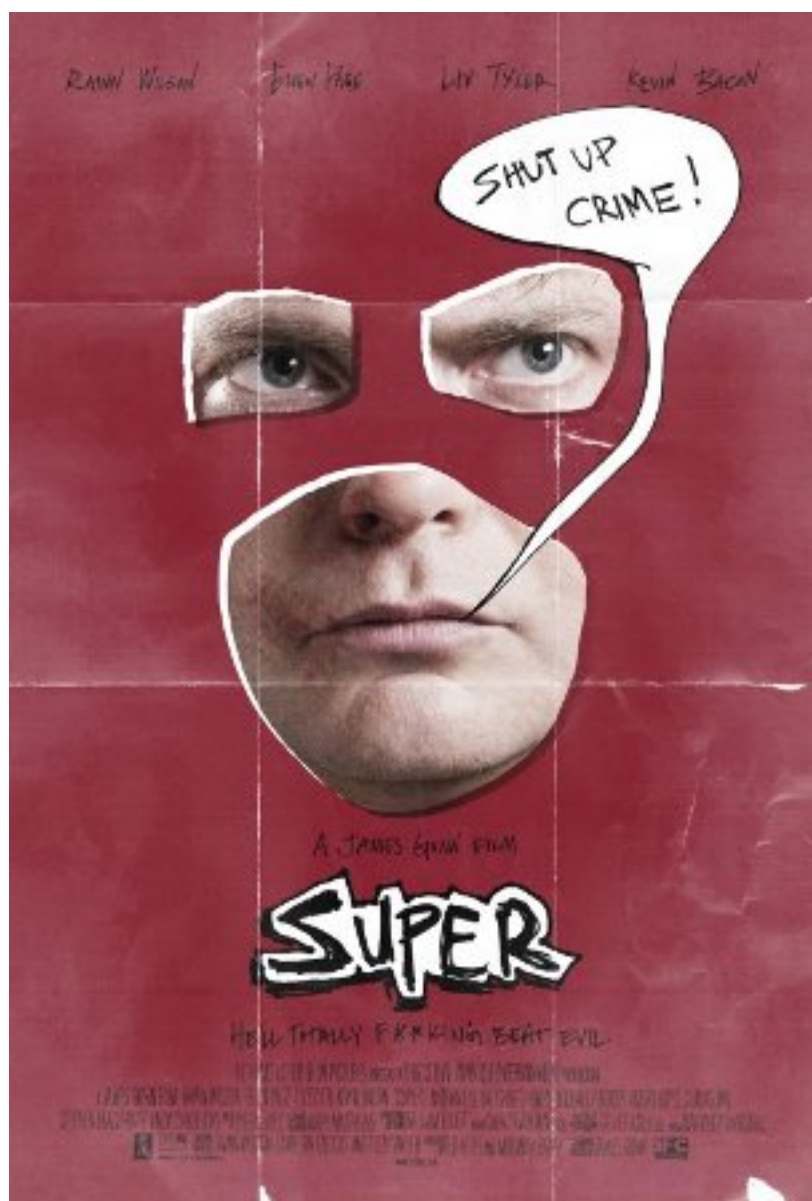
“Norman”



Norman

Like Jonathan Levine’s unlikely feel-good comedy, “50/50,” this terrific indie dramedy may prove to be a great source of catharsis and comfort to people suffering through the daily trials brought on by disease. For audiences merely seeking a fine evening of entertainment, both films also fit the bill. From the moment the titular teenage protagonist rips open the shuddering door of his locker and shoots a morose glance at its contents, Norman (Dan Byrd) has the viewer thoroughly absorbed in his moment-to-moment experiences. As he observes his father, Doug (Richard Jenkins), gradually succumb to stomach cancer, the audience shares Norman’s mounting anxiety about the sudden crises that could befall him at any moment. Life at home is a ticking time bomb, while school is a melancholy dirge. With his father’s illness a mystery to his peers, Norman suddenly claims that he has stomach cancer and has little time left to live. This comes as startling news to the student body, particularly Emily (Emily VanCamp), the girl who instantly won Norman’s heart with her kindness, charm and love of Monty Python. The romantic subplot is tenderly observed, but the real heart of the picture lies in the scenes between Norman and Doug. The toll of functioning as the sole caregiver can easily make one feel as if they are going through the physical turmoil themselves, and that is ultimately what “Norman” is about. The fact that it manages to be as hilarious as it is moving is a remarkable achievement.

“Super”



Super

A great oddball howl of rage delivered with deadpan zeal by writer/director James Gunn. Yes, this jet-black satire about a vigilante superhero draws obvious comparisons to Matthew Vaughn's rollicking guilty pleasure, "Kick Ass," but Gunn's film is far darker and a hell of a lot more fun. Rainn Wilson further perfects his "disgruntled loser" persona as Frank D'Arbo, a genial yet witless man who transforms into a vengeful monster after his wife (Liv Tyler) falls for a drug dealer (Kevin Bacon, displaying the pompous glee of a schoolyard bully). Fed up with all the evil in the world, Frank creates a homemade costume and transforms into the Crimson Bolt. Yet since he lacks any semblance of superpowers, Frank relies instead on his ability to whack evildoers in the head with a wrench. As his sidekick and muse Libby (nicknamed "Boltie"), Ellen Page gives one of year's great comic performances. Libby is so exhilarated by the newfound adventure that her energy reaches frightening levels of hysteria. Unlike the hyper-stylized blood-spruts in "Kick Ass," the violence in "Super" is graphic and genuinely disturbing, thus making it impossible for viewers to dismiss the fractured human drama beneath the onscreen chaos. It's a kick to the cojones that hurts so good.

"Win Win"

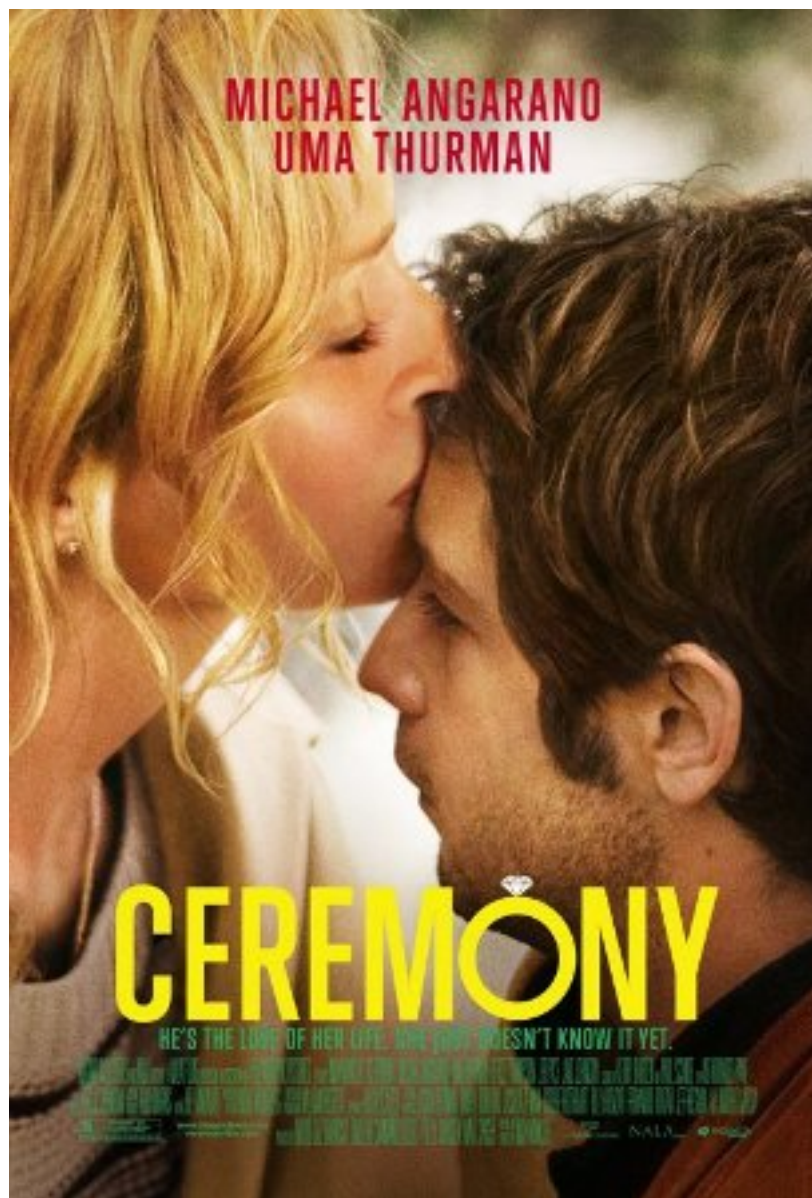


Win Win

One of the finest unsung performances of the year was delivered by Paul Giamatti in Tom McCarthy's microcosm of the financially strapped Midwest. Giamatti has become one of those actors whose work is so consistently brilliant that he's routinely taken for granted. His portrayal of a professional back-stabber in George Clooney's "The Ides of March" was also Oscar-worthy, but quickly became lost in the holiday shuffle. Mike Flaherty, the lawyer that Giamatti plays in "Win Win," is an equally nefarious but considerably more sympathetic character. After double-crossing one of his clients in order to better provide for his family, Flaherty becomes deeply conflicted when faced with the client's young grandson, Kyle (wonderfully played by real-life champion wrestler Alex Shaffer). Mike takes Kyle under his wing and gets him involved in the wrestling team that he's volunteered to coach. Yet the dirty truth of Mike's dirty double dealings threatens to reach the surface once Kyle's mother (Melanie Lynskey) re-enters the picture. There are no heroes and villains in "Win Win," and certainly no winners and losers—only an assemblage of flawed yet endearing people attempting to navigate their way through the murky waters and obstacles of everyday life.

And here are (drum roll please) The Top Ten Best Overlooked Films of 2011...

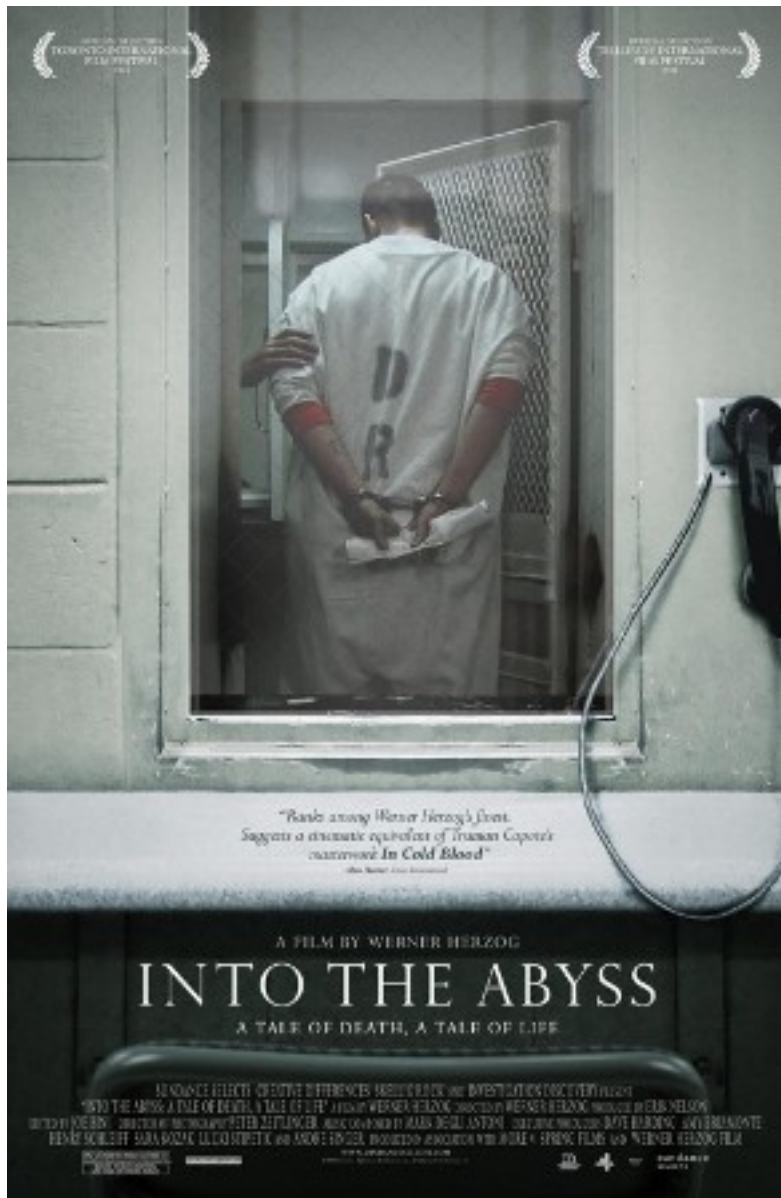
10.) "Ceremony"



Ceremony

How could the directorial debut of the Fonz's son have slipped by unnoticed during its initial theatrical run? Max Winkler was only 25 when he shot "Ceremony," a film dismissed by many critics as a mere imitation of Wes Anderson's "Rushmore." Yet the people Winkler has created within the pages of his richly textured script feel more tangibly human than Anderson's colorfully heightened characters ever have. Instead of glorying in the manufactured personas of its insecure protagonists, the film probes under the surface of their self-deception, exposing the vulnerability beneath the façade. Described by Winkler as a "coming-of-age tale in reverse," the film centers on Sam (Michael Angarano) and Marshall (Reece Thompson), two twenty-something friends whose once-close relationship has faded over the years. On the heels of his failed and blatantly autobiographical children's novel, Sam orchestrates a trip that he claims is designed to help him and Marshall reconnect. Yet it becomes quickly obvious that Sam is withholding his true intentions, as he stealthily eyes his desired destination: an upscale gathering attended by his thirty-something ex, Zoe (Uma Thurman), and her sleek fiancé, Whit (played by Lee Pace with a dash of Russell Brand). It's entirely to the credit of Winkler's script that none of these people are reduced to the level of condescending caricatures. This is Thurman's best non-Tarantino vehicle since Mira Nair's 2002 TV movie, "Hysterical Blindness," and she shares scenes with Angarano that are both endearing and painfully honest. Though the film supplies many laughs, it also offers a great deal of insight and bittersweet catharsis as its characters make the difficult journey toward self-acceptance and adulthood.

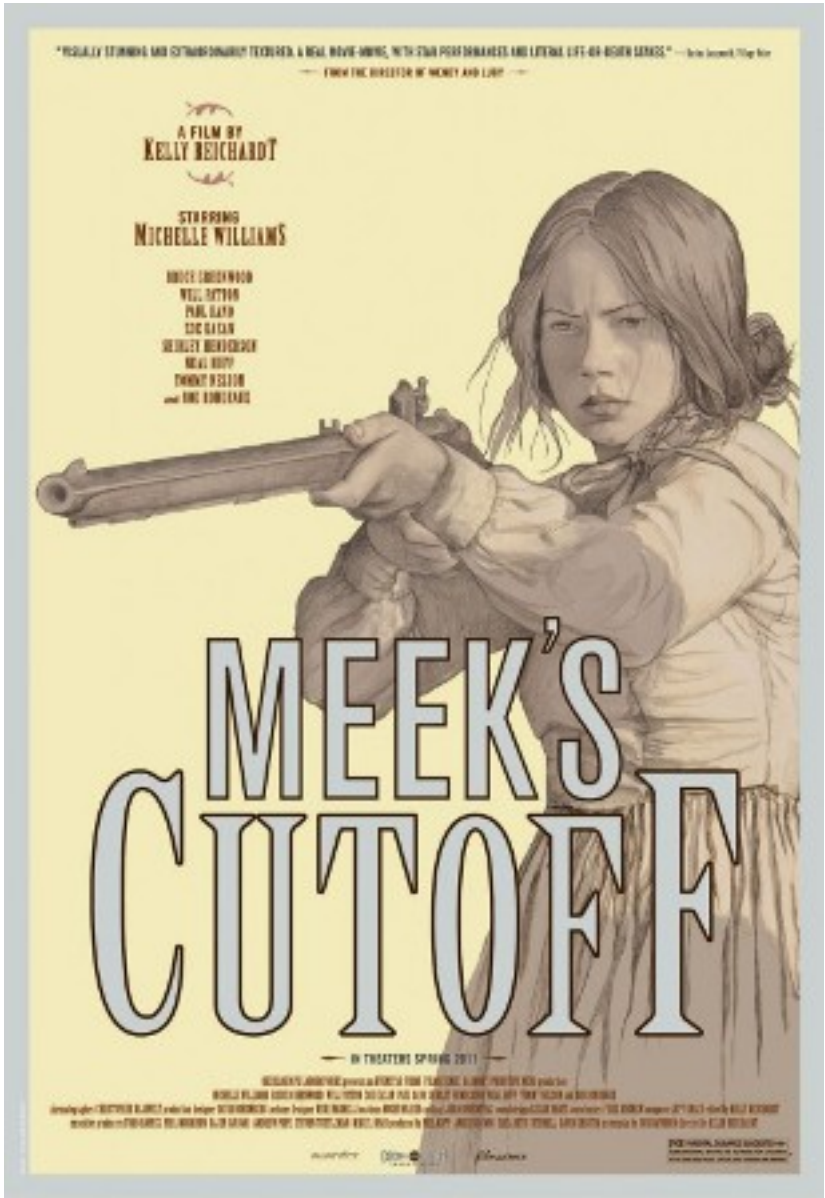
9.) "Into the Abyss"



Into the Abyss

What precisely does the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences have against Werner Herzog? Sure, the Academy threw him a bone in 2009 with a nod for “Encounters at the End of the World,” but that was just a make-up nomination for the criminal exclusion of Herzog’s 2005 effort, “Grizzly Man,” from the Oscar shortlist. Herzog’s portrait of ill-fated animal activist Timothy Treadwell was one of the best films of the decade, and though “Into the Abyss” isn’t quite in the same league, it still towers above most of the year’s documentaries. Herzog’s 3D exploration of ancient paintings in “Cave of Forgotten Dreams” has gotten more considerably attention, but this provocative meditation on the questionable morality of the death penalty is even more riveting. Some critics have complained that the film amounts to little more than a series of talking heads, but Herzog is tremendously skilled at getting the most out of his conversations with various human subjects. The filmmaker makes no secret of his own stance against capital punishment, but he never hesitates in allowing his interviewees to voice their own views. The camera lingers on the face of death row inmate Michael Perry, who’s living with the full knowledge that he’ll be gone from the earth in a matter of days. Perry’s crimes are unforgivable, but is his fate justified? This film is in the grand tradition of Herzog classics like, “Little Dieter Needs to Fly,” where the most unforgettable imagery is conjured by the words and nuances of storytelling.

8.) “Meek’s Cutoff”



Meek's Cutoff

Some films set out to tell a self-contained story with a beginning, middle and end. Others aim to evoke a mood and feeling that illuminates some essence of the human experience. Viewers seeking closure and neatly tied plot threads are often frustrated with the latter, and a few of them let out howls of outrage earlier this year at a screening of Kelly Reichardt's ominous, quietly gripping western. Yet any pat resolution to this yarn would've felt maddeningly false. This film aims to convey the frustration and paranoia of settlers navigating their way through the uncertain terrain of the Oregon desert, and on that level, the film is a flat-out triumph. Michelle Williams further solidifies her status as one of our finest actresses as Emily Tetherow, a women who grows increasingly weary of her group's boastful guide, Meek (brilliantly played by Bruce Greenwood). Like Williams and Reichardt's equally entrancing collaboration, "Wendy and Lucy," this is a film about lost souls on a dangerous journey that may, or may not, have an end in sight. Once a lone Native American, credited as "The Indian" (Rod Rondeaux), is captured by the settlers, the film reaches a whole other level of intrigue. No film this year portrayed its period setting with such consuming power. There's a heart-stopping moment when Williams desperately loads her shotgun to signal for help, and the time and effort it takes to simply load the shotgun creates a morbid fascination in the viewer. If anything, this picture is guaranteed to make modern viewers mightily pleased that they don't live in 1845.

7.) "Margin Call"



Margin Call

The Screen Actors Guild should be penalized for failing to nominate what is unquestionably one of the best ensembles this year. Nope, I'm not referring to "The Smurfs." J.C. Chandor's terrifically tense thriller was one of the most assured feature debuts in years, assembling a pitch-perfect cast jam-packed with talent. Kevin Spacey is electrifying as Sam Rogers, the head of sales at an investment bank (modeled after Lehman Brothers), who's alerted to an impending catastrophe discovered by a recently sacked employee, Eric (played by Stanley Tucci in a potent cameo). According to Eric's dire calculations, excessive leverage could lead the firm to suffer a loss greater than its market capitalization. In other words, another stock market crash is inevitable. Zachary Quinto heads the peerless ensemble as a junior employee who first sheds light on Eric's findings, while CEO John Tuld (a marvelous Jeremy Irons) sweeps in to initiate ill-advised damage control tactics. By viewing the impending financial iceberg through the eyes of the people who first spotted it on the ever-nearing horizon, Chandor humanizes the plight of Wall Street traders while bringing the audience up close to the primal greed and corruption residing beneath their polished façade. Rounding out the main players are Paul Bettany, Simon Baker, Mary McDonnell, Demi Moore and Penn Badgley. This easily gets my top vote for Best Ensemble of the Year.

6.) "A Summer in Genoa"



A Summer in Genoa

At age 50, Michael Winterbottom still seems like one of the freshest talents on the block. His ability to reinvent himself is almost unparalleled at a time when many of the world’s most respected filmmakers are all too happy to go to the same well more than twice. This is one of the best films Winterbottom has ever made, and it was released to little fanfare in 2008. Fortunately, the DVD arrived this year, and deserves to be sought out by cinephiles. It’s a riveting example of how effective Winterbottom’s guerilla style can be when put to the service of a compelling story. When his wife dies in a head-on collision, Joe (Colin Firth) is left solely in charge of his two girls, the elder (Willia Holland) bursting with hormones and resentment, the younger (Perla Haney-Jardine) wracked with guilt. Firth’s performance is a beautifully restrained piece of work, hinting at the vulnerability and raw pathos he would later exude in “A Single Man” and “The King’s Speech.” After his friend and former flame, Barbara (Catherine Keener) informs him of a teaching gig in Italy, Joe moves his family from Chicago to Genoa, which becomes somewhat of a schizophrenic character unto itself. While the picturesque buildings and sparkling beaches certainly appear welcoming, the sun is barely able to peek through the murky, claustrophobic alleyways. Marcel Zyskind’s handheld cinematography turns some shots into artful abstractions, such as the extreme close-up of Firth swimming to check up on his daughter. Under Zyskin’s lens, the chaotic texture of the water externalizes the parental anxiety and emotional insecurity that Joe tries so desperately to keep beneath the surface.

5.) “Certified Copy”



Certified Copy

Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami is certainly among the most playful of auteurs. He's obsessed with exploring the precarious line separating reality from fiction, as he did in his extraordinary 1990 landmark, "Close-Up." Yet the director's first film made outside of Iran was slyly marketed as a straightforward romance in the tradition of Richard Linklater's "Before Sunrise." The trailers may lead one to believe that the plot follows two strangers as they slowly fall in love while strolling along the exotic yet strangely evocative streets of a small Tuscan village. Such a succinct summation would be completely correct and woefully wrong. As in every Kiarostami film, there's far more going on here than initially meets the eye. It's easy to imagine the film becoming a coldly clever essay without the emotional anchor provided by Juliette Binoche, who deservedly won the Best Actress award at Cannes for her portrayal of Elle, the French owner of an art gallery in Arezzo. As she drives British author James Miller (played by opera star William Shimell in his film debut) through the streets of her town, their polite and friendly chatter carries ominous undertones of tension and repressed pain. The key turning point in the picture takes place in a café, where James recounts his observations of a mother and her son, causing Elle to burst into tears. It's precisely at this moment that the audience begins to wonder whether these two have an unspoken history. As the story unfolds and then folds upon itself, Kiarostami keeps the viewer actively engaged in the central mystery with results that are haunting, confounding and absolutely spellbinding.

4.) "Rebirth"



Rebirth

Aired on Showtime and released on DVD by Oscilloscope Studios, this profoundly moving documentary by Jim Whitaker is unlike any other film set in the aftermath of 9/11. It centers on five human subjects whose lives were shattered by the terrorist attacks in New York City, and follows them through the first ten years of their grieving process. Tanya Villanueva Tepper lost her fiancée in the tragedy, while Nick Chirls lost his mother. Ling Young was horribly burned and is left to deal with the permanent scars on her body and mind. Construction worker Bryan Lyons and firefighter Tim Brown remain haunted by the faces of people forever lost in the tower debris. Like Herzog, Whitaker has an unwavering gaze and allows his subjects to open up entirely about their despair, rage, confusion and memories of joy that they hope to recapture. There's also some immensely effective uses of archival footage, such as the moment when a bird lands upon Chirls's head as he eulogizes his mother at her funeral. It's striking to see how comforting such a seemingly random coincidence can be to someone desperate to experience the presence of a lost loved one. Just as Michael Apter's "Up" series chronicles the unpredictable progression of a human life, Whitaker's film shows how the human spirit can achieve resilience even under the most devastating of circumstances, yet not before enduring a series of volatile, sometimes paralyzing emotions. This is a resoundingly hopeful film about the rebuilding of a country and the rebirth of the human soul.

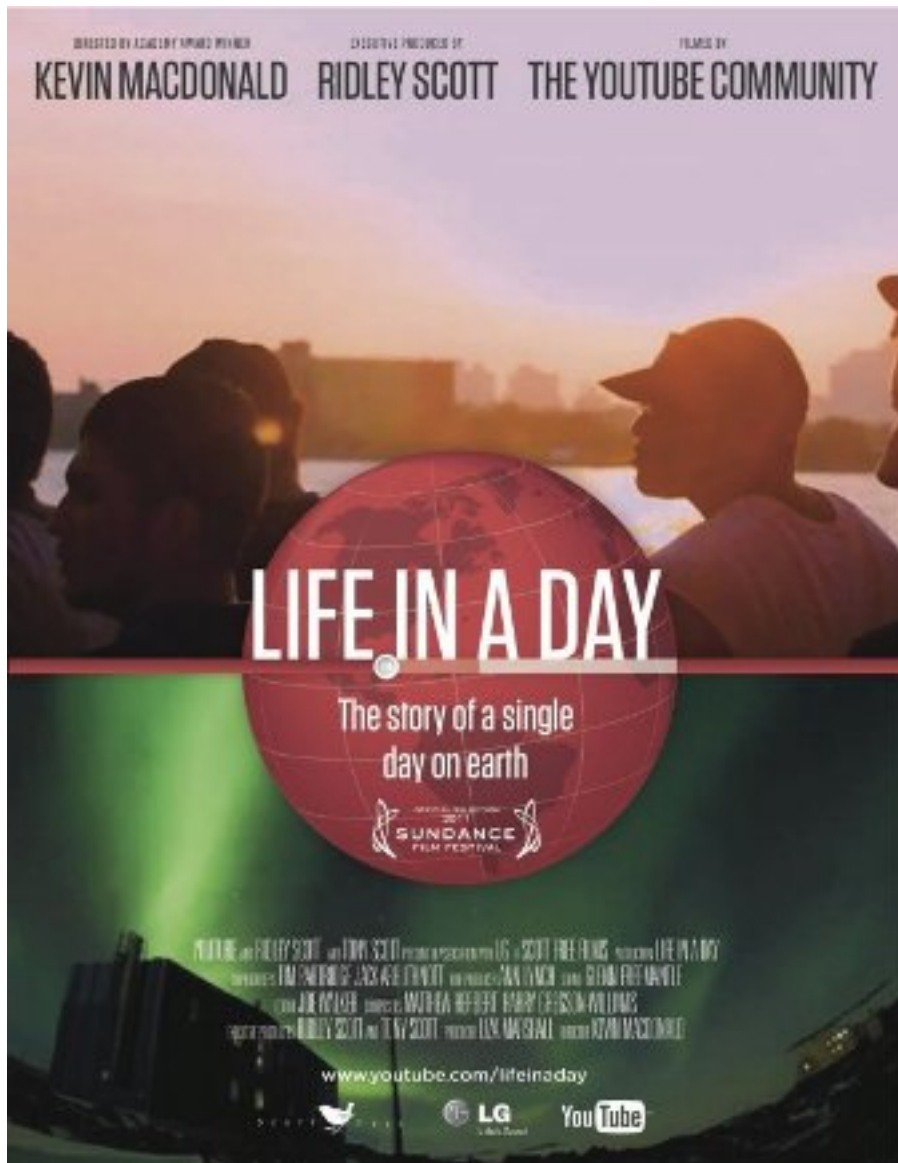
3.) "Trust"



Trust

Though many young actresses have delivered breakout performances this year, only one of them actually made me cry. As a fourteen-year-old girl targeted by an online predator, Liana Liberato takes the audience on an emotional journey that may prove to be richly rewarding for mature family audiences everywhere. What a remarkable achievement for David Schwimmer, whose only other directorial efforts include a handful of TV movies, as well as 2008's comedy, "Run Fatboy Run." It's clear that Schwimmer has mastered the difficult task of creating an atmosphere onset that gives his actors the necessary comfort to deliver intense performances of unflinching honesty. He refuses to accompany the work of his cast with an obtrusive score, trusting them instead to hit the right notes. There are few things more viscerally affecting than watching an actor go through an emotional transformation, as the camera captures every nuance with such meticulous detail that the audience begins to feel as if they are going through it themselves. For the first third of the picture, we share in the mounting excitement and uncertainty experienced by Annie (Liberato), as she corresponds with her viral boyfriend "Charlie," a man far older than his professed age. After an in-person encounter leads "Charlie" to steal Annie's virginity, the film could've easily devolved into a routine revenge drama. Yet the script by Andy Bellin and Robert Festinger (co-writer of "In the Bedroom") goes in a much more thoughtful direction, focusing instead on the deception between family members, and the potentially dangerous ways in which we deceive ourselves. The scenes between Liberato and her father (a wrenching Clive Owen) are more powerful than anything witnessed in the vast majority of this year's Oscar bait.

2.) "Life in a Day"



Life in a Day

YouTube is hardly a reliable source for cinematic masterworks, but documentarian Kevin Macdonald (“One Day in September”) utilized the site’s video uploads as tools to create something truly extraordinary. Olympian editor Joe Walker selected fragments from 80,000 submitted clips to create a sprawling 95-minute panorama of the world viewed on a single day, July 24, 2010. It’s the cinematic equivalent of Edward Steichen’s photography exhibition-turned-book, “The Family of Man,” which also aimed to link the world through the universality of shared experiences. Unburdened by a contrived “plot,” Macdonald and Walker allow the power of their found imagery to give the audience a series of vivid glimpses, while providing a glimpse of the world through a wide variety of perspectives. We see skydivers sailing through the clouds, elderly couples renewing their vows, families grieving the loss of a loved one and rejoicing in the survival of another. In each of them, we see ourselves. I was astonished by just how miraculously well Macdonald’s gamble paid off. “Life in a Day” is nearly as affirming a picture as Terrence Malick’s “The Tree of Life.”

1.) “Tomboy”



Tomboy

Out of the hundreds and hundreds of new films I've seen in 2011, no film captured my heart quite like Céline Sciamma's "Tomboy." It screened this year at the Chicago International and Reeling film festivals, but won't officially open until January 2012 at the Music Box. Believe me, the film is more than worth the wait. Sciamma's 2007 debut effort, "Water Lillies," took a startlingly raw look at the awkwardness of adolescence, as three fifteen-year-old women make their first fumbling advances into the adult world of love, lust and unbridled confusion. The performances Sciamma elicited from her young actresses were stunningly candid, yet the younger ensemble of "Tomboy" proves to be even more revelatory. Zoé Héran delivers one of the best child performances in recent memory as Laure, a 10-year-old girl mistaken by her playmates for a boy. The feelings she develops for Lisa (Jeanne Disson) only increases Laure's motivation to keep up the charade, but it's only a matter of time before her contrived identity will prove unsustainable. As Laure's six-year-old sister Jeanne, Malonn Lévana proves to be a natural born crowd-pleaser, and received a rapturous response from audiences at the screening I attended at Reeling. After her initial shock upon discovering Laure's secret, she decides to help Laure out by spreading stories about "her brother" to the local kids. While some directors treat their pint-sized performers as if they were trained animals, forcing them to recite dialogue with over-enunciated precision, Sciamma has proven in just two pictures that she is a one-of-a-kind master at coaxing naturalistic, meticulously textured portrayals from her young actors. Her sensitivity in tackling such challenging material is a marvel to behold. I encourage all cinephiles in Chicago to mark their calendars for January 27 of next year to see one of the very best films of 2011.



[21]

By [MATT FAGERHOLM](#) [22]
Staff Writer
HollywoodChicago.com
matt@hollywoodchicago.com [21]

Source URL (retrieved on *Apr 20 2024 - 3:41am*):
<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/16911/film-feature-the-10-best-overlooked-films-of-2011>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/mattmovieman>
- [2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/a-summer-in-genoa>
- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/buck>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/ceremony>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/certified-copy>
- [6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/circumstance>
- [7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/into-the-abyss>
- [9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/life-in-a-day>
- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/like-crazy>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/list>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/margaret>

- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/margin-call>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/matt-fagerholm>
- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/meeks-cutoff>
- [16] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/rebirth>
- [17] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/super>
- [18] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/tomboy>
- [19] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/trust>
- [20] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/win-win>
- [21] <mailto:matt@hollywoodchicago.com>
- [22] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#MATT>