

Top Five Irish Films: ‘Into the West,’ ‘Once,’ ‘The Commitments,’ ‘Bloody Sunday,’ ‘The Wind That Shakes the Barley’

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HOLLYWOOD – Someone once said there are two kinds of people: “Those who are Irish and those who wish they were Irish.” While mom claimed I was the first, being an American for a few generations tossed me into the “mutt” category. If there truly is Irish in me, it’s in my big toe or my ring finger, which hardly makes me the Irish lass I had hoped.

The mission of Rachel Faith – the Hollywood-based *Silver Screen Indie Queen* for HollywoodChicago.com – is to help avoid the “beige” film experience by providing easily accessible information on indie film, film festival favorites and must-see Hollywood classics. At the end of the day, it’s all about turning people onto new and different films using the *Indie Queen’s* film geekdom for good and not evil.

At the end of the day, who wouldn’t want to be at least a toenail’s bit of Irish? Following last week’s column on my [top five Irish actors](#) [18], here are my top five Irish films.



“Into the West” (1993), directed by Mike Newell



“Into the West”
Image credit: IMDb

Written by Jimmy Sheridan, this film has elements that generally make me eject the DVD and throw it across the room. It’s a horse movie and there’s not much I despise more than a good, old-fashioned horse movie.

Also, it’s an American playing Irish, but luckily Ellen Barkin’s performance was good and her accent didn’t cause my ears to bleed. The story follows two boys born with traveling in their blood. Life to them is living off the dole and dealing with their drinking father – played by Gabriel Byrne – who hasn’t been the same since their mother passed away.

One day in the gray towers of Dublin, a gorgeous white horse shows up to take the boys on the adventure of a lifetime. I fell in love with the boys, their spirits and their ability to breathe life back into their father. OK, I liked the horse, too.

**"Once" (2006), directed by John Carney**

"Once"
Photo credit: IMDb

This is one of those nuggets that's truly indie. Made for about \$150,000 (our "Once" [interviews are here](#) [19]), blood, sweat and "MacGyver"-like tactics, this little train that thought it could in fact did.

Directed by John Carney (Dublin born) and starring non-actors Glen Hansard and Markéta Irglová as "boy" and respectively "girl," "Once" takes you in like a lover.

With an addictive soundtrack that won an Oscar for best song in 2008 for "Falling Slowly," everyone from Bob Dylan to Steven Spielberg sings its praises. Literally.

**"The Commitments" (1991), directed by Alan Parker**

"The Commitments"
Photo credit: IMDb

Good ole' "Mustang Sally" never sounded so good. Cue "The Commitments," which is a story of an Irish band just wanting to bring their country a lil' bit of soul.

Between their poverty, home life, tempers and prima donna tactics, this short-lived endeavor brings a wee bit of light to all of their tired lives. Look for Glen Hansard from "Once" in his only acting performance prior to the 2006 breakout film.

**"Bloody Sunday" (2002), directed by Paul Greengrass**

"Bloody Sunday"
Photo credit: IMDb

This film will make you shake your fists at the heavens and kick the couch with frustration. It's based on the Jan. 30, 1972 incident of a peace

march gone bad when British troops open fire on protesters and leave 13 dead and 14 wounded.

While it’s not exactly the feel-good movie of that year, it’s one that shows the strength of the Irish spirit as well as the reason the IRA had a great many members and supporters. With a unique fade-in, fade-out way of storytelling, it leaves you mesmerized and in tears.



“The Wind That Shakes the Barley” (2006), directed by Ken Loach



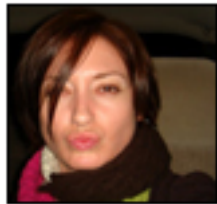
“The Wind That Shakes the Barley”
Photo credit: IMDb

Starring my fave, Cillian Murphy, and a lot fresh-faced actors, Loach brings us to early 20th-century Ireland in the war against the [Black and Tans](#) [20]. Two brothers first fight together against the crown until a peace treaty is signed that throws Ireland into a civil war.

The brothers find themselves on different sides with unimaginable decisions to make. All acting is perfection and the cinematography’s breathtaking. It’s not, however, for the weak of heart. After viewing, I found myself rocking back and forth in the fetal position.

So there are my picks. I took a little bit of everything that makes the Irish magical including their ways of storytelling and weaved in folklore, music, politics and family.

While you may think I left out some heavyweights, hang on until next week. Chances are I’ll remedy your hang-ups with my final ode to the Irish filmmaker. Here’s the *Silver Screen Indie Queen* signing off, and remember: If you don’t like what’s in the theatre, there’s always something from the past to put in your queue.



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