

## Film Feature: 10 Movies to Watch For From Sundance 2014

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on January 14, 2014 - 9:37am

- [A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night](#) [2]
- [A Most Wanted Man](#) [3]
- [Boyhood](#) [4]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [5]
- [Calvary](#) [6]
- [Cold in July](#) [7]
- [Film Feature](#) [8]
- [God's Pocket](#) [9]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [10]
- [Laggies](#) [11]
- [Life Itself](#) [12]
- [Listen Up Philip](#) [13]
- [Sundance Film Festival](#) [14]
- [Sundance Film Festival 2014](#) [15]
- [The Guest](#) [16]

The Sundance Film Festival kicks off this Thursday night, January 16, 2014 and history tells us that one of your favorite films will premiere there. Last year, we covered the Sundance premieres of “Before Midnight,” “Upstream Color,” “The Way Way Back,” “Ain’t Them Bodies Saints,” “We Are What We Are,” and many more. And Chicago Critics Film Festival hits “Stories We Tell,” “The Spectacular Now,” and “The Kings of Summer” premiered in Park City in 2013. What will make waves this year? What films will cinephiles be talking about for the next ten days? There are dozens of films that have piqued our interest and that we’ll be covering here in daily diaries starting on Friday but here are ten, alphabetically, that already have people buzzing. And the amazing thing is how easy it would have been to choose a completely different ten. (Synopses courtesy of Sundance.)



Boyhood

*Photo credit: Sundance*

### “Boyhood”

Writer/Director: Richard Linklater

Starring: Patricia Arquette, Ethan Hawke, Ellar Coltrán, and Lorelai Linklater

Last one in, first one to really make those not going to Sundance regret their decision. Before the Sundance 2014 schedule was announced, most who knew about the existence of Richard Linklater’s latest drama and the rumors that it was complete were hoping it would be on the schedule. It was held back until this week but “Boyhood” will premiere at Sundance this year after a dozen years in production. Yes, a dozen. For 12 years, Ethan Hawke, Patricia Arquette, and Richard Linklater have been getting together sporadically to film segments of a film that will capture the growth of a father-son relationship with actors who will actually age without the aid of makeup. Linklater is one of our best living filmmakers, the concept sounds incredibly promising dramatically, and both Hawke & Linklater are coming off a victory lap from the response given to “Before Midnight” last year. I know I said most of these (and ones not even on this list) were relatively equal but this is #1. Don’t tell the other movies.

#### Synopsis:

Filmed over short periods from 2002 to 2013, Boyhood is a groundbreaking cinematic experience covering 12 years in the life of a family. At the center is Mason, who with his sister Samantha, are taken on an emotional and transcendent journey through the years, from childhood to adulthood.



Calvary

Photo credit: Sundance

### “Calvary”

Writer/Director: John Michael McDonagh

Starring: Brendan Gleeson, Chris O’Dowd, Kelly Reilly, Aidan Gillen, Dylan Moran, and Marie-Josée Croze

When it comes to Sundance predicting, so little is known about the quality of the final product that it can be incredibly difficult to predict what’s going to work and what is not. No one saw “Beasts of the Southern Wild” or “Winter’s Bone” coming. And so lists like these are more often based on pedigree. Which brings us to “Calvary.” This one is real simple: The last time that John Michael McDonagh and Brendan Gleeson worked together, the result was “The Guard,” a confident piece of filmmaking and a showcase for the great actor. They’re working together again? Count me in.

#### Synopsis:

Father James is a good priest, driven by spiritual integrity. One day in confession, an unseen man tells James that he’s going to kill him precisely because he’s done nothing wrong. Given a week to make his peace with God, James ministers to sundry lost souls—visits that double as a guided tour of suspects. His preparation for death is further complicated by the arrival of his daughter, who has recently attempted suicide.



Cold in July

Photo credit: Sundance

### Cold in July

Writers: Jim Mickle & Nick Damici

Director: Jim Mickle

Starring: Michael C. Hall, Don Johnson, Sam Shepard, Vinessa Shaw, Nick Damici, and Wyatt Russell

Again, it’s about track record. Writer/director Jim Mickle really elevated himself to the class of the best working horror filmmakers with last year’s Sundance hit and Cannes smash, “We Are What We Are.” eOne didn’t get that film to a wide enough audience (it’s new to Blu-ray, DVD, and On Demand, and you should definitely see it) but Mickle is back in Park City and this time he’s in competition with a thriller starring Michael C. Hall, Vinessa Shaw, Don Johnson, and more. Mickle and I spoke about this film last year and he was truly excited to get started on it. The Sundance producers must have been excited by it as well to take a horror director and place him in the coveted U.S. Dramatic Competition.

#### Synopsis:

How can a split-second decision change your life? While investigating noises in his house one balmy Texas night in 1989, Richard Dane puts



a bullet in the brain of low-life burglar Freddy Russell. Although he's hailed as a small-town hero, Dane soon finds himself fearing for his family's safety when Freddy's ex-con father, Ben, rolls into town, hell-bent on revenge.



A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night

*Photo credit: Sundance*

### **A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night**

Writer/Director: Ana Lily Amirpour

Starring: Sheila Vand, Arash Marandi, Dominic Rains, Marshall Manesh, Mozhan Marnó, and Milad Eghbali

No pedigree here but the imagery available and very concept are too fascinating to pass up. Sure, movies with Philip Seymour Hoffman or directed by Richard Linklater are to Sundance as catnip is to cats. However, there's some logic in trying to dig deeper, find the movies that might never play outside of Park City. As much as I'm dying to see "The Raid 2," it opens in two months. So I'm going to wait on that one and try and seek out unique prospects like cinema's first Iranian vampire western. It's definitely going to be original. Even without Philip Seymour Hoffman.

#### **Synopsis:**

Strange things are afoot in Bad City. The Iranian ghost town, home to prostitutes, junkies, pimps and other sordid souls, is a bastion of depravity and hopelessness where a lonely vampire stalks its most unsavory inhabitants. But when boy meets girl, an unusual love story begins to blossom... blood red.



God's Pocket

*Photo credit: Sundance*

### **God's Pocket**

Writers: John Slattery & Alex Metcalf

Director: John Slattery

Starring: Philip Seymour Hoffman, Richard Jenkins, Christina Hendricks, John Turturro, and Eddie Marsan

The first of two PSH movies to get buzz going into the Sundance fest also marks the directorial debut of John Slattery of "Mad Men." With an incredibly talented cast and intriguing synopsis, this is a pick based largely on star power and the fact that Slattery is the kind of actor who one can easily see transitioning to a successful career behind the camera. He's accustomed to large ensembles like those he worked with on "Mad Men" (which he directed five times) and has experience in indie films like "Bluebird," which played at this year's CIFF. And, although I hate to be biased, I'm not missing a Philip Seymour Hoffman performance at Sundance. Ever.

#### **Synopsis:**

In the gritty, blue-collar neighborhood of God's Pocket, Mickey Scarpato's crazy stepson, Leon, is killed in a construction "accident," and Mickey quickly tries to bury the bad news with the body. But when a local columnist comes sniffing around for the truth, things go from bad to worse. Mickey finds himself stuck in a life-and-death struggle compounded by a body he can't bury, a wife he can't please, and a debt he

can't pay.



The Guest

*Photo credit: Sundance*

### **The Guest**

Writer: Simon Barrett

Director: Adam Wingard

Starring: Dan Stevens, Maika Monroe, Brendan Meyer, Sheila Kelley, Leland Orser, and Lance Reddick

Again, a horror movie from a director on the rise to the forefront of his genre, Adam Wingard. Last year was an amazing one for the independent horror filmmaker as his “You’re Next” earned major buzz and the second “V/H/S” film (he’s been a part of both) improved on the first. Very little is known at all about Wingard’s latest and, you know, that’s how I like it. The midnight slate this year is weaker than last (perhaps because films with horror themes like “Cold in July” and “Life After Beth” are in competition) but this one stands out (I’m also hoping “Cooties” and “Dead Snow: Red vs. Dead” live up to late-night movie potential).

#### **Synopsis:**

Still struggling over the loss of their oldest son, Caleb, to the war in Afghanistan, the Peterson family finds some solace when an unexpected visitor knocks on its door. David, a steely eyed and charismatic soldier who was recently discharged, is welcomed into their home when he comes to fulfill a promise he made to his fallen comrade. Siblings Anna and Luke are at first reluctant to accept David’s presence, but he soon wins them over by scoring kegs for Anna’s friends and roughing up some bullies from Luke’s school. Though he appears to be the perfect houseguest, a mysterious and sinister chain of events causes Anna to question whether David is actually whom he claims to be.



Laggies

*Photo credit: Sundance*

### **Laggies**

Writer: Andrea Seigel

Director: Lynn Shelton

Starring: Keira Knightley, Chloë Grace Moretz, Sam Rockwell, Ellie Kemper, Jeff Garlin, and Mark Webber

Another year, another Lynn Shelton movie. Last year’s “Touchy Feely” didn’t get the response that “Humpday” and “Your Sister’s Sister”



drew but this one has a spectacular cast that includes the underrated Keira Knightley and the underused Chloe Moretz. The former so often makes smart decisions when it comes to scripts and we've been waiting for the latter to get material that lives up to her talents. Let's hope this is the movie that makes Chloe Moretz an awards season contender.

**Synopsis:**

Content to remain in a permanent adolescence, 28-year-old Megan clings to her job as a sign flipper for her father's accounting company as her high school friends get married and advance their careers. When her high school boyfriend proposes unexpectedly, Megan panics and forgoes attending a professional-development retreat to hide, at least temporarily, at the home of her new 16-year-old friend, Annika, and her attractive, single dad.



Life Itself

*Photo credit: Sundance*

**Life Itself**

Director: Steve James

The director of "Hoop Dreams" returns to Sundance with a documentary about a man who loved his work, Roger Ebert. Based on Ebert's memoir, "Life Itself" has been largely crowd-funded and promises to be more than just a love letter to the most influential film critic that ever lived. Ebert was actually working with James on the production before he passed, and the entire film world is pumped to both pay respects one last time to a legend and celebrate what he brought to the film community at a place where he was such a powerful figure. Ebert loved independent film and Sundance. We'll be giving some of that love back next week.

**Synopsis:**

In 2013, we lost Roger Ebert—arguably the nation's best-known and most influential movie critic. Based on his memoir of the same name, Life Itself recounts Ebert's fascinating and flawed journey—from politicized school newspaperman, to Chicago Sun-Times movie critic, to Pulitzer Prize winner, to television household name, to the miracle of finding love at 50, and finally his "third act" as a major voice on the Internet when he could no longer physically speak.



Listen Up Philip

*Photo credit: Sundance*

**Listen Up Philip**

Writer/Director: Alex Ross Perry

Starring: Jason Schwartzman, Elisabeth Moss, Jonathan Pryce, and Kristen Ritter

Alex Ross Perry's "The Color Wheel" created a stir on the arthouse movie scene and his follow-up boasts two great performers in Elisabeth Moss and Jason Schwartzman, who one feels hasn't really gotten a great part like he may have here in years. Perry has a unique, confident voice and I can easily see him having crafted roles for Moss and Schwartzman that will stand out in their career and push their work to the next level. I know as little about this film as any Sundance work this year but there's something about the potential chemistry of Perry and this cast that has me incredibly intrigued.

#### Synopsis:

Anger rages in Philip as he awaits the publication of his sure-to-succeed second novel. He feels pushed out of his adopted home city by the constant crowds and noise, a deteriorating relationship with his photographer girlfriend Ashley, and his own indifference to promoting the novel. When Philip's idol, Ike Zimmerman, offers his isolated summer home as a refuge, he finally gets the peace and quiet to focus on his favorite subject—himself.



A Most Wanted Man

Photo credit: Sundance

#### **A Most Wanted Man**

Writer: Andrew Bovell

Director: Anton Corbijn

Starring: Philip Seymour Hoffman, Rachel McAdams, Willem Dafoe, Robin Wright, and Daniel Bruhl

Anton Corbijn was a major voice in the music video world who made waves with his work on the Joy Division biopic "Control" and the underrated George Clooney flick "The American." He's back with a simply ridiculous cast fronting an international thriller. PSH, Robin Wright, Rachel McAdams, Daniel Bruhl, Willem Dafoe — in a thriller from Anton Corbijn. Sign me up.

#### Synopsis:

Anton Corbijn's adaptation of John Le Carre's psychological novel follows German spy Gunther Bachmann as he tracks down Issa, a suspicious Chechen-Russian immigrant on the run in Hamburg. Pressured by his German and American colleagues to capture and interrogate his suspect as a Muslim terrorist, Bachmann instead asks for more time to carefully track Issa's movements and his relationship with his German immigration lawyer, Annabel Richter. Using his secret contacts and keen skill, Bachmann uncovers a connection between a world-renowned Muslim philanthropist and a terrorist group and devises a plan to use Issa and Annabel in a brilliant ploy to expose the scheme.



[17]

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[4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/boyhood>

[5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/brian-tallerico>

[6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/calvary>

[7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/cold-in-july>

[8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/film-feature>

[9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/gods-pocket>

[10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>



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- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/life-itself>
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