

Film Feature: The 10 Best Films of 2017, By Patrick McDonald

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on January 6, 2018 - 10:21am

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CHICAGO – It's time to choose the TEN SCARIEST Donald Trump Tweets, excuse me, The 10 Best films of 2017 (got a lot on my mind). Selected by HollywoodChicago.com's Patrick McDonald, the "Über Critic," it is a list that celebrates redemptive spirit, love of the love and just all-out fun at the flickers.

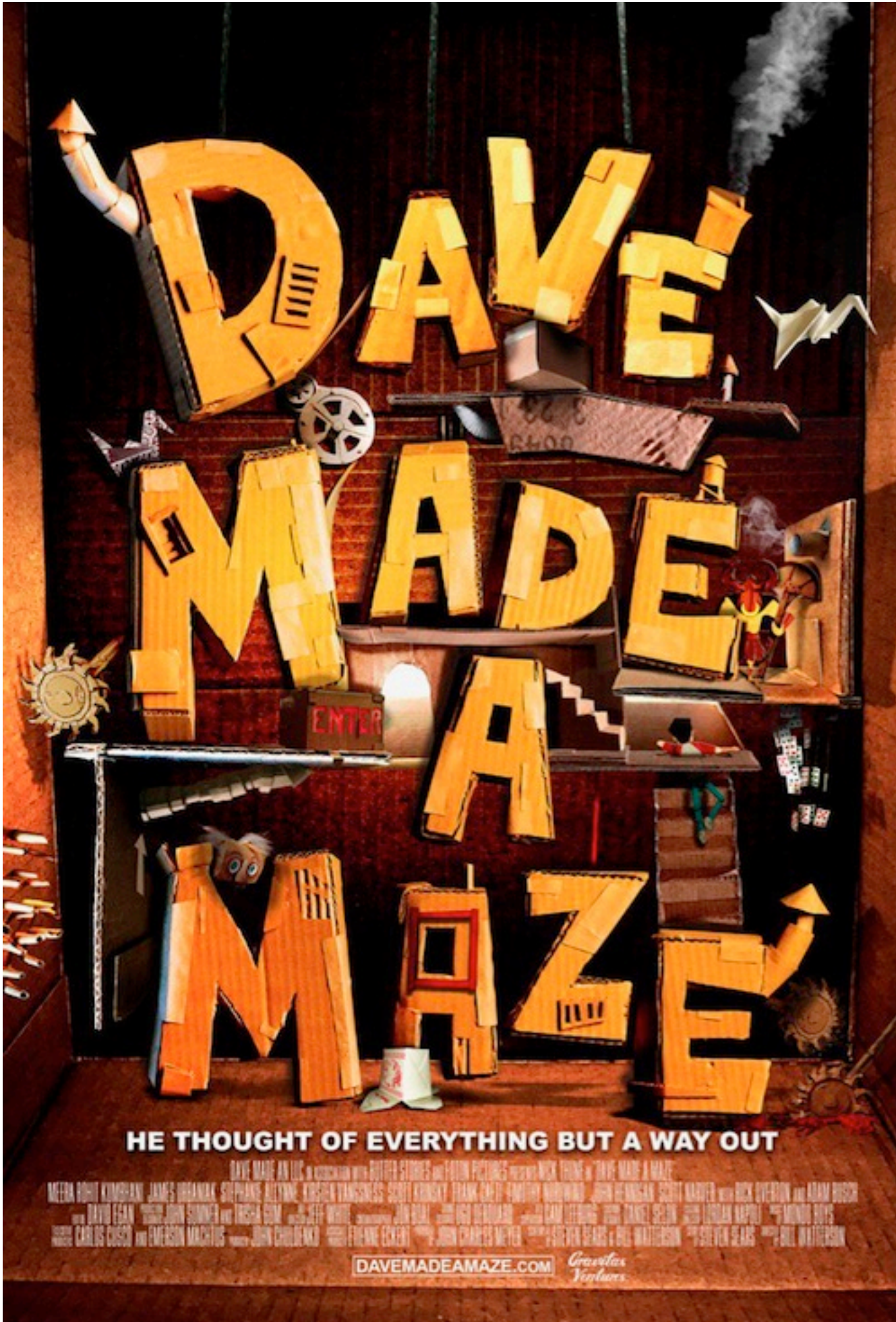
In keeping with list-o-mania, and the need for fuller disclosure, here are the films – according to the Über – that came at 25th-11th (click highlighted titles for reviews/interviews)... 25th - [Patti Cake\\$](#) [22], 24th - Wonder Wheel/I Love You, Daddy, 23rd - Norman, 22nd - [Novitiate](#) [23], 21st - [Free Fire](#) [24], 20th - Coco, 19th - [mother!](#) [25], 18th - Beatriz at Dinner, 17th - [Their Finest](#) [26], 16th - [Wonder Woman](#) [27], 15th - Call Me By Your Name, 14th - Happy End, 13th - BPM (Beats Per Minute), 12th - [The Square](#) [28], 11th - [Beauty and the Beast](#) [29].

In categories from 2017, the top documentary was the biographical "David Lynch: The Art Life" (which was endearingly meditative). For animation, nothing beat Pixar Studio's "Coco." And finally, in 2017's may-you-live-in-interesting-times Year of the Woman Filmmaker, the Best Superhero film was "Wonder Woman."

Below each film description will be a link to full reviews and/or interviews, when applicable, that are associated with the tributes. Through the cosmic filter of Patrick McDonald, here are the 10 Best Films of 2017...



DAVE MADE A MAZE



Dave Made a Maze

Photo credit: Gravitas Ventures

DAVE gets the ten spot for many undeniable reasons, but the main one is that it's the most creative film of the year, especially in the category for "use of the cardboard medium." Co-written and directed by Bill Watterson (from a Steven Sears story) it involves a nebbish artist named Dave (Nick Thune) who builds a cardboard fort in his living room – think childhood and refrigerator boxes – while his girlfriend (Meera Robhit Kumbhani) is away. Stuck inside this maze of his own making, he must be rescued by a team that includes Flemish tourists. Hilariously surreal and bizarre, with a touch of relationship angst thrown in, DAVE proves that filmmaking is "merely" an imaginative flight of fancy.

HIGHLIGHT: Supporting character Kristen Vangsness, literally chewing the cardboard scenery.

[Click here](#) [30] for the full review of "Dave Made a Maze."

[Click here](#) [31] for a podcast interview with producer John Charles Meyer of "Dave Made a Maze."





Columbus
Photo credit: Sundance Institute

There are films that transcend the moment, and the experience of COLUMBUS is one of those free floating journeys. Like Robert Altman’s NASHVILLE, the town of Columbus, Indiana – an architectural utopia that actually exists – embraces and motivates the characters that inhabit the story rather than just being a placeholder for them. Written and directed by Korean director Kogonada (his feature debut), it involves a couple... portrayed by John Cho and Haley Lu Richardson... who take a mismatched connection and change each other’s lives. The background of these characters mesh with the meditation of the architecture in Columbus and propels them to an astral plane that could even suggest the afterlife. An exciting debut from Kogonada, with hopefully more to come.

HIGHLIGHT: How the director, and cinematographer Elisha Christian, photographed the spirit of the surroundings.

 **BABY DRIVER**



Baby Driver

Photo credit: TriStar Pictures

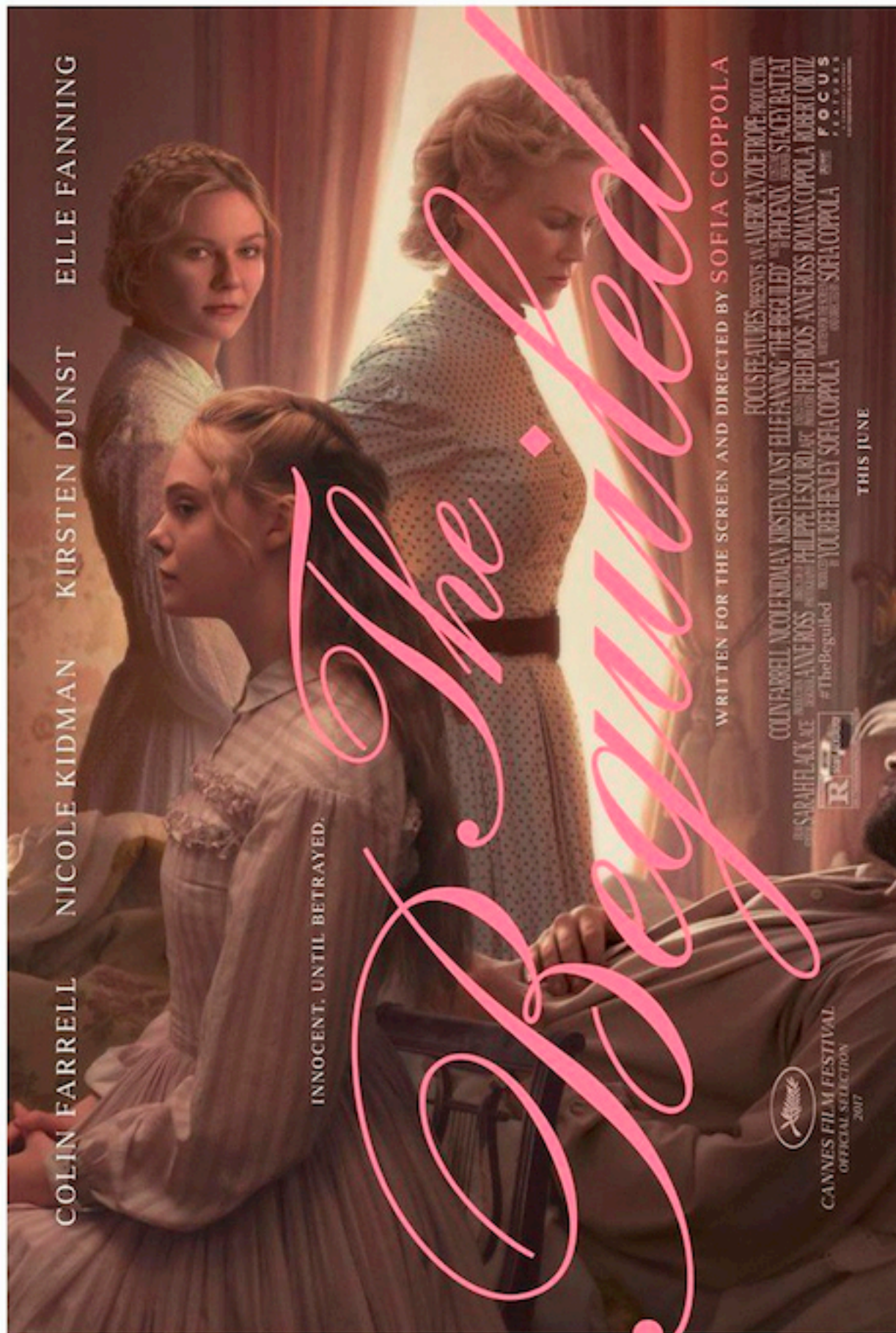
Wham, Bam, thank you Baby Man! This film will define the Summer of '17, with the percussive beats of its soundtrack, the brilliant assembly of form by director Edgar Wright, and possibly the last film appearance of Kevin Spacey. Ansel Elgort breaks out as the title character, the youthful getaway driver, supported by a harsh Jon Hamm, a fantasy girl Lily James and a hilarious Jamie Foxx, all becoming one with the BABY DRIVER world. What sets this apart from Quentin Tarantino copy-cattin' is writer/director Wright's creative soul of cinema, which uses the movie of moviedom to allow the Baby Driver to come to his – and the members of the audience – fruition. Let's all have a smoke afterward.

HIGHLIGHT: The reward that BD gets after a slight rehabilitative incarceration.

[Click here](#) [32] for the full review of "Baby Driver."



THE BEGUILLED



The Beguiled

Photo credit: Focus Features

Birds do it, bees do it, etc. This re-imagining of a 1971 film – adapted and directed by Sofia Coppola – uses a feminine point of view to expound upon the various stages of sexual awakening in womanhood. A Union soldier during the American Civil War (Colin Ferrell, perfectly cast) is injured and abandons the battle. He is discovered by a student at a nearby Southern all-girls boarding school, and is brought there to mend. While coming to his healing, his gets undue attention by all of the girls and women of the school at various times, and embraces it (why not?). Coppola comments expertly on the Southern gothic genre and womanhood, in a tense and melodramatic story.

HIGHLIGHT: The stunning tableau for the last shot in the film.

[Click here](#) [33] for the full review of “The Beguiled.”

★ DUNKIRK



Dunkirk

Photo credit: Warner Bros.

Director Christopher Nolan is a talented and one-of-a-kind filmmaker, and he extends his opportunities with a savage inventiveness. His DUNKIRK is a symphony, from its underlying musical score to the kinetic motion of the film from beginning to conclusion. The audience feels the steely grip of desperation as they follow one World War II soldier from the hellish battlefield to “civilization,” and at the end feels his “anti-deliverance.” There were three 2017 films surrounding the events of Dunkirk, and Nolan’s opus would fit snugly into the recent Churchill film DARKEST HOUR, and is viewed from another angle in THEIR FINEST. But of them all, it is Christopher Nolan that creates the masterpiece.

HIGHLIGHT: The use of familiar actors in key leadership roles, harkening to war movie throwbacks like THE LONGEST DAY.

[Click here](#) [34] for the full review of “Dunkirk.”

 **THE HERO**



The Hero
Photo credit: The Orchard

The word “elegy” is often used to describe the poignant last days of a person or event. And that is all encapsulated in THE HERO, as Sam Elliott – who in his career has portrayed heroic cowboys – creates an elegy for his character (an actor and voiceover artist), his situation, the cowboy and himself... as a veteran performer. The story builds truthfully as it occurs, because it lives in modern life, and doesn’t press upon anything phony. There are no last minute reprieves for Elliott’s character, but there are small patches of hope, which really is a reflection of how life operates. Director Brett Haley, who also helmed the excellent “I’ll See You in My Dreams,” tells the story on a very expressive level (co-written with Marc Basch), with all the themes of regret and the last ditch efforts that dissipate those regrets. Sam Elliott deserves an Oscar Best Actor nomination.

HIGHLIGHT: Besides the surprising and open performance from Elliott, Laura Prepon (everyone’s girl-next-door from “That ‘70s Show”) also kills it as a stand-up comic who uses too much of her life as material.

[Click here](#) [35] for the full review of “The Hero.”
[Click here](#) [36] for an interview with director Brett Haley of “The Hero.”

 THE FLORIDA PROJECT



The Florida Project
Photo credit: A24

The poverty class in America is obviously underrepresented in film, and writer/director Sean Baker focuses on the “hidden homeless” in THE FLORIDA PROJECT through a young mother (Bria Vinaite) and her daughter (the remarkable Brooklynn Prince) who live in a “weekly motel” in Orlando, Florida. Monitoring their situation is a well worn building manager, portrayed to perfection by Willem Dafoe. What was extraordinary about the story was the child’s survival instincts and life force (she doesn’t realize her circumstance, she just lives) combined with the mother’s delusions. The film is raw and very sad at times, but there is also glimmers of humanity, expertly personified through Dafoe.

HIGHLIGHT: A stunning ending, jaw dropping in its symbolic audacity.

[Click here](#) [37] for an interview with director Sean Baker of “The Florida Project.”

 **GET OUT**



Get Out

Photo credit: Universal Pictures

2017 was the 50th anniversary of the extremely dated film *GUESS WHO IS COMING TO DINNER*, and who better than Jordan Peele (of the comedy team Key and Peele) to write and make his directorial debut with this stunning reworking of an interracial couple going “home” to meet the white girl’s parents. The horror/comedy elements of the story (exquisite) masks a history of race relations in America, the hotbed that never cools down. Peele created a masterwork of multiple layers, and still manages to evoke great belly laughs and uneasy scares. The most significant director debut in the last generation.

HIGHLIGHT: Got to give a shout out to the spectacular comic relief of Chicago comedian LilRel Howery, who takes the movie occupation of TSA Agent to the next level of security.

[Click here](#) [38] for the full review of “Get Out.”

★ **LADY BIRD**



Lady Bird

Photo credit: A24

Writer/director Greta Gerwig leads the way in the 2017 Year of the Women Filmmaker with her own autobiographical story, with a truth so direct and affecting it feels like a staged documentary at times. Lady Bird is a nickname, which the main character Christine confers upon herself, just to shake up the impending routine of her Senior Year at a Catholic High School in Sacramento, California (the “Midwest of Cali”). Saoirse Ronan portrays the title character, and mimics the Greta Gerwig-style of eccentric detachment with charm and empathy. Chicago is represented through Steppenwolf Theatre alumni Laurie Metcalf and Tracy Letts, who portray Lady Bird’s parent with heart-melting authenticity. The small triumphs that occur in the film seem much bigger when presented in a context that mimics how we live. The film is a total winner.

HIGHLIGHT: When Lady Bird achieves her college goal, the film could have faded to happy black... but Gerwig had something else in mind.

[Click here](#) [39] for the full review of “Lady Bird.”



THE SHAPE OF WATER



The Shape of Water

Photo credit: Fox Searchlight Pictures

The movies are fairy tales in essence, set in motion through a light source at 24 frames a second. If that sounds magical, then writer/director Guillermo Del Toro captured the light and conjured his own wizardry in THE SHAPE OF WATER. On the surface, it is a simple “Beauty and the Beast” theme, as a mute janitor named Elisa (Sally Hawkins, transcendent), who works in a Cold War-era science facility, falls in love with a captured lizard man, who looks like The Creature From the Black Lagoon. The main theme is about outsiders in 1962, Elisa’s African American co-worker (Octavia Spencer), her gay neighbor Giles (Richard Jenkins) and an undercover Soviet Agent (Michael Stuhlbarg). They are all defending themselves against the patriarchal authority, represented through U.S. Special Agent Strickland (Michael Shannon), whose main objective is destruction. All the motifs unfold at the highest levels, but at its core is the year’s best love story. This is an old-fashioned must see celebration.

HIGHLIGHT: This all takes place in October of 1962, while the world came to the brink of nuclear war during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

[Click here](#) [40] for the full review of “The Shape of Water.”

[Click here](#) [41] for an interview with actor Michael Stuhlbarg of “The Shape of Water” (he talks about it in the audio portion of the interview).

To directly access the reviews, interviews and writings of Patrick McDonald, Writer and Editorial Coordinator of HollywoodChicago.com, [click here](#). [14]



[42]

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