

The most important films of 2013



It was a year of cinematic diversity – for every scantily clad teenage gangster, we had an elderly shunned Irish nun, searching for her son. One thing that did ring true was the fantastic quality of the films released this year, both independent and mainstream. Here is a list, in no particular order, of some of the years best – and yes, Sunshine on Leith does feature!

Spring Breakers

It split critics, but that's Harmony Korine's unmistakeable style. Crude, lurid and shocking, Korine made young idolised girls, some defined by the Disney Channel, into the most daring and contemptible characters of the year. Aided by an unrecognisable performance from James Franco as a drug dealer/rapper (we're hearing unusual Oscar buzz), Spring Breakers is the film that you will either fall for or vigorously detest.

☐☐Captain Phillips

Continuing with the nautical theme, Paul Greengrass' thriller told the story of a freight ship captured by Somalians while sailing through the horn of Africa. It engrossed audiences (it's nearly quadrupled its \$55 million budget in box office sales) and told a story so nail-bitingly tense that it didn't turn into a bore during its lengthy runtime: proof that Greengrass is Hollywood's king of thriller cinema.

☐Leviathan

Having had its UK premiere at Edinburgh's very own film festival, Leviathan went on to stun worldwide audiences with

its intense, harrowing view of a fishing trawler. Engrossingly shot and as beguiling as it is off-putting, it takes the prize as the most innovative documentary of 2013 and the decade so far.

For Those In Peril

Rarely has Scottish film had its one defining moment in cinema in the years gone by. This year, Cannes found a small budgeted film which ticked a surprising number of boxes. Director Paul Wright shows his previously BAFTA-proven talent in this riveting films about a mother, a brother and a son at sea.

Blackfish

In the wake of several killer whale related deaths at Seaworld, Blackfish told the harrowing story of the lives of killer whales in captivity and those who train them. Be prepared, Blackfish is not made to make you smile. Instead, it works as a wonderfully effective and insightful documentary about what the cheering tourists don't truly see.

Blue is the Warmest Colour

A simple love story, effectively told and impeccably performed. That's how I would describe Palme d'Or 2013 winner, Blue is the Warmest Colour. It may have been shrouded in controversy surrounding its lengthy sex scenes and near three hour run time, but the majority of love stories this generation has seen do not hold a candle to the sheer realism presented here. Blue is the Warmest Colour is one of the few contenders in foreign cinema that may seep into the 'Best Film' category at the Academy Awards next year.

The Great Gatsby

Gatsby had been doomed from the start by its erratic release schedule, and the army of dedicated literary fans who refused to see Fitzgerald's original work tarnished by the glossy paintbrush of Baz Luhrmann. What he gave us what exactly what had been expected: a sensational, polished interpretation of the classic story, well scripted and wonderfully cast with all

the wonderful hyperbolism in the most positive sense. Glitz, glamour and a monster of a soundtrack by Jay Z made the 1920s so impeccably cool once again.

Philomena

It takes a lot to make us cry, but for Stephen Frears' *Philomena*, the tears just didn't stop flowing. Telling the story of a woman searching for her long lost son, it sounds like something you've seen a million times before. Steve Coogan's script and Judi Dench's eerily authentic performance helped *Philomena* become one of the most tender, endearing and painfully real films of the year.

Frozen

A late entry in 2013's impressive repertoire, *Frozen* was the film all Disney fans had been waiting for: proof that the golden age of the late eighties/early nineties were not just a fluke. A wonderfully warm and funny interpretation of the classic story of *The Snow Queen*, *Frozen* is a fond testimony to the fact that Disney's still got it.

Frances Ha

Indie directing king Noah Baumbach teamed up with his wife, Greta Gerwig, for this stylish comedy that's both whip smart and immensely enjoyable. Having had its premiere at the city's own Edinburgh Film Festival earlier this year (Baumbach and Gerwig were in attendance), audiences fell in love with an awkward twenty-something (Gerwig) trying to live out her dreams in New York City.

Short Term 12

There is always a surprise independent film that comes from nowhere and wins the hearts of many: 2013's was the sublime *Short Term 12*. Telling the story of a group of disadvantaged children and their dysfunctional carers, its tiny budget was made completely irrelevant by a wonderful script and acting ensemble. Brie Larson, who plays the lead role, has already gained some nominations this awards season.

Blue Jasmine

A 'Streetcar' influenced story, directed and written by Woody Allen, Blue Jasmine told the story of a wealthy woman forced to move from Manhattan to her sister's comely apartment in San Francisco. It's the classic tale of having it all then losing it all, but with Allen's inarguable skill as a film-maker, and Cate Blanchett giving the performance of the year, Blue Jasmine becomes so much more than what cinema has previously led you to expect.

The Selfish Giant

Another British cinema great, The Selfish Giant loosely adapted Oscar Wilde's classic short story onto the cinema screen, telling the story of two lonely boys stealing scrap metal to help feed their families. It's powerful, endearing and impressive – an example of why Britain still has an immense amount of talent to be brought to the forefront of cinema.

The Conjuring

Horror has always been the disappointing genre. In general terms, the vast majority of modern horror films fall at the first hurdle: there's simply no scares. It's reassuring, at least, that James Wan still gives it his all. The Conjuring (another Edinburgh Film Fest premiere) was one of those few films that smashed at the box office and was adored by critics. The Conjuring is not only the best horror film of the year, but may well be the most original film that horror has seen in years.

Sunshine on Leith

A Scottish list could not be complete without the film that turned a dour, grey country into a dazzling, Hollywood style musical. What threw us the most was that Sunshine on Leith didn't feel like a caricature of Scotland, but rather a warm, beautiful homage to the country's capital. It may not have been perfect, but Sunshine on Leith most definitely put smiles on the faces of Scottish and international audiences alike.

Enough Said

Another genre that is regularly panned by critics, romantic comedies are often unrealistic, cringe-worthy and wholly unfunny. *Enough Said* is one of the few authentic rom-com's that you could watch repeatably and still be charmed. Instead of two young star crossed lovers, the leads are two middle-aged divorcees, played wonderfully by Julia Louis-Dreyfus and James Gandolfini, in his final cinematic role. Prepare to fall in love with rom-com all over again.

Gravity

There's probably not a Best of 2013 list in existence that doesn't feature *Gravity*, the Alfonso Cuarón epic set in space, telling the simple story of two stranded astronauts against cinema's most vast and impressive backdrop to date. It left cinemagoers in awe, wondering how we can recreate the world in terrifying detail. Although it may have been a film that was a little bit more style over substance, *Gravity* undoubtedly earns its position as one of 2013's most important films.

Photo Credit: Spring Breakers (Universal Pictures), Blackfish (Manny O Productions), Philomena (BBC Films)