

Top 5 films of 2014 – a personal selection



Having moved back into Edinburgh from the wilds of the countryside in February, I've seen more films in past ten months than I'd managed in the previous ten years. The lovely **Cameo Cinema** is now on my doorstep, the **Filmhouse** is not far away, and I recently discovered the fabulously comfortable seats at the **Odeon** in Lothian Road. Although I have enjoyed just about everything I've seen, certain films stand out.

Here then is my very personal top five for 2014:



5 **Chef**

Carl's life goes into meltdown when a famous food blogger pans his cooking – cooking which he himself abhors, but has been made to produce by his restaurateur boss (**Dustin Hoffman**). Carl is played by **Jon Favreau**, also the film's producer and director.

Overworked, frustrated and fed up, he loses his temper in spectacular fashion – first on Twitter and then in the flesh – and, in the 21st century way of things, his performance goes viral; soon patience is not the only thing he's lacking. Out of work and out of luck, he's persuaded by his glamorous ex-wife to do up an old food truck, and take off on a road trip across the US, accompanied by his tech-savvy son and a former colleague, bringing Cuban street food to the masses. *Chef* may be a bit predictable, but it's a great feelgood film with some hilarious scenes and a few edge-of-the-seat moments (chefs do

use a lot of knives...). And be warned: it'll make you very hungry.



4 20 Feet From Stardom (yes, this was made in 2013 but I only saw it this year..and that's good enough for me).

I've always thought it would be cool to be a backing singer; all that harmonising and synchronised swaying, none of the grief. *20 Feet From Stardom* didn't disabuse me of this notion, even though some of the early singers interviewed in this excellent film documentary have had little credit for significant contributions to major hits. The soundtrack is of course fabulous, and the interviews with, and archive footage of, **David Bowie, Bruce Springsteen, Mick Jagger** and co are fascinating – but the real stars are the singers, most of them black women who have toiled away in the background for years, helping the mega-famous on their routes to stardom. **Merry Clayton, Darlene Love, Patti Austin** – they're all here, all those women you've heard a million times but never actually heard of, though one whose name may be more familiar is **Lisa Fischer**, backing singer for the **Stones** and now a highly respected artist in her own right – a phenomenal voice, and a much nicer woman than many who've made it to the very top. This film is a mixture of celebration and commiseration, but you'll still come out singing – and maybe wishing that you were there, twenty feet from the spotlight, twenty miles from fame.



3 Pride

Pride has deservedly just been named best film at the **British**

Independent Film Awards, with **Imelda Staunton** winning Best Actress and **Andrew Scott** Best Actor for their roles. It's about the 1984 miners' strike and the struggle for gay rights – two campaigns which at first have little in common, until gay activist **Mark Ashton (Ben Schenutzer)** sees the parallels in their situations and decides to rally support for a pit village in the Dulais valley. The ensuing friendship (and in one case the antagonism) between the two communities is a joy to watch, the more so because every character is so well developed and every actor excels. Few are without doubts, all have fears for the future – the Londoners, centering on **Gay's The Word** bookshop, face threats not only from Section 28 but also the advent of AIDS; the miners' families are fighting for their identity as much as for their jobs – their own form of pride. Those of my advanced age can remember these events as if they were yesterday, but for younger people they are history – this film is an education for them, and a wonderfully entertaining story for us all (don't miss **Dominic West** strutting his disco stuff at the miners' fundraising dance). *Pride* is based on a true story.



2 We Are The Best! (Vi ar Bast!) (another one made in 2013, but which only arrived at the Cameo this year)

Two schoolgirl rebels (**Mira Barkhammar** and **Mira Grosin**) in 1980's Stockholm decide to start a band. You may think you know the end already – they become famous, are feted as the new Spice Girls, and meet their handsome princes – tah-dah! Except they don't. Discovering that a classmate (**Liv LeMoyne**) – one they would normally discount as a religious geek – is a brilliant guitar player, they rope her in and rehearse their ear-splitting racket in one another's houses, each of which presents a different picture of modern family life. Gauche, bolshi and occasionally vulnerable, the girls fall out, have

fun, deal with their wayward middle-aged parents and fight their own corners at school, eventually going on a road trip with their brilliantly dreadful guidance teacher to the final of a youth band competition. I loved this film; it's a funny, moving and ultimately very satisfying celebration of difference. *The Princess Diaries* it is not.



1 From Scotland With Love

I'm not usually a fan of films with no words; at the age of 5 I disappointed my parents by being bored to tears by *Fantasia* (which, like most adults, they thought brilliant) and I have to admit that *Koyaanisqatsi* sent me to sleep – but ***From Scotland With Love*** is a masterpiece. It's a documentary made up entirely of film clips from the **Scottish Screen Archive** and the **National Library of Scotland**, with a soundtrack by **King Creosote (Kenny Anderson)**, and it moves from the early 1900s – the First World War, the Glasgow rent strikes and the heyday of the Clyde shipyards – right through to the 1960s, with family days at the seaside and dancing at the Barrowlands. In between there are children trying on gas masks, fishing boats sailing out of northern harbours, Highlanders cutting peat, women working in factories – and abandoned farmhouses, empty crofts, and men emigrating to Canada. Sadness, tragedy – but also lots and lots of fun; this is a film about ordinary Scottish people living their busy, wonderful lives. It's the best film I've seen this year; it may be the best film I'll see this decade.

So those are my choices – do share yours; whether they are art house films, romcoms or animations, we want to know! And if you're looking for a present for an Edinburgh-based friend, my

suggestion is to buy them a membership of one of the independent cinemas. They'll get cheaper tickets, invitations to free and special screenings, plus the warm glow of knowing that they're supporting the local arts scene. Much better than socks and much better for you than sweeties...

