

# Films of 2016



Note: Normally I spend the year after the release watching the films. Therefore, 2016 films were mainly watched in 2017. Except I spent most of 2017 applying to jobs. Thus this list has little in the way of summaries/analysis. In fact, this list wasn't even completed until 2018 (and I had a job lined up). I have attempted to add a brief description years later when converting to TeX, so my memory could be a tad fuzzy.

Rules: 1) Must be English language, 2) Must be a non-documentary feature. Sorry, otherwise this list gets much longer, and I do not have that much time. 3) US Theatrical release in 2015 (some of these films might have imdb years for earlier due to film festival releases).

Let's start with a little bit of criteria for how I chose this list: 1) Oscar Nomination in the following categories; Picture, Director, Actor, Actress, Supporting Actor, Supporting Actress, Original Screenplay, Adapted Screenplay, and Cinematography, 2) Golden Globe Nominations were selectively chosen, 3) SAG Nominations were selectively chosen, 4) Independent Spirit Awards; Picture, Director, Screenplay, First Screenplay, First Feature, Male Lead, Female Lead, Cinematography, Editing, John Cassavetes. Note: some of these films are not English language, or were not given a theatrical release until 2016. 5) Sundance winners that fit the initial criteria. 6) National Board of Review, 7) AFI Top Films, 8) I saw a trailer and wanted to see the movie. 9) I respect certain actors/actresses/directors so I seek out their work, regardless of quality. 10) The film opened with the short *Frozen Fever*.

Within a Tier, you can convince me my ordering is wrong. Between tiers I feel there is a distinct difference in quality.

## Tier 14: Bad

- 115. **I Saw the Light:** This biopic of Hank Williams is slow, and does not do Hank Williams justice. Tom Hiddleston also wasn't given much room to shine.
- 114. **Suicide Squad:** Margot Robbie does her best to save the film, but at the end of the day it is a poorly written mess that didn't know if it wanted to be a *Deadpool* or a serious 'superhero' movie.

## Tier 13: Not Good

113. **War Dogs:** You'd think Jonah Hill and Miles Teller could have made the film better, and they do. But the film itself is poorly written.
112. **Hail, Caesar:** A miss by the Coen brothers. Perhaps too low, only because what is expected from them. The film wasn't funny, the plot was all over the place, and it wasted a good cast.
111. **Naz & Maalik:** What could have had a lot to say about being Muslim and LGBT in America, it ended up being slow and boring. The central idea could never come through due to pacing.
110. **I Am The Pretty Thing That Lives In the House:** Although the film looks nice, it is slow, with little-to-no payoff, and not very scary.

## Tier 12: Meh

109. **Songs My Brother Taught Me:** Like most films in this tier, it is simply too slow to rank any higher. The film had a noble idea about examining life on the reservation, but it took look to do so.
108. **Louder Than Bombs:** The film is trying to makes great statements about grief and loss, but the film never comes together and is excruciatingly slow.
107. **The Girl on the Train:** You keep waiting for the thriller to get going, and it never does. It is a waste of Emily Blunt.
106. **A United Kingdom:** David Oyelowo and Rosamund Pike hold together a slow film that makes sure you get the message that interracial marriage is okay.
105. **Spa Night:** What could have been a great LGBT film dealing with being in a Korean immigration family/community, ends up being too slow to stay focused on.
104. **The Invitation:** What could potentially be considered a horror or thriller, the film does not provide much of either, before going off the rails, and never quite coming back on.
103. **Trespass Against Us:** A fun little crime film starring Michael Fassbender and Brendan Gleeson. But it could have been better focused.
102. **Neighbors 2: Sorority Rising:** A better premise for the sequel, and a better cast too. But possibly even more reliant on some plain dumb gags. Again, Rose Byrne was great.
101. **Hello, My Name is Doris:** Sally Field does most of the heavy lifting here. Max Greenfield is good as well. But the film is standard fare.
100. **Don't Think Twice:** A great cast, written and directed by Mike Birbiglia. However you can't help wish that the film was funnier, had more meaning, and was better paced.
99. **Patriot's Day:** The film was well-made enough, but overly explained the events of the Boston Marathon Bombing, and created more suspense than there needed to be.
98. **Finding Dory:** Part of a mediocre string for Pixar. Nothing new, and heavily reliant on liking *Nemo*.
97. **Queen of Katwe:** A nice little uplifting film that doesn't try too hard.
96. **Eye in the Sky:** The film sets the stage for a modern espionage/war thriller. Except it treats the audience like a child, and beats them over the head with the message.
95. **Snowden:** The film sets the stage for a modern espionage thriller. Except it treats the audience like a child, and beats them over the head with the message.

94. **Denial:** The film sets the stage for a modern courtroom drama. Except it treats the audience like a child, and beats them over the head with the message.

### Tier 11: Popular Movies

93. **Star Wars: Rouge One:** A tolerable *Star Wars* movie. The final thirty minutes take their time to arrive, but once they do, they are fun.
92. **Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them:** For what it wanted to be, it was good. Eddie Redmayne certainly helped.

### Tier 10: Kinda Flawed Indies

91. **Emelie:** An interesting take on the home-invasion thriller/horror genre. The film is a tad slow in the build up and too much of the horror is more cringe than fright. Sarah Bolger is decent as the imposter babysitter.
90. **The Intervention:** The plot is basic and never quite comes together. However the cast is great and the film is funny enough.
89. **Hunter Gatherer:** Great performance by Andre Royo (*The Wire*), but other than that, forgetful.
88. **Elvis & Nixon:** Michael Shannon plays Elvis. Elvis has one mission, meet Richard Nixon. Nixon is played by Kevin Spacey (unfortunately). Still a sorta funny that is an easy watch.
87. **Rules Don't Apply:** Yet another Howard Hughes film. But Lily Collins (*The Blindside*) shines. Look for her going forward.
86. **Miles Ahead:** If you like Jazz music, or Don Cheadle it is a must watch. However it is a tad slow and disjointed.
85. **Last Days in the Desert:** Visually impressive, but Ewan McGregor can not carry the film as it bogs down and is rather slow.
84. **Christine:** A good (but rather slow) character study one of the the most infamous news anchors in US history.
83. **The Monster:** A simplistic take on the horror film, but makes for a great mother-daughter film.

### Tier 9: Sorta Flawed Indies

82. **Krishna:** A decent directorial debut from Trey Edward Shults about alcoholism and forgiveness. Krishna Fairchild is rather good. The film doesn't fully come together though.
81. **Barry:** A Barack Obama biopic about his time at Colombia University. It is a tad slow, and not as subtle as you'd hope.
80. **The Daughter:** A decent family drama with a interesting enough plot, but it could have been better.
79. **Equity:** Anna Gun (*Breaking Bad*) is good, but the film is a semi-standard financial drama/thriller.
78. **Creative Control:** The film looks great in black and white, with some interesting science-fiction themes. Yet, the film does not end up making all the points it wanted to.

77. **Love & Friendship:** A semi-funny costume comedy-drama. Yet, not as funny as I would have hoped.
76. **Café Society:** A decent film by Woody Allen. At its best when reminiscing about 1930s Hollywood and the sets/costumes. The plot itself isn't much to write home about.
75. **The Fits:** There was a good story at the heart of the film, but the pacing was not where it needed to be.
74. **Knight of Cups:** Another of Malick's weaker films. After *Tree of Life* he got into a funk of being too experimental.
73. **Remember:** A Holocaust survivor (Christopher Plummer) goes on a mission to avenge his family before he dies. It is mildly entertaining but could have been better.
72. **The Shallows:** Blake Lively is rather good. And for a  $\approx 85$  minute movie, it is worth a late-night watch to pass the time.
71. **The Founder:** Michael Keaton brings charm to this fairly standard biopic.
70. **Frank and Lola:** Michael Shannon is underrated. The plot is simplistic but he and Imogen Poots carry a short thriller.
69. **20th Century Women:** If you watched this when it came out, you'd be sitting on lots of Elle Fanning stock. A good feminist film.
68. **Certain Women:** Disjointed and slow. But great performances by Laura Dern, Michelle Williams, and Kristen Stewart.
67. **Adult Life Skills:** A quirky comedy about growing up and overcoming loss. A nice easy watch late at night.

### Tier 8: Good Indies and Decent Bigger Budget

66. **Allied:** It is hard to make a bad film starring Brad Pitt and Marion Cotillard when they fall in love. Also, the gowns were great.
65. **Childhood of a Leader:** An amazing score, well shot, but rather slow.
64. **Goldstone:** Another in a recent series of well-made Australian Westerns.
63. **Little Men:** Co-written and directed by Ira Sachs (*Keep the Lights On* and *Love is Strange*). The film is an intimate (though at times predictable) look at coming-of-age; the film particularly succeeds at showing how little control children have in their lives.
62. **Pawno:** A slice-of-life look at various people that come through a pawn shop in a gentrifying area of Melbourne. The characters are nice, but they could have been developed. Maeve Dermody was rather delightful, and hopefully she'll be in more films.
61. **Chronic:** Tim Roth is rather good playing a male nurse who takes care of dying patients. The film is slow at times, but is a great investigation of grief, loss, and death.
60. **A Bigger Splash:** A great cast (Tilda Swinton, Ralph Fiennes, and Dakota Johnson) with a good character-drive plot.
59. **Into the Forest:** A good sister-sister film with Ellen Page and Evan Rachel Wood. The two carry the film, along with a unique plot.

58. **Florence Foster Jenkins:** Meryl Streep almost single-handedly holds this film together (Hugh Grant is good as well). Except the base film is not very good. Streep is that good.
57. **Sully:** Tom Hanks is enjoyable. The film tries to be more dramatic than it needed to be; what if Sully was in the wrong?! But the flaws are mainly forgiven because Tom Hanks is good.
56. **Jackie:** Natalie Portman was good. The costumes were good. Greta Gerwig was also good in a smaller role. Except the film is pure Oscar bait and slow at times.
55. **The Light Between Oceans:** Slow. But carried by Michael Fassbender and Alicia Vikander.
54. **The Accountant:** Ben Affleck oscillates between overrated and underrated. Here he is underrated.
53. **Girl Asleep:** Amazing costumes, rather surreal, quirky, and good. I wished it fit together better, had better pacing, and made some of its points more tactfully. Bethany Whitmore was good; hopefully she'll be in more films.
52. **Deadpool:** Last year was the low-key Ryan Reynolds renaissance: *Mississippi Grind*, *The Voices* and *The Woman in Gold*. *Deadpool* was the natural conclusion as is it pure Ryan Reynolds and hilarious; with just enough meaning. It is the superhero parody we needed.
51. **The Meddler:** Susan Sarandon carries the film as a meddlesome mother. Rose Byrne and JK Simmons have nice supporting roles.

### Tier 7: Disney (and Anime)

50. **In This Corner of the World:** The animation is rather good, with an excellent look at life in World War II Japan. The film seems longer than its runtime, but there are not obvious scenes to cut.
49. **Moana:** Good songs, good animation. An enjoyable Disney film.
48. **Zootopia:** In hindsight, maybe *Zootopia* should rank higher. After all, it was a kids movie that exposed police brutality and government corruption. It was a major deviation from the usual Disney structure.

### Tier 6: Rather Good and Innovative Indies

47. **Other People:** Written and Directed by Chris Kelly in his debut (*SNL* and *Broad City*). This is your alarm to seek out his future films. *Other People* was not perfect, but it showed what he is capable of.
46. **Midnight Special:** Director Jeff Nichols first appearance on this list (*Loving*). Michael Shannon is still, somehow, underrated. An interesting take on the science-fiction film, with some comments on cults.
45. **The Eyes of My Mother:** Horror is the best genre in film. Shot in black and white, the film has a great visual style. The plot however, can drag.
44. **Hush:** Horror is the best genre in film. A victim that lives alone, in a cabin in the woods, is also a deaf-mute. She can not hear the killer, nor can she scream for help.
43. **I Am Not a Serial Killer:** Horror is the best genre of film. With a great late-stage performance by Christopher Lloyd the film is an interesting take on the genre.

42. **The Autopsy of Jane Doe:** Horror is the best genre of film. A father and son team have to perform on autopsy of a unknown woman. Naturally, bad things ensue. But the father-son relationship is at the heart of the film.
41. **Swiss Army Man:** Paul Dano is underrated. The film is unique, charming, and quick.
40. **Southside With You:** The Obama's first date? Yes. I probably rated this too high.
39. **Edge of Seventeen:** All-star cast: Hallee Steinfeld, Haley Lu Richardson, and Woody Harrelson. This is what a coming-of-age film should be.
38. **Morris from America:** Another coming-of-age film, this time about a black boy living in Germany. Craig Robinson is rather good as the father.
37. **The Jungle Book:** Probably the best live-action Disney film so far. The film made many changes to the 'original' plot, while keeping the general outline. It was fresh. It also looked great.
36. **Everybody Wants Some** Watch everything Richard Linklater (*Boyhood*, *Bernie*, *Before* trilogy, *Dazed and Confused*) does. This is a rule to live by.

#### Tier 5: Lower-end of Oscar Nominees

35. **Miss Sloane:** Jessica Chastain can carry a mediocre film to make it good.
34. **American Honey:** A rather long, but interesting look at one girl's coming-of-age journey across America. It is done in a unique way. Also part of Shia LeBouf's renaissance.
33. **I, Daniel Blake:** A great look at poverty and the (needless, and needless complex) bureaucracy associated with receiving government benefits at citizens are entitled to.
32. **Nocturnal Animals:** A film that is primary held together by the great cast (Amy Adams, Jake Gyllenhall, Michael Shannon, Ilsa Fisher, Armie Hammer) and quality source material. Director Tom Ford (*A Single Man*) almost is able to pull it all together.
31. **The Birth of a Nation:** Purposely named after that more infamous D.W. Griffith film, this version is rather god and raw portrayal of Nat Turner's slave rebellion.
30. **The Neon Demon:** Nicholas Winding Refn (*Drive*) partially makes up for *Only God Forgives*. Still visually impressive, the plot drags at times. Elle Fanning is rather good.

#### Tier 4: Better Oscar Nominees and Indies You Should Watch

29. **Fences:** Viola Davis is a national treasure. Film does feel a tad static, it was adapted from a play so there is not much in the of scene changes or editing, or camerawork.
28. **Hell or High Water:** Probably the best film about the financial crisis of 2008. Oh, except it is a beautiful shot film about bank robbers in West Texas.
27. **Maggie's Plan:** Some People: Ladybird was great, Greta Gerwig is great. Me: *Frances Ha*, *Mistress America*, and now *Maggie's Plan* have all been on my list. Even with *Frances Ha*, which I wasn't super fond of, I loved her in.
26. **Ouija: Origin of Evil:** This is a prequel to *Ouija*. Do not watch that movie. Only watch this one. The premise is a family of hustlers pretend to use a Ouija board to get more money out of their customers. Watching the family try and reconcile what is going on, while attempting to keep making mortgage payments is nice.

25. **The Nice Guys:** A fun take on the nior genre. Ryan Gosling and Russell Crowe are great together. Angourie Rice shines in a breakthrough performance.
24. **Sing Street:** Musicals can be fun! At least when they are done as a comedic coming-of-age film where the lead teen forms a band for the most classic of reasons: to get the (older) girl. It is funny, sweet, and sentimental.
23. **Captain Fantastic:** A hilarious and interesting take on parenting, and what it means to be a good parent. Viggo Mortensen absolutely steals the show, with Frank Langella acting as a great foil.
22. **Green Room:** Horror is the best genre in film, Nazi edition.

### Tier 3: The Best Indies (of the Year) and Good Oscar Nominees

21. **Paterson:** Slow, simplistic, yet charming. Adam Driver (highly underrated) plays a bus driver in Paterson, NJ who likes writing poetry in his spare time. That is the plot. See first sentence.
20. **Lion:** Dev Patel is good. Nicole Kidman steals the show, she is absolutely amazing. The visuals are good. It helps that the film is rather heart-warming.
19. **Loving:** An important look at the fight for interracial marriage equality. The film is well-acted (Ruth Negga and Joel Edgerton, plus Nick Kroll playing against type, also Michael Shannon)
18. **Sausage Party:** People wondered why I like this. It is extremely crude. However it touches on the subjects of religion, foreign affairs, and sexism.
17. **In a Valley of Violence:** An absurdist-humor Western. Given my preference for absurdism I could have ranked it a tad high. Also, Ethan Hawke still remains underrated.
16. **Hunt for the Wilderpeople:** Another zany comedy by Taika Waititi ( *What We Do in the Shadows*. It is equal parts charming and funny.
15. **Silence:** Very slow. Very beautiful. Your enjoyment will partially depend on your connection to the Catholic church (or any religion). Adam Driver is highly underrated. Directed by Martin Scorsese.
14. **The Love Witch:** Great cinematography, maybe not Oscar nominee worthy, but right near the cutoff. Perfectly captures the feel of a 60s B-movie horror film, the sets and clothing often are from the 60s, but it is set in the modern era. As I have been saying, horror is the best genre in film. Easily one of the most visually unique films of the year. Also it is rather NSFW.
13. **Train to Busan:** South Korea very much has some class issues to work out. A solid family drama. The VFX are dated/not that good to begin with. But it still is a rather good film, and an excellent zombie movie; because being a zombie movie is third or fourth on its list of priorities.
12. **Kubo and the Two Strings:** If you thought *Zootopia* and *Moana* were amazing, and haven't seen Kubo you are missing out. Kubo is one of the best animated films in a long time. Both from a plot/character and an animation quality view.
11. **Hacksaw Ridge:** Well-made, Andrew Garfield is rather good. It relies on the moving true-life story. And given how amazing Private Doss' life story is, this film ranks highly.
10. **The VVitch:** This film probably deserved a Best Cinematography nomination. A lot of low-light and natural-light shots. The film builds in intensity (or is slow).
9. **10 Cloverfield Lane:** John Goodman should have been nominated for an Oscar. Mary Elizabeth Winstead is rather good as well.

8. **Manchester by the Sea:** Casey Affleck was great. Michelle Williams was great. Kyle Chandler was good. Lucas Hedges had his coming out party. A deeply moving, and emotional draining film, it is worth the watch.
7. **Arrival:** Amy Adams and Jeremy Renner are good. Denis Villeneuve follows up *Prisoners* and *Sicario* (also *Enemy*, but let's forget that) with another great film. One of the better science-fiction films in recent memory.
6. **Don't Breathe:** I have been saying horror is the best genre in film. This film is another exhibit. Take a simple premise: break into a home to steal money. Except people want the money for different reasons. And once in, the homeowner is a blind, gun-toting veteran. There are excellent scenes when the man cuts the power to the house and thus 'levels' the playing field between and the intruders.
5. **Hidden Figures:** The cast is great, the costumes are amazing, the sets are great. This is a wonderful and uplifting film.
4. **First Girl I Loved:** An innovated love story/coming-of-age film about a high school girl that falls in love with someone on the softball team. A non-linear plot helps build suspense. Some characters are not fully developed, but this film kept its objective focused, stayed focused, and did it well. This is the yearly LGBT film that I probably ranked too high.

## Tier 2: Great Films

3. **The Lobster:** The most original film in years. Also, possibly the most quotable film in recent memory.
2. **Moonlight:** Deserving of Best Picture. Barry Jenkins put together a moving and beautiful film. The (nighttime) beach scene is one of the best in film history. Both Mahershala Ali and Naomie Harris were great, Janelle Monáe was rather good as well.

## Tier 1: A Film That Hits All of My Idiosyncrasies

1. **La La Land:** The camera work is amazing (the winter house-party in particular). The costumes are amazing (bold colors with simple yet elegant designs; a type of costume design that is sadly always overlooked by the Oscars). Emma Stone was rather good. The references to *Casablanca*, and *Top Hat*, among other films, is playing straight into my own personal loves.