6) Birdman (or the unexpected virtue of ignorance):

The first time we see [Michael Keaton (Links to an external site.)](https://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/michael-keaton) in his tighty-whities in “Birdman,” it’s from behind. His character, a formerly high-flying movie star, is sitting in the lotus position in his dressing room of a historic Broadway theatre, only he’s levitating above the ground. Bathed in sunlight streaming in from an open window, he looks peaceful. But a voice inside his head is growling, grumbling, gnawing at him grotesquely about matters both large and small.

The next time we see Keaton in his tighty-whities in “Birdman,” he’s dashing frantically through Times Square at night, having accidentally locked himself out of that same theatre in the middle of a performance of a [Raymond Carver (Links to an external site.)](https://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/raymond-carver) production that he stars in, wrote and directed. He’s swimming upstream through a river of gawking tourists, autograph seekers, food carts and street performers. But despite the chaos that surrounds him, he seems purposeful, driven and–for the first time–oddly content.

These are the extremes that director Alejandro G. Inarritu navigates with audacious ambition and spectacular skill in “Birdman”–the full title of which is “Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance).” He’s made a film that’s both technically astounding yet emotionally rich, intimate yet enormous, biting yet warm, satirical yet sweet. It’s also the first time that Inarritu, the director of ponderous downers like “[Babel (Links to an external site.)](https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/babel-2006)” and “[Biutiful (Links to an external site.)](https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/biutiful-2011" \t "_blank),” actually seems to be having some fun.

Make that a ton of fun. “Birdman” is a complete blast from start to finish. The gimmick here–and it’s a doozy, and it works beautifully–is that Inarritu has created the sensation that you are watching a two-hour film shot all in one take. Working with the brilliant and inventive cinematographer [Emmanuel Lubezki (Links to an external site.)](https://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/emmanuel-lubezki) (who won an Oscar this year for shooting “[Gravity (Links to an external site.)](https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/gravity-2013)” for Inarritu’s close friend and fellow Mexican director [Alfonso Cuaron (Links to an external site.)](https://www.rogerebert.com/cast-and-crew/alfonso-cuaron)), Inarritu has constructed the most delicate and dazzling high-wire act. And indeed, before shooting began, the director sent his cast a photo of Philippe Petit walking a tightrope between the World Trade Center towers as inspiration.

Through impossibly long, intricately choreographed tracking shots, the camera swoops through narrow corridors, up and down tight stairways and into crowded streets. It comes in close for quiet conversations and soars between skyscrapers for magical-realism flights of fancy. A percussive and propulsive score from Antonio Sanchez, heavy on drums and cymbals, maintains a jazzy, edgy vibe throughout. Sure, you can look closely to find where the cuts probably happened, but that takes much of the enjoyment out of it. Succumbing to the thrill of the experience is the whole point.

Just as thrilling is the tour-de-force performance from Keaton in the role of a lifetime as Riggan Thompson, a washed-up actor trying to regain the former glory he achieved as the winged action hero Birdman.