
PERSPECTIVE

Earl Palmer

There are no guarantees in life," my parents repeatedly told me as a child. I remember turning their own argument against them, however, to convince them of the cultural importance of moviegoing. After all, I reasoned, what if the movie departs from the local theater, never to be shown again? I might miss what would someday be considered a pacesetter film.

I'm more philosophical now; I can usually wait for the video—a benefit of which is that a person can see one of the industry's best films virtually anytime, whether it left the theater four weeks or four decades ago. Here is my short list of what I believe are important films of the last couple years.

The Joy Luck Club and *A River Runs through It* are intended for mature audiences. In portraying the mother-daughter relationship, *The Joy Luck Club* has a cross-cultural appeal to it that goes beyond its Chinese setting. Like the book, the film prods its viewers to listen to the people in their lives if they want to discover the richness that is stored in their hearts, but that is not easily or quickly explained.

A River Runs through It chronicles the lives of a father and his two sons, whose bond is the art of fly fishing. Exploring feelings, communication, and aloneness, this film quietly sneaks up on you and leaves an indelible mark. There is a sadness in this true story because one son cannot find his way to peace. Love is here, too, but the story shows both the strength and the weakness of human love.

The whimsical *Strictly Ballroom* takes you by surprise, a parable about a ballroom dancing contest and the characters' desire to win. I think it's a classic—romantic, funny, and tender.

The heartbreaking story in *Remains of the Day* concerns the dangers of one man's captivity to a

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small idea—to the degree that he sidesteps and leaves behind him larger gifts and more enduring obligations of the day. In examining the true source of significance, the film raises questions, yet makes no attempt to answer them. A great movie to ponder with a friend over ice cream after the flick.

In describing the late-in-life romance of Joy Davidman and C. S. Lewis, *Shadowlands* brilliantly and quietly portrays their Christian faith, their discovery of each other, their growing relationship, and their eventual romantic love. I liked the unfinished nature of the story; drawn into the lives and thoughts of this couple, the viewer wants to better know these two remarkable people and their faith in Jesus Christ. Davidman's

son becomes the lens through which we see the unfolding of both his mother and C. S. Lewis.

Shadowlands, incidentally, was one of a tidy dozen of titles I gave when asked for a list of my all-time favorite films: *Casablanca*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Citizen Kane*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Snow White*, *Singing in the Rain*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Chariots of Fire*, *Good Morning Vietnam*, *Star Wars*, *The Man from Snowy River*, and *Shadowlands*.

Why do I go to the movies? Because they let me look at my motives and yearnings. Movies help me understand myself and others. And every once in a while, a film is released that shows the grace of God at work in a screen character. By revealing to me my own need for that grace, I am the richer for it. And if a film is truly noteworthy, it is an experience of art and beauty. And that is no small thing. ♦



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