

Movie Titles that begin with “J”

J. Edgar * Jack Goes Boating * Jack Reacher * Jackie * The Jane Austen Book Club * Jane Eyre * Janet Planet * Japanese Story * Jarhead * Jason Bourne * Jeff, Who Lives At Home * Jerry and Marge Go Large * Jersey Boys * Jesus' Son * Joan Baez I Am A Noise * Joan Rivers: A Piece of Work * Joe * Jojo Rabbit * Joker * Judas and the Black Messiah * The Judge * Judy * Judy Berlin * Judy Blume Forever * Julie & Julia * Juliet, Naked * Julieta * June Bug * Jungle Book * Juno * Just Go With It * Just Like Heaven * Just Looking * Just Mercy

J. EDGAR: For several decades J. Edgar Hoover was one of the most powerful and controversial figures our country has known. He built the FBI from an impotent government bureau into the powerful organization it became. He served for nearly fifty years with eight different U.S. presidents. He created a nationalized fingerprinting system and kept secret files on nearly anyone of importance. One would think his life and career would make exciting cinema, especially when the direction was in the hands of Clint Eastwood, director of *Million Dollar Baby*. Instead this biopic has an excitement level more like a documentary. But in spite of being emotionally bland, the film gives us brilliant performances by Leonardo DiCaprio and Armie Hammer playing Hoover and his longtime companion and assistant respectively. In an interesting bit of trivia, Hammer is the grandson of oil tycoon Armand Hammer who hated Hoover and was hated by him. Judi Dench ably plays Hoover's controlling mother, and Naomi Watts his loyal and devoted secretary. The movie cuts back and forth between the 1920's and 1930's when Hoover was young and ambitious to the end of his career and life. To play these scenes DiCaprio often had to sit in a make-up chair for five hours at a time. Although we were hoping for better, both Barbara and I liked *J. Edgar*. **GRADE B-**

JACK GOES BOATING: As the movie credits ended, Gary turned to me and said, "This film may have set a new standard for slow-moving." It is so measured in its pace and so hesitant in its dialogue that I fear won't appeal to many or our readers. Of course the acting is excellent. We'd expect no less from Phillip Seymour Hoffman. Amy Ryan is equally impressive. But, their characters are so shy and inarticulate that we pity them rather than care for them. When reflecting on the characters in this film, the word "pathetic" comes first to mind. Jack (Hoffman) is an overweight loser with scraggly dreadlocks and a complete lack of self-confidence. His blind date with Connie (Ryan) is awkward at best, but a relationship of sorts does develop---slowly. Hoffman and Ryan are assisted by John Ortiz and Daphne Rubin-Vega as a couple who care for Jack and Connie and want them to get together, even as their own marriage is falling apart. The most memorable scenes in the film are those where Ortiz teaches Jack to swim so that, when summer comes, he can take Connie boating without fear of drowning. The Yahoo critics' average grade is B, probably because of the realistic and skilled acting, but Yahoo users average grade is B-, and that's where Gary is. Based on my enjoyment, I have to say C+ **GRADE B-/C+**

JACK REACHER: If you ever read a Lee Child novel featuring Jack Reacher, you will be disappointed in the casting of this film. Tom Cruise is a Hollywood celebrity who has a number of good films in his filmography (*Rain Man, Magnolia, Born on the 4th of July*) but he is far too small, well groomed, and good looking to play a believable Jack Reacher. In the many novels featuring Jack Reacher, he is massively built. He stands 6' 5" tall with a 50-inch chest. He is impressive, but not handsome. If, on the other hand, you never read a Reacher novel and you are a Tom Cruise enthusiast who loved the *Mission Impossible* movies, you will probably find a great deal to like in this mystery, suspense, thriller which may be the first in a long running franchise. At 50, Cruise is still incredibly fit and can bring believability to the obligatory "ass-kicking" scenes. The screenplay is based on a Child novel titled One Shot. In the tense opening minutes of the film we see five people murdered with six shots from a sniper's rifle. The cops quickly solve the case and turn a "slam dunk" case over to the District Attorney. Predictably, the plot thickens when Reacher enters and is teamed with a beautiful young defense lawyer effectively played by Rosamund Pike. Also adding to the films likability are Robert Duvall and Richard Jenkins. Duvall appears late and is in only a few scenes, but he adds a great deal of energy, which we have come to expect from this talented Oscar winner. In the role of evil bad guy is Werner Herzog, director, producer, screenwriter, actor, and opera director. He is recognized as one of the greatest figures in the German film industry. It is a small role, but Herzog is fantastic. Considering Barbara's and my love of the Reacher novels, we liked the film more than we expected. **GRADE B**

JACKIE: (2016) An extraordinary performance from Natalie Portman gives us a peek at one of the most important and tragic events in American history as seen through the eyes of then First Lady, Jacqueline Kennedy. It is a big jump from Portman's Oscar-winning turn in *Black Swan* to this controlled long emersion into overwhelming grief. The film focuses on the week following Kennedy's assassination interspersed with strategic flashbacks. Barbara and I predict that this movie will have far more appeal to those who remember and were deeply moved by the events of that week. Jackie Kennedy will be remembered for her extraordinary dignity and poise but here we see her as an ordinary woman in extraordinary times torn by trauma and grief donning different masks for the press, the public, her associates, and her children, but wearing none when she is alone. All this as she struggles to maintain her husband's legacy and the world of "Camelot" that they created and loved so well. The impressive supporting cast includes Peter Sarsgaard, Greta Gerwig, Billy Crudup, and John Hurt. It is a slow moving docudrama that is perhaps more dark and brooding than many will like, but Portman's performance may win her another Oscar. **GRADE B**

THE JANE AUSTEN BOOK CLUB: We both enjoyed this romantic comedy about a book club devoted to the novels of Jane Austin. Five women and one man meet to talk about Austen's novels, and manage to talk a lot about themselves and their lives. Amy Brenneman, Maria Bello, Kathy Baker, Maggie Grace and Emily Blunt, who was so good in *The Devil Wears Prada*, are joined in their literary efforts by the delicious Hugh Dancy. An unusual group, but an interesting one. Their life and love problems seem to parallel Austen's novels—Bello, for example, is Emma. I was totally engaged in their stories. It's a rare movie that celebrates and encourages reading, but I particularly liked that aspect of the film. In fact, I went home and started Austen's first written but last published novel, *Northanger Abbey*—a book I've had on my bookshelf for several years. The movie is probably more enjoyable for someone who is reasonably familiar with Austen's novels. Although it qualifies as a "chick-flick," Gary did enjoy it, and reader Paul K., has given it a glowing endorsement in this issue's Readers' Views. B+ for me and a B for Gary. **GRADE B+/B.**

JANE EYRE: I first read Charlotte's Bronte's classic romantic novel when I was about 13, and I've loved it ever since. The book has been made into many movies both here and abroad, and has also been produced on TV. The Internet Movie Database lists 22 different versions. I have seen and liked many of them. This 2011 version is no different. The story of plain and poor Jane who comes to Thornfield Hall as governess to the young ward of Edward Rochester, and falls in love with the much older and darkly troubled lord of the manor has been a favorite of women the world over. Gary wanted to see the movie mostly because in this newest version, Jane is played by the luminous Mia Wasikowska. She stunned us with her acting ability when we first saw her in TV's *In Treatment* and hasn't disappointed us since. (*Alice In Wonderland* and *The Kids Are All Right*.) She is perfect for the role of Jane and once again impressed us both. Michael Fassbender, who was in the film *Inglourious Basterds*, although we don't remember him, is, in my opinion, a bit unmemorable as Rochester. But the rest of the supporting cast is splendid, especially Judy Dench as Mrs. Fairfax, the Thornfield housekeeper, and Amelia Clarkson as the young Jane. Director Cary Fukunaga has filmed the story beautifully. I was especially intrigued with the lighting. He has re-created the world of the early 1800s complete with rooms illuminated only by candlelight and fireplaces. The themes of the novel are all here: class distinctions, love and passion, religion and morality, independence, and atonement and forgiveness. Throw in the search for family and a place in the world, and you have a story for the ages. We both loved it. **GRADE A-**

JANET PLANET: 2024 (Max) In rural Western Massachusetts, 11-year-old Lacy spends the summer of 1991 at home, enthralled by her own imagination and the attention of her mother, Janet. Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Annie Baker captures a child's experience of time passing, and the ineffability of a daughter falling out of love with her mother, in this singularly sublime film debut. Sounds good doesn't it? But it's not! RT critics gave it 85%. Audiences gave it 46% Gary and I are with the audiences on this movie. RT's Critics Consensus: "Unfolding at a gentle pace with an even more subdued sense of drama, *Janet Planet* revolves around Julianne Nicholson and Zoe Ziegler's outstanding performances. But I beg to differ. Nothing much happens and people don't talk very much—not at all in the opening—which seems to last forever! Ty Burr gave it 3-1/2 stars, and the critics on RT waxed enthusiastically. One critic who didn't was Christie Cronan. She said, "Great acting is overshadowed by a tediously slow, thin story in this reflective drama that's not for the impatient." I guess we are impatient to get to the storytelling, but maybe we just don't get today's movies! **GRADE D for the storytelling, B for the acting of Nicholson and Ziegler.** (They were good!)

JAPANESE STORY: If you are a Toni Collette fan you won't want to miss this Australian film. A.O. Scott of the New York Times says that it's the main reason to see the film. This is a movie about characters, not plot. If you did not like *Lost In Translation*, you may find this movie equally slow. Collette is Sandy, a geologist with her own software company in the Northwestern Australia outback. Her partner asks her to look after an important visiting Japanese industrialist, Tachibana Hiromitsu (Gotaro Tsunashima). At first they are the picture of culture clash. Hiro assumes she is merely his driver and even expects her to hoist his heavy suitcase into the auto. He ignores her protests and demands to be driven far into the remote desert. Eventually, they begin to connect on several levels. A sudden tragedy changes everything for Sandy. The critics are somewhat divided on this film. One called it "snoozy and unconvincing," while Boxoffice Online Reviews said, "What at first seems to be a clichéd, slow-moving, cross-cultural odd couple/fish-out-of-water comedy about a collision of opposites evolves into a poignant love story with profound repercussions." Even if you find the story a bit thin, or even melodramatic, you will be impressed with the power of Collette's performance. We both were quite moved by this film. **GRADE B+**

JARHEAD: (2005 movie seen on video.) I can't say I enjoyed this film, but I have great respect for the effort and the outstanding acting. "*Jarhead* is set in the first Gulf War, but it is more about the lives of young men caught up in the rigors of a harsh military process. Jake Gyllenhaal and Peter Sarsgaard are outstanding and believable in their portrayal of young marines going through a brutal training camp led by Staff Sgt. Sykes (Jamie Foxx) and then waiting to fight anticipated battles that never happen. In gas masks that don't work carrying 100 pound back packs in 112-degree temperatures they strive to survive. There have been many military films that would be considered better than *Jarhead*. If you try to see all films in this genre, then by all means see this one. Otherwise you might be better served to place this film down a ways on your must see list. (Barb: I agree with Gary's comments. In addition, I can't imagine anyone wanting to be a Marine after seeing this film!)

JASON BOURNE: (2016) I like Matt Damon and the character he has created, but this *Jason Bourne* outing was a disappointment. It spent too much time on the characters walking/running through crowded streets, corridors and hallways, and too little time on the characters themselves. And the question posed is an important one: How can we reconcile our citizens' privacy with their need for security. There are hints that the question will be covered in the next *Bourne* movie, but the emphasis in this one is on Jason's search for the truth of his identity and revenge against the people who killed his father. Set in Athens, Rome, Berlin, London and Las Vegas, the movie looks good and Alicia Vikander is a solid addition. Is her character good or evil? Only time will tell. This is the first time that Tommy Lee Jones plays the CIA Director determined to eliminate Jason Bourne. The actor is always excellent, but I hope his character in this movie is not typical of the CIA. There is a motorcycle chase in Athens that was reasonably exciting, and there is a car chase scene in Vegas that, I have no doubt, was a marvel of choreography and CGI. However, for us it was preposterous and ultimately boring. There was nothing in this movie to compare with the chase scene over the rooftops of Tangiers in *The Bourne Ultimatum*. The final confrontation pits Bourne and "the Asset" in an inevitable fist fight—inevitable because the movie opens with Bourne as bare knuckle brawler. Upon leaving the theatre, Gary mentioned the thumping score designed to ratchet up the tension. It didn't work for us. I think the well has run dry with *Jason Bourne* movies, although I will be tempted to see the fifth movie, if it's made. I suspect Gary will protest. **GRADE C+**

JEFF, WHO LIVES AT HOME: A couple of years ago, the Duplass brothers (Jay and Mark) wrote and directed an off-beat romantic comedy that delighted both Barbara and me. It was titled *Cyrus*. Now they have written and directed another quirky comedy that has as much warm-hearted pathos as it has comedy. Jason Segel, Ed Helms, and Susan Sarandon are excellent in the leading roles. Segel plays Jeff, a 30-year-old stoner who still lives at home in his mother's basement waiting for his rendezvous with destiny. He relies a little too heavily on weed and obsessing over his favorite film, *Signs*, thinking a science fiction thriller might hold answers. Helms plays his older brother who is about to lose the best wife he could possibly hope for and Sarandon plays the brother's widowed mother who is also a little lost in her search for meaning. The film has received mixed reviews and anyone wondering into the theater expecting a rollicking comedy like *The Hangover* might be disappointed. We side with the reviews praising the movie, but must add that it would be

better received if seen with few expectations and with a mind open to the quiet charms of a modern day fable. We found it an interesting story with a satisfying ending. I think the Duplass brothers have found their niche in Hollywood and may gain the profound respect Barbara and I have for the Coen brothers (*Fargo & O Brother, Where Art Thou?*). Let us know your views. **GRADE B+**

JERRY AND MARGE GO LARGE: (Prime with Paramount) The critics weren't too high on this movie—they thought it was clichéd. But we like Bryan Cranston and Annette Bening and decided to take a chance. The opening quote gave us our first and biggest laugh: Based on a true story...in all probability. In fact, it was inspired by the remarkable true story of retiree Jerry Selbee, who discovers a mathematical loophole in the Massachusetts lottery. With the help of his wife, Marge, they win millions and use the money to revive their small Michigan town. Larry Wilmore (*The Daily Show*) and Rainn Wilson (*The Office*) also appear, and they play their parts with a sense of fun. A sense of fun is what this movie is all about, that, and a sense of community. Jerry has always been good at math, but he struggles with people and knowing what to say to them. Retirement is difficult for Jerry because he has been all about work. Thank goodness that he has Marge who wants retirement to be more fun. When Jerry discovers a flaw in the State Lottery, the fun begins. It was nice to see Cranston and Bening as retirees who rekindle their marriage and have fun doing it. This isn't an A movie to be sure, but Gary and I agree that it is a good, solid B. **GRADE B**

JERSEY BOYS: (2014) *Jersey Boys* opened on Broadway in 2005, won a Tony Award for Best Musical in 2006 and became a long-running hit musical on Broadway. Director Clint Eastwood brings the successful staged version to the silver screen. The *Jersey Boys* refers to an American pop band with a unique sound that came to be known as The Four Seasons. After struggling in the 1950s, and gaining international success in the 1960s, they were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1990. A little research suggests that the screenplay doesn't drift far from the musical and that the musical is based on a true story about four young guys from the wrong side of the tracks in New Jersey, one of whom became a legend in the world of music. His name was Frankie Valli and he had a falsetto voice people were unlikely to forget. Professional critics are often hard on movies based on stage productions. Reviews were mixed, but many of those who were most critical acknowledged the power and quality of the musical moments. Barbara and I liked the movie, both the music and the story. The most famous name in the cast is Christopher Walken. He is always good, but his role is relatively small. The story has to be carried by the four leads. The actors do not have big names but we think they were perfectly cast and did an outstanding job of portraying fascinating characters. Photos show them to look remarkably similar to the real life characters they play. Neither Barb nor I had seen the stage version, but we truly enjoyed the film. **GRADE B+**

JESUS' SON: This is a hard movie to grade. It's quite well put together, but not a story that most people will find enjoyable. It's a movie about a drug addicted young man whose nickname is F** *head, shortened to FH. He comes by his nickname honestly because he tends to screw up all the time. But he is at heart a good-natured kid, and Billy Crudup is credible in the part. Samantha Morton who was so good as the mute girl in *Sweet and Lowdown* plays his girlfriend. Jack Black, who was the chubby clerk in *High Fidelity*, appears here and he is outstanding in a macabre/funny scene in a hospital. Holly Hunter has a cameo role. The story is not linear, but is told in short episodes, probably because it was adapted from a series of short stories by Denis Johnson. The title is inspired by a Lou Reed lyric "When I'm rushing on my run/And I feel like Jesus' son." Roger Ebert gave the film three stars and said, "He (FH) isn't a hero or an anti-hero, just a fairly clueless guy with good intentions who gets muddled by the drug lifestyle." Unlike most druggie movies this one has a hopeful ending. If you like counter-culture independent films, you might like this one. I liked it a bit better than Gary did. **GRADE: C/C+**

JOAN BAEZ I AM A NOISE: 2023 (Available for streaming on Hulu and Prime Video (rental at .99 cents)) At the end of a 60-year musical career, legendary singer and activist Joan Baez reflects on a life of making history and reveals, for the first time, the personal struggles she's kept private, until now. The 1h 49m film follows one woman's personal journey from pain to peace and forgiveness. Revealing her traumas of heartbreak, estrangement, and possible abuse the film paints a portrait of an artist who had an electric connection with her audience but struggled with interpersonal trust and intimacy. Critics loved the movie as evidenced by 98% on the Rotten Tomatoes Tomatometer. Baez became famous overnight at the age of 18. Raised in the Quaker faith, she strongly gravitated toward civil rights, social justice, and antiwar activism. In her early 20s she began a five-year relationship with a then-relatively unknown Bob Dylan. Her professional success and notoriety did little to stop the roller coaster of anxiety and depression that vexed her from her early teen years. The film moves between the singer's farewell concert tour in 2018, at the age of 79, and a bursting storage unit of personal archives stretching across Baez's life, from childhood to the present day. It reveals shockingly personal confessions of inadequacy, depression, panic attacks, egotism, heartbreak, and more. Barbara was a little put off by the hurtling rollercoaster of emotional ups and downs and her lower grade reflects that. **GRADE B/C**

JOAN RIVERS: A PIECE OF WORK: She a 75-year-old comedy icon who's still trying to hit it big. She's an outrageous, insecure, funny, lonely, desperate for approval, in-your-face comedienne whose biggest fear is a blank calendar. She'll play any gig and hawk any product to keep that calendar full. She's Joan Rivers, famous for her addition to plastic surgery and her falling out with Johnny Carson, and this documentary makes you laugh at her jokes and empathize with her fears—her off-stage fears, because she is fearless onstage. I confess to getting choked up when she talked about not having anyone to whom she can say "Do you remember when. . ." I'm including the last paragraph of Roger Ebert's review, because I think he sums up the appeal of this documentary and I could never say it as well as he does:

It's the portrait of a woman who will not accept defeat, who will not slow down, who must prove herself over and again. A brave and stubborn woman, smart as a whip, superbly skilled. You want to see what it looks like to rage, rage against the dying of the light? Joan Rivers will not go gentle into that good night.

She is definitely a piece of work! Gary wished there had been more clips of her early years, and he can't go higher than B. On reflection, I have to give this one a B+. **GRADE B+/B**

JOE: (2013) As Barb and I left the theater I broke a long silence with, "That was a lot like watching a horrifying train wreck in slow motion." And I mean that in a good way. The film is based on a 1991 novel with the same title by the late Larry Brown. As one book reviewer opined, "Brown's characters are Southern rednecks who exist from day to day, from hand to mouth, in tar-paper shacks and shabby mobile homes. The film is not pretty and I suspect many of our Movie Views readers would not care for it, especially if violence

puts them off. But it is a well-made film and the acting is terrific. The movie reminds me of how good an actor Nicolas Cage used to be. Remember his Oscar winning role in **Leaving Las Vegas** before he was lured to the big budget pay checks in films like the three **National Treasure** films. The whole supporting cast in **Joe** is outstanding, but watching a young actor named Tye Sheridan was a special treat. I predicted Sheridan would be a name we would see a great deal of after his mesmerizing performance in **Mud**, an "A" film reviewed earlier. As of this writing he also has five films in post-production not yet released. In this film Cage plays in the title role as a hard-living, hot-tempered, ex-con who wants to, and tries to, keep his volatile temper in check. Joe is honest and well intentioned with good instincts, but flawed. A perfect role for Nicholas Cage. Sheridan plays a good kid from a horrible home environment with an abusive drunken father, a helpless mother, and a sister who hasn't spoken a word in years. Joe sees a lot of himself in the boy and tries to take him under his protective wing. Barbara and I liked this film but recommend it with caution. It is a low budget indie film that focuses on character development and the telling of a violent, but gripping story. It may be the film that elevates the acting career of Nicholas Cage in the same way Matthew McConaughey's career began a rebirth with **The Lincoln Lawyer, Killer Joe, and Mud**. **GRADE B+**

JOJO RABBIT: (2019) New Zealand Director Taika Waititi did triple duty in this movie. He directed, wrote the screenplay, and played Jojo's imaginary friend, Adolph, dressed and made up to look like Adolph Hitler. Jojo is a 10-year-old boy obsessed with Hitler and the Nazis. He attends a youth camp to learn how to be a soldier. The head of the camp is Captain Klenzendorf, played with dry humor by Sam Rockwell. Jojo lives with only his mother (Scarlett Johansson), his father being away fighting in the war, or so thinks Jojo. When Jojo discovers that his mother is hiding a young Jewish girl in their house, he doesn't know what to think. At first, he wants to turn her over to the Nazi's because he has believed the propaganda about Jews. Later, he becomes her friend, and even later, thinks he's fallen in love with her. At a time when fascism is overtaking other countries and we are having white supremacists marching in our streets, it's getting harder to laugh at the humor in **Jojo Rabbit**. But I rather enjoyed the laughs at the Nazi's expense, especially when it came out of Rockwell's mouth. Gary, however had trouble staying awake. He did think the ending was touching. He doesn't feel he stayed awake enough to grade the movie, but for me, it was firmly in the B range. (The film was nominated for a Golden Globe this year in the "Best Motion Picture - Musical or Comedy" category.) **GRADE B**

JUDAS AND THE BLACK MESSIAH: (2021 now streaming on HBO MAX) Based on a true story, this is a timely film with a powerhouse cast. It had its premiere at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival on February 1, 2021 and was lauded by critics. The movie earned 97% from 180 reviewers on the *Tomatometer*. You might think of **Judas and The Black Messiah** as a historical thriller, an insightful film well worth seeing and learning from. It is the story of Fred Hampton, the young chairman of the Illinois Black Panthers. Do not confuse the original Black Panthers with the new Black Panthers. The original Black Panther Party was founded in 1966 and dissolved in 1982. Their goals were to provide food, healthcare, and education to black people. The New Black Panther Party is a racist and anti-Semitic hate group that has hijacked the Panther name. Fred Hampton is brilliantly played by Daniel Kaluuya who received great praise and an Oscar nomination for Best Actor in the horror film **Get Out**. Usually Barbara and I avoid revealing any information not used until late in a film. But in this case I think you should go into the film knowing that Fred Hampton was in the crosshairs of J. Edgar Hoover. In 1969, at the age of 21, he was shot and killed while sleeping by a squad of FBI agents. Howling rage against injustice and police brutality is at the film's core. It is not an easy film to watch, but is an electrifying dramatization of historical events. **GRADE A**

JOKER: (2019) Barbara and I ran out of excuses for not seeing this psychological thriller that received mixed reviews and scored only 68% from critics on Rotten Tomatoes. It also received mixed reviews from friends who had seen it. It did receive numerous accolades. Joaquin Phoenix won a golden globe for best performance as an actor. At the 92nd Academy Awards, the film was nominated for a leading 11 awards, including Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Actor for Phoenix. One critic warned that audiences will most likely leave the theater a little more depressed than when they came in. So it was with trepidation that we finally decided to spend a couple of hours with the most recognizable and popular comic book villain in pop culture history. Set in 1981 in Gotham City, the story centers on Arthur Fleck, a party clown and aspiring stand-up comedian who suffers from a medical disorder that causes him to laugh at inappropriate times, usually when he is feeling stressed or agitated. The role of Arthur Fleck is brilliantly played by Joaquin Phoenix, 44-year-old actor who lost 52 pounds to play this version of the Joker. It is a gritty story of the downward spiral of a disturbed personality. The movie was produced, directed, and co-written by Todd Phillips. When we walked into the theater we were expecting the worst. As we left the theater Barbara summed up her reaction with one word: WOW!!! We have to side with the critics who were enthusiastic about the production value and blown away by the performance of Phoenix. **GRADE A**

THE JUDGE: (2014) It is exhilarating to see two of our best actors at the top of their form, although to be honest, Robert Duvall has been in top form in all of his roles beginning in 1962 as Boo Radley in **To Kill A Mockingbird**. Robert Downey, Jr. was the perfect choice for playing the judge's son. Hank and the Judge have been estranged for many years, but when his mother dies, Hank comes home to the small Indiana town for her funeral. He is desperate to get back to Chicago and his law practice, but when his father is arrested for vehicular manslaughter, Hank stays in Indiana to do what he does best. **The Judge** is a prodigal-son story combined with a courtroom drama. Oh yes, there's a high school girlfriend (Vera Farmiga) thrown in to give Hank a softer side. (We are both Farmiga fans!) Vincent D'Onofrio plays Hanks older brother, and, in an impressively consistent portrayal, Jeremy Strong plays the youngest and mildly intellectually disabled son. Billy Bob Thornton provides a nice touch as the prosecuting attorney. Our local critic thought that the story was saved by the presence of Duvall and Downey, Jr., and Gary did think that the movie was occasionally manipulative. One problem I had was with the final testimony in the courtroom scene. The feelings that the judge revealed to Hank at the very end, although crucial to their personal story, would never have been allowed in a real courtroom. (I think we watch too many legal dramas!) Nevertheless, in spite of some script problems, the movie is eminently watchable. No wonder audiences rate it higher on Rotten Tomatoes than do the critics. We're with the audiences on this one. **GRADE B+**

JUDY: (2019) Adapted from the play "End of the Rainbow," the movie **Judy** is a tribute to Judy Garland. Most of the movie is set in 1969, three decades after she donned the ruby slippers in **The Wizard of Oz** and just a few months before her death at the age of 47. Renée Zellweger gives a convincing performance playing Judy and she also handles the demanding singing chores. Wisely, Director Rupert Goold didn't ask Zellweger to try sounding like Judy Garland. Who could? But she captures the essence of Garland. The movie doesn't sugarcoat the failings of the legendary entertainer who earned a reputation for showing up drunk and skipping shows. **Judy**

begins with one of several flashbacks to the teenage Garland and shows us how the movie industry created the image of Garland and while doing it turned her into an insecure drug addicted and neurotic woman. We have all probably heard about the tragedy of Garland's life, but this film makes us feel it. For me the movie started slow, very slow, and built to a powerful emotional ending. Barbara and I agree that it was an A+ ending but not quite an A film. **GRADE B+**

JUDY BERLIN: This is a difficult movie to review. It is a black and white film festival or art house movie and will not win a large audience. If you like independent films the way they used to be before independent filmmakers went Hollywood, you may like this excellent movie. If superior acting turns you on, then you should definitely see Judy Berlin because all the performances are superb. Writer/Director Eric Mendelsohn gives us glimpses into the lives of several residents of Babylon, New York. We only see them for one day-but it is an extraordinary day because there is a total eclipse of the sun that lasts all afternoon. At first a four-hour eclipse bothered me, but I realized after a while that it serves as a powerful visual metaphor for the half-light in which people live--never completely understanding themselves or others. We meet Sue Berlin (Barbara Barrie), a teacher in Babylon's elementary school, her principal, Arthur Gold (Bob Dishy) for whom Sue has a private yearning. We also meet Sue's daughter, Judy Berlin (Eddie Falco from TV's *The Sopranos*) who is leaving to pursue her impossible dream of acting in the movies. In addition, we get involved with Arthur's wife, Alice (Madeline Kahn in her last movie role), and his son, David (Aaron Hamick). Also notable, was Bette Henritze as a retired teacher suffering from Alzheimers. I agree with a critic who said, "Those who see it will have a hard time shaking its gentle, ghostly echoes." (Gary gives it a B.) **GRADE: B+/B**

JUDY BLUME FOREVER: 2023 (Included in Prime Video) The radical honesty of the books by trailblazing author Judy Blume changed the way millions of adolescent readers understood themselves, their sexuality, and what it meant to grow up, but also led to critical battles against book banning and censorship. Blume has been an activist against the banning of books in the United States. In the 1980s, when her books started facing censorship and controversy, she began reaching out to other writers, as well as teachers and librarians, to join the fight against censorship. This led Blume to join the National Coalition Against Censorship which aims to protect the freedom to read. In 1975, Blume published the now frequently banned novel *Forever*, which was groundbreaking in young adult literature as the first novel to display teen sex as normal. Blume explained that she was inspired to write this novel when her daughter, 13 years old at the time, said she wanted to read a book where the characters have sex but do not die afterward. These novels tackled complex subjects such as family conflict, bullying, body image, and sexuality. Blume has expressed that she writes about these subjects, particularly sexuality, because it is what she believes children need to know about and was what she wondered about as a child. *Judy Blume Forever* is an enjoyable and enlightening look at the award-winning author. One critic on RT said, "*Pardo and Wolchok were able to fully capture Judy by letting her tell her own story in her own way. It's a learning experience for us all.*" One of the most heartfelt moments concerns her writing back to the many kids who wrote saying, "*You're book changed my life!*" (Some months she got over 2,000 letters from children who loved the honesty of her books.) When one of her longstanding pen pals told Blume that her parents were in crisis and would not be making it to her college graduation, at Bryn Mawr, Blume showed up—for a girl she had never met in the flesh. She was never condescending and had, in the words of Lauren Mechling of the Guardian, "*uncanny respect for the young people they're meant for.*" Gary and I loved the documentary. When it was over, I asked Gary what grade he would give the film, and he said, "An A++."

GRADE A+

JULIE & JULIA: My copy of *Mastering The Art of French Cooking* has been sitting on my bookshelf for 45 years. I must confess I haven't opened it for a long time, but this movie made me hungry for Julia Child's kind of cooking. And hungry for butter and brie! I loved this film. To say that Meryl Streep was wonderful as Julia is a gross understatement. She had Child's speech pattern and her special verve down pat. Amy Adams is Julie Powell, a young woman who decides to cook every recipe in Child's cookbook in one year and blog about the experience. The blog becomes popular and leads to a book deal and a movie—this one. Director Nora Ephron blends Powell's story with that of Julia and Paul Child, cutting back and forth between the two women. While all critics praise Streep, they are less enthusiastic about the character that Adams plays, referring to her as "whiney," and "single-minded" and "self-obsessed." Powell is all those things, but it didn't keep me from enjoying the movie. Stanley Tucci is Paul Child and Chris Messina plays Powell's long-suffering husband. But this movie is really about the food. And the food is glorious! As soon as it cools down here in Phoenix, I plan to make some Boeuf À La Bourguignonne. I'm sure it will be as delicious as this movie! **GRADE B+** for me; **GRADE B** for Gary.

JULIET, NAKED: (2018) This film is based on a novel by English writer and lyricist Nicholas Hornby. It is not Hornby's first novel to be turned into a movie. You may remember *High Fidelity* and *About a Boy*, both of which were adapted into feature films. *Juliet, Naked* is an appealing and amusing romantic comedy about life's second chances with a charming cast led by Rose Byrne, Ethan Hawke, and Chris O'Dowd. Byrne plays Annie who is stuck in a long-term but unmarried relationship with Duncan played by Irish actor and comedian O'Dowd. Hawke plays Tucker Crowe, a now faded singer-songwriter who made a few records a quarter century ago and then walked away from an emerging career. Tucker Crowe also happens to be the obsession of a small band of rabid fans led by Duncan. The performances are outstanding. All three leads are high on my "favorites list". Barbara and I are especially impressed with the versatile acting of Ethan Hawke who earlier this year turned in a powerful performance as a deeply conflicted priest in *First Reformed*. He also wrote and directed a film to be released later this year: *Blaze*, based on the life of musician Balze Foley. *Juliet, Naked* was showing on only one screen in a suburb of Phoenix, but we hope it will receive wider release. **GRADE B+**

JULIETA: (2016) Our nieces turned us on to Pedro Almodovar's films by encouraging us to watch *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* in 1988. Since then we have seen most of his movies, liking some and not caring for others. *Julieta* is one that we liked. It's about communication, or the lack thereof, a reoccurring theme in Almodovar's films. To quote June Thomas on *Slate*, "*His films are packed with missed phone calls, letters that didn't arrive, the living reading dead people's diaries, and people telling each other that they really need to talk.*" His films often feature women in loving relationships and *Julieta* is about a mother and daughter. When we meet Julieta, she has been separated from her daughter. Antia, for twelve years—completely separated because she has no idea

where her daughter is living. Julieta is preparing to leave Madrid for Portugal with her lover, Lorenzo, a man who doesn't even know that she has a daughter. In a chance meeting with an old friend, she learns that her daughter now has three children, and, hoping that Antia might get in touch with her, she breaks it off with Lorenzo, telling him nothing about her reasons. In a long letter—a letter that will never be sent—she tells Antia all the things they never talked about, and as she writes, we see a young Julieta and learn how she and her daughter came to be separated. The middle-aged woman is played by Emma Suárez and Adriana Ugarte plays the younger version. Both are beautiful and both have captivating screen presences. The story bogged down a bit for us, but Suárez and Ugarte kept us involved. Almodovar knows how to frame a shot and his movies are always beautifully photographed. *Julieta* is no exception. Gary fears that people without a grounding in independent and foreign films might not enjoy the movie, but we did. **GRADE B**

JUNE BUG: (We saw this film on video.) This unusual 2005 little film has become a favorite of the critics. Roger Ebert put it on his 10 best list that year, and Amy Adams received an Oscar nomination for her portrayal of Ashley. The film is about family, love and ambition and the choices people make. All the actors are outstanding. The film's strength is its realistic look at small town Southern life—complete with Church potluck social. I found the movie charming and delightful. Gary said that he always thought small town life was boring, and so was the movie. We disagree on this one, but I'd give it a **THUMBS UP**

THE JUNGLE BOOK: (2016) This movie has earned raves from critics and audiences, and Gary and I are no exception. The re-telling of Rudyard Kipling's classic children's tale of a man child raised in the jungle by wolves is filled with wonder and excitement. Advertised as a live-action film, it is the latest and best example of the blurring of the line between live-action and animation. In his online article, David Sims says, "*The Jungle Book* is basically a computer-animated film with a real actor at its center, but against all odds, it never feels 'fake.' In it, Mowgli successfully manages to sustain heartfelt conversations with realistic-looking wolves, bears, panthers, orangutans, and tigers." Young Neel Sethi, the child actor who was chosen to play Mowgli, is the human being in the movie. He did all of his scenes in front of a green screen. What a challenge for Director John Favreau, and he deserves praise for the young boy's believable performance. The rest of the animal characters were created entirely in CGI. Months later, famous actors like Bill Murray (Baloo) and Christopher Walken (King Louie), recorded their parts. We have been slow to embrace computer-assisted filmmaking because often it is in the service of those summer blockbusters we tend to avoid. However, we felt obligated to see this Disney film that, on its opening weekend, took in \$103 million at the box office. We are so glad that we didn't miss the enchanted story-telling of *The Jungle Book*. As a kid's movie it deserves an A, but for us, we settled on a B+. **GRADE B+**

(We saw the movie in 2D, but it would be quite spectacular in 3D)

JUNO: If there has been a more adorable and engaging heroine in a movie this year than Ellen Page, I haven't seen her. Juno (Page's character) is also much smarter and wittier than any 16-year-old has a right to be, and for that, we must credit the writer, Diablo Cody. We're not the only ones to praise her clever writing. Cody has garnered a Golden Globe nomination for this, her first screenplay. The terrific cast includes J.K. Simmons, Allison Janney, Jennifer Garner, Jason Bateman and they are all outstanding. Michael Cera (*Superbad*) is particularly perfect as Juno's friend, Paulie. The tagline of the film is, *A comedy about growing up...and the bumps along the way*, and all I'm going to say about the story is that Paulie is the father of Juno's baby bump. That fact is made clear in the first few minutes of the film, so it won't spoil anything for you. The rest of the story and all the people in it are delightful and unpredictable and we urge you to see this Oscar-worthy film. And remember the name, Ellen Page. She has real star quality. **GRADE A.**

That ain't no etch-a-sketch. That's one doodle that can't be un-did, homeskillet.

... Rainn Wilson as a convenience store clerk

JUST GO WITH IT: Just another ho-hum romantic comedy. And we like Adam Sandler. And Jennifer Aniston. The two of them are quite good together and they kept us in the theatre. But, the writing is not good. It is based on a mediocre 1969 movie *Cactus Flower*, which was based on a Broadway play that was based on a French Play. Aren't there any original stories anymore? This version tells the story of a plastic surgeon, romancing a much younger woman, who enlists his loyal assistant to pretend to be his soon to be ex-wife, in order to cover up a careless lie. Somehow, everyone winds up going on a Hawaii vacation where at least the scenery doesn't disappoint. Aniston's Katherine has two children, played by actors Bailee Madison and Griffin Gluck. The kids are quite skilled, but I never bought them as real kids. Not their fault, I think, but that of the writers. They sounded and behaved the way a comedy writer thinks kids behave—a comedy writer who doesn't have any real kids of his own. Most of the goofy stuff was written for stand-up comedian Nicholas Swarzen, playing a friend/cousin of Sandler's. He is molested by a wild pig in Hawaii, gives CPR to a sheep, and does a variety of other goofy things that are equally unfunny. The most amusing character in the film was Aniston's college nemesis played with great style by Nicole Kidman. She displayed a real flare for comedy. Sandler's young girlfriend was played by Brooklyn Decker and Gary thought she was most watchable—especially in her bikini. Aniston plays her usual character and does it well. Adam Sandler can handle sweetly romantic. He proved that in *Spanglish* and *50 First Dates*, but he and Aniston just weren't enough to give this a very high grade. **GRADE C**

JUST LIKE HEAVEN: Neither of us cares much for movies with a supernatural theme, so Gary was a bit reluctant to see this one. At first, the idea of Witherspoon being a spirit that only Ruffalo could see was off-putting, but the two performers are so charming and the script so well done, that we were able to suspend our disbelief and enjoy an engaging love story. We first saw Ruffalo in *You Can Count On Me* and we were very impressed with this stage-trained actor. Witherspoon may be the most winsome actress working in films today. They make a great pair. Elizabeth (Witherspoon) is a workaholic doctor who was the victim of a horrible car crash. David (Ruffalo) is having difficulty recovering from the death of his wife two years earlier. When David sublets Elizabeth's apartment, he starts seeing her everywhere. Together, they try to figure out why she has appeared to him and why she can't remember her former life. One critic referred to this as a version of *Ghost*, "without all that messy pottery stuff." It's also a bit like a modern version of *Sleeping Beauty*. I suppose it does qualify as a "chick-flick," but I hope that doesn't keep you from seeing it. The performances are worth the price of a ticket. And it will satisfy those who enjoy a movie without violence or graphic sex. Plus, there are some great views of San Francisco. Anyone familiar with the real estate market in that city will realize that no young doctor could ever afford an apartment like Elizabeth's, but that's just something else that you accept in a movie like this. Gary gave it a B-, but I say B. **GRADE B/B-**

JUST LOOKING: This is a first-time directing effort for Jason Alexander (George on TV's *Seinfeld*) and he has a real feel for the time period and for sexually obsessed young boys. *Just Looking* is set in 1955 and offers a loving glimpse of a simpler time. Some critics might dismiss it as a typical coming-of-age plot, but we thought the albeit predictable elements were handled with charm and sensitivity. The people and their reactions were genuine and interesting. Lenny (Ryan Merriman) is a likeable and sexually naïve fourteen year old whose greatest goal in life is to see a couple "doing it." He tries to spy on his mother and stepfather with no success. When he is sent to live with his Aunt and Uncle in Queens for the summer, he is determined to achieve his goal. In the process, Lenny develops a crush on Hedy, an "older" woman who lives in the neighborhood. He is first attracted to her when he learns that she once modeled brassieres, but they develop a friendship that is quite touching. Ultimately, Lenny sees more than he bargained for, and he learns quite a bit about sex, love and forgiveness. Merriman is most appealing as Lenny and Gretchen Moll is lovely and vulnerable as Hedy. We also liked Peter Onorati as Lenny's Uncle Phil. Richard V. Licata is notable in the unenviable role of Lenny's hated stepfather. Also appearing are Patti LuPone as Lenny's mother and Amy Braverman as Alice, a young girl Lenny befriends. **GRADE: B**

JUST MERCY: (2019) Bryan Stevenson was newly out of Harvard Law School when he headed for Alabama to defend those wrongly condemned to Death Row. He had the support of local advocate Eva Ansley, played by the always excellent Brie Larson. Together they founded the Equal Justice Initiative. The movie is centered on the case of Walter McMillan, a black man wrongly convicted of killing a young white girl. Stevenson had to battle systemic and overt racism in order to finally free McMillan. An appearance on *60 Minutes* probably helped change minds. The screenplay is adapted from Stevenson's memoir of the same name, ***Just Mercy***. Stevenson is played convincingly by Michael B. Jordan, one of our favorite actors. Jamie Foxx is McMillan in an extraordinary performance. Tim Blake Nelson plays a pivotal role in the case and does it with his usual flair. It is a formula that has succeeded before and does so again here. One of the *Rotten Tomatoes* critics said "that the markers of the story are so familiar (venal law enforcement, leaned-on witnesses, the courtroom), it takes nerve to tell it this simply." Another said that when you "realise how closely the film-makers have stuck to the facts - you won't care. That the truth will out is entertainment enough." Gary and I agree with both of them. **GRADE A**