

Movie Titles that begin with "L"

L.I.E. * La La Land * La Vie En Rose * Labor Day * Ladder 49 * Lady Bird * The Lady Bird Diaries * Lady Chatterley's Lover * Lady J * Ladykillers * Ladies in Lavender * Land * Lantana * Larry Crowne * Larry Kramer in Love and Anger * Lars And The Real Girl * The Last * The Last Black Man In San Francisco-2019&2023 * The Last Castle * Last Chance Harvey * The Last Duel * Last Flag Flying * Last Holiday * The Last King of Scotland * The Last Kiss * The Last Lions * Last Night * The Last Of The Blonde Bombshells * Last Orders * Last Rites of Joe May * The Last Samurai * The Last Station * Last Vegas * The Last Vermeer * The Last Word * Late Night * The Laundromat * Lawless * Layer Cake * LBJ * Le Weekend * The League * Lean On Pete * Learning to Drive * Leatherheads * Leave No Trace 2018&2023 * Leaving Las Vegas * Lee Daniels' The Butler * Legally Blonde * The Legend of Bagger Vance * The Legend of Zorro * The Lego Movie * Leila * The Leisure Seeker * Les Misérables * Let the Sunshine In * Letters From Iwo Jima * Letters to Juliet * Leviathan * Liberty Heights * The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou * The Life Ahead * Life As A House * * Life As We Know It * Life Itself * The Life of Pi * Life, Or Something Like It * The Light Between Oceans * Like Crazy * Lilo and Stitch * Limitless * Lincoln * The Lincoln Lawyer * The Lincoln Lawyer 2022 * Linda Ronstadt: The Sound of My Voice * Lion * Lions For Lambs * Listen To Me Marlon * Little Children * Little Fockers * A Little Help * Little Men * Little Miss Sunshine 2006/2023 * Little Richard: I Am Everything * Little Women * Little Woods * Live Action Shorts-2017 * Live Free Or Die Hard * The Lives of Others * Living * The Lobster * Local Color * Locke * Logan Lucky * The Lone Ranger * Lone Star * Lone Survivor * Lonely Hearts * Long Shot * The Longest Yard * Look at Me * The Lookout * Looper * The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring * The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King * The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers * Lord of War * The Lost City * The Lost City of Z * The Lost Daughter * Lost Girls * The Lost King * Lost In La Mancha * Lost In Translation * Louis Armstrong's Black and Blues * Love Actually, 2003/2024 * Love Crime * Love & Friendship * Love & Mercy * Love and Other Drugs * Love Is All You Need * Love, Marilyn * The Love Punch * Love, Simon * A Love Song * A Love Song For Bobby Long * Lovelace * Lovely and Amazing * The Lovely Bones * Loving * The Lovers * Luce 2019 & 2020 * Lucky Number Slevin * Lucky You * Lucy, the Human Chimp * The Lunchbox * Lymlife

L.I.E.: (2001 release seen on Video) In the opening scene, we see Howie Blitzer (Paul Franklin Dano) balanced on a railing above the Long Island Expressway. Later we hear him say, "*On the Long Island Expressway there are lanes going east, lanes going west, and lanes going straight to hell*". The title of this film is an abbreviation for the Expressway. Howie tells us that many people have died on that road--Harry Chapin, the movie director Alan Pakula, and Sylvia Blitzer, Howie's mother. He is a lonely boy, missing his mother and angry with his father who has too quickly brought a girlfriend into the house. Howie comes in contact with Big John Harrigan, subtlety played by Brian Cox. Big John likes young boys, and he befriends Howie. There is much sexual yearning here, but Big John also acts like a real friend. If there can be such a thing as a sympathetic pederast, Big John is it. Cox is outstanding! In Roger Ebert's review of the film he said, "*The most remarkable thing about "L.I.E.," a drama about a 15-year-old boy and a middle-aged ex-Marine, is that it sees both of its characters without turning them into caricatures.*" The film ends with Howie once more looking down at the Long Island Expressway. His voice over says, "*It's taken a lot of people, but it's not going to get me.*" **L.I.E.** was directed by Michael Cuesta and written by Stephen M. Ryder, Michael Cuesta and Gerald Cuesta. We give it a **Thumbs Up**.

LA LA LAND: (2016) How appropriate that the opening number takes place on a gridlocked Los Angeles freeway. Been there, done that. But enough of traffic nightmares and on to the movie. Performers more appealing than Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling would be hard to find. They are magical in this movie celebrating Hollywood, romance, and old movie musicals wrapped up with just enough fantasy to engage a modern audience. Rex Reed, a critic who was not completely in love with the movie, said that **La La Land** was "a well-intended tribute to the fabulous MGM musicals..., made by people who have never seen one." I doubt that Damien Chazelle, the director/writer, has never seen those classic movie musicals, because the dance in Griffith Park harks back to Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. While Stone & Gosling are not the dancers that Fred and Ginger were, they are equally charming. I applaud Chazelle's use of fantasy. For example, the scene and dancing in the Griffith Observatory is lovely and completely believable in the context of the couple's love story. The ending, more modern in its resolution, relies on a fantasy that makes everything come together in a completely satisfying way. We were both caught up in the love story, although Gary wasn't quite as enthralled by the ending as I was. **GRADE B+/B**

LA VIE EN ROSE: This wonderful film draws you in slowly to the sorrows and joys in the life of Edith Piaf. Sadly, there were many sorrows and few joys. The film is beautifully constructed. It begins with her on-stage collapse in 1959 and moves back and forth from her terrible childhood to her death in 1963 at the age of 47. It may take you a few minutes to adjust to the movie's style*, but believe me, you will be drawn into the story. By the end, both Gary and I were devastated by the inevitable death scene. Piaf's tragedies and heartaches and her life-long search for love are reflected in many of her songs, and French actress Marion Cotillard is extraordinary. She brings the famous chanteuse to vivid life. Cotillard is as vibrant and moving on screen as Piaf was on stage. Although we knew in advance that the actress lip-synchs Piaf's songs, we never would have guessed it from watching her performance. She even manages to look remarkably like Piaf in spite of the fact that she is considerably taller. (Edith Piaf was only 4'8" tall.) Hers is one of the best performances of the year, if not the decade. Cotillard truly becomes "The Sparrow." Although we liked Piaf, neither Gary nor I were ardent fans when we entered the theatre. We are now. **GRADE A**

LABOR DAY: Henry's divorced mother (Kate Winslet) is so depressed that she rarely leaves the house. The 13-year-old tries to be the man of the house and takes care of her as best he can. One day, on their weekly trip to buy groceries, an escaped prisoner confronts them in the store and forces his way into the car and into their house. Thus begins a story about the longing for love and the desire for a father. Frank (Josh Brolin), the escapee, is too good to be true. He supplies Adele's need for love, teaches Henry (Gattlin Griffith) how to play baseball, cleans the gutters, fixes the furnace and the car, and even bakes a peach pie. Every woman should have an escaped prisoner for the weekend. The three leads are very good, and I must mention how much Tom Lipinski resembles a young Josh Brolin. It is through his scenes that we learn something of Frank's background and how he came to be convicted of murder. This is one of those movies that critics deplore and audiences like. We did like parts of it, but parts were too sappy for me. The pie-making scene, for example, will never become an iconic scene like the pottery wheel bit from **Ghost**. And Frank was, as I said, too good to be true. The

relatively happy ending will please some viewers, but I had problems with it. And why, oh why did Director Jason Reitman cast Toby Macguire as the older Henry. Not at all believable. I suspect that the novel, which is told from the young teenager's point of view, reads better than the movie plays. We are somewhere between a C+ a B- on this one. **GRADE C+/B-**

LADDER 49: What makes a firefighter rush into a burning building when everyone else is running out? *Ladder 49* answers that question by showing us the life of one brave firefighter. It may be the most exciting movie ever made about the courageous people who risk their lives to put out fires. Joaquin Phoenix is Jack Morrison, a man who became a firefighter because he wanted to help people. When the movie begins, Morrison and his company are fighting a raging inferno in a 20 story building. He saves one man trapped on the 12th floor, but then the floor under him gives way and he plunges down several stories. As we watch the Ladder 49 crew try to save Morrison, we see flashbacks of his life. We see him from his first day as a rookie and fighting his first fire and we understand his growing attachment to the men who fight fires alongside him. He and his Chief, played by John Travolta, form a special bond. We also see him meeting a girl (Jacinda Barrett), marrying her and baptizing their first child. We see his pain when a member of the company dies in a fire. We also see the adrenaline high that comes from having saved someone's life. The awesome power of fire is vividly portrayed. I don't know how they can film the fire scenes so realistically. Yes, there are melodramatic moments, but that's the nature of the job. Although some critics disagree, we thought the writer (Lewis Colick) and director (Jay Russell) never let the movie get maudlin. **GRADE B+**

LADY BIRD: (2017) Written and directed by the talented Greta Gerwig, this delightful and witty coming-of-age film focuses on a year-in-the-life of an ordinary high school senior. Barbara and I thought it was a realistic view of the turmoil of adolescence. Lady Bird invented her own nickname which she considers her given name because she says "*I gave it to myself*". It is a well written script and a perfect cast. The two female leads are Saoirse Ronan (Lady Bird) and Laurie Metcalf (her mom). The story is set in Sacramento, California in 2002. In a throw-away line that could be easily missed, Lady Bird mumbles, "The only thing exciting about 2002 is that it's a palindrome." As is often the case in "coming-of-age films", *Lady Bird* shines a light on the relationships that shape us. Special attention is paid to the turbulent bond between a mother and her teenage daughter. There's love there but it's buried under layers of friction and tension. But don't think it is an unhappy film. It is witty and heartwarming. Barb grades the film a little higher than I do, perhaps because she could more easily identify with the leads. **GRADE B+/A-**

THE LADY BIRD DIARIES: 2023: (Available for streaming on HULU) This powerful documentary from award-winning filmmaker Dawn Porter is about one of the most influential and least understood First Ladies in history. It features 123 hours of personal and revealing audio diaries made on her borrowed reel-to-reel tape recorder. She began her diaries after JFK's assassination and continued throughout her husband's administration. It focuses on her White House years and captures the surprising influence and power that this gentle, smiling woman wielded over her husband. LBJ died in 1973 at age 64. Lady Bird died in 2007 at age 94. The nickname Lady Bird started when she was a child. A family nurse said that little Claudia Taylor was as pretty "as a ladybird." The nickname stuck. Think of this film as an entertaining history lesson. For those of you who are old enough, you will be reliving a tumultuous period through which you lived. For those too young to remember the 60's, sit back and enjoy a front-row vantage point. Lady Bird Johnson proves an engrossing narrator to her own story and that of a troubled nation. Filmmaker Dawn Porter brilliantly pairs the audio with archival film footage: The killing of JFK, the Vietnam war, the Civil Rights Act, the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. igniting riots in several cities, followed one day later with the assassination of Bobby Kennedy, just to name a few of the troubles of the '60's. And Porter never puts her thumb on the scales in her approach to history. For example, she uses animated illustrations to reenact a remarkable moment when Eartha Kitt confronted Lady Bird over the Vietnam War which feels fair to all parties. Barbara liked the film, but felt it could benefit from some editing and graded it a little lower than I did. **GRADES: A/B**

LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER: 2022 (Available for streaming on Netflix) This film is based on a controversial 1928 novel with the same title written by D. H. Lawrence. The book is now considered a masterpiece, but it was banned as pornography for nearly thirty years in the United States, as well as the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, India, and Japan. Playing Lady Chatterley is Emma Corrin, best known for her role as Princess Diana in *The Crown*. The book became notorious for its story of the physical and emotional relationship between a working-class man and an upper-class woman and for its explicit descriptions of sex and its use of then-unprintable four-letter words. Perhaps most outrageous at the time, though, was the author's portrayal of female sexual pleasure. As one critic observed, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* manages to be both steamy and British stuffy at the same time. Immediately following the wedding that made her Lady Chatterley, her husband went off to fight in the First World War. When he returned, he was paralyzed from the waist down. He was unable to walk or have children. Lady Chatterley's life of wealth and privilege gradually becomes an incarceration forcing her into a life Edwardian society expects of her. One of the things expected of her was providing her husband an heir to the family's fortune. Her husband makes it clear that he wants her to sleep with another man in order to produce that heir. Being a wealthy aristocrat, he also clarifies that his wife should avoid "the wrong sort of fellow" and only consider upper class men as candidates for the siring. Lady Chatterley and her sterile marriage ultimately leads her to a torrid affair with their gamekeeper, and it's here she finds tenderness, care, passion, and yes, love — the elements that have been missing in her own marriage. But the gamekeeper is exactly the "wrong sort of fellow" her husband pompously declared earlier as unsuitable. The movie and book are as much about class expectations as about sexual awakening and love. The film may not have the power to shock that it once did, but Barbara and I liked it especially for the historical significance. Perhaps our expectations were a little too high. **GRADE B+/B**

LADY J: (2018/2020 streamed from Netflix) Barbara and I streamed this subtitled French drama about infidelity, passion, and revenge. Costumes are gorgeous and pacing is leisurely as the story zigzags its way to a surprising ending. The promotional material suggested that anyone who loved the Hollywood film *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988) should rush to cue up Lady J. Both films are set in the same time period with similarly decadent story lines and snappy repartee. *Lady J* stars a young widow who, against her better judgment, falls head-over-heels in love with a libertine rake. It would be criminal to reveal much more. Suffice it to say that the story cleverly warns libertines who take advantage of women that they may be dealt a well-deserved comeuppance. It also leaves us with an equally valid lesson that revenge does not always lead to the expected outcome. The Tomatometer, only based on twelve critical reviews, yielded 83%. We liked the film, but not as well as *Dangerous Liaisons*. **GRADE B** (Barbara thought the film lost something on a small screen.)

LADYKILLERS: I don't think this is one of the Coen brothers' better films. A remake of a 1955 movie starring Alec Guinness, it is a crime caper movie, with a group of robbers pretending to be musicians. Roger Ebert referred to the criminals as "comic strip oddities," and I totally agree. It was impossible to see any one of them as a real person. The only real person in this film is Marva Munson, beautifully played by Irma P. Hall. Tom Hanks is Professor Goldthwait Higginson Dorr the leader of the gang. I didn't care much for the character he created. A bit overdone, I think. The gang plans to tunnel into the counting room of a riverboat casino, telling the Professor's landlady, Mrs. Munson, that they want to use her root cellar to practice their Renaissance music. It is mildly amusing at times, although when the principle joke in the film has to do with irritable bowel syndrome, I'd say the Coens were reaching too far. Perhaps the brothers are better when they do original material. The film has been updated with a lot of totally unnecessary 4-letter-words, mostly from the mouth of Marlon Wayans. Gary thinks I'm being too hard on the movie. He enjoyed it more than I did and gives *Ladykillers* a B-. But I say C. **GRADE B-/C**

LADIES IN LAVENDER: (2004 release seen on Cable) We saw this sweet movie recently. Judi Dench and Maggie Smith are sisters living in a seaside Cornish village in 1936. One morning, after a terrible storm, they find a young man unconscious on their beach. They care for him and learn he is Polish and a talented violinist. Although it seemed a bit longer than necessary, we did enjoy it. **THUMBS UP**

LAND 2021 (A \$5.99 rental on Prime) This movie is Robin Wright's directorial debut and Gary and I agree with Leonard Maltin who said "*Land* is an impressive debut film from Robin Wright, and a damn good movie." Wright (*The Princess Bride*, *Forest Gump* and *TV's House of Cards*) also stars as Edee, whose tragic, (although unexplained) loss leaves her unable to be with anyone, including her own sister. She impulsively retreats to a cabin the magnificent, but unforgiving, wilds of the Rockies, without car and cell phone. Edee wasn't prepared for the harshness of winter high up in the Rockies and almost dies of starvation. She is saved by a hunter, Miguel (Demián Bichir), who notices that there is no smoke coming out the cabin's chimney and investigates. Miguel teaches Edee to hunt and lay traps, and she finally learns to conquer the elements. She is at peace with her loneliness and embraces it, but she comes to depend on Miguel's very occasional visits. When he tells Edee that he won't be visiting for a long time, she eventually goes into town to discover the reason for his long absence. The ending is poignant and affecting, and we liked the movie and the magnificent scenery. **GRADE B**

LANTANA: Lantana is a flowering plant native to Australia. The common variety has a variegated flower and is a pretty landscaping addition, but, if not carefully cultivated, it can grow into an almost impenetrable thicket. So it is with relationships: if not carefully cultivated, they can become an emotionally tangled mess. That's the symbolism in this excellent Australian import. We see the lives of several people become intertwined through coincidence, yet everything that happens seems perfectly possible. Never did we feel manipulated and we always felt totally engaged in the story. The script is beautifully written with dialogue that is never predictable. It reminded us a bit of last year's *Magnolia* but this film has a more linear plot line and some of the stories are resolved. And, there are no frogs falling from the sky. The movie begins with a body, but solving the crime is only the vehicle that demonstrates how these lives intersect. The cast is uniformly excellent: Anthony LaPaglia is Leon, a cop who loves his wife but has spent the night with Jane (Rachael Blake). Leon's unhappy wife, Sonja (Kerry Armstrong), has been seeing a therapist, Valarie (Barbara Hershey), and Geoffrey Rush plays Valerie's husband, John. All their stories are engrossing. We were particularly impressed with LaPaglia. Recently he has been doing a comedy role on TV's "Frazier." It's rare to see an actor who can be so effective in both comedy and drama. The film was written by Andrew Bovell based on his play, *Speaking In Tongues*. It was directed by Ray Lawrence. We hope you will all get the chance to see this outstanding film. **GRADE: A**

LARRY CROWNE: I think the critics have been too hard on this romantic comedy. We quite enjoyed it. How can spending an hour or two with Tom Hanks and Julia Roberts possibly be bad? When Larry (Hanks) loses his job because he has no college courses on his resume, he heads to the local Community College to remedy the situation. The first student he meets is the adorable and outgoing Talia (Gugu Mbatha-Raw) who takes Larry under her wing and helps him reinvent himself. The first teacher he meets is Mercedes Tainot (Roberts) who teaches Public Speaking, a course that Larry is hoping will change his life. Not surprisingly, it does, because that's what romantic comedies are all about. Of course Hanks and Roberts are good, but what makes the movie more entertaining are the supporting actors. Hanks real-life wife, Rita Wilson, plays a good-looking but insincere loan officer and their son, Chet, has a small part as a pizza delivery boy. Cedric the Entertainer plays Larry's next door neighbor who sells him a motor scooter to replace his gas-guzzling minivan. Bryan Cranston (TV's *Breaking Bad*) is Mercedes' loser of a husband and Pam Grier plays her colleague and office-mate. A young actor named Rami Malek is worthy of mention as a classmate of Larry's. He's believable and amusing as a reluctant student, and George Takei of *Star Trek* fame plays a goofy Economics professor. You will probably recognize others actors in small roles. Hanks directed the film, and is listed as the co-writer along with Nia Vardalos. Our local critic called the movie "the best-cast bland romantic comedy you've ever seen." True, it is a bit on the bland side, but we still liked it. I do have one criticism. As a former Speech teacher, I didn't think Larry deserved the grade he got in Roberts' speech class. His final speech was good, but he never once looked at the audience on his right, and he gave the entire speech sitting on a stool. That would be a no-no in any Speech class! At least it would have been in mine. **GRADE B**

LARRY KRAMER IN LOVE AND ANGER: (2015) The timing couldn't be better for HBO's showing of this documentary. It is a slice of history that must never be forgotten. Author, activist and playwright Larry Kramer gave voice to the outrage and grief that inspired a generation of gay men and lesbians to fight for their lives. From the onset of the AIDS epidemic, Kramer emerged as a fiery activist who denounced both the willful inaction of the government and the refusal of the gay community to curb potentially risky behaviors. His confrontational style proved to be an advantage, as it earned the attention of the New York media that no other individual could get. He wrote the powerful and influential play *The Normal Heart*, which helped usher in a new era of strength and advancement in the struggle for LGBT rights. Kramer was a complicated man who was known simultaneously as egotistic and selfless, angry and inspiring, rude and caring. Barbara and I enjoyed every minute of this five-year-old 82 minute salute to the irrefutable father of the AIDS movement. Kramer recently died on May 27, 2020. **GRADE A**

LARS AND THE REAL GIRL: (2007 release seen on DVD) This is, without doubt, one of the weirdest and at the same time most charming films we've ever seen! Ryan Gosling (*The Notebook*) is Lars Lindstrom, a pathologically shy and introverted young man. He

rarely communicates with his brother and sister-in-law, so you can imagine their surprise when he brings his new girlfriend, Bianca, to dinner one night. Bianca is a life-sized doll, that Lars treats like a real girl. Everyone who loves Lars, plays along with his delusion and they, too, treat Bianca like a real girl. Gosling is absolutely wonderful. I can't think of any other actor who could bring such pathos and credibility to this unusual character. Patricia Clarkson is outstanding as the sympathetic family doctor. **ENTHUSIASTIC THUMBS UP**

THE LAST: (2019) Rebecca Schull, remembered as the kooky airline employee in TV's long-running sitcom, *Wings*, has a 45-minute monologue in *The Last*. When we read that, we knew we had to see the movie. And we were captivated by Schull's outstanding ability in that monologue. In the movie's opening scenes, we are introduced to a Jewish family talking about their faith, and about Josh's fiancé who is converting from Catholicism to Judaism. Claire, the matriarch, is a benign presence at the family gathering with scarcely a line of dialogue. She makes up for that when she joins Josh, her beloved great-grandson and his now wife, Olivia, at the beach. Claire confesses secrets that she has kept for 70 years: that she is not Jewish but was in fact a Nazi nurse who assisted at Auschwitz, and later emigrated to the U.S., posing as a Jewish refugee of the war. Why confess now? Because, Claire reveals, she has been diagnosed with cancer and intends to take her own life, rather than wait for the disease to claim it. Talk about bombshells! Josh and Olivia are understandably stunned. Up to that point, we were engrossed in the story-telling, but as the movie went on and showed the family's reactions, we had more and more unanswered questions. Several scenes were inexplicable to us. I subsequently learned that Jeff Lipsky, who wrote and directed *The Last*, is famous for his, as the *Variety* critic put it, "shocking disregard for either dramatic tension or cinematic composition." He goes on to say that Lipsky "makes virtually no concessions to his audience." We haven't seen any other movies that Lipsky has made, and we definitely will avoid his future movies. Needless to say, we can't recommend this one. Only the skill of Rebecca Schull is responsible for our grade. **GRADE C**

THE LAST BLACK MAN IN SAN FRANCISCO: (2019) This is another art-house movie that got high praise from critics but left us wondering why. The main plot seemed to be what Dorothy discovered at the end of *The Wizard of Oz: there's no place like home* (and family). In this case, the home is a gorgeous \$4 million Victorian mansion in San Francisco. Jimmie Fails (played by actor Jimmie Fails) apparently grew up the house when his family was still intact. He is fond of telling people that his grandfather built the house in 1946, but that turns out not to be true. He cares for the house even though a white couple is living there now. Jimmie stays with a friend, sleeping on the floor next to his friend, Jonathon, in the small cluttered bedroom. When the house becomes empty, Jimmie and Jonathan move in a hope to establish squatters' rights. Not surprisingly, it doesn't work out that way. Jimmie works as a caregiver in a nursing home and his friend Jonathan works in a fish house. Jonathan is also an aspiring playwright, and he produces his play in the attic of the mansion. The play is titled "The Last Black Man in San Francisco," and it makes about as much sense as the entire movie does. However, it brings things to some sort of climax. At the end of the movie, Jimmie has left San Francisco. One critic wrote that the movie "a poetic and picturesque ode to the title city, to friendship and to the universal urge to find a place to call home." But Gary and I agree that the tone is mostly slow and mournful, and in spite of good acting, we were underwhelmed. **GRADE C**

THE LAST BLACK MAN IN SAN FRANCISCO: 2019 (Available for streaming on Netflix) This film is a 2019 drama directed and produced by Joe Talbot in his directorial debut and based on a friend's real-life experiences. The focus is on an area of San Francisco undergoing rapid "gentrification." Gentrification is the process whereby the character of a poor urban area is changed by wealthier people moving in, improving housing, and attracting new businesses, typically displacing current inhabitants in the process. *The Last Black Man In San Francisco* isn't really an angry film. It's less of a rallying cry against gentrification than a pained acceptance by those who suffer its effects. Jimmie and his best friend Mont try to reclaim a Victorian home built in the heart of San Francisco by Jimmie's grandfather. Jimmie searches for belonging in a rapidly changing city that seems to have left him behind. I would describe this as a low budget artsy Independent film. Critics loved it as evidenced by a score of 92% from 213 reviews on the Tomatometer. Audiences weren't far behind with a score of 84%. This is admittedly a strange film and extremely difficult to grade. Barbara and I liked it, but we are not sure all our readers will. **GRADE B+**

THE LAST CASTLE: We both thought this movie was a real stinker! The only reason we are giving it a D instead of an F is because we hate to admit that we sat through two hours of an F movie. And we did stay through the whole thing in spite of a ridiculous predictable script and completely implausible effects. We stayed because there are three good actors and we did enjoy watching them. Robert Redford is Gen. Irwin, a three-star-general sent to a military prison for, as nearly as we could tell, failing to follow orders. James Gandolfini (*The Sopranos*) is Col. Winter, a soldier whose only battlefield has been the prison. Mark Ruffalo, so outstanding in last year's *You Can Count On Me*, is Yates, the prison bookie whom everyone takes for a snitch. All three make the very best out of this sub-standard material. The big question is, why would Redford do this film? How can he say a line like, "They can't take away our humanity," without gagging? Gandolfini gives a layered, creative performance, but he is still just a stereotypical villainous prison warden. I'm sure Ruffalo couldn't resist a movie with these stars, but I hope he exhibits better script judgement in the future. The film was directed by Rod Lurie, a former movie critic, who last year gave us *The Contender*, an admirable film. The film's running time is 120 minutes. **GRADE: D**

LAST CHANCE HARVEY: (2008 release) If it weren't for the two stars, this would be a mediocre movie. Dustin Hoffman and Emma Thompson make it a pleasantly mediocre movie. The story is predictable with several obligatory emotional scenes, but when the two actors are walking around London and talking to each other, you get a bit of movie magic. And it is nice to see a film with a linear story that doesn't rely on special effects. Harvey has flown to London for his daughter's wedding, but things are not going well. His job back in the States as a jingle writer is in jeopardy and his daughter has decided to ask her stepfather to give her away. Kate (Thompson) is unhappily single. Her only enduring relationship is with her mum who calls her several times a day. When Kate and Harvey meet in the London airport, they each claim to be having the worst weekend ever. Harvey wins. The rest of the film revolves around two lonely people getting to know each other. The critics have generally been lukewarm to the film, but I have to say we did enjoy the London scenery. Plus, it's always a pleasure to watch two veteran actors doing their thing. **GRADE B-**

THE LAST DUEL: 2021 (Seen in a theater) This is an exciting, well-acted period drama that leaves you with a lot to think about. Based on actual events, the story is set in the 1300's when France's last sanctioned duel between Jean de Carrouges (Matt Damon) and Jacques Le Gris (Adam Driver), face off in a grueling duel to the death. Carrouges' wife Marguerite (Jodie Comer) is viciously raped by

Le Gris, a charge he denies. At that time in history it was widely believed that in a trial by combat, God would determine who is telling the truth. The movie is two and a half hours long. In the first twenty minutes Barbara and I were getting tired of the Medieval battles and feared we were in for a long afternoon. Thankfully the story got more interesting as it went along and by the end we were surprised how quickly the time seemed to pass. The story is told from three viewpoints: husband's, rapist's, and wife's. It should come as no surprise that the film highlights problems women faced in the late 1300s. For example: legally, rape was not a crime against a woman, but a property damage claim against the husband who owned the wife. And it was widely believed that rape could not result in pregnancy. The penalty for a woman bearing false witness in a rape charge was to be burned alive. Marguerite is living in a world controlled by men, one where men wield all the power, including the control over the bodies and lives of women. If that sounds familiar, I'm sure that was the intention of Director/Producer Ridley Scott. Barb and I ended up liking the movie. **GRADE B+**

LAST FLAG FLYING: (2017) Is it better to believe your loved one died a hero fighting for his country, or to know the truth. Three Viet Nam buddies wrestle with this question as they meet after many years for one last mission. The mission: to bury Doc's son, a Marine who was killed in Iraq. Doc, played in low-key fashion by Steve Carell, enlists the aid of Sal (Bryan Cranston) and the Reverend Richard Mueller (Laurence Fishburne) to accompany him on this sad mission. Sal owns a bar and hasn't changed much from his Marine days while Mueller has found God and is the opposite of what he was as a Marine. Cranston is marvelous as the almost non-stop talker, Sal, peppering his speech with four-letter words. Director and Screenwriter Richard Linklater (*Boyhood* and the *Before Sunrise* trilogy) is a master at dialogue, and the three actors imbue their characters with believability and naturalness. J. Quinton Johnson is effective as a young Marine who was a friend of Doc's son and a member of his honor guard. It was a touching exploration of the horrors of war and the camaraderie of men in uniform. But it does have some humor, or, as one critic put it, *a heavyweight drama that's light on its feet*. I thought the movie was a bit too long, but Gary, perhaps because he identified more with the three men and their reminiscing, thought it the perfect length. He liked it better than I did and gives it a higher grade. **GRADE A-B**

LAST HOLIDAY: This is a pleasant enough comedy, although not as good as Ebert and Roeper made it sound on their review show. It is actually a remake of a 1950 film starring Alec Guinness. Queen Latifah is Georgia Byrd. She works in the housewares department of a large store and dreams of being a gourmet cook. She also dreams about connecting with Sean (LL Cool J) a co-worker. However, she is too shy and afraid to do either. But, when she learns that she has only three weeks to live, she decides to live out some of her dreams, and finds a zest for life that she never knew she had. Gerard Depardieu is quite good as the French chef at a high-class hotel in the Czech Republic. Others appearing are Timothy Hutton, Michael Nouri, Giancarlo Esposito, Alicia Witt, and Jane Adams. They all do fine in their roles, but it is Queen Latifah who makes this predictable and hokey film worth seeing at all. We would probably have given the film a C grade were it not for her. Because she is so natural and appealing, we decided on a B-. **GRADE B-**

THE LAST KING OF SCOTLAND: "Brilliant" seems too weak a word with which to praise Forest Whitaker's portrayal of Idi Amin, but I can't think of a stronger one, so "brilliant" will have to do. Word is that he will surely get a nomination for best supporting actor. I can't imagine him not winning. Whitaker is such a consummate actor that no matter what part he plays you immediately accept him as that character. Amin's reign over the country of Uganda from 1971 when he took power until 1976 when Palestinian hijackers landed an Israeli plane at the Entebbe airport is told from the viewpoint of a young Scottish doctor. (Perhaps that is the reason Whitaker is considered a supporting actor.) James McAvoy is Nicholas Garrigan, a recent medical school graduate who travels to Uganda in search of an adventure. A chance encounter with General Amin leads to Garrigan becoming Amin's personal physician. Through Garrigan's eyes we see the famous dictator's charm and, ultimately, his savagery. Garrigan and the supporting cast are fine, but it is Whitaker who dominates every scene in which he appears. The gripping story and Whitaker's powerful performance raises our grade to an A-. **GRADE A-**

THE LAST KISS: It's difficult to make the decision to get married and start a family, especially if you're a commitment-phobic 29-year-old male. Michael (Zach Braff) is just such a young man in this pleasant romantic comedy that explores the nature of relationships. He and his girl friend, Jenna, are expecting a baby, and when she suggests buying a house, he panics. And he strays. His friends also have relationship problems: an unhappy breakup, a troubled marriage, and the inability to commit to any lasting relationship. One friend is completely enamored of a hot girlfriend until she wants him to meet her parents. The problems these young people are having is contrasted with the rather troubled 30-year-marriage of Jenna's parents, beautifully played by Blyth Danner and Tom Wilkinson. In fact, all the acting is above average. This film could have been stereotypical and banal, but the dialogue is smart enough to make it very real. Jacinda Barrett is appealing as Jenna, and Rachel Bilson (TV's *The OC*) is adorable as the college girl who turns Michael's head. Gary was not enthusiastic about going to this one, but he thought it was significantly better than he expected. He agrees with me on a grade of B. **GRADE B**

THE LAST LIONS: This film is a cry from the hearts of husband and wife team Dereck and Beverly Joubert who have been Explorers-in-Residence at National Geographic for more than four years. There is no doubt that they are passionate about saving wild lions whose numbers have dropped from 450,000 to barely 20,000 in that last 50 years. Complete elimination of the lions would wreak havoc on all species below them, causing a complete ecosystem collapse, and the Jouberts believe we have both a moral and an economic imperative to save these magnificent animals. The pictures of a lone lioness trying to protect and feed her two remaining cubs are extraordinary. Her confrontations with a herd of water buffalo are both frightening and thrilling. It's unfortunate that Joubert wrote such melodramatic narration to accompany the impressive visuals. It's also unfortunate that Jeremy Irons reads that narration in such a florid manner. I did not like the fact that the writer was continually trying to ascribe human emotions and feelings to the wild animals. I think that diminishes rather than enhances the film, and it made us feel manipulated. It's not something I expected from The National Geographic. Disney, perhaps, but the Disney nature films avoid that pitfall, letting the visuals speak for themselves. At only 88 minutes, the film still seemed too long. We are sympathetic to the Joubert's cause but we aren't sure the film helped it much. Nevertheless, it did bring the plight of wild lions to our attention and that's a good thing. **GRADE C+**

LAST NIGHT: (2010) "The story follows a married couple, apart for a night while the husband takes a business trip with a female colleague to whom he's attracted. While he's trying to resist temptation, his wife encounters her past love." That's the synopsis on the Internet Movie Database and that just about says it all. Keira Knightley and Sam Worthington are the married couple, and Eva Mendes

and a French actor, Guillaume Canet, play the other two people. Knightly is always interesting and we liked Canet and Mendes, but Worthington just didn't do it for us. Gary thought it might have been better with a different actor playing the husband. And if you like a story with an ending that ties things up, you'll be disappointed in this one. We did stay with **Last Night** for the entire 93 minutes, but it seemed much longer than that. In spite of Knightley, we can't grade this one very highly. **GRADE C**

THE LAST OF THE BLONDE BOMBSHELLS: (2000 release seen on video) Judi Dench stars here as Elizabeth, a recently widowed woman who spent her WWII years playing saxophone in a band called "The Blonde Bombshells." When she begins to play her horn again, she starts on a journey of memory and reunion. She encounters Patrick (Ian Holm), who played for a time with Bombshells in drag to avoid his National Service obligations. Elizabeth's granddaughter encourages her to reunite the band, and promises to book the Bombshells for her school dance. Elizabeth and Patrick trace most of the old band members, and some of them actually agree to play a reunion gig. The trumpet player (Olympia Dukakis) is a wealthy drunk, the trombone player has joined the Salvation Army, the alto Sax player is in jail, and so it goes. Leslie Caron appears briefly as the bass player, and Cleo Laine belts out the tunes. It is great fun. The 2000 movie was produced by HBO, and Dench received a Golden Globe nomination for her role. The reviewer on the Digitally Obsessed website said, "There are worse ways to spend 84 minutes than by enjoying some fine World War II-vintage music and memories with *The Last of the Blonde Bombshells*." We enthusiastically agree. **THUMBS UP**

LAST ORDERS: If you enjoy superior acting in a film devoted to character development, then be sure to see this British import. Six of Britain's finest strut their stuff in this film based on the Booker Prize-winning novel by Graham Swift. Here's the setup: Just before Jack dies, he writes out his last orders: He asks that his ashes be scattered from the pier in Margate. Jack's wife, Amy, declines to do it, but his three friends, Vic, Lenny, and Ray, along with Jack's son, Vince, makes the trip. Along the way we learn much about Jack and Amy and how their friends were a part of their lives. I don't want to tell you anything about the story because that would deprive you of getting to know these people gradually. Jack is played by Michael Caine and Helen Mirren is Amy. Ray Winston (*Sexy Beast*) is Vince, and Tom Courtenay, David Hennings, and Bob Hoskins play the three friends. The only problem with this movie is all the characters speak with middle-class British accents. It is difficult, at times, to understand just what they are saying. In his review, Roger Ebert spoke to that issue. He wrote, "*Some reviews have complained about the Cockney accents. All of these actors can speak the Queen's English if they choose to. The Cockney is their gift to us in creating the world of their characters. You may miss a word or two, but you hear the music.*" We think this one is special. **GRADE: B+**

THE LAST RIGHTS OF JOE MAY: (2011) Dennis Farina, a veteran character actor, plays the lead and title role in this better than average independent film. Before becoming an actor, Farina spent 18 years as a Chicago police officer. One of his most memorable film roles was when he played a rival criminal of Chili Palmer's in **Get Shorty**. There aren't many surprises in this low budget film, but Farina is terrific playing a down-and-out small-time criminal trying desperately to hold together what is left of his life. Watching Farina breathe life into one of the best roles in his film career is the main reason to see this movie. We liked it. **GRADE B**

THE LAST SAMURAI: This is an exciting and entertaining adventure in the grand epic tradition. It is about bravery, honor and family and both the acting and the photography are truly splendid. *Entertainment Weekly* referred to it as "Dances with Sushi," and there are elements of Kevin Costner's epic tale of a man who becomes friends with his enemies. Tom Cruise is Nathan Algren, an alcoholic and disillusioned veteran of the Indian Wars. He is tormented by his participation in the massacre of a peaceful Indian village. When he accepts a commission from the Emperor of Japan to train the Imperial troops, he goes as a mercenary only interested in the money he can earn. The troops are preparing to fight a group of rebels led by a legendary samurai, Katsumoto. Algren is captured in the first battle and spends an entire winter in Katsumoto's village. The experience completely changes his outlook on life. Ken Watanabe is awesome as Katsumoto. (I have read that the two men became fast friends on this film and are now working on another film together.) There are some stunning battle scenes and also some lovely quiet moments in the Samurai village. I couldn't help but compare the attitude of the Samurai with that of the WarLords in Afghanistan: For centuries they have protected their people and they are proud of their warrior tradition. It's enlightening to see this from their point of view. We both thought the film was A material, but Gary just can't bring himself to give an A to a film that glorifies bloody battles. He says A-. I don't usually care much for these battle epic either--especially when they are 150 minutes long--but this one made quite an impression on me, and I say A. **The Last Samurai** was directed by Edward Zwick. **GRADE: A/A-**

THE LAST STATION: This is a historical drama about the final days of Leo Tolstoy. Christopher Plummer and Helen Mirren received Oscar nominations for the two leading roles. Their performances are outstanding even though the story is, at times, a little slow moving. A battle is raging between Tolstoy's wife and his leading disciple, aptly played by Paul Giamatti. Should Tolstoy's considerable wealth and the money coming in from his writings be willed to his family or to "the Tolstoy movement?" In addition to being about two strong-willed people in a tumultuous marriage, it is a biting treatment of how the politics of a "movement" can distort the underlying philosophy which caused it to develop. James McElvay is excellent as a young man who is hired to be Tolstoy's secretary. He idolizes the famous writer, but also develops some sympathy for Tolstoy's wife. As do we. Barbara and I both enjoyed the film, though she rates it marginally higher than I. We both left the theater wanting to learn more about Tolstoy and the Tolstoyan Movement. **GRADE B+/B**

LAST VEGAS: This movie has received a cool reception from most critics, but Barbara and I just couldn't pass over a film set in Las Vegas with a cast of screen legends, all of whom are Oscar winners: Michael Douglas, Robert De Niro, Morgan Freeman, Kevin Klein, and Mary Steenburgen. After the 90 minute running time we concluded that the movie was a little better than we expected, but not as good as we had hoped. Four longtime friends from their early years in Flat Bush decide to throw a Las Vegas bachelor party for the only one of them who has remained single. More than one critic viewed **Last Vegas** as a geriatric version of the movie **The Hangover**. Steenburgen, not a part of the original "Flat Bush Four" contributes mightily to the limited charm of the film in the role of a Vegas lounge singer. Even "over the hill" jokes when delivered by veteran actors bring a few chuckles. And the cast did seem to be having fun. Barbara was a little harder on this one than I, perhaps because I am more likely to lose myself in a Vegas setting. **GRADE C/C+**

THE LAST VERMEER: (2019 available for streaming on STARZ) Based on real events and real people this is a historically inspired wartime story. **The Last Vermeer** is based on a novel that is based on the true story of Han van Meegeren, a Dutch artist and dealer.

He was charged with collaboration with the Nazis for selling a Vermeer masterpiece to Hermann Göring, one of the most powerful leaders of the Nazi party. The movie will fascinate art lovers as well as 20th century history buffs. In the leading role and playing Han van Meegeren is Guy Pearce, an Australian actor. Vermeer is a Dutch artist who is now acknowledged as one of the greatest painters of the Dutch Golden Age. One of his most well-known paintings is "Girl With a Pearl Earring" a painting that inspired a well-liked 2004 film with the same title starring Colin Firth and Scarlett Johansson. Van Meegeren was an artist suspected of selling a valuable painting to the Nazis, a crime punishable by death, but there is more to the story than meets the eye. Van Meegeren claimed the paintings were fakes, forgeries he painted to defraud the Nazis. The story is based on true events, but occasionally diverges from historical facts. The end result is an entertaining if uneven mixture of post-World War II fact and fiction. That is probably why the Tomatometer shows critics far less enthusiastic than audiences: 69% vs 91%. Barbara and I think that while some dramatic license is taken, it is still a film which is worth seeing if you have access to STARZ. **GRADE B**

THE LAST WORD: (2017) This is the kind of movie that critics love to hate and audiences, especially older ones, love to like. (Rotten Tomatoes critics=38%; audiences=67%) Shirley MacLaine is a National Treasure, and she is on full display in ***The Last Word***. MacLaine plays Harriet, a controlling retired business woman who doesn't appear to have any friends or family. When she reads an obituary lauding the deceased, she decides that Anne (Amanda Seyfried), the young woman who works as an obituary writer for the local newspaper, should write her obit. However, she wants Anne to write it before she dies. To make sure that the obit is interesting, Harriet decides to change her life in significant ways. Do Harriet and Anne become friends? Does Harriet mentor a young adorable black child who swears like a trouper? Do the three women go on a road trip? Does Harriet find a boyfriend for Anne? Does Harriet reconnect with her daughter and ex-husband? Yes, of course. All that stereotypical stuff happens, but it is fun watching MacLaine do her thing and do it so well. Our local critic loved MacLaine, but thought the movie went dead when she wasn't on the screen. He's right, but we enjoyed the movie and so did the rest of our audience. **GRADE B**

LATE NIGHT: (2019) Emma Thompson is terrific as a late-night talk show host who is in danger of losing her show. Kathryn Newbury has been popular for years, but the show has declining viewership and an out-of-touch vibe that concern the new Network head (Amy Ryan), who tells her that this season is her last. The show will go on, but Newbury will be replaced. The staleness of the show may have something to do with the staleness of her writing room, which is a bastion of young white males who slack-off every chance they get. But it also has to do with Newbury herself, and with her insistence on doing things her way, which means the old way. In an effort to change things, she tells her producer to "hire a woman writer." Molly Patel (Mindy Kaling) has arrived at just the right time. Lacking any experience, she is hired on the spot and turns everything upside down. Molly has idolized Newbury for years, but she is not afraid to tell her the truth--something that has never been done before. Initially the generational and cultural differences between the two women threaten to derail the relationship, but all is cozy by the end, or as cozy as it gets with prickly Newbury. John Lithgow is Newbury's husband, a former concert pianist whose career succumbed to Parkinson's. He is excellent in the role. Hugh Dancy (TV's ***Hannibal***) and Reid Scott (TV's ***Veep***), provide the necessary writer's room machismo. Mindy Kaling wrote the screenplay and she obviously understands everything about mounting a TV show. She also wrote a great part for Thompson and one for herself, and it doesn't hurt a bit that both actors have whip-smart comic timing. We enjoyed the movie, and wish we could see Emma Thompson in many more roles that suit her so well. **GRADE B**

THE LAUNDROMAT: (2019) Available on Netflix, this comedy/drama is directed by Steven Soderbergh and has an all-star cast including Meryl Streep, Gary Oldman, Antonio Banderas, Jeffrey Wright, David Schwimmer, James Cromwell, and Sharon Stone. ***The Laundromat*** is about the practice of money laundering and corruption through fake trusts and shell companies based in tax havens. It ends with Streep making a clear and bold statement about the immediate need for campaign finance reforms. The movie has received mixed reviews from critics and it was apparent why. With an impressive cast list like the above, one would expect better than a mediocre movie. In their attempt to simultaneously educate and entertain, the film makers failed to excel in either. Both Barbara and I were disappointed. **GRADE C**

LAWLESS: (2012) I had a high school history teacher who thought the Volstead Act was the worst thing to happen in U.S. constitutional history. She believed the amendment not only bred corruption, but encouraged disrespect for the law, since heretofore law-abiding citizens thought it was OK and even "cool" to ignore prohibition. ***Lawless*** certainly reinforces her argument about breeding corruption. Taken from a true story, the movie tells of the three Bondurant brothers who ran a successful bootlegging business in Franklin County, Virginia. The local sheriff was no problem because he was "on the take." However, when big-time corrupt lawmen from the city decide to take over the county's stills, the brothers refuse to cooperate. This enrages Special Deputy Charlie Rakes (Guy Pearce) who makes it his mission to subdue the rebellious brothers. This results in a lot of hitting, kicking and killing. Pearce, with his natty suits and slicked-back hair, creates a character that is easy to hate. Tom Hardy is Forrest, the strong, silent leader of the Bondurants; Jason Clark is Howard, the biggest, strongest and drunkest brother; and Shia LeBeouf is Jack, the youngest and most tender-hearted of the three. It doesn't seem right when you root for Jack to find the courage to kill Deputy Rakes, but you do. No one is good in this movie except for Mia Wasikowska who plays a preacher's daughter courted by Jack. Even Jessica Chastain as a waitress in the diner owned by the brothers has a checkered past. The woodland settings are as lovely as the story is not, and the buildings, costumes, props and cars evoke the Depression Era in which the story takes place. The Australian director, John Hillcoat, made ***The Proposition*** in 2006. It was also about a band of brothers up against a ruthless lawman, and it was one of the best films of that year. ***Lawless*** doesn't rise to that level. **GRADE B-**

LAYER CAKE: (2004 release seen on DVD) This British good British crime movie is the one in which we first saw the wonderful Daniel Craig. He plays a successful cocaine dealer who plans for an early retirement. Things don't go according to plan. He finds himself in the middle of a lethal mess, trying to sell some stolen ecstasy pills and avoiding more than one man who wants him dead. The plot is complicated, the filming stylish, and the acting superior. In his review, Ebert compared this film to a Scorsese film in which, as he put it, "a smart and ambitious young man has it all figured out and then gradually loses control to old-fashioned hoods." **THUMBS UP**

LBJ: (2017) This biopic focuses on the political upheaval that Vice President Lyndon Johnson faced when he was thrust into the presidency after an assassin's bullet ended the life of then President John F. Kennedy in November, 1963. The film was directed by

Rob Reiner with compelling performances from Woody Harrelson and Jennifer Jason Leigh as Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson. LBJ's legacy includes such milestones as helping get Kennedy's historic Civil Rights Act signed into law, as well as Medicare and Medicaid. But he may be remembered most for his escalation of the Vietnam War. The movie largely focuses on events from 1959-1963. In 1959 Johnson was a legislative lion in the Senate in the role of powerful Senate majority leader. After running for president in the Democratic Primary and losing to Kennedy he was surprised when he was selected to run with him as the candidate for Vice President. In that role he was pretty much out of the news until the Kennedy assassination. For twenty years before he became president LBJ had worked against Civil Rights legislation, but after the assassination he worked tirelessly to honor JFK's legacy by championing the historic Civil Rights Act of 1964. Working behind heavy makeup, Harrelson gives a convincing portrayal of the 36th president of the United States. Playing LBJ's loyal and loving first lady, Lady Bird, is an almost unrecognizable Jennifer Jason Leigh. Barbara and I were especially impressed with how convincingly Harrelson played LBJ and brought important history to life. **GRADE B**

LE WEEK-END: (2013) This is a bittersweet movie about a long married British couple who revisit Paris for the first time since their honeymoon in hopes of rekindling their possibly broken relationship. I predict that this film will have greater appeal to older audiences. It is an offbeat senior romantic comedy (perhaps dramedy) about a sixty-something British couple effectively played by two veteran actors, Jim Broadbent and Lindsay Duncan. Jeff Goldblum plays a supporting role that lightens the mood and increased our enjoyment of the sometimes painful portrayal of middle aged boredom. I had the feeling that the rollercoaster ups and downs of the week-end mirrored the ups and downs of their rocky thirty-year marriage. The film's final scene pays tribute to Jean-Luc Godard, considered by many to be the most influential and radical French filmmaker of the 1960s and 1970s. It comes as a hopeful note in the form of a dance referenced earlier in *Le Week-End*. Barbara and I didn't love the film, but we liked it enough to award it an above average grade. **GRADE B**

THE LEAGUE: 2023 (Available for streaming on Prime Video for \$4.99 Rental) 2023 This film is a documentary that highlights Black players' indelible influence on the modern sport, making a powerful case for how important the Negro Baseball Leagues were. The filmmaker shows the joy that was on display before the major leagues were integrated, but he also shows the difficulties those athletes faced. By World War I, a gentlemen's agreement among white team owners entirely ousted Black players from Major League Baseball. *The League* tells a story told through previously unearthed archival footage and never-before seen interviews with legendary players like Satchel Paige and Buck O'Neil -- whose early careers paved the way for the Jackie Robinson era -- as well as celebrated Hall of Famers like Willie Mays and Hank Aaron who started out in the Negro Leagues. It features a broad cross section of players, as well as the umpires, owners, assistants, writers, and family members who witnessed—and made—the sport's history. It is a story that most Americans (especially white Americans) know only in outline. There's no shortage of great movies about baseball, but there is a severe lack of films about the role played by blacks. *The League* covers some of the best and worst times in baseball history. It is a documentary that is both illuminating and remarkably entertaining. But the film isn't just about baseball. It's about Black American life in the first half of the 20th century, when industrialization, two world wars and a mass migration from the South to the North led to a boost in Black economic power — and a subsequent push for widespread integration. If one measure of a documentary's quality is whether it inspires you to learn more about its subject after the credits roll, *The League* is an unqualified success. Critics scored 96% on Rotten Tomatoes from 46 reviews. Barb and I liked it too, **GRADE B+**

LEAN ON PETE: (2018) *Lean on Pete* is the name of a horse, the name a novel, and the name of a movie about a fifteen-year-old boy and a broken-down racehorse that gives the movie its name. The boy, Charley Thompson, arrives in Portland, Oregon with his single father, both of them eager for a fresh start after a series of hard knocks. Charley is brilliantly played by Charley Plummer, a talented young actor who Barbara and I predict will become a major star in Hollywood. Charley is in nearly every frame of this unforgettable portrait of adolescent turmoil. The film earned an impressive 90% from the 93 reviews counted. Although helped by a uniformly excellent supporting cast including Steve Buscemi, Chloe Sevigny, and Steve Zahn, the success of the film rests on Charley Plummer. One could describe this as a coming-of-age story, but I would quickly add that it is like no other coming-of-age movie I have ever seen. One might also describe it as a "boy and his horse" film or a poignant road movie that sends the human-horse bonded pair on a search for security. But none of this does the film justice. It is a well written screenplay by Andrew Haigh who was also the director. I won't say it is an easy movie to watch, but we agree it is one well worth seeing. **GRADE B+**

LEARNING TO DRIVE: This is a slice-of-life comedy/drama starring Patricia Clarkson as Wendy and Ben Kingsley as Darwan. Wendy is a Manhattan literary critic whose stable world has just been shattered by her husband's announcement that he is leaving her for a younger woman after 21 years of marriage. Darwan is a Sikh Indian cabbie who teaches driving by day and drives a cab by night. After a chance encounter, Wendy hires Darwan to teach her, late in life, how to drive. The metaphor is obvious, the story a bit predictable, and in lesser hands might have been a mediocre effort. But it is elevated by the two seasoned actors playing the leads. Sir Ben Kingsley who has given powerful film performances for decades was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II for services to the film industry in 2002. He is probably best known for his Oscar winning portrayal of Gandhi. Patricia Clarkson has been making movies and impressing us with her considerable talent since 1987, but is more often seen as a character actor than a leading woman. Effectively playing Wendy's daughter is Grace Gummer who has been building a reputation as an excellent actor in Hollywood, but is still probably best known as the daughter of Meryl Streep. Do not be misled. This is not a romantic comedy or even a romantic story. It is a beautifully acted tale of loneliness, friendship, and resilience. Adding to my enjoyment of the film was the juxtaposition of two very different cultures. Barbara and I both liked the film, but my grade is slightly higher than hers. **GRADE B+/B**

LEATHERHEADS: Barbara and I wanted to see this film because, in spite of many bad reviews, we just couldn't believe that the director of *Good Night and Good Luck* (George Clooney) would direct a bad or even mediocre film. Sadly we were wrong. I liked the concept and the seeds of a good film were there, but in my humble opinion it needed a few more script rewrites and a much better film editor to make the seeds mature. The year is 1925 and professional football is struggling to get off the ground. Clooney is a great choice to play an aging, but charming football hero struggling to get his ragtag team into the public's eye and heart. John Krasinski (TV's *The Office*) is also a great choice to play a young college football All-American and widely known war hero. He is recruited to help put fans in the bleachers for professional football. Renee Zellweger adds another dimension playing a sharp tongued, snappy dressing

His-Girl-Friday type reporter who is supposed to introduce suspense and sexiness into this period-piece screwball comedy. Great idea, but for me there were too many dull moments to give the film a high grade. **GRADE C**

(**Barb's 2 cents:** *Loved Krasinski, didn't care for Zellweger's Rosalind Russell imitation, thought Clooney seemed distracted, and didn't see much chemistry between C & Z.*)

LEAVE NO TRACE: (2018) In 2010, director Debra Granik and her screenwriting partner crafted the astonishing **Winter's Bone** and launched the career of Jennifer Lawrence. Eight year later, the team has produced another remarkable film, **Leave No Trace** with another talented newcomer, Thomasin McKenzie. McKenzie plays a young girl living a bare-bones existence in the forest with her father, a damaged veteran who can no longer live among people. The two obviously love each other, and the daughter, Tom, has never known anything else. Will (Ben Foster) has taught Tom everything she knows, including how to elude anyone who threatens their life. One day, however, they cannot escape detection, and, since they are living in a vast public park, they are taken into custody. A sympathetic social worker sets them up in a small house in a relatively remote location. It is Tom's first experience with a "normal" life and she learns to ride a bike, makes a friend and plans to enter school. But, her father can't settle down. The seclusion of the forest is too enticing for him to resist, and once again the pair is on the run. The always impressive Foster (**Hell or High Water, Lone Survivor, and The Messenger**) is one of our finest actors and he is flawless as a father who loves his daughter but is incapable of change. If you seek out this movie you will be treated to two incredible performances. Gary and I couldn't help but compare it to the earlier film and, while it didn't blow us away as **Winter's Bone** did, we agree that it well worth seeing. **GRADE B+**

LEAVE NO TRACE: 2018/2023 (Available for streaming on Netflix) Barbara and I saw this low-budget independent film about five years ago when the movie was first released. We liked it, but only gave it a B+. We liked it even better recently when we watched it again at home on Netflix. In the lead, Ben Foster, who has been doing solid work in Hollywood for years, gives the performance of his career. Thomasin McKenzie, a young talented newcomer born in New Zealand costarred with Foster and they were terrific playing together as father and daughter in a chilling story of survival. **Leave No Trace** received immense praise from critics earning a rare 100% positive reviews from 252 critics. It's not a movie deeply concerned with plot. Instead it is all about character. Foster plays Will, a military veteran suffering from PTSD whose experiences have left him shaken and compelled to retreat from mainstream American society. McKenzie, plays his 13-year-old daughter, whom he calls Tom. They live in a wooded Forest Preserve near Portland, Oregon. This is a truly superb drama that offers no answers and just takes viewers along for the ride. You may remember Director Debra Granik's earlier film, **Winter's Bone**, which I reviewed giving it an A. If interested, you can find that review in the Movie Views Archives. Barbara and I loved our 2nd viewing of **Leave No Trace**, **GRADE A**

LEAVING LAS VEGAS: (1995--I thought that this movie was so outstanding that I felt compelled to put it the Archives) This incredibly sad love story is a brilliantly made film that is almost painful to watch. Nicholas Cage and Elizabeth Shue create characters so real you almost forget you are watching actors. Cage is unusually subtle and understated and Shue is luminous. Both should get Academy nominations. And I think the director deserves a lot of credit. Cage is Ben, and man who has lost his wife and his job and goes to Las Vegas to drink himself to death. Shue is Sera, a prostitute who needs someone to need her. They are made for each other. Many people will find this movie too depressing, but we found it powerful. The fact that the author, who was an alcoholic, committed suicide shortly after finishing the novel makes the film even more tragic. **GRADE A+**

LEE DANIELS' THE BUTLER: (2013) What Lee Daniels has given us in this movie is a condensed history of the civil rights movement seen through the eyes and family of a man who worked as a White House butler. The character of Cecil Gaines, beautifully brought to life by Forest Whitaker, is inspired by Eugene Allen, who served eight Presidents in the White House. While both Allen and Cecil Gaines, endured a harsh and segregated beginning in Virginia, Daniels creates the life of the fictional character to offer a stark contrast: We watch as the violent civil rights struggle is played out against the butler's subdued behavior in the White House. Daniels also gives his fictional character two sons, once again to offer a contrast: the older son fights for the soul of his country by sitting-in at a lunch counter, riding a freedom bus, and joining the Black Panther movement; the younger son fights for his county by joining the army and going to Viet Nam. Oprah Winfrey is Gloria Gaines and she is terrific as a woman torn between the passivity of her husband and the activism of her son. She and Whitaker have wonderful chemistry together. The casting of the various Presidents and their wives is noteworthy. Robin Williams doesn't resemble Eisenhower either in looks or stature, but Alan Rickman looks remarkably like Reagan, and Jane Fonda, despite outrage from right-wingers, looks remarkably like Nancy. Liev Schreiber and John Cusak, both with fake noses and jowls, give, respectively, a spirited portrayal of LBJ, and a frightening portrayal of Nixon. David Oyelowo is especially effective as the older son, and both Cuba Gooding, Jr. and Lenny Kravitz were good as butlers who worked with Gaines. The only negative for us was the director putting his name in the title of the movie. What's up with that? Perhaps he wanted to emphasize the fact that his butler is a fictional one. I hope that, and not arrogance, was the motivation. I never got closer to the Civil Rights struggle than my TV set, but **The Butler** brings all the ugliness of that battle into vivid focus. The lunch counter sit-in scene was particularly graphic and filled me with admiration for those who suffered and fought for equality. This is an important movie in the lest-we-forget category, and we recommend it. **GRADE B+**

LEGALLY BLONDE: It's, like, totally superficial but it does have Reese Witherspoon so it's not, like, totally lame. It also has Luke Wilson, another actor we particularly like. (He and brother Owen Wilson wrote **Rushmore and Bottle Rocket.**) In addition, it features Holland Taylor as a law professor and Raquel Welch, looking fabulous, in a small role. This is a bit of summertime fluff that helps pass the time on a hot afternoon. Witherspoon is Elle Woods, a Valley Girl with a degree in Fashion Merchandising, who manages to get into Harvard Law School. She does it to win back the love of her boyfriend who dumped her because she wasn't "serious" enough. Not surprisingly, Elle proves to be unusually bright and intuitive. It has some smiles and a few laughs, but we can't go higher than a C on this one. (The grade would have been lower if not for Witherspoon.) We suggest that you rent another, much better, Witherspoon film-- **Election. GRADE: C**

(NOTE: The dorky law student who becomes Elle's friend is played by Oz Perkins, the son of actor Tony Perkins.)

THE LEGEND OF BAGGER VANCE: For pure enjoyment, we had to give this film a B. But you must know that we are both golf addicts. For those who have not fallen under the spell of golf, the film may seem slow and overly philosophical. Poor Will Smith doesn't

have much to do except mouth one semi-profound statement after another. "Golf is not a game you win, it's a game you play." "Every man has one true authentic swing inside him." Stuff like that. It does get a bit ridiculous after a while, even for a golfer. But the movie and the golf course look gorgeous, and Matt Damon looks rather good, too. Charlize Theron is totally at home in the period. Damon is Rannulph Junuh, the best golfer in Georgia before the First World War. Suffering from severe battle trauma, Junuh doesn't come home after the War. He disappears for ten years. He deserts his fiancée Adele Invergordon (Theron) without a word. When he finally comes home to Savannah, he is pressured into playing an exhibition match with Walter Hagen and Bobby Jones. The problem is, Junuh has lost his swing. It's a mysterious caddie named Bagger Vance (Will Smith) who helps him find it. The story is told through the eyes of a young boy who loves golf and idolizes Junuh. It was nice to see Jack Lemmon playing the young boy as an old man. The actors playing Walter Hagen and Bobby Jones were very well cast and they could hit a golf ball too. The biggest flaw in the film is that we never really get to know the people involved enough to identify with them. Redford likes to make sports movies where playing the sport is a metaphor for living your life. Remember *The Natural*? In *Bagger Vance* he has a sport that many don't understand or appreciate. What's more, the climax of putting a ball in the hole doesn't quite compare in excitement with hitting a home run. But if you do like golf, you'll enjoy this movie. **GRADE: B**

THE LEGEND OF ZORRO: When we were kids, movies were almost always double features: a major movie combined with a "B" movie. *The Legend of Zorro* reminded us of those "B" movies, but with better production values. This film is a sequel to the 1998 movie, and once again stars Antonio Banderas as Zorro and Catherine Zeta-Jones as Elena. Here they have been married for 10 years and have a little boy, Joaquin, who seems to have inherited some of his father's unique skills. The first movie was fun although we thought it was about 20 minutes too long. This 2005 version is at least 40 minutes too long! We thought it would never end. Some of the scenes involving Zorro's horse were amusing. (One scene was a direct steal from the film *Cat Ballou*.) There was some beautiful scenery, Adrain Alozo made a cute Joaquin, and there was an impressive explosion at the end, but we couldn't recommend the film. Young children might enjoy it, although there is considerable violence. Our 14 year-old-grandson saw it with us and he thought it was "just OK." We didn't think it was even that good. **GRADE C**

THE LEGO MOVIE: (2014) If you are one who loves animated feature films or even has a fondness for some of them, you should skip this review. The last animated feature I enjoyed was *Shrek*. That was twelve years ago. And I can promise you *The Lego Movie* will be the last animated feature film I will ever again attempt to review. Professional critics loved it! One said she couldn't decide whether it is "a great film, or the greatest film ever in the history of cinema." It scored a whopping 96% from critics on Rotten Tomatoes Tomatometer which is higher than four out of five of the Animated Feature films nominated for an Oscar this year. As you might guess, my evaluation stands a bit lower on the scale. I do remember with fondness playing with those little colored plastic bricks that snapped together. My kids and I spent hours creating new shapes and forms. I am told Legos are far more flexible than they were then. Most of the characters in this film are lego pieces. We follow the story of Emmet, a perfectly ordinary lego minifigure who is mistakenly identified as extraordinary and capable of saving the world. The most valuable thing I learned was that ubiquitous chases and explosions are as soporific in animated features as they are in regular feature films. I will grudgingly admit, however, that this toy-inspired film picked up for me in the last fifteen minutes when a real human character in the form of Will Ferrell makes his entrance. The movie's inspirational message of "everyone is special" is made believable in the end. Although the film is available in 3-D, Barbara and I saw it in the traditional 2-D format and we both liked the ending far better than the beginning and middle. **GRADE C/B-**

LEILA: (1997/2015) Dariush Mehrjui is a well-known filmmaker in Iran, but *Leila* is the first movie of his that we have seen. The cultural differences are hard to understand, but Leila's emotions speak a universal language. Married to a man she loves, Leila is devastated to discover that she is barren. Her husband insists he doesn't care, doesn't even want children, but he is an only son and his mother is determined to find him a second wife. Pressured by her mother-in-law, Leila agrees, but she doesn't realize the emotional impact of that decision. It's hard for us to understand how cultural pressure can force Leila and her husband to do something they really don't want to do, but we can sympathize with their dilemma. Leila Hatami is very skilled at expressing emotion without words. Her dark eyes speak volumes. She was the star of *A Separation*, a 2011 Iranian film that won "Best Foreign Film" that year. *Leila* got 100% from the critics on *Rotten Tomatoes* and 89% from the audience. If you enjoy foreign films, you should put this one on your list. We also recommend *A Separation*.

THE LEISURE SEEKER: (2018) First let's face a hard reality. No one under sixty is likely to see or appreciate this poignant film starring Helen Mirren and Donald Sutherland. It is a journey of tears and laughter and the chemistry between these two award winning actors is magic. *The Leisure Seeker* did not fare too well with critics, but Barbara and I, who easily pass the age test, were charmed by it. It is a story about a long-married elderly couple one of whom has Alzheimer's. Surprisingly, it is not depressing. It is about an unforgettable journey in an old 1975 Winnebago dubbed the *Leisure Seeker*. Without telling their two grown children, they gas up the Winnebago and head to Key West. It was a trip they always meant to take but never got around to. Along the way there are adventures and mishaps, as you might expect, but it is largely a celebration of lives well lived. Our grade is for our age appropriate readers. **GRADE B+**

LES MISÉRABLES: There are some stirring moments in this film adaptation of what we remember as a powerful and moving stage production. For me, one of those moments was Fantine's, "I dreamed a dream." While Anne Hathaway doesn't have a strong stage voice, it worked well for the screen. The director's extreme close-ups intensified the emotion of the song. Eponine's "On My Own," was beautifully performed by Samantha Barks, although it did bother Gary that her teeth were far too Hollywood perfect. Eddie Redmayne was an ideal Marius, both in the acting and singing department. We also thought the ending, which would be a curtain call on stage, was creatively handled and made for a powerful finish. But in between these moments there was a lot of in-your-face melodrama, and the movie never really took off. Plus, the comedy bits, supplied by Helena Bonham Carter and Sacha Baron Cohen as the criminal innkeepers, fell flat. Melodrama, much like over-the-top comedy, plays better on stage than it does on the movie screen. Tom Hopper, who directed the Oscar-winning *The Kings Speech*, was apparently unable to bring some necessary subtlety to this movie. When you emphasize everything it gets exhausting. Hugh Jackman certainly has the musical chops to play Valjean, and he was quite good. However, his performance couldn't compare with our memory of Colm Wilkinson in the original Broadway production which we were privileged to see in 1987. (We were surprised to learn Wilkinson plays the Bishop in this movie.) We were disappointed with Russell Crowe. I didn't expect his singing to be memorable, but thought he would bring more passion to the character of Javert. In the

production of *Les Miz* we saw last summer in Cedar City, Utah, Javert (Brian Vaughn) was a dynamic presence. Crowe, not so much. Even the magnificent backdrops for his songs didn't do it for us. Gary is almost sorry he saw the movie—it took away from his love for the two brilliant stage versions we have seen. No doubt, people who like musicals but have never seen a superior stage production of **Les Miz** will be enthusiastic for the movie. Our reaction was too much influenced by our memories. **GRADE B**

LET THE SUNSHINE IN/ *Un Beau Soleil Intérieur* : (2017) As you would expect Juliette Binoche is beautiful and still has a commanding screen presence in this subtitled Art House Drama/Romance. The acclaimed French writer/director Claire Denis is the filmmaker and it earned a favorable 91% from the 85 reviews counted on the *Rotten Tomatoes Tomatometer*. Binoche plays a divorced middle-aged Parisian painter searching for another shot at love. Subtitled foreign films can be an acquired taste. Barbara and I still take a chance on foreign films because we are sometimes overwhelmed by their beauty and power. Of course we are sometimes underwhelmed. Unfortunately we were underwhelmed by **Let the Sunshine In**. It was depressing, but even worse, boring. Most of the film could be described as looking for love in all the wrong places, and talking endlessly about it. Then there was the final scene between Binoche and Gerard Depardieu. Our local reviewer described it as follows: "It goes on for a long time. But it is fascinating." Barb agrees that it goes on for a long time but she would change the word fascinating to irritating. The luminous presence of Binoche on screen elevates our grade, but not by much. **GRADE D**

LETTERS TO JULIET: If it weren't for the presence of Vanessa Redgrave and the gorgeous Tuscany scenery, this would be just another corny predictable romance. Although Amanda Seyfried and Christopher Egan make for an attractive couple and do their best with some rather lame dialogue, it is Redgrave and her search for a lost love that captured our imagination. And since that search was in the countryside around Sienna, a place where we spent two weeks a few years ago, we were captivated by the scenery. For these two reasons, we agree with Roger Ebert who said that he knew the movie was a soppy melodrama, but that he enjoyed it anyway. Sophie (Seyfried) and her fiancé, Victor (Gael García Bernal) travel to Verona for a pre-wedding honeymoon, but Victor is more interested in visiting suppliers for his soon-to-open New York restaurant than he is in spending time with Sophie. She does some sightseeing on her own and, at the home of the famous Juliet, she discovers a 50-year-old romance. Enter Claire (Redgrave) and her handsome grandson, Charlie (Egan). Sophie and the uptight Charlie fall into instant dislike, and you can no doubt guess the rest. In an interesting note, Claire's true love is played by Franco Nero, the actor who played Lancelot to Redgrave's Guinevere in the 1967 movie version of **Camelot**. The two actors fell in love while making that film, but didn't marry until 40 years later. No wonder they were attracted to the roles. The film's trailer calls it "the greatest love story ever told." Not hardly! But it is quite pleasant. **GRADE B**

LETTERS FROM IWO JIMA: When I was a young man (admittedly a long time ago), it would have been unthinkable to make a film about Iwo Jima from the viewpoint of the "enemy." But times and attitudes change and apparently the world is ready for Eastwood's bold film-making. Many critics rate this movie higher than his first film on Iwo Jima titled **Flags of Our Fathers**. In "Flags..." the Japanese are a faceless enemy firing from dug in tunnels in the mountainside. In "Letters..." the Americans are a faceless enemy mounting an overwhelming attack. From the Japanese perspective, the battle is un-winnable. It is a matter of holding the island as long as possible. Ken Watanabe (**The Last Samurai, Memoirs of a Geisha**) is the best known actor in the film and may be nominated for an Academy Award. He is excellent in his role of the commanding officer charged with the impossible defense of Iwo Jima. Although we could not rate this war film as high as **Flags**, it is a powerful and unique film. **GRADE B+**

LEVIATHAN: (2014) This subtitled Russian film won the 2014 Cannes Film Festival award for Best Screenplay and has been receiving high praise at festivals the world over. It has also been nominated for an Oscar in the Best Foreign-Language Film category. It is a skillfully crafted film about corruption in Putin's Russia. Unsurprisingly it was not well received by Russian officials. Even if it wins an Oscar, viewing will probably be limited to art house venues. Set in a small run-down fishing village, the beach is littered with the carcasses of old ships and a large skeleton of a leviathan (whale). Symbolism abounds. Andrey Zvyagintsev, a well-respected Russian filmmaker wrote and directed this dramatic vodka-soaked social satire which touches on religion, politics, guns and alcohol while being at least partially inspired by the Biblical story of Job. Kolya lives in a house by the sea with his son and Lilia, his beautiful second wife. The house has been in his family for generations, but is being threatened by a corrupt political system and a scheming unscrupulous mayor who has the government and the church behind him. Though the subject matter is bleak, the setting is starkly beautiful and the acting uniformly superb. The complex story holds several surprises and builds to a creative ending. Barbara liked the film a little better than I did, but we agreed it is a well-made movie, perhaps the best foreign language film we have seen in months. **GRADE B+/B**

LIBERTY HEIGHTS: (1990 release seen on Video in 2000) This is the fourth in a series of movies set in Baltimore and directed by Barry Levinson. We loved it. Gary says it's the best movie he's seen in a long time. Levinson borrows heavily on growing up Jewish in Baltimore. His first film was **Diner**, then came **Tin Men** and **Avalon**. We have liked all of them. **Liberty Heights** is set in 1954 when the Baltimore schools were first integrated. Prejudice against blacks and anti-Semitism both flourished at this time and both are dealt with in this film. Ben, a young Jewish boy, forms a friendship with Sylvia, a "colored" girl in his class, much to the consternation of both sets of parents. Sylvia introduces Ben to black musicians and there is a wonderful sequence involving a James Brown concert. Ben's older brother, Van, has his own problems when he falls for a rich suburban debutante. Meanwhile Ben's father (Joe Mantegna) is having business difficulties: His burlesque hall is dying for want of patrons and he has suffered a catastrophic loss in his numbers business. Bebe Neuwirth plays Ben's mother. These four Baltimore films are Levinson's loving homage to his childhood and his hometown. This one is definitely worth seeing. If you haven't seen the others, we suggest you rent them, too. **ENTHUSIASTIC THUMBS UP**

THE LIFE AQUATIC WITH STEVE ZISSOU: (2004) Gary: The first 20 minutes were excruciatingly boring. I thought the movie would get better. I was wrong.

Barb: I can't add anything to Gary's comment. I, too, thought it was quite awful. I did chuckle twice, but they were both very small chuckles. The only actor who came off well was Cate Blanchett. Here's a brief summary: *With a plan to exact revenge on a mythical shark that killed his partner, oceanographer Steve Zissou (Bill Murray) rallies a crew that includes his estranged wife (Angelica Huston), a pregnant journalist (Cate Blanchett), and a man who may or may not be his son (Owen Wilson)*. It was written and directed by Wes Anderson, who has done some strange movies. His first, **Bottle Rocket (1996)** we rather enjoyed; his next, **Rushmore (1998)** showed promise. Then, in 2001 he gave us **The Royal Tennenbaums** which left us cold. Now this one. I guess we just don't get him. Critics

seem to like the film and so do some of the people who write personal reviews on Yahoo. We'll be very interested in our readers' comments on this one. **GRADE D**

THE LIFE AHEAD: (2020) It was a pleasure watching a much-loved actor, 86 year old Sophia Loren, in her first feature role in more than 10 years. Her career at this point has spanned 70 years. She plays a feisty Holocaust survivor living in coastal Italy. The film is co-written and directed by her son, Edoardo Ponti and is available on Netflix. Loren plays Madame Rosa, a retired prostitute who spends her elderly life caring for impoverished children of other prostitutes. One of those wayward children is Momo, brilliantly played by Ibrahima Gueye, a talented young actor in his first movie role. Momo is a Senegalese orphan living in the streets. The whole arc of the story is watching the evolving relationship between the two. It is a heartwarming tale and may draw a few tears. If **Ponti's** goal was to simply introduce us to a fine young talent in Gueye, as well as reintroduce us to the ageless talent of his mom, then I would say he accomplished his goal. Barbara and I think the ninety-five minute film is well worth your time, especially if you fondly remember the work of Sophia Loren. **GRADE B+**

LIFE AS A HOUSE: This movie is unabashedly sentimental and wildly manipulative. It pulls every trick in the book to touch your emotions, and it is a credit to the actors that it does succeed in eliciting an emotional reaction. We both confess to being touched in the proper places, even though at the time we were pulling out the Kleenex, we resented being manipulated. Kevin Kline is George, a divorced father who is having a very bad year. He just lost his job and he is dying of cancer. His son, Sam (Hayden Christensen) is an angry alienated 16-year-old. Sam lives with his mother, (Kristin Scott Thomas), his stepfather and his two young half-brothers. George decides that he will spend his last few months building a house on the site of the ramshackle cottage he now inhabits, and he insists that his son help him with the building. You can probably guess the rest. The aforementioned shack is on a multi-million dollar lot overlooking the Pacific. We did enjoy the view, but not the script. I know people can change, but I don't think it ever happens as quickly as it does in this film. Kline comes off well in spite of the script and we liked Thomas more than we usually do. Christensen is particularly good as Sam and it is to his credit that he adds some believability to the character. We also like Mary Steenburgen and Jena Malone as George's neighbors. **GRADE: C**

LIFE AS WE KNOW IT: Almost all the critics dismissed this movie as predictable date-night fluff, and that's precisely what it is. Viewers, on the other hand, mostly enjoyed it and Yahoo users give it a B+ grade. Once again, we're somewhere in between. The plot reminded me a bit of the wonderful *When Harry Met Sally*. In both films the couple dislikes each other when they meet, are thrown together and eventually sleep together which causes problems, and finally realize they were made for each other. The difference between the two movies is that *WHMS* is smartly written; *LAWKI*, isn't. Katherine Heigl and Josh Duhamel meet on a disastrous date—a date set up by their friends. When those friends are killed in an automobile accident, Heigl and Duhamel are named in the will as guardians of little Sophie. They decide to live together platonically and care for the adorable one-year-old. I'm sure you can imagine some of the scenes that follow: diaper changing, sleep deprivation, first steps, yada yada. Heigl and Duhamel are incredibly photogenic and pleasant to watch, but it is Sophie who steals the show. (Actually, there are three Sophies. The baby is played by triplets.) There are a few amusing moments, but this romantic comedy is pure fantasy. It has absolutely no relationship to real life. **GRADE C**

LIFE ITSELF: (2014) For movie lovers and especially those who have been touched by the reviews of Roger Ebert, this is a "must see poignant tribute to a world-renowned film critic." Roger was the first film critic to win a Pulitzer Prize for his writing and was the first film critic to receive a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Barbara graciously allowed me to write this review even though she has more personal experience with Roger than I. She was one of the few to view his first television show in Chicago and she met and talked with him at the Telluride International Film Festival in 1979. This documentary film is based on the bestselling memoir with the same title, *Life Itself*. Ebert died last year (2013) and it seems fitting that a man so influential in the movie industry, has his life's story so beautifully told in film. *Life Itself* touches on many milestones in his colorful life and does not shy away from his struggles with disfiguring cancer that took away his lower jaw, his voice, and ultimately his life. Barbara and I agree that Roger would have given thumbs up to this inspiring film. **GRADE A**

THE LIFE OF PI: Seeing the 3D version of this movie probably enhanced the look of the film. It's a gorgeous shipwreck tale with a twist: Pi shares his lifeboat with an adult Bengal tiger. Knowing that the tiger was completely CGI generated did not at all detract from the experience of watching these two survivors learn to live with each other. Pi's father was a Zoo keeper who decided to emigrate from India to Canada. The family, along with some animals that are destined for North American zoos, board a ship for their journey across the ocean. When a monumental storm sinks the ship, Pi, a hyena, an orangutan, a zebra and a tiger named Richard Parker find refuge in a lifeboat. It doesn't take long before the survivors are down to only Pi and Richard Parker. Many fantastical things happen on Pi's lifeboat adventure and all are beautifully rendered in 3D by director Ang Lee (*Brokeback Mountain, Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*). Suraj Sharma, who plays the shipwrecked teenager, is excellent and holds his own with the tiger and the ocean. The story is told in flashbacks as an adult Pi relates his adventures to a writer looking for a good story. And it is a very good story—a story that makes you believe in the power of filmmaking. We grade it somewhere between a B and a B+. **GRADE B/B+**

LIFE, OR SOMETHING LIKE IT: I think the best word to describe this movie is "cute." Angelina Jolie is cute as Lanie Kerrigan, a very blonde Seattle TV reporter whose life, she believes, is "perfect." That is, until a street prophet (Tony Shalub) tells her that she is going to die in a week. Although the movie seems to deal with life and death issues, it handles the emotional elements in a rather superficial way. Some of the key events could never happen in real life. For example, Stockard Channing appears as a Barbara Walters type interviewer who breaks down in an interview with Lanie. After just one question. It would never, ever happen. What's more, there is nothing particularly creative in the interpersonal relationships, or in the story. We've seen most of it before—except for Jack, the street prophet, who is both interesting and funny. However, we did think Jolie was good in her first romantic comedy, and Ed Burns, who plays Pete, a cameraman with attitude, is perfectly suited to his role. **GRADE: C+**

THE LIGHT BETWEEN OCEANS: (2016) Tom Sherbourne (Michael Fassbender) takes the job as the lighthouse keeper on a remote and uninhabited island off the coast of Western Australia, because he longs for peace and quiet after the trauma of 4 years of fighting in WWI. His solitary life ends when he falls in love with and marries Isabel (Alicia Vikander), his employer's daughter and brings her to live

on Janus Rock. The couple at first enjoys their simple and blissful life, but eventually difficulties in having a child threaten their happiness. Fate intervenes when a rowboat washes ashore carrying a dead man and a living baby. Isabel pleads with Tom to pretend child is their own, and he reluctantly agrees. However, when they learn the truth about the little girl the pair are faced with a dilemma that, no matter what they do, will end in heartbreak for someone. Derek Cianfrance has directed a lovely film which is acted and photographed beautifully. However, the slow pace of the movie combined with the melodramatic last half seemed to emphasize its soap-opera quality. I read the novel (same title) by M.L. Stedman several years ago but admit that I skimmed a bit, probably because the tearful ending seemed so inevitable. I felt the same way about the movie—the heartbreak was inevitable, and it took a long time to get there. **GRADE B**

(Since Gary never read the novel, we thought his views would interest our readers.)

GARY'S VIEWS: The film is based on a best-selling novel that I never read, but having read the novel should never impact one's enjoyment of a film. Barbara and I saw this movie with a couple of good Phoenix friends and I was less emotionally involved than the other three. One of the main factors in my reduced emotional involvement was an early scene that was essential in setting up the sequence of events that made up the story. I did not find the scene was sufficiently motivated and therefore not believable. To be fair, I also missed many words delivered by Alicia Vikander in what were probably important speeches. Given these problems, I cannot grade the movie higher than a C. **GRADE C**

LIKE CRAZY: Being in love like crazy is wonderful, but it doesn't always last, especially when it turns into a long distance love affair. The hand held camera filming of Jacob and Anna falling in love is delightfully creative. It makes you long to be young again. But when Anna, a British citizen, is prevented from re-entering the US because she overstayed her student visa, sadness creeps into the love story. Anton Yelchin is excellent as Jacob and Felicity Jones is a charming Anna. We remember Yelchin from *Huff*, a 2006/7 TV series we especially liked. Ten years ago he played opposite Anthony Hopkins in *Hearts In Atlantis*. Jones, a British actor, was new to us. We were expecting a romantic comedy, but this movie is definitely not a comedy. The ending was particularly sobering and left us feeling quite sad. I read that the actors improvised a portion of the film, working from a 50-page outline. Manohla Dargis, critic for *The New York Times*, thought that Yelchin and Jones didn't yet have the tools to fill in such blanks. I suspect that most young actors, no matter how charming, lack those tools. However, Lisa Schwarzbaum of *EW* gave the movie high marks for being a "palpably real, universally identifiable manifestation of young love in all its ecstasy and agony." We were not as enthusiastic as she was. **GRADE C+**

LILO AND STITCH: In this animated feature Disney combines aliens, hula dancers, and Elvis Presley and makes it all work. The animation is the old-fashioned flat kind, and is the first film to use a watercolor background since *Dumbo*. Stitch is a creature that has been illegally engineered on a faraway planet. He has been designed for destruction, and the planet's ruling council banishes him to an uninhabited planet. But, he escapes and winds up on the Island of Kauai. There a little girl named Lilo, who thinks he is just a strange kind of puppy, adopts him from an animal shelter. She names him Stitch and teaches him the Hawaiian concept of ohana, or family, which is summed up in the oft-repeated promise that "nobody gets left behind." Lilo, her older sister, Nani, and Stitch do become a family, but not without a good dose of mayhem. Ving Rhames gives voice to Cobra Bubbles, the strangest social worker you'll ever see. Mr. Bubbles is assigned to check up on the two sisters whose parents died in an automobile accident. A couple of comic aliens get involved: Jumba, the scientist who created Stitch, and Pleakley, a researcher who is an expert on the watery planet we call Earth. Ebert liked this one and said, "*It keeps its edge and its comic zest all the way through, and although it arrives relatively unheralded, it's a jewel.*" I took grandson, Nathan, and he gives it an A-. I'd give it a solid B. **GRADE: B**

LIMITLESS: What if you could take a pill that would enable you to use 100% of your brain power? A pill that would enable you to learn a language in a day or two, unlock the mysteries of the stock market and tap every ounce of your potential. Would you take that pill? Eddie (Bradley Cooper), a writer with a serious case of writer's block, does and within minutes he has access to every bit of information his brain has ever processed. The novel he hasn't been able to even start practically writes itself. Before taking the pill his world is shaded in blues and grays; after the pill, his life is in Technicolor. Unfortunately, Eddie discovers that the price is steep. He must take the \$800 pill every day, but that's not the real cost. The real cost is to his psyche that almost undoes him. Cooper, best known for his role in *The Hangover* benefits from a more challenging role in this movie. Owen Gleiberman of Entertainment Weekly thinks that his performance in *Limitless* proves that Cooper is "a cock-of-the-walk movie star." Robert DeNiro plays a wily Wall Street moneyman who hires Eddie for his pill-induced genius. I thought the premise of the film was intriguing and I like the way director Neil Burger visualized the change in Eddie's brain after taking the pill. The plot evolves into a thriller, with bad men chasing Eddie for various reasons, but I thought that was OK. Gary always has trouble with the plot of movies that delve into fantasy. He can't help but notice logical inconsistencies. I agree the film has some things that don't make sense, but overall, I enjoyed the ride. I even liked the ambiguous ending. I give Limitless a B+, but Gary can't go higher than B-. **GRADE B+/B-**

LINCOLN: We are used to seeing Abraham Lincoln as a great statesman, but in this movie, we see him as a consummate politician. The civil war has been waging for over four years and the human toll has been astronomical. Lincoln knew that his Emancipation Proclamation would not be the law of the land when the war was over. He needed to pass the 13th Amendment to forever abolish slavery before the end of the war. The Senate had a Republican majority and they had passed the amendment easily, but the House of Representatives was another matter. Lincoln needed 20 Democrats to vote "Yea", and it didn't look good. Lincoln bought the votes of lame duck senators by giving them patronage jobs. Those that couldn't be bought, he persuaded. Filling up the gallery with "Negros" on the day of the vote was brilliantly persuasive. It was difficult to hear those opposed to abolishing slavery say things like, "Congress must never declare equal those whom God has created unequal." Of course, we know that the 13th Amendment did pass, and 143 years later, Barack Obama was elected President of the United States. We are used to hearing that our country has never been so polarized, but our political situation pales in comparison to the violent polarization in Lincoln's second term. Daniel Day Lewis is a remarkable Lincoln. His makeup, posture and his mannerisms were perfect, and he always looked like the tallest person in the room. Tommy Lee Jones as Thaddeus Stevens, an ardent abolitionist, and David Strathairn as William Seward, Lincoln's Secretary of State lead an outstanding supporting cast. In addition to Lincoln, the politician, we see Lincoln a husband and father interacting with his wife, played by Sally Field, and his two sons. The movie looks and sounds amazingly authentic. It is a "talky" movie, but Ty Burr of the *Boston Globe* says, "If you consider this movie 'too talky,' well, you may not be worthy of it. Because it was directed by Steven Spielberg and had

such a marvelous cast, we expected great things. It didn't quite live up to our expectations, but we think it is well worth the two and a half hours of your time. **GRADE B+**

THE LINCOLN LAWYER: The title refers to a character in a best selling Michael Connelly novel, a lawyer who runs his law office out of the back seat of his chauffeured Lincoln Town Car. If you like legal thrillers with a little humor woven in but without a single car chase, this is one Barbara and I both enjoyed. Mickey Haller (Matthew McConaughey) is a slick Los Angeles criminal defense attorney who relies as much on street smarts and quick wit as on law books to defend his sometimes shady clients. It has been awhile since McConaughey has needed more than a tanned body and an impressive six pack of abdominal muscles to attract an audience. We hope this film is the beginning of a run of more serious roles for McConaughey. Names you may recognize in the impressive supporting cast include Marisa Tomei, Ryan Phillippe, and William H Macy. As you would expect, the story starts as a straight forward case that evolves into something far more complex. It might increase your enjoyment of the film if you see the film before the advertising trailer. Barbara and I went to the film with a positive attitude because we give high marks to Connelly novels, but we were not disappointed with the story or the casting. **GRADE B+**

THE LINCOLN LAWYER: (Available for streaming on HBO Max and on Prime Video) Barbara and I first saw this film when it was released in 2011. The movie was adapted from a 2005 novel with the same title written by Michael Connelly. Now, a 10 episode series of *The Lincoln Lawyer* is available on Netflix. We decided to refresh our nearly 90 year old memories by viewing the movie before we start the series. You can read my decade old review of the film in the Movie Views Archives. It is a well-crafted, well-cast adaptation of a Michael Connelly's best-selling crime thriller. Matthew McConaughey plays Mickey Haller, a charismatic defense attorney who does business from the back seat of his chauffeured Lincoln Town Car....thus the title. As I said in my earlier review, "If you like legal thrillers with a little humor woven in but without a single car chase, this is one Barbara and I both enjoyed. We gave the movie a B+ in 2011, and our evaluation hasn't changed. **GRADE B+**

The Lincoln Lawyer series is based on a 2008 novel, "The Brass Verdict" by Michael Connelly.

It premiered on Netflix on May 13, 2022.

The series has been renewed for a second season which is expected to stream in 2023.

LINDA RONSTADT: THE SOUND OF MY VOICE: (2019) Words fail me to describe this documentary and Linda Ronstadt's wonderful voice and consummate musicianship. I fell in love with her in 1983 when I saw her in *The Pirates of Penzance*. I couldn't believe that the woman who sang "Blue Bayou," "When will I Be Loved" and "You're No Good" could sing the coloratura part of Mabel so beautifully and with such mastery. I became convinced that Ronstadt could literally sing anything, a fact that people in the music industry already knew. This loving tribute to Ronstadt was directed by Rob Epstein, Jeffrey Friedman. and the fact that it needed two people to adequately tell her story is a testament to her talent. She grew up surrounded by music in Tuscon, Arizona. One of Ronstadt's early musical influences was the Mexican songs her father sang, accompanying himself on the guitar. Her mom played the piano, and her love of the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas was the influence that no doubt drew her to *The Pirates of Penzance*, which she first performed for Joseph Papp's Broadway production. Throughout her musical life she was always searching for new challenges. Her managers usually protested when she wanted to try something new, but they were won over when the resulting albums were hits. In the biography, many people talked about her musicianship and her ability to shape her voice to fit the music. Ronstadt's biggest challenge came later in life. In 2013 she revealed the reason she had been absent from the music scene in recent years: She had been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, and the Parkinson's robbed her of her voice. That is what Gary and I found so touching about the title of this film: *The Sound of My Voice*. If you love Linda Ronstadt, you will love this documentary. If you don't know who Linda Ronstadt is, you will fall in love with her by the end of the film. **GRADE A**

LION: (2016) How can you tell a story when the hero spends almost all his time on the computer? Garth Davis solves the problem so creatively that the movie garnered a Golden Globe nomination for Best Motion Picture, Drama. The movie is based on the true story of Saroo Brierly, who, as a five-year-old boy got lost on the streets of Calcutta, 1300 kilometers from home. After surviving for months, Saroo is eventually adopted by an Australian couple. Twenty-five years later, the young man sets out to find his lost family. Dev Patel, looking quite different from his role in *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, plays Saroo so convincingly that he got a Screen Actor Guild nomination for his outstanding performance. It is a scent that awakens Saroo's long-buried memories—the scent of home. He uses Google Earth to search for the location of the train station from which he was lost so long ago. Davis exquisitely weaves together the poignant memories of the five-year old boy and the young man's computer search. Saroo hesitates to tell his Australian mother and father of his search, although when he finally does, they are wonderfully supportive. Nicole Kidman, who plays Saroo's adoptive mother, also got a Golden Globe nomination for her affecting performance. She is excellent, especially when she talks about "her vision." And the reunion scene is heart-breaking and perfect. Gary and I encourage you to stay through the closing credits to see the real-life meeting between Saroo's two mothers. **GRADE A**

LIONS FOR LAMBS: I believe most Republicans will either dislike or boycott this film. Teenagers will avoid it because the action scenes are too few and too static and it will not get the word-of-mouth hype that might keep it alive. The powerful cast of Robert Redford, Meryl Streep, and Tom Cruise will draw a few million in box-office sales, but not nearly enough to make it a success by Hollywood standards. Barbara and I liked this **admittedly talky drama, but not nearly as well as well as *Before The Devil Knows You're Dead***, which will probably flounder at the box-office. The celebrity leads, as well as the supporting cast, are impressive and believable in their roles. Director Robert Redford moves the action between three stories. In one, he plays an earnest college professor trying to inject some intellectual fervor into a brilliant, but apathetic, student. In a second story, Cruise plays an articulate hawkish Republican senator who has granted a rare one-hour interview to a seasoned cable-news journalist (Streep). The third story follows two young soldiers who are injured in Afghanistan. This story has intertwining threads with the first two. Movie critics often flog moviemakers for not dealing with urgent contemporary themes, but when they do, usually flog them for telling us things we already know. As expected, critics are luke warm on this film, but I think it has enough going for it for a grade of B. **GRADE B**

LISTEN TO ME MARLON: (2015) The *MARLON* in the title refers to Marlon Brando, seen by many as one of the greatest actors who ever lived. This is a unique documentary in which director and co-writer Stevan Riley has edited hundreds of hours of unpublished

homemade audiotape recorded by Brando over the course of his life and blended them with movie clips, old interviews, and newsreel footage. Barbara and I enjoyed this look at the inner life of a Hollywood icon, but I think it will have limited appeal. Its greatest appeal will be to professional and amateur actors as well as people in the film industry. Devoted film buffs will also find it appealing. Brando was a prize pupil of Stella Adler, who brought the Stanislavsky Method of acting to America and Brando had a profound influence on hundreds of actors and even to the entire film industry. The material taken from the audiotapes range from stream-of-consciousness rambblings to deeply felt concerns. Footage of Adler and Brando as well as his comments about "the method" are fascinating. Brando had a turbulent childhood and a troubled life. In case you have forgotten, Marlon's son Christian shot his half-sister's boyfriend and served five years in prison. Brando's daughter, Cheyenne committed suicide. In the final reel it was sad to watch the decline of a man emotionally destroyed by the tragedies that befell his children. I remember one critic who regards this film as Brando's posthumous self-portrait. I see it as a fitting epitaph. **GRADE B**

LITTLE CHILDREN: As we left the theater, Barbara and I agreed we had just seen an extraordinary film. It is a film that will garner high praise from most critics and independent film buffs, but will be seen by very few people. It is not a "feel good" movie unless your mood is elevated by a really well made movie regardless of content. Sometimes a film makes you want to read the book on which it is based. In this film the marriage of book and film is so intertwined that you leave the theater feeling that you have just read the book. The film is based on a novel written by Tom Perrotta and carries the same title. The story centers mainly on two families in a quiet Massachusetts suburb. Kate Winslet plays a bored stay-at-home mother trying to cope with a less than perfect marriage. Patrick Wilson plays a handsome, but pathetically immature stay-at-home father who is trying to cope with a less than perfect marriage. What starts as an innocent hug and a playground dare evolve into a riveting story involving a rich texture of characters and subplots. Jackie Earle Haley deserves special praise for his brilliant portrayal of a recently released sex offender. It isn't easy to convincingly play a character with equal parts humanity and depravity. I prefer not to reveal more of the plot. It is sufficient to say that this powerful psychological drama is a fascinating cross between *Desperate Housewives* and *In the Bedroom*. **Grade B+**

A LITTLE HELP: It's clear that this is an "independent" movie because it doesn't follow the typical Hollywood format and the ending is definitely not Hollywood. But, we enjoyed it mostly because of Jenna Fischer (TV *The Office*) as Laura, an unhappy wife who becomes a widow trying to find her way. Chris O'Donnell plays her cheating husband, but he doesn't last long. Laura's son, Dennis, is a typical hostile teenager who deals with his father's death by telling a big lie. A lie that Laura goes along with, at least for a while. Rob Benedict is appealing as Paul, Laura's brother in law. Paul is married to Laura shrew of a sister, but we learn that he has always had a crush on Laura. Brooke Smith has the unenviable task of playing the shrew, Lesley Ann Warren is Laura's mother and Ron Leibman plays her father. It's not a perfect movie, but we thought it was enjoyable. I'll end with a quote from our local critic's review: "**A Little Help** is worth watching, mostly for Fischer. It's not her first non-"Office" appearance but it's her first lead role, and she's good enough to make you want to see her next one." We agree. **GRADE B**

LITTLE FOCKERS: O. K., it wasn't a great movie. Sequels rarely are. But the name is still funny enough to draw an audience. For two weeks in a row *Little Fockers* has led in box office sales. It was over ten years ago that we were introduced to male nurse, Gaylord 'Greg' Focker (Ben Stiller), his macho ex-CIA agent father-in-law Jack Byrnes (Robert De Niro), his sweet mother-in-law (Blythe Danner), his wife (Teri Polo) and his wife's eccentric former boy friend (Owen Wilson). Four years later in the first sequel we met Greg's parents, played by Dustin Hoffman and Barbara Streisand. They all return for the third installment and are even joined by Jessica Alba and Laura Dern. There are occasional laugh-out-loud-laughs, but probably fewer than stars in the cast. Critics generally see this as a lackluster effort and I am afraid we must agree with them. As we left the theater, Barbara observed, "On the whole, it was characters in search of a story." That about sums it up. **GRADE C-**

LITTLE MEN: (2016) This slice-of-life movie describes one summer in Brooklyn for two families and introduces two talented young actors: Theo Taplitz, who plays Jake and Michael Barbieri, who plays Tony. When Jake's grandfather dies, he and his family move to the Brooklyn building left to the family in the will. Jake's father (Greg Kinnear) is an unsuccessful actor. The family is supported by Jake's therapist mother (Jennifer Ehle). The ground level of the building is a storefront space rented by Lenora (Paulina Garcia) for her small dress shop, and her son Tony and Jake soon become fast friends. Their bond is tested when Tony's mother and Jake's parents become embroiled in a dispute over the dress shop lease. That's about it for plot in *Little Men* which focuses more on character development. We see the two 13-year-olds hanging out together and planning to attend the LaGuardia High School for the Performing Arts in the fall. Tony is gregarious and outgoing and wants to be an actor, while Jake is introverted and wants to be an artist. We also learn more about Lenora and her friendship with Jake's grandfather. There are no bad guys here. All are just trying to get by as best they can. Both Gary and I have been Greg Kinnear fans ever since 1997's *As Good As It Gets*. Kinnear just keeps getting better, and his scenes with the boys are the best in the movie. It is to the movie's credit that all the characters are so honestly drawn and acted that we wonder what happens to everyone after the summer is over. Gary says B-, but I give it a B. **GRADE B/B-**

LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE: 2006 This is the story of an Albuquerque family determined to get their young daughter to the finals of a beauty pageant in California. It is laugh-out-loud funny yet it surprises you with some very touching moments. It is never predictable; always interesting. It is a terrific movie! Greg Kinnear (Richard) and Toni Collette (Sheryl) are the parents; Abigail Breslin (Olive) and Paul Dano (Dwayne) are their two children; Alan Arkin is the Grandpa; Steve Carell is Sheryl's brother, Frank. They are the poster family for "dysfunctional." Dwayne has taken a vow of silence until he realizes his dream of becoming an Air Force pilot; Richard is an optimistic loser trying to market a lame self-help program; Sheryl is the harried bread-winner of the group; Grandpa has been kicked out of a retirement home for snorting heroin; and Frank has just been released from the hospital after a suicide attempt. The film puts forth their problems for your amusement, but it never makes fun of the people. This is an authentic family, and a stellar cast makes you care for each one. Newcomer Michael Arndt is credited with the writing and the husband and wife team of Johanthan Dayton and Valerie Faris directed. We hope you all get the chance to see this gem. **GRADE A-**

LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE: 2023 (Available for streaming on HBO Max) This black comedy is over twenty years old. The film was nominated for four Academy Awards, including Best Picture. It scored 91% from critics on the Tomatometer as well as 91% Audience score based on over 250,000 ratings. As Barbara said in her review for Movie Views, "It is laugh-out-loud funny yet it surprises you with

some very touching moments." You will find her review in the Movie Views Archives. If you have fond memories of seeing *Little Miss Sunshine*, you may want to spend 1hr 42min refreshing your memory of this delightful indie film. It exposes the hypocrisy in children's beauty pageants as well as the myth of winners versus losers. It still manages to hold up with plenty of laughs over twenty years after the film was initially released in theaters. The film succeeds thanks to a strong ensemble cast that includes Greg Kinnear, Steve Carell, Toni Collette, Alan Arkin, and Abigail Breslin, as well as a delightfully funny script. **GRADE A**

LITTLE RICHARD: I AM EVERYTHING: {Available on Prime Video and Apple TV for a small rental fee} Documentaries should educate, entertain and enlighten. This fast paced film is a tribute to the 87-year life and legacy of a Rock and Roll pioneer. *Little Richard: I Am Everything* is chock-full of useful information from music scholars, historians, and fans and it certainly meets those requirements. Director and co-producer Lisa Cortés, gives Little Richard the kind of recognition he was too often denied in his lifetime. In "cradle-to-grave" fashion, we learn that Richard was born in 1932 in Macon, Georgia and that he was one of 12 children. He was a one-of-a-kind rock'n'roll icon who shaped the world of music. Director Cortés's impressive work includes a montage of the many musicians Richard influenced including big names like Mick Jagger, Tom Jones, Pat Boone, The Beatles, and The Rolling Stones. Even if you go into this movie knowing very little about Little Richard, you will come out with a profound respect for him. He was born into a Black church where his father was minister. Richard periodically renounced rock and roll for religion. At times he comes off as a flamboyant man filled with self-confidence, but at other times he comes off as a self-loathing gay man. Taking a quote from the film, Writer Ty Burr says, "Little Richard was very, very good at liberating others through his example, but not good at liberating himself." The Little Richard story is a roller-coaster ride of highs and lows. He died in 2020 at the age of 87. Barbara and I loved this documentary and highly recommend it. **GRADE A**

LITTLE WOMEN: (2019) *Little Women* was my favorite book as a young girl, and I have seen many film adaptations. I remember Kate Hepburn as Jo in the 1933 version. (I must have watched it on TV.) Greta Gerwig's version emphasizes Jo as Louisa May Alcott's alter ego, and the character with which I, and many other girls, most identified. Saoirse Roman is the perfect Jo imbuing the character with independence and the enduring notion that girls are more than just pretty things waiting for a man to marry them. It is a notion both timeless and timely. She deserves her Golden Globe nomination. The movie is perfectly cast with Emma Watson, Florence Pugh, and Eliza Scanlen as Meg, Amy and Beth March and Laura Dern as Marmee. Timothée Chalamet plays their neighbor Laurie, and Meryl Streep is Aunt March. You might be surprised to see Bob Odenkirk (*Better Call Saul*) as Father March. Gerwig is a talented filmmaker, as *Ladybird* demonstrated, and I want to see her flourish. One of her messages in *Little Women* is that sisterhood is powerful. I could identify with that. Perhaps I watched too many versions of this story, because, although I wanted to love the movie, I only liked it very much. I have to give the movie a B+, but Gary gives it a B. **GRADE B+/B**

LITTLE WOODS: (2018) This insightful film is set in a small town in North Dakota (up near the Canadian border) where riches gained from the local oil wells have not made it to the people who actually live there. *Little Woods* is all about financial insecurity. It is focused on two sisters, Ollie (Tessa Thompson) and Deb (Lily James), living below the poverty line in a fictional town named "Little Woods." Both actors give powerful performances. This is Nia DaCosta's debut as a writer and director and I think she has a promising future in Hollywood filmmaking. The film earned 97% from 65 critics on the Tomatometer. As both sisters find themselves in desperate situations, the family strength is put to the test. As soon as one money crisis is solved, another one hits. It is a familiar drama in which many low income families today find themselves. Ollie's sister, Deb, has one child and is pregnant with another. They are stunned to learn that it will cost \$8,000 in medical expenses to have the baby or she could cross the border with a false identity and get an abortion for free in Canada. At the heart of the movie is the complicated relationship between the two sisters and their struggle for survival in an economy that seems to have forgotten them. Barbara and I liked the film and look forward to DaCosta's future films. **GRADE B+**

LIVE FREE OR DIE HARD: If you have a taste for some mindless violence mixed with cyber-terrorism and a dash of humor, than you'll want to check out what John McClane is up to in this 4th version of the *Die Hard series*. Bruce Willis may have reached the ripe old age of 52, but he's still "that man." No one can mix violence and humor better than he does. And Justin Long, playing a computer geek who unwittingly has aided the cyber-terrorist, is very good as Willis's young sidekick. We also liked Mary Elizabeth Winstead as McClane's feisty daughter. The movie's special effects are terrific. There are a couple of spectacular explosions and a sequence with a fighter plane and McClane in an 18-Wheeler that is off the charts. McClane miraculously survives an untold number of calamities that would have killed anyone else. I think he may be a super hero in disguise as a mere mortal. Timothy Olyphant, the sheriff in TV's *Deadwood*, makes a credible computer whiz turned terrorist, and the havoc he wreaks upon the country is frightening. What's more, it seems almost plausible. We learned two new phrases, "Fire Sale," and "E Bomb," but you'll have to see the film to make sense of them. The critics grades range from A to C. Gary and I give it a **B+**. **GRADE B+**

THE LIVES OF OTHERS: This is a beautifully crafted movie. I can understand why it won the Oscar last year for Best Foreign Film. Although the film got off to a slow start, it didn't take long for us to become totally engrossed in the story and the people. The film is set in East Germany in 1984 when the GDR (German Democratic Republic) had total control over the lives of its citizens. Their goal was to "know everything," and to that end, the government engaged in secret surveillance of anyone who didn't toe the party line. Captain Gerd Wiesler is a party loyalist who hopes to boost his career when he is given the job of collecting evidence against a playwright, Georg Dreyman. In science there is something called the "observer effect." It refers to changes that the act of observing will make on the phenomenon being observed. Here, the act of observing has an effect on the observer. The more Wiesler becomes immersed in the lives of Dreyman and his actress girlfriend, the more he himself changes. The actor playing Wiesler, Ulrich Mühe, is masterful at showing this change with very little dialogue and extremely subtle expressions. The playwright is portrayed by Sebastian Koch,* who so impressed us in *Black Book*, reviewed in last month's issue. He has such a warm and charming persona that you are naturally drawn to him, even though in *Black Book*, he played a Nazi SS officer. He's equally appealing here as a sympathetic character. Small wonder that he is one of Germany's most acclaimed actors. We enthusiastically recommend this one. **GRADE A-**

LIVING: 2022 (Prime rental 19.99) *Living* is an English adaptation of Akira Kurosawa's film *Ikiru*, which itself was an adaptation of Leo Tolstoy's novel "The Death of Ivan Ilyich." The film is set in 1950s London in the midst of Britain's postwar reconstruction. *Living* tells the story of the final days of Mr. Williams (Bill Nighy) following a grim prognosis. Mr. Williams is a bureaucrat in the county Public Works

department where things get done, if they ever get done, at a snail's pace. Kazuo Ishiguro's screenplay largely follows the same narrative structure as Kurosawa's, but the new setting provides added layers—mirroring elements of Britain's reconstruction with Williams' own eleventh-hour reconstruction of the legacy he intends to leave behind. After the grim prognosis, Mr. Williams embarks on a night of debauchery with a man he met in a restaurant. He doesn't return to work, but instead, in a chance meeting, he encounters a soon to be former employee, Margaret Harris. Her vivacity and love of life intrigue him and he develops a little crush. When he tells her that he hasn't long to live, she urges him to return to work. He does, and becomes dedicated to a project several women have petitioned for to no avail: to build a playground in a bombed out area of London. That playground becomes his legacy. *Living* requires its audience to look inward and reflect on the legacy they will one day leave behind. Nighy gives a moving performance as he grapples with regrets for a life well spent, but not spent well enough. We both give his performance an A, although Gary gives the movie a B+. I, on the other hand, thought the movie was beautiful and haunting and give it an A. **GRADE A/B+**

THE LOBSTER: *The Lobster* is a 2015 film directed and co-written by Greek director Yorgos Lanthimos. Lanthimos was born in Athens and has an international reputation for making experimental films. This film is co-produced by companies from Ireland, the United Kingdom, Greece, France and the Netherlands. It is his first English language feature film. Clearly it is absurdist satire and is one of the most bizarre films I've ever seen, but it received an impressive 91% on the Tomatometer based on 159 reviews. It stars Colin Farrell and is supported by an excellent cast that includes Rachel Weisz and John C. Reilly. It is a simple story about a man (Farrell) who loses his loved one and is sent to a surreal hotel where he must try to find love once again within the first 45 days, or he will be turned into an animal of his choosing. The title of the film gives you a clue about his choice. After several romantic misadventures he decides to make a daring escape and join a rebel faction known as The Loners, a group founded on a complete rejection of romance. Movie posters tout the movie as an unconventional love story and it certainly lives up to that claim. Lanthimos is definitely an acquired taste and since I don't feel I have acquired the taste yet, I would hesitate to recommend it to anyone even though it won awards at film festivals including at Cannes. One critic described it as follows: "*The Lobster* is what would happen if Wes Anderson set about doing Franz Kafka, with a hefty dash of George Orwell thrown into the mix: surreal, comic, sad, strange, beautiful, sublime." I don't feel I can give a meaningful grade to this creative, but bizarre effort. **GRADE: UNGRADED**

LOCAL COLOR: Our local cinema mogul, Dan Harkins, saw this film at the Sedona Film Festival and liked it so much that he booked it into one of his theaters here in the Valley. He did the same thing in 2004 for *What the #\$! Do We Know*. That film ran for a year at his Tempe theater and went on to make over 10 million when a national release followed. George Gallo, writer-director of *Local Color*, hopes that kind of magic happens again. *Local Color* is set in 1974 and focuses on John Talis, a teenage boy who yearns to be a painter, and the Russian artist who becomes his mentor. The story is based on the experiences of Talia who is now a successful artist. The film is beautifully photographed—many of the scenes look like they should be hanging on a museum wall. However, there is a lot of "art" talk, which may not appeal to everyone, even though Armin Mueller-Stahl, who plays the Russian artist, Nicoli Seroff, is able to make the talk interesting. Mueller-Stahl creates an eccentric yet believable character and is the best reason to see the film. Trevor Morgan is good as the earnest young would-be artist. Ray Liotta, who plays Talia's father, is hampered by having to play a stereotypical philistine who would prefer that his son play sports and chase girls instead of spending his time at an easel. Seroff was a representational* artist, and his kind of painting is dismissed by the modern art world as sentimental and old-fashioned. There is much discussion in the film of the value of sentiment and beauty versus the pretensions of modern art. In one scene Seroff judges a local art competition. It is amusing to hear the artists try to justify their creations as works of art, especially one artist who displayed a large canvass filled with nothing but black paint. We enjoyed the film but are not sure it will attain the success of *What the #\$! Do We Know*. **GRADE B**

*The word "representational" describes a work of art that depicts something easily recognized by most people.

LOCKE: (2013) This is an extraordinary film. At less than an hour and a half in length the film was shot in just eight nights using a car mounted with three cameras. It is a one-man show shot in one confined location. It takes a powerful director, Steven Knight, and a powerful actor, Tom Hardy, to pull it off. But pull it off they did as they produced what could have been a gimmicky dud into a tension filled compelling bit of film-making. Hardy plays Ivan Locke, a foreman on a massive construction job, who is scheduled in a few hours to supervise the largest non-military concrete pour in Great Britain's history. But on the eve of the biggest challenge of his career a phone call has set in motion a competing personal problem that threatens to destroy everything important to him. He has committed to a moral decision, the details of which painfully spill out in phone calls he makes as he travels from Birmingham to London. Acclaimed writer/director Steven Knight who authored both *Eastern Promises* and *Dirty Pretty Things* also wrote the screenplay for this unique film experience. Barbara and I were so impressed with the originality of the film and the acting ability of Hardy that we have to give it high marks. **GRADE A-**

LOGAN LUCKY (2017) The actors must have had a lot of fun making this redneck heist movie, and we had fun watching it. Daniel Craig, with short blond hair, tattoos and a Southern accent was a hoot as an expert at blowing up bank vaults. When brothers, Jimmy (Channing Tatum) and Clyde (Adam Driver) Logan decide to rob a Charlotte, North Carolina auto race track, they need the services of the aptly named Joe Bang. However, because Joe is presently incarcerated, they have to break him out and get him back before the warden notices. And they have to add his two dim brothers to the heist team. Mellie Logan drives the get-away car. She knows a lot about driving, but very little about hairdressing. Or, as critic Rex Reed, who despised *Logan Lucky* put it, Meillie is a *hairdresser who doesn't seem to know a hot comb from a portable mixmaster*. Despite a planning list that includes two items for "shit happens," the brothers manage to pull off the prison break and the heist with a little help from friends along the way. An FBI investigator, nicely played by Hillary Swank, seems determined to catch the Logan brothers, and a scene at the end of the film suggests a sequel. Steven Soderbergh, who directed *Oceans 11, 12 & 13, Erin Brokovich, Out of Sight, Traffic, and Sex, Lies, and Videotape*—all films we have enjoyed—directed *Logan Lucky*. He must have no difficulty getting actors for his movies since Seth McFarlane, Katie Holmes, the aforementioned Hillary Swank and a host of terrific characters populate the cast. Rex Reed notwithstanding, critics have given this one high marks. Because Gary's closed caption device malfunctioned, he had a bit of difficulty understand the southern accents, so he didn't enjoy it quite as much as I did. **GRADE B/B-**

THE LONE RANGER: (2013) If you're a Johnny Depp fan you're sure to enjoy his Tonto. He's not the Tonto you remember from childhood, though. He isn't as monosyllabic as the Tonto of old, and he's much more hip. I liked his modern version. Arnie Hammer was entertaining as John Reid, aka The Lone Ranger, but for those of us who remember the hero of our youth, it was a bit difficult to see the masked man as a bit of a doofus. And there was definitely something wrong with Silver. It was a good idea to go back and show how the two got together, why The Lone Ranger wore a mask, and how Silver came to be his faithful steed, but this backstory didn't live up to our expectations. The script definitely needed another rewrite, or two, and at least 20 or 30 minutes cut from its 2 hour and 29 minute running time. We waited a very long time to hear the William Tell Overture, and, by the time we heard it, we didn't much care anymore. Three writers got credit for the story and the screenplay, and you know what they say about something designed by a committee. The result is a bit of a mess and the spectacular train crash can't rescue it. The scenery was gorgeous, but it definitely wasn't Texas—Monument Valley is more like it. The villains were all very, very bad—comic book bad—and they all deserved what, after a long, long wait, happened to them. Ruth Wilson played the Ranger's love interest, and Helena Bonham Carter, continuing her tradition of playing outrageous characters, was a madam with a most unusual artificial leg. Critics have disliked this movie, which only earned a 27% on Rotten Tomato's Tomatometer. We liked it only minimally better. **GRADE C**

LONE STAR: We saw this 1996 movie on Amazon for \$3, and it was just as good as I remembered. We'd give it an A again, but we'll let this 1996 review speak for the movie. **LONE STAR:** In the opening scene of *Lone Star*, a skeleton is found buried in the desert outside a small Texas border town. As Sheriff Sam Deeds (Chris Cooper) investigates the 40-year old crime, he uncovers the secrets of many of the townspeople as well. When the body is identified as a former Sheriff, Charlie Wade (Chris Kristoferson), Deeds learns that there were many people who wanted to put a bullet in Wade. The name at the top of the suspect list, however, is Buddy Deeds, Sam's father, played in flashbacks by Matthew McConaughey, the hot new star of *A Time To Kill*. Buddy took over as sheriff when Wade "disappeared, and Sam took over for his father when Buddy died. Their troubled father-son relationship is the motif for the other relationships revealed in the film. We applaud John Sayles for writing characters with such depth and for making a film that works on so many levels. It is beautifully textured: Every character is fully realized, even those only on screen for a few minutes. Sam's relationship with his high school girlfriend (Elizabeth Pena), now a widow, provides the love interest, and Francis McDormand has a great scene as Sam's ex-wife. Beautifully interweaving present and past, the film explores not only family secrets, but also the difficult racial relationships in a town that is peopled by Whites, Hispanics, African-Americans, and Native Americans. This is one film we could happily see again. Favorite line: "It's always nice to see a prejudice defeated by a deeper prejudice." **GRADE A**

LONE SURVIVOR: Peter Berg has been kicking around Hollywood for twenty-five years. He broke into the business as an actor, but is now better known for his directing and writing. He wrote and directed this gripping and grim war film which is based on a true story of four Navy Seals on a mission in Afghanistan. It is a powerful story of heroism, courage and the horrors of war. It is not a pretty film, but a memorable one. A difficult moral decision by the soldiers leads to a tragic end that is unfortunately revealed in the movie's title. Berg has written a tribute to young soldiers willing put their lives on the line in defense of their war brothers and their country. In the opening scenes of the film he uses actual film footage of Seal Training camps and marvels at the ability to endure pain. He avoids the moral ambiguity of war itself, though you could argue that the unrelenting grimness itself is an indictment of war. Mark Wahlberg, always an interesting actor, is very effective in the lead. He is ably backed by Ben Foster, Taylor Kitsch and Emile Hirsch in supporting roles. I have been following war movies for the past sixty five years and I have to say that this film has some of the toughest and most realistic battle scenes I can remember. If you can tolerate battle scenes and war, Barbara and I think this is a movie you will want to see. **GRADE B**

LONELY HEARTS: (2006 release seen on DVD) John Travolta and James Gandolfini are Long Island cops on the trail of a pair of killers. The film is a remake of a 1970 cult movie titled *The Honeymoon Killers*. It is based on the actual crimes of the couple known as the "Lonely Hearts Killers." Jared Leto and Salma Hayek are Ray and Martha, a pair of sociopaths who find each other and join forces to fleece lonely women out of their life savings. Soon, their con games involve murder. The film is beautifully shot and every detail of the 1949 setting seems authentic. The film is moody and brooding and the violence is graphic. Some critics found it "plodding," and I can appreciate that view. We, however, did find it interesting enough to recommend. **THUMBS UP**

LONG SHOT: (2019) This film is a far-fetched, lighthearted, and decidedly raunchy rom-com starring Seth Rogen and Charlize Theron. Who would have thought the graceful, elegant and Oscar winning Charlize Theron and the nerdy, often outrageous Seth Rogen would make such a perfect pair? Let's face it, physically, Theron and Rogen **are** a mismatched couple. But the two stars have good chemistry on screen. And the supporting cast is stacked with loads of talent. Theron plays the youngest ever Secretary of State, Charlotte Field, as she prepares to make a run for the Presidency. Rogen plays a political reporter who has harbored a crush on Charlotte Field since he was a kid and she was his slightly older babysitter. So it's another odd-couple romantic comedy. It is also very funny and even a little poignant by the end. Barbara and I liked the movie and so did critics and test audiences who scored 83% and 89% respectively on the Tomatometer. In the end, *Long Shot* somehow manages to keep hope alive both for the romantic comedy genre and for the American political process, and that's not easy. **GRADE B+**

THE LONGEST YARD: Many of you will remember the 1974 film by the same title starring Burt Reynolds. It was about a former pro football quarterback, now a prison inmate, who organizes his fellow convicts into a football team to play against the prison guards. Adam Sandler plays the role that Burt Reynolds played in the 1974 film, and Burt appears in a supporting role. Our local reviewer astutely observes that *The Longest Yard* (2005 version) drops the ball on originality which sounds humorously obvious, but I confess I found myself comparing this version with my memory of the first. The newer film pushes for more comedy and the talent of Chris Rock helps that along. Adam Sandler is good, but not great. And I'm afraid I have to say the same for the film. Grade C+ for me, but Barbara has the last word.

LOOK AT ME: It's tough to be an overweight young woman whose very young stepmother is beautifully slender. And whose 5 year-old stepsister is adorable. It is particularly difficult when your father is a monumentally self-obsessed, egotistical jerk. Lolita yearns for her father's love and attention but he can't see beyond his own needs and self-interest. When Lolita, who is studying voice, gives her father a tape of her lessons, he never even has time to listen to it. Thoroughly lacking self confidence, she assumes that no one likes her for

herself, but only for her connection to her father, a famous author. The French title translates to "Like a Picture," but I prefer the American title. It reminds me of how young children, when playing, call out to their parents, "Look at me, mommy. Look at me, daddy." Lolita has been doing that all her life, but her father never has time to look. This French film doesn't offer any solutions to Lolita's problem, and there is no happy Hollywood ending. However, by the end of the story, Lolita has learned a few things about herself and there is a glimmer of hope that she will handle things better in the future. Along the way, we get some good character development and some fine acting by one and all. The film is in French with subtitles. My grade is B, but Gary says B-. **GRADE B/B-**

THE LOOKOUT: This film is so unique that it's impossible to classify. It's part a taut bank-heist thriller and part a subtle sensitive portrait of a young man trying to find his way after a horrific accident that left him badly damaged. The writing, acting and filming are all outstanding. Joseph Gordon-Levitt is wonderful as Chris Pratt, a former high school hockey star who was responsible for the accident that killed two of his friends, badly injured his girlfriend, and left him with a serious head injury. Because of one reckless moment he has gone from being one of the most popular boys in his school to being a nobody who works as a night janitor in a local bank. As we meet Chris, he is dealing with both physical and psychological problems. His rehabilitation therapist has placed him in an apartment with Lewis, a bearded, blind, guitar-playing mentor. Jeff Daniels takes what could have been a trite role and makes it vital and interesting. He also provides some needed lightness in this bleak tale. When Chris makes some new friends he begins to feel better about himself, but he soon learns that their friendship has a price. Matthew Goode is worthy of mention as one of the false friends, and Isla Fisher (**Wedding Crashers**) is appealing as a young woman who professes admiration for Chris. Scott Franks both wrote and directed the film. It is his first directorial effort and he demonstrates a sure hand behind the camera. I liked the way he mirrored the bleakness of Chris's life with the bleakness of the winter Kansas landscape. Although it is the first time Scott has directed, he does have impressive credits as a writer, most notably in *Little Man Tate*, *Get Shorty* and *Out of Sight*. We both think this film deserves an **A-**. **GRADE A-**

LOOPER: Hollywood appears to take a pessimistic view of the future. In most recent films, the future is ugly, dirty and violent. *Looper* is no exception. It is 2044, and those who have money spend their time using eye drop drugs and partying in clubs. In the inner city, the rest seem to be homeless and hopeless. And violence is everywhere. Time travel has not yet been perfected, but it does exist in 2074. When criminals in 2074 want to get rid of someone, they put them in a time machine that looks a bit like an industrial dryer, and send them, bound and hooded, back to 2044 to be eliminated by assassins called "loopers." When a future version of one of the loopers is sent back to 2044 to be killed by his younger self, it is called "closing the loop." And that is what happens. Joseph Gordon-Levitt (with a fake nose) is the 30 years younger version of Bruce Willis, but it's not easy for him to eliminate his future self, because Willis is on a mission. I won't go into that because it all gets increasingly ridiculous and I've probably lost you already. I coerced Gary into going to this movie because I like both Gordon-Levitt and Willis. They are very good both at being violent and also at pondering whether their actions in 2044 can change what happens in 2074. Plus, the movie also has Emily Blunt and Jeff Daniels. The acting wasn't enough for Gary, though, who refuses to grade science fiction movies because he is so biased against them. I was entertained for the first half, but then, in spite of the presence of Emily Blunt, my credulity was strained to the laughing point. I did, however, like the ending. Those who enjoy violent science-fiction will find this one interesting, but I can't give it higher than a C+. **GRADE C+**

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RINGS: If you are a fan of Tolkien's books, you will probably give this movie a B. Roger Ebert, a great fan of the books, didn't like the way the emphasis in the movie was changed from the Hobbits to powerful men and wizards. He also thought the filmmakers created an "overwrought special-effects action picture." He felt that the movie does transcend that genre and is a "well crafted and sometimes stirring" adventure, but that it is not a "true visualization of Tolkien's Middle-earth." If you are a fan of special-effects action pictures, you will probably give this movie an A. Nathan, our 11-year-old grandson thought it deserved a grade "between an A and an A+." (He wouldn't give it an A+--he reserved that grade for *Harry Potter*.) Nathan thought the movie seemed much shorter than its 178 minute running time. If, like us, you don't favor overwrought special effects movies that center on mysticism and wizardry, then you will probably think this is a C+ movie. As we did. However, all of the special effects were quite amazing and I know the visual effects will stay with me for a long time. I thought the sequence in the kingdom of the dwarfs was especially exciting. But, it is a very long movie and couldn't keep our attention all of the time. The actors acquitted themselves admirably and we especially liked Ian McKellen as Gandalf, Elijah Wood as Frodo Baggins, and Viggo Mortensen as Aragorn. Also, Liv Tyler and Cate Blanchett as elves were very appealing. **GRADE C+/B/A**

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RETURN OF THE KING: The final battle scene in this last of the rings trilogy is so magnificent that I hope no one else ever makes another science fiction battle movie. But, I suspect someone will. I enjoyed this film more than I did the first two, although this is definitely not my favorite genre. I can, however, admire the awe-inspiring achievement of Peter Jackson and his crew of artists. It is impossible for realistic sets to compete with these computer-generated fantasies. I loved the villainy of the evil Gollum, the bravery of the valiant Aragorn, the wisdom and leadership of Ian McKellen--looking very spry for his age--and the beauty of both Liv Tyler and Orlando Bloom. The Hobbits are cute, and the Orks are ugly--really, really ugly! I question the Orks' wisdom in using those huge elephants to carry their warriors, though. When an elephant goes down, so do all the warriors carried on its back. Risky business. And I thought they'd never throw that damn ring into the fiery crater. The actual film runs for 3 hours and 15 minutes, but I must confess that I had no trouble sitting through it. I even confess to some snuffles at the end. Gary sat with me, but he did have trouble sitting through it. At a point about 45 minutes before the end, after the ring had been returned to Mount Doom, Frodo said, "It will end now." I heard Gary murmur, "God, I hope so!" I have to give this one a B for my enjoyment and an A for the skillfulness of the filmmaking. Gary declines to give it a grade. **GRADE B**

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE TWO TOWERS: I took grandson, Nathan, to this movie. He thought it was "really good." I thought it was "really long." Yes, the special effects are awesome, but almost all of them have to do with violence, war, and hacking, beheading and killing. Three hours of it! Because I've never read the books, I can't keep all the different groups straight. I also have trouble with the names, so I'm never sure who people are talking about. And everyone is so very dirty! I wanted to throw all of them in a bathtub. It is quite a sight to see the legions of Uruk-hai march to the climactic battle at Helm's Deep. They apparently were formed from mud and they look it--hideous creatures with the worst teeth you ever saw. I did admire the creativity of a computer-generated image named the Gollum. He has a split personality and can't decide whether he wants to help the Hobbit, Frodo, or kill him and steal the ring. Also, the

opening sequence showing Gandalf's battle with Balrog, the monster made of fire and smoke, is quite impressive. There is no doubt that this film is a directing feat of monumental proportions. It's just not my cup of tea. Nathan would give it an A. I wouldn't. **GRADE: C+**

LORD OF WAR: It's difficult to get emotionally involved in a movie that has an unscrupulous arms dealer as it's central character. As charming as Nick Cage can be, his Yuri Orlov is about as low as they come. He deals with anyone who can pay his price, even when he knows the weapons will be used to slaughter innocent people. Jared Leto is Yuri's troubled brother, Bridget Monahan is his wife, and Ethan Hawke is the AFT agent who has vowed to put Yuri in jail. Eamonn Walker is very effective as the evil Liberian dictator Baptiste. I guess this is a well-made film, but it is oddly dispassionate, even cold. Gary suspects that was the filmmaker's intent, since gun-running is a cold and dispassionate business. The ending left us depressed about the state of the world. Roger Ebert calls the film a "bleak comedy." We didn't find much to laugh about. One of the user reviews on the Yahoo movie site called the film "a liberal left-wing piece of crap!" Another user said "This movie can change the world." We don't agree with either one of them, but are not surprised that opinions on this film are wildly disparate. We'll be interested in what our Readers think of this one. **GRADE C**

THE LOST CITY: 2022 (Prime Video) This afternoon we watched the movie, however, the cold light of afternoon can't compete with the darkened movie theatre experience. When it comes to romantic thriller movies, it's best to see them in movie theatres. The spectacular scenes look more real there. As Art S. wrote in his review of **The Lost City** in the May issue of Movie Views: "The movie was fast-paced...and entertaining--pure escapism." (Art did see this in a theater.) This is the story: Reclusive author Loretta Sage (Sandra Bullock) writes about exotic places in her popular adventure romance novels that feature a handsome cover model named Alan (Channing Tatum). She names her hero Dash, and her fans equate Dash with the handsome model on the cover of the books. While on tour promoting her new book with Alan, Loretta gets kidnapped by an eccentric billionaire (Daniel Radcliffe) who hopes she can lead him to an ancient city's lost treasure from her latest story. Determined to prove he can be a hero in real life and not just on the pages of her books, Alan/Dash sets off to rescue her. Gary thought Radcliff had been miscast, as did Art, both thinking that someone with more menace would have been better. But we all thought that the inclusion of Brad Pitt was genius. His Jack Trainer character was the highlight of the movie! Until Trainer, after numerous and impossible fisticuffs, has his head blown off. (He appears at the end of the credits, so stay put for them.) Gary and I always like Sandra Bullock more than do the critics. But, **The Lost City** suffered from seeing it at home, and for us it was only a B-, or maybe even a C+. Critics on Rotten Tomatoes give it 79%, while audiences give it 83%. **GRADE B-/C+**

THE LOST CITY OF Z: (2017) The movie was long and at times very slow. Barbara who was even less enthusiastic than I would say it was interminable. The movie was written and directed by James Gray and is an adaptation of David Grann's 2009 nonfiction best-seller with the same title. **The Lost City of Z** tells the story of British explorer Percy Fawcett, who first entered the jungles of the Amazon in 1906 and discovered evidence of a previously unknown, advanced civilization that may have once inhabited the region. Despite being ridiculed by the scientific establishment who regard indigenous populations as "savages, Fawcett returned time and again to his beloved jungle in an attempt to prove his case, culminating in his mysterious disappearance in 1925. Since he disappeared in the Brazilian jungle, the British explorer has inspired plays, comic books, Hollywood movies and even an Indiana Jones novel. Barb and I wanted to like the film but felt there were so many flaws that we could not. There were far too many scenes shot in near darkness and people often made it difficult to hear by speaking in whispers when the scene did not require it. Barbara was critical when the well-known mosquitos and bugs were brought to our awareness when one character slapped at a mosquito his neck...once. A critic for **The Washington Post** was even more scathing in his criticism than I have been: "Far from the champion of indigenous people Percy Fawcett in real life was a self-mythologizing racist who never discovered anything and whose mistreatment of Amazon natives likely got him killed." In fairness other critics have been more kind. Based on 142 reviews Rotten Tomatoes gives **The Lost City of Z** a very respectable 87%. Barb and I would agree more with the 13% who didn't like the movie. **GRADE C-/D**

THE LOST DAUGHTER: (2021, Available on Netflix after Dec 31, 2021) This movie is the writer/director feature film debut for actor Maggie Gyllenhaal. One critic commented that Gyllenhaal also proved to be a natural storyteller as well as a good writer/director. The Lost Daughter is a character study of a woman grappling with her past decisions. Olivia Colman plays Leda, a woman haunted by choices she made as a young mother. Motherhood is an experience often romanticized both in fiction and real-life, but Gyllenhaal makes a point of shattering the illusion. It was risky for Gyllenhaal to take on the complicated truths about motherhood as her first feature film, but critics loved it. (95% on the Tomatometer) The film was shot on location on the gorgeous Greek island of Spetses, which is near Athens. Olivia Colman is a British actor who has received numerous awards including an Academy Award, four BAFTA Awards, three Golden Globe Awards, two Critics' Choice Awards, and two Screen Actors Guild Awards. The story centers on Leda Caruso (Olivia Colman) who goes on a seaside vacation, only to become obsessed with a young mother Nina (Dakota Johnson) and her young daughter. Johnson is an American actress and model best known for appearing in the **Fifty Shades of Gray** film series. She is the daughter of actors Don Johnson and Melanie Griffith. I chose the movie largely based on the enthusiasm of critics. At the time Barb and I saw it in a theater, there were no Audience Scores. After spending two hours with the film, I predict Audience Scores will be significantly lower than Critics scores. I have to admit that focusing on an unhappy mother rejecting her maternal role wasn't as interesting as I thought it might be. In fairness, I should say that I had great difficulty hearing all the dialogue. Partly that was due to accents and largely because the theater was unable to provide me with a closed caption device which they usually have. But Barbara, who usually has no trouble hearing, also had trouble. We both agreed that the movie was difficult to follow. Flashback scenes were, especially at first, a source of confusion. I feel sure that Gyllenhaal intentionally wrote a script that raises more questions than it answers. Maybe this is a movie I should see a second time with a closed caption device, but I don't think I will. **GRADE B-/C+**

LOST GIRLS: (2020) In a role reminiscent of her Oscar-nominated role in **Gone, Baby, Gone** (2007) as the mother of a child who has been kidnapped, Amy Ryan here plays the mother of a girl who is missing. Thirteen years later, Ryan is Mari Gilbert, the mother of a 24-year-old escort named Shannon. In **Lost Girls** she is playing the mother of a real girl named Shannon Gilbert. Shannon left with her driver for a client's residence in Oak Beach, a gated community on the South Shore of Long Island. She disappeared after a 911 call in which a distraught Shannon pleaded for help. Her driver, who was supposed to keep her safe, instead left her in Oak Beach. When the police arrived, a full hour later, Shannon was nowhere to be seen. Thanks to her mother's dogged insistence that the police investigate her daughter's disappearance, the police uncovered four bodies. None of the four was Shannon. After a year of investigation, they

finally discovered the body of Shannon along with several more victims of what came to be known as the case of “The Long Island serial killer.” The movie is an indictment of the prejudice that police officers the world over feel for sex workers. The police don’t take prostitutes’ disappearances seriously, and they often believe that the young women are to blame for their own deaths. In spite of the fact that the Long Island serial killer is believed to have murdered 10 to 16 people over a period of nearly 20 years, the case remains unsolved. Most of the victims were prostitutes. Over the closing credits, we see the real Mari Gilbert. The movie was inspired by Robert Kolker’s best-selling nonfiction book of the same name. Gary grades **Lost Girls** slightly higher than I do. **GRADE B/B+**

THE LOST KING: 2022 (A Prime Video rental at \$4.99) This movie is the true story of Philippa Langley, an Edinburgh woman who got a bee in her bonnet about rehabilitating Richard III’s reputation by finding his burial site. Fortunately, Sally Hawkins portrays Langley, and she is fantastic! Gary and I have enjoyed her since we first saw **Happy Go Lucky** in 2008. It’s from the team that made **Philomena** ten years back--and we gave an A to that film— producer and co-writer Steve Coogan and director Stephen Frears. Steve Coogan has appeared in both films and adds his usual humor to the undertaking. It is based on the 2013 book “The King’s Grave: The Search for Richard III” by Philippa Langley and Michael Jones. Langley is a British writer and producer, who is best known for her role in the discovery and exhumation of Richard III in 2012. But the more important story is the one about discrimination and misinformation; that fact can be twisted into fiction. (Shakespeare didn’t do right by King Richard in **Richard III**.) Speaking of discrimination, Langley had to deal with stodgy academic establishment in her efforts to find King Richard III’s remains, and the men who all too willing to take the credit. The movie’s relatively low grade from critics may have to do with its distinctly British obsession with royalty, which doesn’t always translate with the same reverence in our country. But audiences loved the film. We did too. **GRADE A**

LOST IN LA MANCHA: After seeing this documentary one wonders how any movie ever makes it from idea to screen. This story of director Terry Gilliam's attempt to film a version of Don Quixote could be a primer on how to fail at moviemaking. Gilliam, director of such films as **Brazil**, **12 Monkeys**, and **The Fisher King**, has developed a script for the project that features Johnny Depp as a modern-day hero who is transported back in time and finds himself acting as Sancho Panza to Don Quixote. He calls the film, **The Man Who Killed Don Quixote**. Orson Wells had a similar dream to make a movie of the Cervantes novel. He spent twenty years working on it but never put anything on film. Gilliam muses early in this film that perhaps there is some sort of curse working here. It turns out to be a prophetic comment. Everything that can go wrong, does go wrong. F16’s scream across the sky ruining dialogue scenes, torrential rain makes a swamp out of the location, and the working budget is, according to Gilliam “far below what a film like this would usually cost.” Worst of all, Jean Rochefort, a famous French actor who has spent seven months learning English in order to star in the film, falls ill. Eventually, the insurance company takes over rights to the film and everyone packs up and goes home. Some of the things that happen seem funny as you watch the film, but I don’t think anything was funny to those involved. At last report, Gilliam is trying to buy back the rights to the film from the Insurance Company, so that he can try again. We wish him luck. **GRADE: B**

LOST IN TRANSLATION: In the early Eighties I taught a corporate training course for McGraw-Hill. The course ran for a week, but only met for two hours each morning. When teaching out of town, I was faced with many empty afternoons and evenings, but at least I was in places where English was spoken. Bob Harris (Bill Murray) is in Tokyo to shoot a whiskey commercial, and his feelings of loneliness and isolation are intensified by not being able to speak the language. Harris is an aging movie star whose career and marriage are floundering. He isn’t pleased about being reduced to acting in a TV commercial, but he does it with good grace. Suffering from jet lag, he spends most nights in the Hotel bar, and one night he meets Charlotte (Scarlett Johansson). Newly married, she is there with her husband (Giovanni Ribisi) who is a professional photographer working with a rock band. He is consumed with his work and Charlotte is left to her own devices. The twenty-something woman and the fifty-something man become friends, and it is a lovely thing to watch this friendship develop. They share their deepest feelings--something that’s easiest to do with a stranger over a couple of drinks. Murray demonstrates what an accomplished actor he is. The New York Times reviewer said, *Here he supplies the kind of performance that seems so fully realized and effortless that it can easily be mistaken for not acting at all.* Johansson, so good in *Ghost World* and *The Man Who Wasn’t There*, demonstrates an understated acting style that works well with Murray’s performance. Director/writer Sofia Coppola uses strong visual images to make Bob and Charlotte’s loneliness real and touching. At the end of the movie, Bob and Charlotte still have problems, but they feel better for having met each other and we feel better for having seen the movie. **GRADE: B+**

LOUIS ARMSTRONG’S BLACK AND BLUES: 2022 (Streamed on Apple +) Luis Armstrong was admired and loved by millions, but he couldn’t stay in the hotels in which he performed. Not until he had it written into his contract that he would only perform in hotels where he could stay. Relentlessly apolitical, “Satchmo” wanted his story told in his own way, and he made many recordings, wrote letters, and had personal conversations. Using these and archival footage, Sarah Jenkins has made a definitive documentary, honoring Armstrong’s legacy as a founding father of jazz, one of the first internationally known and beloved stars, and a cultural ambassador of the United States on his trips all over the world. He was called an “Uncle Tom” in that turbulent era of the Civil Rights movement, but Ossie Davis said, after getting to know the greatest ever trumpet-player, that he saw his father and uncle and all the men who were just “getting on” and paved the way for the angry protesters to make their case. The film notes James Baldwin appreciating Armstrong’s rendition of Star-Spangled Banner as the “first time he ever liked that song.” That gravelly voice hid a deep love of his country, in spite of the difficulties of being born black. Armstrong said that he “put a little in the till,” and that was his contribution to civil rights. Gary and I were not aware of Louis Armstrong’s impact on the music business. Armstrong’s influence is cited as so important that “any American pop artist that’s uttered a sound on a record in the last 90 years” is touched by him. Gary read some quotes by people who knew him. One quote stood out: “He was born poor, died rich, and never hurt anybody in between.” Critics and audiences alike loved the documentary, as did Gary and I. **GRADE A**

LOVE ACTUALLY: This is a Christmas present of a movie and, like all presents, you’ll really want to open it yourself. I won’t begin to talk about the eight or so story lines that are woven together beautifully or the inspired performances from everyone involved. I must, however, comment on how charming Hugh Grant is as the British Prime Minister, and how endearing Colin Firth is, and how nice it is to see Emma Thompson again. But, most of all, I have to rave about Bill Nighy (*I Capture The Castle*) who is hilarious as Billy Mack, the aging rock star who hopes for a #1 Christmas song. *Entertainment Weekly* called this film this season’s “most populous romantic comedy.” And it is. Also appearing are Liam Neeson, Laura Linney, Keira Knightley (**Bend It Like Beckham**), Alan Rickman, Roawan

Atkinson and, believe it or not, Billy Bob Thornton as the President of the United States. *Love Actually* is actually delightful. We highly recommend it. **GRADE: A**

LOVE ACTUALLY: 2024 (Netflix—only until December 31, 2023) I hope Netflix or some other streaming service has this movie again next Holiday season, for this is one of our favorite to see over and over again. If you haven't ever seen it, go immediately to Prime Video and cough up \$3.79 to rent it. It has a lot of our favorite actors: Hugh Grant, Liam Neeson, Laura Linney, Emma Thompson, Bill Nighy, Keira Knightly, Collin Firth and the incomparable Alan Rickman. It also has Billy Bob Thornton as the President of the United States. You can read my original review in the **Archives**. **GRADE: A**

LOVE & FRIENDSHIP: (2015) I have always wanted to be enthusiastic about Jane Austen books and movies. I must have had a literature teacher somewhere in my academic past who suggested that anyone not loving the British Classics is lacking intellectually. I finally warmed to Austen in the 2005 film version of *Pride and Prejudice*. *Love & Friendship* is based on an Austen novella, *Lady Susan*. It was written when Austen was still shy of 20, and not published until after her death. Before telling you more about this fascinating film, I will first reveal a little trivia that I only now became aware of in my research for this review. Jane Austen's main novels, which are rarely out of print today, were first published anonymously and brought her little personal fame. Her reputation as a significant author did not occur until five decades after her death. *Love & Friendship* introduces us to Lady Susan, a colorful character brilliantly played by Kate Beckinsale and surrounded by a large and equally colorful cast of characters. A beautiful young widow, Lady Susan Vernon, visits the estate of her in-laws to wait out the colorful rumors about her romantic indiscretions circulating through polite society. While there, she decides to secure a husband for herself and a future for her eligible but reluctant daughter. Lady Susan is a manipulative, selfish, unscrupulous and scheming woman who is highly attractive to men. The movie received and impressive 99% on the Tomatometer and an enviable quote from critic Richard Roeper who wrote, "It is one of the sharpest and funniest Jane Austen adaptations in recent memory." The film is set in the late 18th century and is a witty comedy of manners. It is also about the power of words and sexual politics. The movie is essentially all dialogue, with sharp and biting humor and endless wit and charm. If you are a movie fan who only really appreciates films with fast and continuous action, you may want to skip this one. It is wordy with tricky plots and relationships. It is brilliantly directed by Whit Stillman who creatively supplied title cards at the outset to introduce his cast of characters and their respective entanglements. Barbara and I liked the movie and were blown away by the performance of Kate Beckinsale. **GRADE B+**

LOVE & MERCY: (2014) This brilliant movie gives us insight into the turbulent life of Brian Wilson, lead singer, song writer, and co-founder of the *Beach Boys*, a premiere rock vocal group from the 1960s. Wilson wrote or co-wrote more than two dozen Top 40 hits for the group and is widely credited as a major innovator in the field of music production. Barbara and I were impressed by the inspired performances of Paul Dano playing Wilson as a young creative genius in the 1960's, and John Cusack playing him twenty years later when he was in a fog from being over-medicated and incorrectly diagnosed by an unethical manipulative psychiatrist. Paul Giamatti is unforgettable playing the psychiatrist. The film jumps back and forth in time with dual portrayals of Wilson. It seems like two brilliantly written screenplays morphed into one compelling story. Elizabeth Banks deserves special mention for her role as a determined woman who rescues Wilson and later becomes his wife. On the *Rotten Tomatoes* website the film received 88% from critics and 97% audience score. *Love & Mercy* was especially inventive when exploring Wilson's creative process while trying to replicate the sounds and rhythms in his head through instruments, voices, and even bicycle horns and barking dogs. And for me it all worked well. I recommend the film especially for anyone who has fond memories of the *Beach Boys* or anyone interested in mental instability or mental health. **GRADE A**

LOVE AND OTHER DRUGS: Jake Gyllenhaal and Anne Hathaway make a sympathetic and believable couple in this movie that probably should be titled, "Love, Sex and Other Drugs." The movie has many sex scenes! But it also handles a couple of serious subjects: Drug reps and their influence over doctors, and the problems that accompany Parkinson's Disease. Both subjects are handled well. We first meet Gyllenhaal's Jamie as an expert salesman who uses his not inconsiderable skills of persuasion to charm women into bed—a lot of women. When he lands a job as drug rep for Pfizer Pharmaceuticals, he meets Maggie (Hathaway) and is immediately smitten, despite the fact that she suffers from early onset Parkinson's. The story of their romance is told along with Jamie's success as a drug rep, a success made possible when Pfizer releases that ubiquitous little blue boner pill. Jamie is the perfect *Viagra* salesman. What elevates the story is the sensitive and realistic way Maggie's disease is handled. My sister, whose husband had Parkinson's, saw the movie with us and she, too, thought the subject was handled well. Oliver Platt is humorous as Jamie's sales partner, and Josh Gad is amusing as Jamie's younger brother. Hank Azaria plays a doctor, and there is a brief appearance by George Segal and Jill Clayburgh. (This was Clayburgh's final movie role, for she died in early November.) Gary was moved by the movie's ending and raised his grade to B. I'd probably go as high as B+ and my sister thought it was worth an A-. **GRADE B+**

LOVE CRIME: Original French Title, *Crime d'Amour* Isabelle (Ludivine Sagnier) is a bright young executive with a lot of good ideas. Unfortunately, her boss, Christine (Kristin Scott Thomas), takes credit for all of them. The two seem fond of each other, but when Isabelle goes behind her boss's back and comes to the notice of top management, Christine turns on her. She publicly humiliates Isabelle, and privately vows to fire her at the least provocation. It's like the worst break up ever. Most of the movie is devoted to the elaborate plan that Isabelle hatches to get her revenge. We had no problem with the performances. We always have liked Thomas best in French movies, and Sagnier is equally talented. However, we had a problem with Isabelle's motivation. We thought that Thomas was no worse than most bosses, and the public humiliation didn't seem to warrant Isabelle's complicated and violent revenge. Plus, we saw some glaring holes in Isabelle's plan. We saw the film in a new theatre—an Ultra Star Cinema with luxury reserved seating. If it hadn't been early in the day, I could have ordered a glass of wine from my theatre seat. The picture on the screen was brilliantly clear, the sound was exceptional and the seats were comfortable. Unfortunately, the movie wasn't quite up to the venue. **GRADE C+**

LOVE IS ALL YOU NEED: (2013) If Romantic Comedies are not your cup of tea, I doubt that this one would change your mind. Barbara usually grades romantic comedies a little higher than I, and this one is no exception. Still, I liked it. That is partly due to the sunny Italian coastal setting and the quiet charm of the ever handsome Pierce Brosnan playing the male lead. I was also won over by Trine Dyrholm, a Danish actress whom I have never before seen, but who charmed me with her warmth and natural acting. Detailing the events of this film would make it sound too much like the hackneyed rom-com that raises the hackles of critics. While there was only

the occasional doubt that the film was going to have a happy ending, there were just enough twists and turns to hold my interest, but never so many to make me feel manipulated. The film takes on some heavy themes including mortality, death, infidelity, and sexual identity, but it is not a heavy movie. There is enough humor to keep you chuckling throughout. **GRADE B/B+**

LOVE, MARILYN: (HBO's 2013 Summer Documentary Series) This documentary coincides with the 50th anniversary of Marilyn Monroe's death. It presents remarkable footage and audiotapes along with her recently discovered handwritten letters, diaries, notes, poems, journals and notebooks, which set the icon's private life against the backdrop of her very public life and loves. Actors present the reading from Monroe's writing to excellent effect. The all-star cast includes F. Murray Abraham, Elizabeth Banks, Adrien Brody, Ellen Burstyn, Glenn Close, Hope Davis, Viola Davis, Jennifer Ehle, Ben Foster, Paul Giamatti, Jack Huston, Stephen Lang, Lindsey Lohan, Janet McTeer, Jeremy Piven, Oliver Platt, David Strathairn, Lili Taylor, Uma Thurman, Marisa Tomei and Evan Rachel Wood. Interviews and rare archival footage feature Arthur Miller, Joe DiMaggio, Amy Greene, Molly Haskell, Truman Capote, Norman Mailer and Elia Kazan, among others. Beautifully directed by Oscar® nominee Liz Garbus, this offers a new look at the famous Marilyn. If you enjoy documentaries we think you will like this touching and well-done look at an American Icon.

THE LOVE PUNCH: (2013) Pierce Brosnan and Emma Thompson are one of the most charming couples to grace the screen. They are both great-looking and skilled at comedy timing. Too bad that the story they must get through is predictable and, to quote my grand-nephew Nicolas, "ridiculous!" The two actors play a divorced couple who band together to save their money and, perhaps, renew their love. To accomplish this, they fly to Paris and confront the corporate raider who bought Brosnan's company and stripped it of value. When the man who stole their money doesn't respond to the confrontation, they decide to steal a 10 million dollar diamond that he has given to his girlfriend. It involves kidnapping two unsuspecting Texas couples and breaking into a heavily secured wedding by sea and land. Preposterous! Cilia Imri and Timothy Spall are two friends who fly to Paris to aid them in this caper. Both provide some amusing moments. I did have some trouble liking people who would leave two couples tied up in their hotel rooms overnight and treat it as an "adventure." But, the scenery was beautiful and so were Brosnan and Thompson, so I can go as high as a grade of C. Gary says that C- is the highest he is willing to go. **GRADE C/C-**

LOVE, SIMON: (2018) Everyone deserves a great love story, and every movie deserves a lead as charming as Nick Robinson. The young actor makes the title character a boy with whom everyone can identify. Simon, a senior in high school, has great friends and an almost perfect family, but he has a secret that he's never shared. That is, until another student confesses online that he is gay. Simon begins an email correspondence with this unknown boy while keeping his own identity a secret. A secret that eventually gets exposed in a most public way. This happens mid-way through the movie, and suddenly it is no longer a typical teen comedy. Up to that point, Gary was not impressed, but the way the screenplay handled the more serious aspects of a teen being outed, completely won him over. It was handled believably and sensitively with several touching moments. We did think that a couple of characters were overdone in the first half of the film, but we got a kick out of the drama teacher (Natasha Rothwell). She was directing a student production of the musical *Cabaret!*, and really didn't get paid enough for that. Simon's friends were appealing and Jennifer Garner and Josh Duhamel as his parents were everything you'd want parents to be. Perhaps not every community would be as accepting of Simon as the upscale suburb of the movie, but we'd like to think so. **GRADE B+**

A LOVE SONG 2022 (Seen in a movie theatre) The movie opens with a weathered-looking woman (Dale Dickey) camping out in the Colorado backcountry. It slowly becomes apparent that she is waiting for somebody. That somebody eventually appears and it is an old classmate and first love, played by Wes Studi. That's not what the movie is about, though. It's really about loneliness and acceptance of the way things are. The setting is lovely: mountains, a lake with crawdads, surrounded by a desert in bloom. Faye and Lito have both been married but their beloved spouses have died many years before. Ty Burr said, "The movies rarely tell us stories about older people, what they hold close and what they've learned to let go, and first-time writer-director Max Walker-Silverman handcrafts *A Love Song* both for Dickey and for us." It is a quiet movie and the dialogue is spare, but Gary and I loved it. **GRADE A**

Note: Art S. reviewed *A Love Song* in this issue in Readers' Views.

A LOVE SONG FOR BOBBY LONG: (2004 release seen on video) Bobby Long (John Travolta) is a former literature professor who is now a drunken loser. He lives with a young protégé, Lawson (Gabriel Macht), in a dilapidated house belonging to Lorraine, a jazz singer and former friend of Bobby's. When Lorraine's daughter (Scarlett Johansson) arrives on the scene, she is surprised to find that she has to share the house with two broken men. The three misfits eventually become a family of sorts. **Thumbs Up**

LOVELACE: (2013) We rented this movie from Netflix because we wanted to see Amanda Seyfried in the role of porn star Linda Lovelace. Lovelace became famous after appearing in the enormously successful 1972 film, *Deep Throat*. The film is based on her life, but it is a complete whitewash of the real woman, born as Linda Susan Boreman. Seyfried plays the part with her usual wide-eyed innocence, and gives a sympathetic portrayal of a woman whose abusive husband forced her into prostitution and pornography. The movie is notable for the appearance of Sharon Stone as Lovelace's mother, but it may take you most of the film to recognize her. Other personalities that have parts include Hank Azaria and Bobby Cannavale as the men responsible for *Deep Throat*, James Franco as Hugh Hefner, and Peter Sarsgaard, very good in the role of Lovelace's sleazy husband, Chuck Traynor. After going to Wikipedia and reading what they had to say about Lovelace, we can't rate the movie very highly. As fiction, it's OK, but as a true picture of the world's most famous porn star it leaves a lot to be desired. **GRADE C-**

LOVELY AND AMAZING: This independent film chronicles the lives of a mother (Brenda Blethyn) and her three daughters. Two adult daughters are her natural children and the third daughter is adopted, preteen, and black. Roger Ebert, who liked this film, said that it celebrates "the lives of these imperfect women, and the joy of their imperfections." They are definitely imperfect. All of the women are struggling to find their places in the world. One of the adult daughters (Michelle played by Catherine Keener) has failed in nearly everything she has undertaken. Another adult daughter (Elizabeth played by Emily Mortimer) is an actress who recently got a small part in a movie, but still is wildly insecure about her body and her talents. The young adopted daughter struggles with being black in a white family. The mother undergoes what proves to be dangerous cosmetic surgery in the unrealistic belief that her doctor will then be attracted to her. The family is a mess, but a likeable mess. Nicole Holofcener, who both wrote and directed the film, has made her

characters funny, interesting and vulnerable. We enjoyed watching them stumble through their lives. The acting is uniformly excellent and we recommend this one. **GRADE: B+**

THE LOVELY BONES: (2009 film seen on DVD) I read the Alice Sebold best-seller that was the basis for this film. It tells the story of a 14-year-old girl who is murdered and then watches over her family and her killer from some sort of afterlife. The emotions in the novel were handled touchingly, but they were mostly internal, and it's difficult, if not impossible, to bring that to a film. The murdered girl is played by Saoire Ronan who was nominated for a best supporting Oscar for her role in 2007's *Atonement*. She is the best thing in the film, but she is hampered by a director who felt compelled to make a fantasy afterlife visible. Peter Jackson is famous for directing the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy which may account for the overuse of special effects in this film. Stanley Tucci was nominated for best supporting actor by both the Academy and the Golden Globes for his performance as the killer. Mark Wahlberg and Rachel Weisz appear as the grieving parents and Susan Sarandon plays a blowsy grandmother. Most critics panned the film. Ty Burr of *The Boston Globe* called it "a spectacular, cringe-inducing failure as both a book adaptation and a film." Roger Ebert called it "deplorable," and Gary thought that was an appropriate word for this movie. He had trouble watching it and said he really couldn't grade it. I was disappointed in the film because I remember liking the novel. I can't give it more than a C-, and that is only because of Ronan's performance. **GRADE C-**

LOVING: (2016) The movie tells the story of the unanimous 1967 Supreme Court decision which overturned all previous state laws banning interracial marriage. It tells the story from the inside. Instead of focusing on the legal arguments, it shows us how it must have been for Richard and Mildred Loving. It begins with them getting married in Washington DC in 1958 and ends in 1967 with the landmark decision. Along the way we see them arrested several times, the birth of their three children, their obvious affection for each other, and lots of brick-laying. Apparently, the real Richard Loving was a man of few words, and Mildred was only slightly more articulate. When the couple does speak, the pauses are excruciating, especially for us with our theatre background. Gary thought the first half of the movie was painfully slow, and only the historical factor kept him engaged. We agree with *Orlando Weekly* critic who said, "It is a solid drama - but you can't help but wish at least some of it was depicted in a more dynamic and interesting way." We wouldn't want to discourage anyone from seeing *Loving* because the Supreme Court decision was dramatic and still relevant today. However, be warned that is very realistic. "Realistic" seems to be the word for very slow these days. The historical significance wasn't enough to raise Gary's grade above a B-, but it did raise mine to a B. **GRADE B/B-**

THE LOVERS: (2017) Our advice: See the trailer. Skip the movie. The trailer made this movie look good, but we were sadly disappointed. To us it just didn't make sense and we didn't believe the characters, their relationships or the climactic scene between the parents and their son. Here's a two sentence synopsis from IMDB: *Debra Winger and Tracy Letts play a long-married, dispassionate couple who are both in the midst of serious affairs. But on the brink of calling it quits, a spark between them suddenly reignites, leading them into an impulsive romance.* Other reviewers have liked the chemistry between Winger and Letts, but we didn't detect any chemistry—not between them or between Mary (Winger) and her lover or Michael (Letts) and his girlfriend. In fact, the only character that Gary found believable was the girlfriend of Mary and Michael's son. It was good to see Debra Winger on screen again, although I think she should occasionally run a comb through her hair. Perhaps we should have read the tag line for the movie before seeing it. "A love so strong it can survive marriage" That would have helped. **GRADE C-**

LUCE: (2019) If you are bothered by ambiguity, you probably won't care for this movie. Gary and I are not bothered, so we appreciated *Luce*. Ten years ago the Edgars (Naomi Watts & Tim Roth) adopted their son a war-torn country. After years of therapy and a new name, Luce Edgar has become an all-star student beloved by his community in Arlington, Virginia. His African American teacher, Harriet Wilson (Octavia Spencer), believes he is a role model of black excellence. She assigns his class to write an essay in the voice of a historical twentieth-century figure, and when Luce turns in a paper that seems to advocate political violence, she is alarmed. After she searches his locker and finds illegal fireworks, she becomes fearful enough to involve his parents. The rest of the movie asks a troublesome question: Is Luce a star student, or a boy that is deeply maladjusted and even dangerous? Might his parents be completely unaware of the shadow side of their apparently good son? In a review of the original play, the *NY Times* reviewer said that the actor who played the title character never came across as remotely threatening or disturbed. Kelvin Harrison Jr., on the other hand, plays Luce with such great skill that you are left wondering if he really is the ideal son that his parents think he is. The movie is about putting people in boxes--good or bad--and expecting them to behave accordingly. At one point, Luce asks poignantly, "Why do I have to be either a hero or a monster?" Gary commented that if the filmmaker wanted people to discuss the movie afterward, he was successful. It is definitely a movie that sparks discussion. No answers are provided by the screenwriter. After all, the movie's tagline is: *The Truth Has Many Faces*. The director, Julius Onah, collaborated with the playwright, J.C. Lee, to craft a memorable movie. **GRADE A-**

LUCE (2020 seen on *Hulu*): It's a story about the two white parents, Amy (Naomi Watts) and Peter (Tim Roth) who pulled a 7-year-old boy out of a war zone in Africa to give him a "better life" in America. Because Amy couldn't pronounce his real name, they decided to call him Luce, with means "light." After years of therapy, *Luce* has become a son to be proud of. He's an honor student, good at track and debate. Everyone at school looks up to him. Mrs. Wilson (Octavia Spencer), the teacher of his political science class, becomes concerned about an assignment he has written, and searches his locker. She finds some illegal fireworks and brings them to Amy's attention. She gives them to Amy and suggests that she talk with him. Mrs. Wilson has searched lockers before. She searched a locker belonging to Luce's friend and found marijuana. That got the friend expelled and ruined his chances for a track scholarship. Luce has reason to think Mrs. Wilson is a bitch. (I think it unlikely that a teacher could search a locker. I think that would be a matter for the principal or the guidance counselor. Nevertheless, that is the set up.) The movie makes you think, and Gary and I had an interesting conversation after viewing it. Gary felt a bit manipulated by the author, and thought that the parents, in particular, were speaking the author's words. We agreed that we are all victims of our past and our prejudices, and that it's almost impossible to escape them. Luce says at one point, "Why do I have to be either a saint or a monster?" A critic thought that the film's problem is that it is asking us to make this very judgment. Another critic said that "Staginess stalks the enterprise throughout," and that is not surprising since it was adapted from a play, and the author had a hand in the screenplay. In spite of a strong performance by Octavia Spenser, we can give this film only a grade of B. **GRADE B**

LUCKY NUMBER SLEVIN: There's a whole lot of killin' going on in this one. The film is a crime-mystery with opposing hoodlum bosses, assorted thugs, a beautiful neighbor, a confused guy from out of town, a steely assassin and a cop. It's almost impossible to figure out exactly what is going on in this film, although you're certain that you can't take it at face value. The wrap-up at the end is rather clever, but it's doubtful that many will want to wait through all the gratuitous mayhem to get there. We also thought the stylized dialogue between the thugs wore a bit thin. Apparently the writers were trying for some *Pulp Fiction*-type chatter, but I'm afraid they fell short. While waiting to figure it out, you will be treated to some fine performances from Morgan Freeman, Ben Kingsley, Bruce Willis, Stanley Tucci and others. Robert Forster even makes a brief appearance. The Slevin of the title is played by Josh Hartnett. We haven't much cared for him in previous films, but thought he was quite good here. The actors may be worth the price of admission for some. Roger Ebert gave the film thumbs down because he felt the trickery was too flagrant and the payoff too slim, but Roeper liked the film and gave it thumbs up. Other critics have called it "whip-smart," "high octane slop," "enjoyable" and "too clever for its own good." Because of the impressive cast, we decided on a B-. **GRADE B-**

LUCKY YOU: Whether you like this movie or not will depend on whether you play poker. Anyone who plays Hold'em, or who watches it on TV, will like that fact that in this film, they got the poker right. Probably because poker great Doyle Brunson was a consultant on the film. Both Gary and I enjoy playing and watching the game, so we liked the film. The fact that one scene takes place on a golf course was an added bonus. Poker and golf! It doesn't get much better than that for us. But, to a non-poker-player, the Hold'em scenes will, I suspect, be boring. Eric Bana is Huck, a man who plays poker for a living. Reckless at the table, he wins and loses a lot of money. At present, his house is completely empty of furniture, but since he really lives in Casino poker rooms, it doesn't much matter. Huck spends most of the film trying to get his hands on the \$10,000 entry fee into the World Series of Poker. The always special Robert Duvall is Huck's father, a world famous poker player who taught his son the game at their kitchen table. As you might expect, father and son are now estranged. (I never said the story wasn't predictable.) Drew Barrymore is the girl who makes an impression on the charming but commitment-phobic Huck. (I know, predictable.) If you watch TV poker, you'll recognize some of the players. The film was directed by Curtis Hanson who gave us *L.A. Confidential* and *Wonder Boys*. The strengths of the movie are Bana, Duvall, and getting the poker right. We give this film a B, but realize that for non players, it's more of a C movie. **GRADE B/C**

LUCY, THE HUMAN CHIMP: 2021 (Available on HBO Max) In the 1960s a unique experiment was conducted by psychologists at the University of Oklahoma. A man and his wife agreed to raise a 2-day-old chimpanzee (Lucy) in their suburban home as if she were a human child. The study was to focus on that age-old question of "nature versus nurture." It was a fascinating story and gained world-wide attention. Barb and I both remember talking about the study in our college classrooms. I taught Psychology and Barb taught Communication. Lucy was a fast learner. She learned to eat with silverware, dress herself and even learned 140 words using American Sign Language. During those early years, Lucy became very close to the married couple as well as to Janis Carter, a U of O psychology graduate student. By the time she was twelve; Lucy had outgrown the cute-and-cuddly stage and was considered unpredictable and dangerous. She became so strong and was so destructive around the home that the experiment had to stop. *Lucy, The Human Chimp* is a documentary focusing on what happened after Lucy left the spotlight. It was decided in 1977 that Lucy would be sent to a rehabilitation center in Gambia where chimps raised in captivity learned how to live in the wild. Archival footage and photos combine with staged re-enactments to bring the film to life. Janis Carter, arguably Lucy's best friend, ultimately abandoned her life in the United States to live with Lucy on a remote island in Africa hoping to rehabilitate her. What looked like a project lasting a few weeks turned into years. Barbara and I were especially drawn to this film because of our interest in the original study, but I should point out that the project was not without criticism over the scientific indifference to animal welfare. We still think the film is worth viewing. **GRADE B**

THE LUNCHBOX: (2013) This is an Indian Rom-Com and director/writer Ritesh Batra's first full-length feature film. Fortunately, the director had an experienced and talented actor, Irrfan Kahn, to play one of his central characters. Kahn will be familiar to viewers for his appearances in two Oscar-winning films, *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) and *The Life of Pi* (2012), in which he played Pi Patel as an adult. In *The Lunchbox*, Kahn plays Saajan, an about-to-be-retired office worker who one day gets a lunchbox by mistake. The lunchbox meal was prepared by Ila, a beautiful young wife who hopes that her cooking will find the way into her husband's heart. In Mumbai, lunch boxes are collected from a worker's home in the morning and delivered by trains, buses and bicycles to the workplace. While proud of their tradition of accurate delivery, this time the dabbawallas delivered Ila's lunchbox to Saajan, who was surprised and delighted by the quality of the cooking. When Ila discovers the mistake, she includes a note in the next lunchbox, and when Saajan replies, a friendship begins that ultimately changes both their lives. Variety called it "A feel-good movie that touches the heart," and we concur. We hope Hollywood does not decide to remake this critically-acclaimed and popular film because we doubt they will do it with the same delicacy and depth of feeling. The movie is more romantic than comedic, although Ila's "Auntie" who lives upstairs and whom we never see, and the young man scheduled to take over Saajan's job when the older man retires supply some humorous moments. *The Lunchbox* offers lovely proof that the way to a man's heart may truly be through his stomach. **GRADE B+**

LYMELIFE: Set on Long Island in the late 1970's, this high quality independent film is about two teens coming of age in two hopelessly dysfunctional families. I loved this film and it pains me that it will be seen by such a small audience. It is flawlessly cast with high powered actors: Alec Baldwin, Rory & Kieran Culkin, Jill Hennessy, Timothy Hutton, and Cynthia Nixon. It is absolutely mind boggling that this film could be made in less than a month for about one-and-a-half million dollars. It must have been a labor of love by directors and writers Derick and Steven Martini who based the story on their own childhood experiences. The film breaks no new ground in the story line, but the acting is strong and the writing is clever. It is about young love, old love, and the tragedy of lost love. I liked *Lymelife* a little better than Barbara. **GRADE A-/B+**