



2008: A LOOK BACK AT THE YEAR IN MOVIES

If 2007 was the year of dark, violent, independent art-house films, then 2008 was the year of dark, violent comic book superheroes. It seemed that blockbusters based on action characters, such as *Hancock*, *Ironman*, *The Incredible Hulk*, *Batman*, *Hellboy*, and *The Spirit* dominated every weekend. Other movies like *Tropic Thunder* and *Indiana Jones IV* just seemed as though they were based on comic book material.

As is usual at this time of the year, Hollywood has saved its best for last. The month of December saw openings of more than a dozen Oscar-worthy films in a ploy to gain the attention of those Motion Picture Academy voting members who are known to sleep through the first eleven months.

As is also the case, hyperbolic Oscar buzz began building in September for a dozen films that had not yet appeared on Sonoma County screens before mid-December. If you wanted to see *Doubt*, *Revolutionary Road*, *The Reader*, *Gran Torino*, *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, *The Wrestler* and *Frost/Nixon* when they were first released, you had to travel to San Francisco, Los Angeles or New York.

In this column last year, I detailed my obsession with film. This year, I viewed 65 movies on the big screen, in planes, and on DVDs, down from my high of 80 films last year. I enjoy all genres, but tend to shy away from films that seem sophomoric, based upon movie previews.

In 2007 American theatergoers had the opportunity to view approximately 225 “wide release” motion pictures. (A ‘wide release’ means screenings in most multiplex cinema centers across the country.) In 2008, that number jumped to more than 255. These “wide release” films tend to crowd out the thousands of independent international films that are screened at various festivals, and those exhibited on the Internet or shown exclusively at New York art-houses.

Despite 2008’s solid array of films, most were considered box office failures. And given the current recession, the independent producers and major studios do not appear to be cutting back on upcoming releases. This January, the 2009 Sundance Film Festival in Utah will screen 118 films culled from over 3,600 entries worldwide.



On the surface, it appears there are more films than the market can bear. Clearly there is a glut that even the hardiest of film buffs cannot catch up with. But here's a shout-out to the *New York Times* for devoting the manpower that reviews as many as 650 global films each year. Surely there must be an Oscar for that kind of dedication to film criticism.

A number of people have suggested that I start a film blog, something I am considering. But as I also mentioned in last year's column, I have a real life that is often at odds with my film obsession.

Here are my "Top Ten Films of 2008."

- 1.) Batman: The Dark Knight
- 2.) Slumdog Millionaire
- 3.) The Wrestler
- 4.) Milk
- 5.) Frost/Nixon
- 6.) Doubt
- 7.) Wall-E
- 8.) Ironman
- 9.) The Reader
- 10.) Revolutionary Road

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