

David Walsh picks his favorite films of 2006

David Walsh
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2006 was generally a poor year for US and English-language films. In 2005 a number of American films grappled with important problems—including *Syriana* (Stephen Gaghan), *Munich* (Steven Spielberg) and *Good Night, and Good Luck* (George Clooney)—with varying degrees of success. There was no such comparable work in 2006. A global radicalization in cinema, however, is undoubtedly under way. Given the state of the world, how could there not be?

As usual, I include two lists. The first contains what were in my opinion the best films shown in movie theaters in the US this year (although, in some cases, this might only have amounted to a brief run in one or more of the major cities). The second is comprised of the best films I saw at film festivals, none of which has yet been released in the US (several, however, are scheduled to be shown in 2007).

On my first list I include two Asian films (or three, if one includes *Water*), two US documentaries and three British feature films—two of them dealing with current political issues. The sole American feature film on the list is *Little Miss Sunshine*, an amusing and well-intentioned but not earthshaking work.

This summer and autumn, it should be noted, numerous films were released that might be considered, by one standard or another, ‘serious’ efforts—including *The Good German*, *Blood Diamond*, *The Last King of Scotland*, *Apocalypto*, *The Departed*, *Catch a Fire*, *Fur*, *Borat*, *The Science of Sleep*, *All the King’s Men*, *Bobby* and *Stranger Than Fiction*, among others—but all of them seem to me seriously flawed, in some cases fatally.

There is undoubtedly an increased ‘weight’ to the average fare emerging from the Hollywood studios, as well as independent film circles, driven no doubt by the disastrous war in Iraq and the widespread hostility to the Bush administration and its policies, but so much remains hazy and unclear. Decent and humane

intentions need to be enriched and deepened by knowledge—about history and society, above all. To do important work one needs to know important things.

Best films released in the US in 2006 (in no particular order)

Death of a President Gabriel Range
A Good Woman Mike Barker
Yeojaneun namjaui miraeda (Woman Is the Future of Man) Hong Sang-soo (South Korea)
Jazireh ahani (Iron Island) Mohammad Rasoulof (Iran)
Iraq in Fragments James Longley
Water Deepa Mehta
Little Miss Sunshine Jonathan Dayton, Valerie Faris
The Queen Stephen Frears
Shut Up & Sing Barbara Kopple, Cecilia Peck
Joyeux Noël (Merry Christmas) Christian Carion (France)

Best films that have not yet been released in the US (in no particular order)

Offside Jafar Panahi (Iran)
J’ai vu tuer Ben Barka (I Saw Ben Barka Get Killed) Serge Le Péron, Saïd Smihi (France)
Dong Jia Zhangke (China)
The Prisoner, or How I Planned To Kill Tony Blair Petra Epperlein, Michael Tucker
Bamako Abderrahmane Sissako (Mali)
Serambi Garin Nugroho, Tonny Trimarsanto, Viva Westi, Lianto Luseno (Indonesia)
L’Ivresse du pouvoir (A Comedy of Power) Claude Chabrol (France)
Vanaja Rajnesh Domalpalli (India)
Niwe mung (Half Moon) Bahman Ghobadi (Iran)
Beiya zi de nanhai (Taking Father Home) Ying Liang (China)



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