

# MONTHLY MOVIES

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## Love comes in many forms as Oscars approach

*By T. Rob Brown*

**V**alentine's Day is upon us and we typically think of romantic love. Yet that feeling of caring is not exclusive to the realm of romance; we love our family, friends, and colleagues.

While not all love is romantic love, some love comes from friendship and respect—that's something I see in the words of actor Ryan Gosling as he responded to a clear oversight on the part of the Academy.

The Golden Globes and Critics Choice Awards saw fit to include *Barbie*, director Greta Gerwig, and star Margot Robbie in the limelight of recognition, yet the Academy fell short of that mark in its 2024 Oscar nominations for the Academy Awards regarding their respective primary categories. Gosling did garner a best supporting actor nomination, as did America Ferrera for best supporting actress—the film received eight total nods, but Gerwig's and Robbie's Oscar snub took hold in the public discourse.

To be clear, Gerwig did get a nomination in the adapted screenplay category, just not as director, and Robbie did get a nomination for producer with the film's best picture nomination, but not for best lead actress.

Gosling's expertly written statement offered some choice words in response to the 2024 Oscar nominations and went viral, appearing in *Time*, *The New York Times*, CNN, and media outlets all over.

"I am extremely honored to be nominated by my colleagues alongside such remarkable artists in a year of so many great films," Gosling's statement began. "And I never thought I'd being [SIC] saying this, but I'm also incredibly honored and proud that it's for portraying a plastic doll named Ken. But there is no Ken without Barbie, and there is no *Barbie* movie without Greta Gerwig and Margot Robbie, the two people most responsible for this history-making, globally-celebrated film.

"No recognition would be possible for anyone on the film without their talent, grit, and genius.

"To say that I'm disappointed that they are not nominated in their respective categories would be an understatement.

"Against all odds with nothing but a couple of soulless, scantily clad, and thankfully crotchless dolls, they made us laugh, they broke our hearts, they pushed the culture and they made history. Their work should be recognized along with the other very deserving nominees.

"Having said that, I am so happy for America Ferrera and the other incredible artists who contributed their talents to making this such a groundbreaking film."

Gosling's words did not linger in the public ear alone, as Ferrera echoed similar sentiments.

"I was incredibly disappointed that they weren't nominated," Ferrera told *Variety*. "Greta has done just about everything that a director could do to deserve it. Creating this world, and taking something that didn't have inherent value to most people and making it a global phenomenon. It feels disappointing to not see her on that list.

"... Margot is a magician as an actress in front of the screen, and it was one of the honors of my career to get to witness her pull off the amazing performance she did. She brings so much heart and humor and depth and joy and fun to the character. In my book, she's a master.

"I would love to see even more female-directed movies on the list and to see more female directors acknowledged for making the best cinema of the year."

It's a matter of representation and recognition for those who have been traditionally marginalized in the film industry. Hollywood film directing began in 1910 with a short film titled *In Old California*. In 1911, the first movie studio appeared on Sunset Boulevard. Major motion-picture companies relocated to Hollywood by 1915. This is an old industry more than 100 years in the making.

Not until 1971 did Hollywood finally allow a Black person to direct a film when photojournalist Gordon Parks took on the mantle and created the first U.S. Blaxploitation film *Shaft*. Not only did he create a franchise that would survive for decades with five films, he helped create an entire ethnic subgenre and style of films. The term Blaxploitation was first coined by Junius Griffin, president of the Beverly Hills—Hollywood NAACP branch, in August 1972.

Granted, Parks wasn't the first major U.S. Black filmmaker—that credit goes to Oscar Micheaux who directed and produced 44 films. His films depicted Black life in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Parks was just the first one backed by Hollywood—just like Jackie Robinson wasn't the first Black man to play

professional baseball, but the first to play in Major League Baseball. Both broke barriers, paving the way for others to follow.

The first woman to direct films was Alice Guy-Blaché, a silent film pioneer with the Gaumont Film Company in France. She created *La Fée aux Choux* (1896). Russian director Yuliya Solntseva was the first woman to win best director at Cannes for *Chronicle of Flaming Years* (1961)—a whole 65 years later.

In 1976, Lina Wertmüller became the first woman nominated by the Academy for best director. She also received a nomination for best original screenplay. This was during the 49<sup>th</sup> year of the Academy Awards.

It wasn't until 2010 that the first film directed by a woman won best picture with *The Hurt Locker* (2008 Venice Film Festival release, but 2009 general release) by Kathryn Bigelow. This film won six Academy Awards.

Not surprisingly, the seven highest-grossing films directed by women have all been in the past 15 years. *Frozen II* (2019) at \$1.45 billion, *Barbie* (2023) at \$1.44 billion, *Frozen* (2013) at \$1.33 billion, *Captain Marvel* (2019) at \$1.13 billion, *Wonder Woman* (2017) at \$823.97 million, *Mamma Mia!* (2008) at \$694.47 million, and *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2015) at \$569.65 million.

The Oscars are scheduled for 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Central Time on Sunday, March 10, live on ABC.

Directed by Gerwig, *Barbie* (2023), Rated PG-13, stars Robbie (Barbie), Gosling (Ken), Ferrera, Kate McKinnon (Barbie), Issa Rae (Barbie), Rhea Perlman, Will Ferrell (Mattel CEO), John Cena (Ken), Michael Cera, Kingsly Ben-Adir (Ken), Simu Liu (Ken), and Ncuti Gatwa (Ken). It runs for 1 hour and 54 minutes. It received a certified-fresh 88% on the Tomatometer and an 83% audience score, plus a 6.9/10 on IMDb. I gave it two thumbs up in my initial review.

Speaking of representation, I finally got to see *American Fiction* (2023) when it came to Alamo Drafthouse recently. This film is a wonderful comedy that simultaneously delves into the important issues of Black representation in U.S. culture. It even references Blaxploitation and its impact of stereotypes.

Expertly playing off those stereotypes is what makes this film so fun—as the white characters in the film try so hard to support Black literature and praise it without recognizing the stereotypes within. This film is well-written, with excellent dialogue. The cinematography isn't anything groundbreaking but it does what it does well.

What really shines in this film is lead actor Jeffrey Wright who portrays Thelonious "Monk" Ellison, a novelist and English professor, and the rest of Wright's colleagues who all bring powerful performances to the table. I know I began by describing this film as a comedy, but that's an understatement. I did laugh hard several times as I would in a comedy, but I also saw the deep emotions and the character conflicts that drove the drama in the story.

Some might call this a romantic film and it certainly has a romantic storyline. Some might call this a dysfunctional family film and it certainly has those elements as well. What's great about this film is that despite thrusting us into an unlikely but comedic situation, it's also very gritty and real—holding many truths out in the light for all to see. This is the beauty of the writing—it all comes together so well.

Another aspect of the film I really enjoyed is the relationship between Monk and his agent Arthur, played by John Ortiz. These two hold your attention as they banter and work in cahoots to pull off an elaborate ruse.

*American Fiction*, Rated R, written and directed by Cord Jefferson, stars Wright, Tracee Ellis Ross, Ortiz, Erika Alexander, Leslie Uggams, Adam Brody, Issa Rae, and Sterling K. Brown. At 1 hour and 57 minutes, it received a certified-fresh 94% on the Tomatometer and a 96% audience score at Rotten Tomatoes, plus a 7.9/10 at IMDb. I give it two thumbs up.

As for the near future, I'm looking forward to the spy action-comedy *Argylle* (Feb. 2), *Bob Marley: One Love* and *Madame Web* (both Feb. 14), and *Dune: Part Two* (March 1). *The Fall Guy* releases on May 3 and looks pretty funny—and stars Gosling alongside Emily Blunt. *IF* looks promising and releases on May 17. I'm not sure how good it will be, but I don't expect to miss a Mad Max film, so I plan to see *Furiosa*, which releases on May 24.

Love is an important element in nearly every film. It ranges from the love of the craft by those who create films to the love of cinema by those who enjoy films. It includes the love of all types that characters share for one another from kindling friendship to romance. Proper and fair representation too is love.

Will you be my Valentine?

“The show must go on.”