

MONTHLY MOVIES

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Movie Review column for *Dvino Magazine*, a monthly production of *The Laredo Morning Times*.

January 2023

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2022: A year of films in review

By T. Rob Brown

The ball dropped—or the fleur de lis, if you happened to be in New Orleans—and another year began. It's time again to reflect on the films of 2022.

Looking back on 2022, I'd say it was an interesting year for holiday films and musicals. On the other hand, it was a dry year for fantasies, comedies and romantic comedies—romcoms. Westerns and martial arts were almost non-existent this year in terms of a variety of memorable films. This was a year of action, superhero, holiday and animated movies.

Granted, I didn't get to see every single film that released this past year; my opinions are based only on those I watched. Let's break them down by nominees in each category and my choice for best of the year.

For the category of Best 2022 Holiday Film, I nominated the following, alphabetically: *The Guardians of the Galaxy Holiday Special*, *Spirited* and *Violent Night*. Over the holiday break, I finally got to jump on Apple TV+ and check out *Spirited*. My sister called it "an instant holiday classic." I loved the festive spirit, the new take on the old Charles Dickens tale. While I'm not normally a big fan of musicals, this one was quite good. It's difficult to beat the combined talents of Ryan Reynolds and Will Ferrell.

Despite all that, I have to barely give this category to *Violent Night*. For more on *Violent Night* and *The Guardians of the Galaxy Holiday Special*, see last month's column.

Directed by Tommy Wirkola, *Violent Night*, Rated R, stars David Harbour, John Leguizamo, Alex Hassell, Alexis Louder, Cam Gigandet, Edi Patterson, Beverly D'Angelo, Mike Dopud and Leah Brady. At 1 hour and 52 minutes, it received 70% on the Tomatometer and an 88% audience score at Rotten Tomatoes, plus a 7.1/10 on the International Movie Database.

For the category of Best 2022 Musical Film, I nominated the following: *Elvis*, *I Wanna Dance with Somebody*, Guillermo Del Toro's *Pinocchio* and *Spirited*. Recently, I watched *I Wanna Dance with Somebody* and learned a lot of things from this biopic about the life of R&B superstar Whitney Houston. While not a huge R&B fan myself, I remember her music well in the 1980s and loved the power of her voice. Despite only possessing a 3-octave range, according to multiple online sources, she was the greatest voice of her generation and definitely one of the greatest of all-time. Her string of consecutive No. 1 songs surpassed even the Beatles, which is saying a lot. In the end, I have to give this category to the King of Rock 'n' Roll himself, *Elvis*. As I mentioned in a previous column, the Colonel is such a devious villain played to perfection by Tom Hanks. Elvis battled his own demons in terms of alcohol, drugs and infidelity, a common theme he shares with Houston's story. I enjoyed both films immensely but the villain makes *Elvis* a more enjoyable film to rewatch.

Elvis, Rated PG-13, directed by Baz Luhrmann, stars Austin Butler and Hanks. At 2 hours and 39 minutes, it received a certified fresh 77% on the Tomatometer and a staggering 94% audience score at Rotten Tomatoes, plus a 7.4/10 at IMDb.

For the category of Best 2022 Sci-Fi Film, I nominated the following: *The Adam Project*, *Avatar: The Way of Water*, *Jurassic World: Dominion* and *Nope*. Honestly, it wasn't a very strong year for sci-fi. While I loved *The Adam Project*, it felt more like a comedy than true sci-fi and left something to be desired. The final installment of the six-part Jurassic series pulled us in for its nostalgia by featuring much of the cast from both trilogies, but failed to deliver a great story. *Nope* delivered a great story and a memorable and original sci-fi creature, but was rather weak in terms of its science. Though I'm not personally happy about this decision, I give this category—by a slim margin—to *Avatar: The Way of Water*. This film at least tries to be more than the original, more than a plot copy of past films like *Dances with Wolves* (1990), *The Last Samurai* (2003), *FernGully: The Last Rainforest* (1992), *The Battle for Terra* (2009), *A Man Called Horse* (1970), *Pocahontas* (1995), *Dune* (1984), etc.

Once again, director James Cameron upped the ante on cinema 3D technology. I highly recommend you see this film in 3D, but make sure it's the right 3D type. Cameron's team shot this one with a Fusion Camera System, utilizing two Sony Venice cameras, to create real stereoscopic 3D—not the processed 3D from a 2D original as most films are created. He also had the film shot in IMAX quality and aspect ratio for a much-larger picture. Fortunately, I was able to catch the film on IMAX 3D at AMC in KC over the winter break. This film uses all-new 3D glasses too, part of the Dolby Vision 3D system. It also features 48 frames per second projection—twice the industry standard, which offers sharper individual frames and smoother action sequences. On the downside, the 48 fps feature can cause nausea in a small percentage of moviegoers—as it did when Peter Jackson released the first *Hobbit* film. Films recorded slower than 24 fps can have an effect called “judder overkill” anytime the camera sweeps or there is a lot of subject movement. Shooting scenes at higher speeds of 120 fps, on the other hand, creates a lack of

judder, which can make a scene look fake, unlike traditional cinema. The sweet spot is usually 24 or 48 fps for cinema.

Avatar: The Way of Water, Rated PG-13, directed by Cameron, stars Sam Worthington, Zoe Saldana, Sigourney Weaver, Stephen Lang and Kate Winslet. At a lengthy 3 hours and 12 minutes, it received a certified fresh 78% on the Tomatometer and an impressive 92% audience score, plus a 7.9/10 at IMDb.

For the category of Best 2022 Comedy Film, I nominated: *Clerks III*, *The Man from Toronto*, *Senior Year*, *Violent Night* and *Weird: The Al Yankovic Story*. On one hand, *Clerks III* is admittedly more of a dramedy than a true comedy—it's definitely director Kevin Smith's best film in terms of making it feel real. The characters, while true to their past, have really grown up to match Smith's own increasing maturity. The film's theme proves this isn't just another Smith-style comedy; the director draws from his own near-death heart-attack experience, which lends itself to a more believable film.

The win here has to go to *Weird: The Al Yankovic Story*. This Roku Channel exclusive features Harry Potter himself, Daniel Radcliffe, in the title role. Rainn Wilson plays the legendary Dr. Demento. The master of parody, "Weird Al" Yankovic, tells his life story as only he can—as a parody of music biopics. With a slew of cameos, such as Jack Black and Yankovic himself, this story will keep you laughing.

Weird: The Al Yankovic Story, Rated TV-14, directed by Eric Appel, stars Radcliffe, Wilson, Yankovic, Will Forte, Patton Oswalt, Conan O'Brien, Black and Diedrich Bader as the voice of the Grizzled Narrator. At 1 hour and 48 minutes, it received a certified fresh 83% on the Tomatometer and a solid 83% audience score, plus a 7.0/10 at IMDb.

For Best 2022 RomCom Film, I nominated: *The Lost City*, *Marry Me*, *The Noel Diary* and *Ticket to Paradise*. The win goes to *Marry Me*, which was easily the strongest of these films.

In Best 2022 Drama Film, I nominated: *Death on the Nile*, *Father Stu*, *Hustle* and *Where the Crawdads Sing*. The best here was *Death on the Nile*.

For Best 2022 Superhero Film, I nominated: *The Batman*, *Black Adam* and *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*. Sorry Marvel, but this definitely went to *The Batman*. See one of my past columns for my thoughts on *The Batman*.

In Best 2022 Animated Film, I nominated: *DC League of Super-Pets*, *Minions: The Rise of Gru*, *Paws of Fury*, Guillermo del Toro's *Pinocchio* and *Turning Red*. This one goes to *Pinocchio*.

For Best 2022 Horror Film, I nominated: *Dr. Strange and the Multiverse of Madness*, *Nope* and *Werewolf by Night*. Keep in mind, I don't watch a lot of horror films, so your favorites of the year may not be included here. While the Marvel entries in this category are a nice twist for superhero-based films, I have to give this one to *Nope*.

In Best 2022 Action Film, I nominated: *Bullet Train*, *The Gray Man*, *Top Gun: Maverick*, *The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent* and *Uncharted*. This was a difficult category, lots of fierce competition here. Both *Bullet Train* and *The Unbearable Weight of Massive Talent* impressed me in this category, but it's hard to face down *Top Gun: Maverick*.

For Best 2022 Fantasy Film, I only found two nominees: *Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore* and *Slumberland*. The Jason Momoa-led Netflix fantasy plays on two layers and shows us a side to Momoa's acting that we've never seen before—a fun side. Probably because I'm not all that familiar with the original Winsor McCay classic Nemo comics, I tend to agree with the 86% audience rating this film received, much more than the 38% rotten score it received on the Tomatometer. This film also stars Chris O'Dowd and Kyle Chandler along with Marlow Barkley as Nemo. To me, this film was far more original and interesting and heartfelt than the latest Wizarding World film. Winner: *Slumberland*.

Our final category is Best 2022 Martial Arts Film. For this, I nominated only one film: *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. This film is much more than just a martial arts film; it's a comedy, a bit of sci-fi and a look at family relationships. It's also quite weird; it might take a while to grow on you.

Here's hoping for a great 2023: Happy New Year!

"The show must go on."