

# The year's best films offer variety of comedy and drama

By TOM MOORE

I've complained so much in print and in conversations about the movies this past year that people often have said after I've loudly voiced my opinions, "Well, he just doesn't like the movies."

Not so! Despite numerous inane and poorly made flicks, 1980 was a good year for the movies. You might have had to hunt hard amongst the sea of *Fames*, *Ordinary Peoples*, and *American Gigolos* to find a decent, intelligent movie but thank goodness there were quite a few fine films that made it into release.

Before you find out what my favorite films of the year were I'd like to make a couple of qualifications. The list contains films that I saw during the last year so you'll find films that were released in some larger markets during late 1979 but didn't find their way into North Carolina until early 1980. And thanks to a trek I made to film Mecca—New York City—over Christmas break you'll find some titles that haven't made it to the Southland yet.

As I find it silly that most critics in this somewhat absurd ritual limit themselves to only 10 films on their best of lists, my list consists of 16 films that I felt were clearly outstanding.

So now without further rambling here are my favorite films released in the last year, listed in random order.

**1. Best Boy.** Ira Wohl's stunning non-fiction film about the age-old story of a child who leaves his home and parents for the outside world. In this case the boy was Wohl's 52-year-old retarded cousin Philly whose elderly parents enter him into a school for retarded adults, where he learns to be more self-reliant, and slowly prepares to leave behind his family to live in a home for retarded adults. A film both funny and sad, free of sappy sentimentality that bogs down Hollywood attempts at such subjects.

**2. The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith.** This epic Australian film about a half-caste whose frustrated attempt to make it in a white man's world causes him to go on a killing spree has an ambivalence and anger rare in a movie dealing with such subject. This makes it a demanding, but nonetheless, great movie.

**3. Kagemusha (The Shadow Warrior).** Akira Kurasawa's triumphant return to cinema is about 16th century feudal Japan. A warrior dies and is replaced by a vagabond lookalike who keeps the tribe in power. Filmed in a rousing style; Kurosawa has one of the best visual senses in the history of film. *Kagemusha* is scheduled to come to the Carolina in Durham sometime this winter.

**4. Raging Bull.** Martin Scorsese and Robert De Niro team up once again for this adaptation of the life of middleweight champion Jake La Motta. Great acting and great cinema style make this film about La Motta a powerhouse. This movie should clean-up at the Oscars (for whatever that's worth) and is scheduled for release here next month.

**5. The Black Stallion.** In a fit of reviewer's hyperbole I called Carroll Ballard's feature debut the best first film wedding of sound and image since *Citizen Kane*. Well, it isn't quite that great but it is a hell of a good movie, able to transport us all back to childhood.

**6. Being There.** A film whose reputation as classic is already insured. The role of Chauncey Gardner is one of the few parts that really taxed the talents of the late Peter Sellers. His acting in this film is perhaps the best lead performance in any American film since Brando's role in *The Godfather*.

**7. Dressed To Kill.** I used to hate Brian De Palma with fiery passion, but this past year I've become a zealous convert. He has remarkable cinema style and a vicious wit. And no he's not a rip-off of Hitchcock. He might use the same plot devices but De Palma's outrageous sense of humor and avant garde techniques separate him from the master. *Dressed To Kill* is arguably a copy of *Psycho* but it's a rip-off with enough style and flare to stand on its own.

**8. Home Movies.** De Palma made this satire of self-help movements with a class of students he taught at Sarah Lawrence College. It contains none of the rough violence that De Palma has become noted for, just silly humor. It stars Kirk Douglas, Vincent Gardenia, Nancy Allen and Keith Gordon are cast in roles that are sort of predecessors of the ones they play in *Dressed To Kill*. One of the theatres in this area would be smart to pick up *Home Movies* and play it for a week or so.

**9. Every Man For Himself.** Jean-Luc Godard's visual poem about how work affects our lives. A complex and funny film scheduled to arrive at the Carolina in Durham sometime soon.

**10. Wise Blood.** John Huston is still making great films in his 70's. His adaptation of Flannery O'Connor's novel about a redneck who, dismayed with Christianity, founds his own Church—The Church of Christ Without Christ—has more bellylaughs in it than any other film I saw last year.

**11. Mon Oncle D'Americainique.** A comedy by Alain Resnais. The director of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* turns to behaviorism for laughs and he gets them. This film also is scheduled for the Carolina in Durham sometime soon.

**12. The Tin Drum.** A well-acted, well-filmed adaptation by Volker Schlöndorff of Gunter Grass' novel about a German boy who appalled at the Nazi world around him decides not to grow anymore when he is four years old.

**13. Stardust Memories.** Woody Allen's latest film met with derision from critics and the public. I'm afraid his acid-laced satire was too much on the ball for its own good. This brutally funny and non-compromising look at celebrityhood and its worshippers will become more widely accepted in time.

**14. The Big Red One.** The cult director of B movies, Samuel Fuller, returned to the screen after a lengthy absence with this magnificent B movie epic about the First Infantry Division during World War II. Crude and often simplistic it still works as a film and is awe-inspiring.

**15. Simon.** Marshall Brickman, co-scripter of *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan*, made his directorial debut with this Preston Sturges-like comedy about a professor who along with the public is duped by a bunch of meddlesome scientists into thinking he's an alien. This sophisticated comedy starring Alan Arkin and Madeline Kahn was given a crummy ad campaign and never found the audience it deserved.

**16. Coal Miner's Daughter.** A sometimes corny bio-pic about the rags-to-riches, American Dream saga of country singer Loretta Lynn. Sissy Spacek as Lynn and Tommy Lee Jones as her husband Mooney were simply magnificent in their roles, their acting overcame the script.

There were other films that offered minor pleasures such as *The Empire Strikes Back* with its incredible special effects, *Caddyshack* with hilarious performances by Rodney Dangerfield and Bill Murray, *The Shining* with its magnificent cinematography, *The Blues Brothers* with the incredible Aretha Franklin and Ray Charles bits, *Seems Like Old Times* with nice performances by Chevy Chase, Goldie Hawn and Charles Grodin, Marlon Brando in *The Formula*, Dolly Parton in *Nine To Five* and the cinematography and John Hurt in *The Elephant Man*. But these films were so lacking in other areas that they weren't entirely satisfying. W

Tom Moore is arts editor for *The Daily Tar Heel*.

## At the Movies

*Seems Like Old Times* is Neil Simon's attempt to make a screwball comedy in the mode of Howard Hawks *Bringing Up Baby* and Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night*. Though it isn't nearly as good as movies it tries to emulate, the plot and jokes are too tired and things seem too forced, the antics of Chevy Chase, Goldie Hawn and Charles Grodin make this film more fun than any of the other Christmas movies. Now playing at the Plaza.

*Nine to Five* is saved by the witty ensemble of Dolly Parton, Lily Tomlin and Jane Fonda. Parton comes off best because her part has the most verve; the roles of Fonda and Tomlin are conceived more to make statements about the treatment of women in the work force than they are to entertain. Which points to the basic flaw of the film, it mostly concentrates on making trivial observations about how women are abused in their jobs and this makes things pretty dull. But when it turns to absurdist humor, the movie works marveously. Now playing at the Carolina.

*Popeye* looks and feels too much like the great E.C. Segar's *Thimble Theatre*, the comic strip on which the movie is based, for it to work. Attempts at cartoonish surrealism are too disconcerting when real people play the parts. And this combined with the distancing of Robert Altman's direction and the rather awful songs by Harry Nilsson, it's surprising that *Popeye* is actually a pretty entertaining movie. The acting by Shelly Duvall, Robin Williams and Ray Walston and Wesley Allen Hurt as Sweet Pea overcome the many odds and make things click. Ram Triple.

*The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*, an Australian film about an embittered aborigine who turns to murder because of the frustrations of living in a white man's world, treats its subject matter with intelligent ambivalence. This epic tragedy, based on actual events that occurred in the early century, refuses to trivialize its story by turning to sappy sentimentality. This makes this extraordinary violent epic directed by Fred Schepisi a very demanding film for audiences and its also what makes the movie great. Now playing at the Carolina in downtown Durham.

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