

Films, films, films: which are good, which are bad?



MIKE LAROCQUE

its release, showing that even a movie based on profoundly unfunny situations can still make for comedy gold.

CASINO ROYALE

I'll grant that the Bond's latest outing may have placed behind a few other flicks this year, but the understated action film injected new life into a stale franchise, and for that it earns a spot on the list. Done away with was the tuxedo-clad Brit of old in exchange for a darker, grittier and slightly less polished Bond. To cap off a critical and box-office hit, an outstanding performance from Daniel Craig garnered widespread praise and silenced the anti-Craig naysayers.

V FOR VENDETTA

An artful adaptation of Alan's Moore's acclaimed graphic novel, the film proved to be a popular and critical success amongst both fans and mainstream audiences. While not completely loyal to the texts and at times a heavy-handed commentary on the war on terror, *V for Vendetta* still manages to thrive in a world where so many comic-to-movie adaptations go horribly wrong. For originality and a definite break from the expected, *V for Vendetta* easily makes my list.

ALL THE GOOD FILMS I DIDN'T SEE

The inherent problem with this list is not only its subjectivity, but also the fact that there are many good films from 2006 that I have yet to see. *Letter's From Iwo Jima* and *Babel* are both flicks I've managed to as of yet miss and could have made my list—at least, if popular film criticism is any indication. *Borat*, despite making many critics' "Top 10" lists, remains a very funny guilty pleasure for me, and others like *Rocky Balboa* and *Inside Man* still rank amongst 2006's most enjoyable films.

With 2006 over and the Oscar-contender-filled November and December past, the most special time of the new year is upon us—that special time when film critics get to arbitrarily place a select few films above all others. Without further ado, here are my top five films for 2006:

THE DEPARTED

Hyped as Martin Scorsese's attempt at grabbing the Best Director statue at this year's Oscars, *The Departed*'s most notable triumph isn't getting bogged down by its own weight. Starring Jack Nicholson, Leonardo DiCaprio, Mark Wahlberg and Matt Damon, it's notable that the violent story of identity and sacrifice in the line of duty wasn't lost among a handful of award-worthy performances. Whether Scorsese's Oscar-less status will change has yet to be seen, but *The Departed* is yet another film which solidifies his place in the filmmaking history books.

LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE

The dysfunctional family unit has perhaps never been presented as simultaneously depressing and hilarious as with *Sunshine*'s protagonist core, the Hoovers. Steve Carell delivers a hilarious, out-of-character performance, proving his acting chops and singling himself out as the highlight of an all-round spectacular film. Despite a limited release, *Little Miss Sunshine* still managed to achieve the highest per-theatre gross of all movies playing for more than two weeks after

Best of theatre in 2006

Edmonton was home to some fantastic performances. Many of them will go down in history; the rest will, uh, die a lonely death



AMANDA ASH

BEST TENNESSEE WILLIAMS ADAPTATION: THE GLASS MENAGERIE, KILL YOUR TELEVISION

Tennessee Williams' plays tend to encounter characterization and accent problems (think the Citadel's 2005 production of *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*), but *The Glass Menagerie* was flawless in every way.

BEST SPECTACLE: THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, JUBILEE AUDITORIUM

Fire! Crashing chandeliers! Moving staircases! My eyes were hungry for more. Really, I felt like a kid at the circus—minus the cotton candy. *The Phantom of the Opera* might be on Edmonton stages more often than it's not, but nonetheless, it still manages to please.

BEST ACTIVE DESTRUCTION OF FREUD'S THEORIES: MRS KLEIN, STUDIO THEATRE

Playwright Nicholas Wright tried way too hard to simplify Freud's phallic obsessions for audiences. You just can't cram all of Freud's theories about mother-offspring relationships or the death drive into a boring plot about a dysfunctional family.

BIGGEST WASTE OF TIME: ALADDIN, JUBILEE AUDITORIUM

If I wanted to hear lame jokes and watch stupid magic tricks, I would've hired a smoke-smelling, vodka-soaked carnie to entertain me. At least then I could've thrown rotten food or something to make him shut up.

BEST UNEXPECTED COMEDY: PRIVATE LIVES, NORTHERN LIGHT THEATRE

Private Lives was one of those plays that doesn't boast a heck of a lot of depth but will leave you giggling throughout. I never thought relationships could be so ridiculously funny.

The curtain has risen and fallen on 2006's theatre season, leaving me to applaud many of the brilliantly realized plays Edmonton's theatre scene has produced, or gently pat the less invigorating productions on the back with a "good job; better luck next time." Thus, here are my kudos and unfortunate frowns of disapproval for theatre in 2006.

BEST ONE-MAN PERFORMANCE: I AM MY OWN WIFE, CITADEL THEATRE

Both John Kirkpatrick and John Ulyatt gave great multi-role performances in the Citadel's 2004 production of *Stones In His Pockets*, so when they were signed up to take on one-man roles in two separate productions (Kirkpatrick in *Fully Committed* and Ulyatt in *I Am My Own Wife*), the thespian battle was on. Kirkpatrick put up a good fight with *Fully Committed*, but with the weak characterization the script presented to him, he simply couldn't compete with John Ulyatt's much more challenging, gender-bending role in *I Am My Own Wife*.

BEST INDICATION THAT STUART LEMOINE IS ACTUALLY HUMAN: HEY COUNTESS!, TEATRO LA QUINDICINA

Hey Countess! wasn't a bad play in the least, but it wasn't Stuart Lemoine's best piece of work either. Thus, I'm happy to announce that Stuart Lemoine isn't a robot, and that he, too, sometimes creates some performances that just don't quite tickle you in the right way.

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