



Courtesy

Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling star in "La La Land."

MOVIE MANIAC

Hold the backlash: These were the best films of the decade



BY ROD POCOWATCHIT
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Well *that* 10 years went fast. Before we head wholeheartedly into the cinematic '20s, here's a look back at my picks for the best films of the past decade (I can hear the

backlash already).

1. "La La Land" (2016) — Exuberant, poetically romantic and absolutely dazzling, they just don't make 'em like this anymore, an ode to the golden age of movie musicals and a love letter to Los Angeles with all its pain and promise. But it would have been nothing without the sparkling chemistry between a dashing Ryan Gosling and a ravishing Emma Stone, in her well deserved Oscar-winning role. That whole best pic-

ture fiasco thing aside, this is a new musical classic.

2. "Gravity" (2013) - Alfonso Cuarón rightfully won an Oscar for his labor-of-love tale of a medical officer helplessly adrift in space trying to get back home. The film pulsed with urgency and was a jaw-dropping technical marvel. But it was also wondrous, grounded - excuse the pun - in a gripping performance by Sandra Bullock. She made us feel every exasperated



File photo

Sandra Bullock stars in "Gravity," Alfonso Cuarón's space journey.

moment, and as she fought to survive, she seemed to come alive a little bit more. She may have been enveloped in nothingness, but she refused to succumb to it.

3. "Mad Max: Fury Road" (2015) - A visceral adrenaline-pumping ride from start to finish, we got completely caught up in the feverish journey as things go from worse to worse. Director George Miller returned in ferocious form as he lovingly resurrected his franchise, but he also created a post-apocalyptic universe with surprisingly meaningful mythology, injecting commentary about the state of humanity and blind faith.

4. "Bridesmaids" (2011) - So much better than all the raunchy comedies it spawned, this proved that women could be funny front-and-center, and rightfully made Kristin Wiig a star. And it gave a rare Oscar nod to comedy with a supporting actress nomination for Melissa McCarthy (her first). Comedy is hard, but these women made it look easy.

5. "Guardians of the Galaxy" (2014) — Call me a fanboy all you want, but I didn't have more fun in the past decade at the

theater than with these misfit space heroes. The music was nostalgic, the action exciting and the humor spot-on. And the film even said bigger-picture things about friendship and loyalty. We *are* Groot, indeed.

6. "A Quiet Place" (2018) — This had a pretty out-there premise — a family lives in silence so as not to attract monsters that hunt by noise — but it defiantly worked on many levels, driven by actor John Krasinski's urgent direction and his wife Emily Blunt's riveting performance, which won her a Screen Actors Guild award. The film rises above the horror genre to become something as original as it is nerve wracking. And now everyone has a new appreciation for movie sound designers.

7. "Black Panther" (2018) — Sure, it was a cultural phenomenon, but it more than made history. It elevated the superhero genre to new heights, delivering a smart, breath-taking adventure that was equal parts funny and exciting. Wakanda forever! (Or at least until the inevitable sequel.)

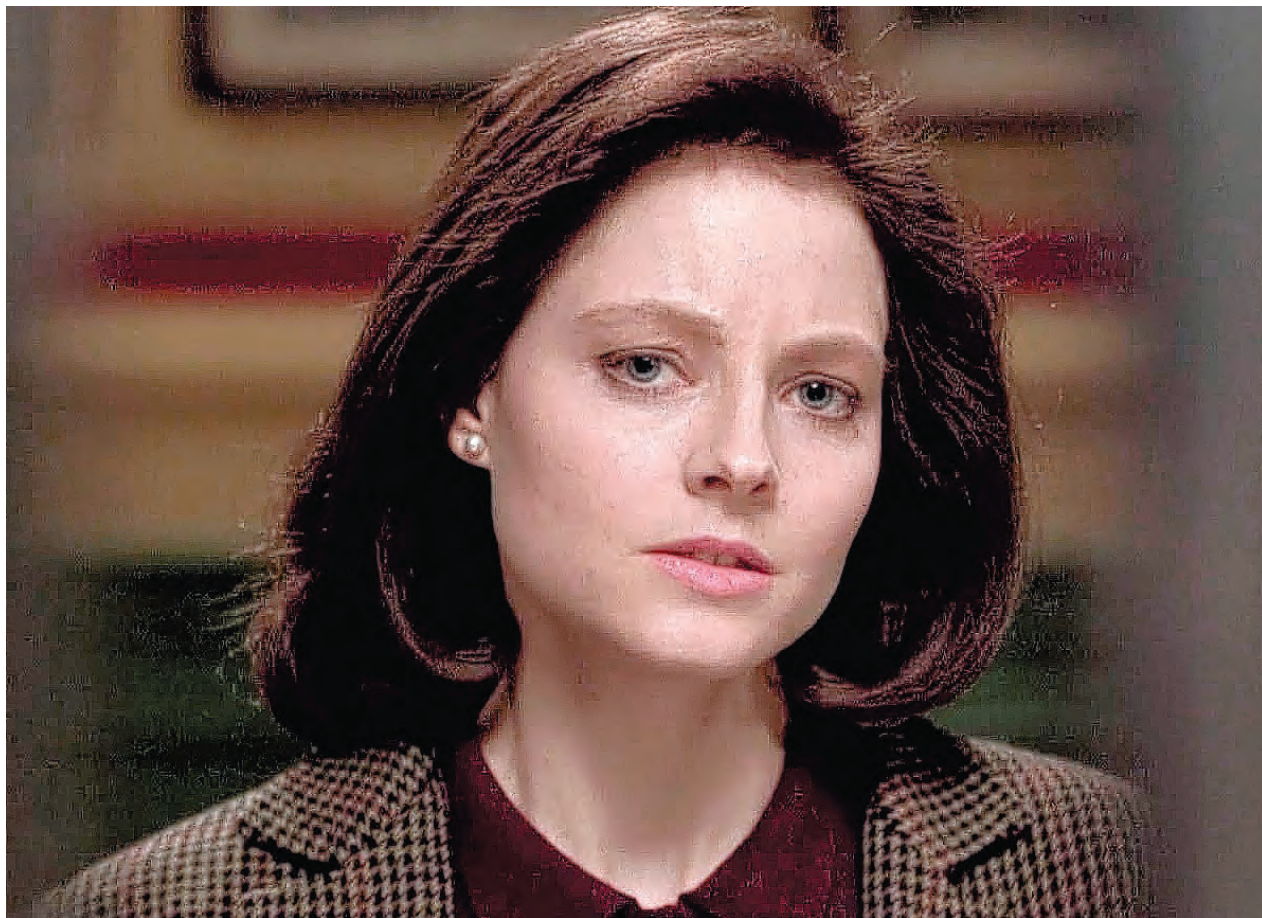
8. "The Fighter"

(2010) — We've seen underdog boxing tales before, but this film is really about family dynamic. And Micky "Irish" Ward certainly had a combustible one, which he tries to control when he finally gets a shot that could advance his flailing career. Christian Bale and Melissa Leo won Oscars as his loud-mouthed brother and mother, and Amy Adams was perfect as his spitfire girlfriend, but Mark Wahlberg was every bit as impressive as Micky. He's the center of the chaotic storm, only his shouting is internal — and it's louder than everyone around him.

9. "Inception" (2010) - Writer/director Christopher Nolan wasn't afraid to make up his own rules and revel in them. The technique and the idea — about a team of specialists who infiltrate a businessman's dreams to plant an idea — are the real stars. The story could have benefited from more character development, but the film was still a dizzying, euphoric ride.

10. "Logan" — This wasn't just another X-Men movie. It turned out to be something far greater and more meaningful than that. It was also Hugh Jackman's last outing as Wolverine, and the film defied genre conventions in many ways by going to some dark places. But it was also tragic, as Wolverine grappled with his impending mortality and an aging, ailing Professor X. It was surprisingly powerful and emotional, thanks to its Oscar-nominated screenplay, and was beautifully resonant.

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File photo

"Silence of the Lambs" is one of Jodie Foster's best performances, which the Movie Maniac discussed in his very first column 10 years ago.

MOVIE MANIAC

Looking back on 10 years: It's been a long movie trip

Pssst. I have a secret.

This is totally showing my age, but I've been writing this column for 10 years now.

Yep, that's right. I wrote my first Movie Maniac column for The Eagle on April 2, 2008. "The Brave One" had just come out on DVD and I discussed what I thought were star Jodie Foster's five best



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performances ever.

To think that it started

out a little, small column and now it's . . . still a little small, column.

When I started writing Movie Maniac (which I named after myself since I've probably seen more movies than eaten meals in my entire lifetime), my intention was to provide a local voice about film. I thought that was important since Wichita is such

a movie-going town (and the great Bob Curtright was no longer reviewing movies).

I tended to mostly write reviews about independent films, though there was the occasional blockbuster ("The Amazing Spider-Man" was Kansas.com's most-read story for a day – on a probably very slow news day, but

I'm not picky about accolades.)

Through the years, I've gotten some feedback that was nice ("keep up the good work") and not-so-nice ("you're an idiot"). But I tried to point out movies most people might not see and steer them in a direction they might not normally go.

Whether you agreed with my opinions or not, I at least strove to be a gauge for readers. If I liked a movie, maybe that was a clear signal that you wouldn't – such as "Rachel Getting Married," one of my more polarizing reviews in which I call Anne Hathaway's performance "revelatory." Many, um, disagreed.

Likewise, if I hated a movie, maybe it was a sign that you would love it. I said this of "The Boondock Saints II: All Saints Day": "It was as pleasant as having my spleen ripped out while standing on broken glass and chewing shards of metal. I would rather do any of that than see this film again." That prompted the aforementioned "you're an idiot" comment.

I also tried to point out cool film events happening in the area, from the Tallgrass Film Festival to the October at the Old-town Horror Festival to Oscar shorts at the library to other retro screenings. There were so many cool film things happening in Wichita beyond the mainstream Hollywood offerings, and I hope I helped them get noticed through the years.

I also tried to offer an insider view, of sorts. I am a SAG-AFTRA-eligible actor with union set experience. I have now directed 21 short films and four

features, all made right here in Kansas or Wichita.

I also wanted to offer a Native American perspective on movies. I am Pawnee, Comanche and Shawnee and my feature films all have Native themes, even if they run the gamut from road trip movie to zombie comedy to time-travel actioner. I wrote about the making of my films "The Dead Can't Dance" and "Red Hand," lamenting over the long hours we spent on set and the alarming amount of cheese balls we consumed.

But mostly I just wanted to talk about movies. Because if it isn't apparent, I love them. And this goes way beyond an average moviegoer's love for movies. Mine is borderline, well, maniacal. Every time I enter a movie theater, my popcorn sense tingles. As the lights go down, my heart beat races. As the first preview rolls, I feel like a child again.

That's because it all started when I was a kid, when my mom would take me to the now-defunct Crest Theatre. I found movies awe-inspiring. What some kids found magical in comic books, I found in movies, especially how they could teleport me to a different galaxy. How they could make me feel like anything was possible. How they made me feel larger than myself.

But even though I've been writing about movies for a long time, I hopefully still have a lot to say.

So thanks for reading. And thanks for letting me be a Movie Maniac. I'll see you in the popcorn line.

MOVIE MANIAC

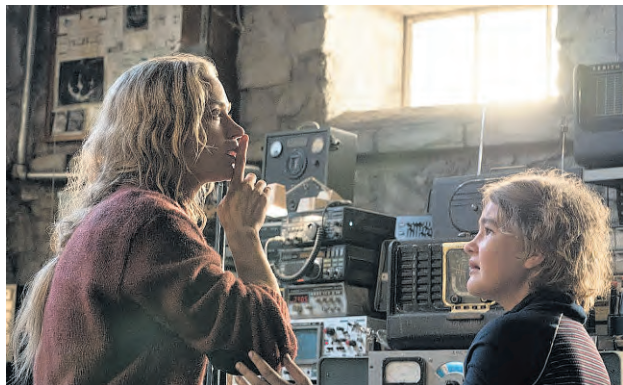
Judging horror: The 10 best films in past 10 years



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With Halloween right around the corner, what better time for a list of my favorite horror films from the past 10 years? But before you chastise me for omitting your favorite, let's be clear that I'm not talking about your run-of-the-mill slasher flick or "scary" movie that goes for cheap thrills. I'm talking get-in-your-head-and-stay-there, gripping-your-seat horror films. Or maybe some that just defied expectations. Regardless, these films made me remember why I love movies.

1. "A Quiet Place" (2018) — Actor John Krasinski's thoroughly riveting directing debut has a premise that's pretty far out there — a family tries to survive in silence to not attract monsters that are attracted to sound — but it's also beautifully simplistic at the same time. And none of it would have worked were it not for the wrenching performance by Krasinski's wife, Emily Blunt, who (spoiler alert) gives birth to a baby al-



Paramount Pictures

Emily Blunt, left, and Millicent Simmonds star in "A Quiet Place."

most without uttering a sound (I shriek if I get a hang-nail). But the film is at once original, heart-pounding and heartbreaking.

2. "Hereditary" (2018) — This film literally made me afraid of the dark again, about an artist (Toni Collette, never better) who suspects her misfortunes are tied to the death of her recently deceased mother, a woman who dabbled in witchcraft, secrecy and odd cults. Writer/director Ari Aster (in his feature debut) takes the story in chilling, tragically surprising ways and delivers a new horror classic that will make you shudder.

3. "Let the Right One In" (2008) — This Swedish standout is all about atmosphere and mood, eerily conveying a somber,

almost mournful tone, but it befits the story beautifully, about the budding friendship between a 12-year-old boy and the vampire girl who lives next door to him. Hoyte Van Hoytema's cinematography is downright hypnotic, and the film's genius final confrontation will win a movie lover's rightful appreciation. The film was remade in 2010 for an American version starring Kodi Smit-McPhee and Chloe Grace Moretz, but the Swedish version is far superior and in a class all its own.

4. "Get Out" (2017) — This is part horror, part satire, all smarts, and Jordan Peele won an Oscar for his screenplay about a young black man (Daniel Kaluuya) who meets his white girlfriend's parents at their

country home where things are very, very uncomfortable. It's an exploration of white hypocrisy and black paranoia told with equal parts comedy and tension. And for such a simple setting, it's visually vibrant.

5. "It Follows" (2015) — Absolutely terrifying and set in a strangely timeless era (there are no cell phones but everyone holds a device that glows in their faces), this follows (see what I did there?) a young woman who is stalked by an unknown supernatural force that is transferred to her after a sexual encounter. Much like John Carpenter's "Halloween," this boasts a pulsating musical score that is so vital to the film that it's almost a character unto itself.

6. "It" (2017) — This big-screen adaptation of Stephen King's novel — about a creepy clown who preys on children — has at its core a friendship of kids that gives the film an emotional connection (much like "Stand By Me" or "Stranger Things") that is as strong as the scares. And there are some pretty chilling scares (I've always been afraid of clowns).

7. "Hidden" (2015) — Before the aforementioned Netflix smash hit "Stranger Things," the wonderfully crazy Duffer brothers delivered this little-seen but brilliant tale of a family that takes refuge in a bomb shelter to avoid a mysterious, dangerous outbreak of some sorts. To give too much away would rob the viewer of the film's creepy delight, but it takes surprising turns, and boasts strong performances by Alexander Skarsgard and Andrea Riseborough and an utterly astonishing one

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FROM PAGE 13C

10

from young Emily Alyn Lind, who plays their bewildered daughter.

8. "Black Swan" (2010) — Natalie Portman won an Oscar for playing a mentally unraveling ballerina in director Darren Aronofsky's sometimes baffling but bracingly intense, passionate and wildly melodramatic tale that became a \$329 million hit and earned four other Oscar nods, including best picture and best director.

9. "Split" (2016) — A young woman (Anya Taylor-Joy) is kidnapped by a mentally ill man (James McAvoy, brilliant) who

has 23 personalities. It was a sort of surprise comeback for director M. Night Shyamalan, who previously stumbled through quite a few commercial and critical failures, and also emerged as a secret sequel to his 2000 hit "Unbreakable," and has now spawned another sequel to that film, of sorts, "Glass," due in January.

10. "The Girl with All the Gifts" (2016) — What's Glenn Close doing in a zombie movie, you might ask? Well, this is no ordinary zombie movie, but one with a new twist on the genre that posts thought-provoking questions without skimping on the scares, and pays creepy homage to George A. Romero, Danny Boyle and the best of the genre.

FROM PAGE 12C

MOVIES

Ryan Gosling and director Damien Chazelle reunite for the story of NASA astronaut Neil Armstrong and his path to being the first person to walk on the moon, in 1969. (2:18) **PG-13** for some thematic content involving peril, and brief strong language.

Showing at:

AMC Northrock 14
Chisholm Trail 8 (Newton)
Derby Plaza
Hutchinson Mall 8
Movie Machine
Warren East
Warren West
IMAX at Warren West

"Goosebumps 2: Haunted Halloween"**★★** – Tribune News Service

The spooky holiday comes to life in this second adaptation of R.L. Stine's popular books. (1:30) **PG** for scary creature action and images, some thematic ele-

ments, rude humor and language.

Showing at:

AMC Northrock 14
Chisholm Trail 8 (Newton)
Derby Plaza
Hutchinson Mall 8
Movie Machine
Warren East
Warren West

"Gosnell: The Trial of America's Biggest Serial Killer"

The true story of the investigation and trial of Dr. Kermit Gosnell, his 30-year killing spree and the political and media establishment that tried to cover it up. (1:33) **PG-13** for mature thematic content including disturbing images and descriptions.

Showing at:

Warren 21 at Warren East
Warren West

"Halloween"**★★1/2** – Tribune News Service

Forty years later, Jamie Lee Curtis returns as Laurie Strode

for a final showdown with masked killer Michael Myers. With Judy Greer. (1:46) **R** for horror violence and bloody images, language, brief drug use and nudity.

Showing at:

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Chisholm Trail 8 (Newton)
Derby Plaza
Hutchinson Mall 8
Movie Machine
Warren East
Warren 21 at Warren East
Warren West
Warren Old Town
Director's Suite at Warren Old Town

"The Hate U Give"**★★★** – Tribune News Service

A young girl witnesses the fatal shooting of her childhood best friend at the hands of a police officer. Now, facing pressures from all sides of the community, she must find her voice and stand up for what's right. (2:12) **PG-13** for mature thematic elements, some violent

content, drug material and language.

Showing at:

AMC Northrock 14
Hutchinson Mall 8
Warren East
Warren West

"Hell Fest"

A traveling Halloween-themed amusement park becomes a literal playground of horror when a masked killer terrorizes its guests. (2:00) **R** for horror violence, and language including some sexual references.

Showing at:

AMC Northrock 14
Movie Machine
Warren West

"The House with a Clock in Its Walls"**★★1/2** – Tribune News Service

A quiet town is magically shaken when a young boy unleashes a secret world of witches and warlocks. With Jack Black, Cate Blanchett. (1:44) **PG**

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File photo

George A. Romero's 1968 classic "Night of the Living Dead."

MOVIE MANIAC

Why George A. Romero's 'Night of the Living Dead' was so influential

My movie world took a pretty big blow when George A. Romero died on Sunday, July 16, at the age of 77. He was a visionary horror film director who basically invented the modern zombie movie genre with his iconic 1968 classic "Night of the Living Dead."

As the director of my own zombie film ("The Dead Can't Dance," which we shot here in Wichita in 2009 and released in 2010), his passing was particularly mea-



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ningful to me. But not just because he created the zombie genre. He also inspired countless others like me with his low-budget inventiveness and can-do spirit.

His legacy is far-reach-

ing. From the many movies through the years to video games to comics, there have been more zombie apocalyptic visions than you can shake a severed arm at. And it just keeps getting more popular with each incarnation.

Just what is it that Mr. Romero gave us that still strikes such a strong chord today? Here are some ways that "Night of the Living Dead" was so influential:

● **It was straightforward.** The film actually has a simple premise: A



Romero

group of strangers end up trapped in a farmhouse as slow-moving ghouls (the film never actually calls them "zombies") try to break in and eat them.

What's novel here is that the action almost never leaves the house, creating tension and a sense of claustrophobia. The best zombie scenarios keep it simple, man vs.

zombie, and go from there. But the possibilities are endless.

● **It was ripe with social commentary.** Much has been said of the film's underlying societal and political commentary, that it's a metaphor for America's collapsing social order.

And then there's the matter of race relations. One of the men at the house is black, and he emerges as the hero, trying to take control of the situation. Black men weren't usually the heroes of films during the 1960s. And the fact that he gets killed (oops, too late to say spoiler alert?) by police at the end of the film was very topical during the dawn of civil rights.

Romero's underlying commentary in his films set the stage for horror movies to be entertaining but also thought provoking – particularly with zombie movies.

● **It was artistic.** The film's black-and-white verite images perfectly set its tone. The film's low-budget aesthetic actually enhances its eeriness. I can't imagine how bigger production values would have improved "Night of the Living Dead." Color photography would only ruin it.

But the film also let Romero pay homage to some of his own inspirations. Those crooked Dutch angles certainly seem reminiscent of Alfred Hitchcock's films. The black-and-white visuals are perhaps reminiscent of Stanley Kubrick's "Dr. Strangelove." Romero himself said the novel "I Am Legend" was a huge inspiration for him.

His filmmaking has inspired other filmmakers to pursue their own cre-

ative filmmaking homages (such as those dazzling long takes in "Shaun of the Dead" or the feeling of stark, poetic isolation in "28 Days Later") that are downright filmmaking artistry.

● **It took chances.** The film went places in its narrative that aren't typical choices, such as killing off its main character.

But the biggest gamble was by Romero and his crew for just making "Night of the Living Dead." It was his first feature, so there was undoubtedly a lot of experimentation. They made up their own special effects. They created their own zombies. They even set fire to crew members. All for the sake of a movie that they had no idea would have the impact that it did.

And that's cause enough for any artist, filmmaker or dreamer to pursue their own creative visions. Just like him, you never know what you will create. And you never know what will become of it unless you try.

So thanks for the lessons and the inspiration, dear Mr. Romero. Because of you, zombies, "Night of the Living Dead" and your championing spirit will never die.

SPECIAL PRESENTATION

I will give a special presentation about my films as part of the Mid-America All-Indian Center's "Indians in the Arts" exhibit opening at 1 p.m. Saturday, July 22, at the Indian Center, 650 N. Seneca. Admission is free.

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SCREEN SCENE

NEW MAINSTREAM MOVIES THIS WEEK

● **"Baby Driver"** – After being coerced into working for a crime boss, a young getaway driver finds himself taking part in a heist doomed to fail.

● **"Despicable Me 3"** – Gru (voice of Steve Carell) meets his long-lost twin brother for the first time, while his Minions get in typical trouble.

● **"The House"** – Will Ferrell and Amy Poehler are parents who start an underground casino in their basement to raise money for their daughter's college fund.

NEW INDEPENDENT FILMS THIS WEEK

● **"The Beguiled"** – Sofia Coppola became the first woman to win best director at the Cannes Film Festival for her take on Thomas Cullinan's novel about sheltered young women at a Southern girls' boarding school during the Civil War who take in an injured enemy soldier, spawning sexual tension and dangerous rivalries. Starring Nicole Kidman, Kirsten Dunst, Elle Fanning and Colin Farrell.

● **"The Hero"** – Acting vet Sam Elliott is getting raves for his performance as an aging, ailing movie star who must come to terms with his past and mortality.



Courtesy of Focus Features

Kirsten Dunst and Colin Farrell star in "The Beguiled."



WILSON WEBB Courtesy of TriStar Pictures

Baby (Ansel Elgort) and Debora (Lily James) try to make a break for it in "Baby Driver."

MOVIE MANIAC

Review: 'Baby Driver' is a fun, wild ride

Director Edgar Wright likes to make waves in the movie genre pool.

In his better films, he splashed comedy all over the zombie genre in "Shaun of the Dead" and made a whirlpool of satire with the buddy cop/action genre in "Hot Fuzz." He somehow makes fun of the genres he swims in while also celebrating them.

He does it again with **"Baby Driver,"** though this time makes a belly flop of the heist genre. This is the most original, surprising and smart action movie of the year. In just one word, it's down-



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right cool.

And it knows it. Or rather, everyone in the film seems to know it. But it all works.

Perfectly baby-faced Ansel Elgort (from "The Fault in Our Stars" and the "Divergent" movies) stars as the titular Baby, who is, well, also the titular driver.

He's a driver for heists

at the command of Doc (an always effortlessly snide Kevin Spacey), who orchestrates robberies but never uses the same crew twice. Except Baby, who is indebted to Doc somehow. But he has just one more job to fulfill and then he's free – or so he thinks. He pulls it off with ease and makes a lot of money.

Then he meets Debora (a dazzling Lily James of "Cinderella"), a waitress at a local diner. They hit it off swimmingly.

And that gives fuel for Doc to recruit Baby for yet another job, against Baby's wishes. Your girlfriend's pretty, Doc tells him. "Let's keep it that

way."

Baby gets teamed with the psychotic Bats (Jamie Foxx, doing evil well) and the married team of Buddy (Jon Hamm) and Darling (Eiza Gonzalez) for a high-stakes robbery.

But, alas, things don't go as planned. Do they ever? And when Baby gets in over his head, he must figure out how to survive and save Debora.

Though the film isn't technically a musical, it is a very musical film. The music is almost a character unto itself, with a vibrant soundtrack that includes everything from the Beach Boys to Queen to the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion. Wright also wrote the script, and uses the music to drive the narrative in smart and surprising ways.

He also keeps the pace quick. And choreographs action car chase sequences that leave "The Fast and the Furious" in the dust.

The performances are

'Baby Driver'

★★★★1/2

Rated: R for violence, language

Starring: Ansel Elgort, Jamie Foxx, Jon Hamm, Lily James, Eiza Gonzalez, Kevin Spacey

Written and directed by: Edgar Wright

Showing at: Chisholm Trail 8 (Newton), Derby Plaza, Warren East, Warren 21 at Warren East, Warren West, Warren Old Town

all top-notch, particularly by Elgort, who looks too innocent at first but reveals a darker side when he has to. Hamm is also particularly captivating, convincingly playing against type as a bad guy. And Foxx makes you downright hate him.

James doesn't actually have a lot to do, but her radiance adds a lot to the story.

The film's sleek tone does get darker as it goes along, though, so be warned. And it gets violent, but it all comes with the territory – and that's what "Baby Driver" knows best. It coolly revels in the action genre playground. It's clever, funny, exciting and yet, somehow sweet.

It's an exhilarating burst of much-needed energy in this year's crop of summer movies. *This* is the summer movie we've been waiting for.

So buckle up, because "Baby Driver" is a wild, fun ride.

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