

10 FILMS WE LOVE!

A RESPONSE TO SIGHT AND SOUND'S TOP 50 FILMS



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There has been a lot of top 10 film lists popping up on the internet over the last couple of days in response to the release of *Sight and Sound's Top 50 Films of All Time*. Everyone has an opinion about the validity of the list and the discussion has mostly centred around whether *Vertigo* is the best film ever made. Personally we think *Vertigo* is a great film but it certainly wouldn't be on the top of our list.

The *Sight and Sound* list is pretty much the same as every other top 50 list, it doesn't particularly matter if *Citizen Kane* or *Vertigo* is number 1 or number 2, chances are that if you are interested in cinema then you've seen them both. While we recognise the importance of these films they are not the films that have had a significant impact on us. So last night we made a list, not necessarily a list of the best films ever made, maybe not even a list of our favourite films but a list of the first 10 films that came to mind that have excited and inspired us. They are certainly not films that you would see on the *Sight and Sound* list but they are all unique and important works of cinema.

Hold Me While I'm Naked (1966) George Kuchar

Hold Me While I'm Naked is one of the things in life worth living for! In fact, we could say that about a lot of Kuchar films, which are amateur concoctions of melodrama, sci-fi and other Hollywood genres and archetypes with a great sensibility for cinematic spectacle. *Hold Me While I Am Naked* is an example of unstoppable creativity, the film started with a somewhat more conventional narrative but, after leading lady Donna Kerness pulled out, it became a film about a director who is trying to get his film made while everyone else is off having sex. It has it all: Douglas Sirk lighting and colour, Elizabeth Taylor eyebrows, quotable lines (as long as you do the voices!), raw emotional expression, a fabulous cast, really great music and George's mum!

George made films with his brother Mike who was responsible for another masterpiece of the American underground scene (in which, incidentally, George stars): *Sins of the Fleshapoids* (1965).

The Films of Jeff Keen (All of them!)

It's very hard to pick one Jeff Keen film to talk about, our favourite is usually whichever one we happen to have seen last, in this case I think it was *White Dust* (1970-72). We watch at least one of Jeff's films every week without fail. His layered images and sound, mixing home-movies, pop imagery, archetypes of cinema and comics, and an array of characters of his own invention in a constant journey of creation and destruction, it's unlike anything else you will ever see. He is the secret treasure of British cinema and isn't celebrated enough. Until recently it hasn't been that easy to see his work but it is now available on DVD. We recommend that you see the world through the unmistakable filter of the Keen-vision, it will stay with you.



Daisies (1966) Vera Chytilova

Daisies is a bold and unruly film, an example of the innovativeness and daring of the Czech New Wave, a fantastic movement in cinema which is so often overlooked! *Daisies* is a film that makes its own rules and that's why we love it. It follows two girls who play the dangerous game of taking advantage of the world for their own amusement, if the world is spoiled, they're going to act spoiled too! Its narrative is not driven by plot and its characters are not psychologically motivated, instead the film jumps over the boring bits from scene to scene, bombarding us with ideas, images and enjoyable moments! This is one of the key inspirations on our own film *Savage Witches*.



City of Pirates (1983) by Raul Ruiz

Every morning while shooting *City of Pirates* on the coast of Portugal Ruiz would wake and write down his dreams, these notes would then form the script for the day's filming. It certainly is the nearest we have seen a film come to capturing that feeling of dreaming. Everything in the film is routed in physical reality as we know it but at the same time everything has an unusual atmosphere, something just isn't right. The waves crash as a constant reminder of the sea's presence, a reoccurring piece of music gives a sense of repetition, characters talk slowly and softly, more to themselves than to each other. We gather plot fragments and piece together our own idea of what the story could be. A woman sleepwalks into the sea and meets a lover emerging from the waves, a child who has murdered his family appears from nowhere and becomes her companion, there are hints of incest and molestation and then there's the island where she meets a man who plays out the roles of his mother, father, uncle, sisters and grandparents. So many moments stick in my mind, like when the father figure from the first part of the film complains of a toothache and we see a woman peering into his mouth, we see this from the point of view of his throat, giant teeth frame her. It's a tricky film to find a copy of but we would very much recommend seeking it out.



Hausu (1977) Nobuhiko Obayashi

You may have guessed from the films on this list that we love films that celebrate excess, colour and the artifice of cinema, we don't have a particular passion for realism and *Hausu* certainly doesn't offer much of that. What it does offer is a girl getting eaten by a piano, dancing skeletons, a murder by lampshade while the floor turns to a river of lava, a painting that spews blood, a cat with sparkling green eyes, a decapitation in which the head flies around laughing and so so much more! Words can't describe the chaotic wonderfulness of this movie. It might sound like a silly B-movie which just has a lot of weirdness for the sake of it but it goes deeper than that, it's a ghost story about the feelings towards the younger generation by the older one, the conflict between the traditions of the past and the consumerism that was possessing Japanese youth in the 70's. Old versus New like you've never seen it before, *Hausu* may well be the craziest horror film ever made.



Emperor Tomato Ketchup (1971) Shuji Terayama

In *Emperor Tomato Ketchup* children overthrow the adults and establish their own authority. The new generation rejects its predecessors' idols and rules and put on their own version of an empire, as decidedly as their child emperor puts on his costume, adjusts his hat and declares tomato ketchup the national symbol. It is unlikely that a film like this would ever be made now, it certainly would get its makers in trouble with the censors with its scenes of naked children having an orgy with a bed full of women. This is a real gem of film anarchy which still elicits gasps from an audience.



Bunny Lake is Missing (1965) Otto Preminger

This film seems to only have bad reviews online but we can't understand why because its brilliant! Something I love about Preminger is how his films unravel, they are often quite long and wind off in all sorts of unexpected directions. They never sound that great when you try to describe them, but they are a truly cinematic experience that doesn't translate well into words. If I ever want to wander off into unknown lands and forget where it was I started, I turn to Otto Preminger. *Bunny Lake Is Missing* had me gasping and leaping from my chair in excitement! The suspenseful story, the incredible and somewhat odd performances, the unexpected arrival of Sir Larry and the ending, oh the ending!! We have been toying with the idea of making our own low-fi sequel to this superb film, I would tell you the plot of our backyard production but it would give away far too much about the twists and turns of *Bunny Lake is Missing* and I wouldn't want to ruin it for you.



I would also recommend Preminger's *Rosebud* (1975) which also doesn't seem to have a single good review but I thought it was a masterpiece and couldn't think of anything else for days after watching it.

The Colour of Pomegranates (1968) by Sergei Paradjanov

The Colour of Pomegranates is Paradjanov's celebration of the life and work of the Armenian poet Sayat-Nova, and it is a very intriguing piece of cinema. He sets out to mirror the poet's lyrical style in cinematic terms that are quite unlike anything else. The film explores the poet's life in a series of tableaux sequences which are, according to Paradjanov, inspired by Persian miniatures. The actors are often, if not always, facing the camera, and the performance style, which emphasises the metaphorically charged actions, objects and colours through repetition as in a poem, creates a mystifying feeling.



Lisztomania (1975) by Ken Russell

Watch any of Ken Russell's films and you are in for a treat! It's hard to pick just one to recommend, but I'd suggest that *Lisztomania* is as good a place as any to start. Revelling like no other in the characteristic exuberance and libertine spirit of the late Sixties and Seventies, out of cinema Russell makes the greatest of spectacles, encompassing all the best features of the other arts, especially music, opera and dance. *Lisztomania* is one of those films in which so much more happens than you can remember or even take in, that you'll be blown away every time you see it. From a concert hall scene in which Liszt, played by Roger Daltrey, parodies young Wagner's serious music by alternating it with Chopsticks to please the over-excited audience of screaming young girls, to the scene where a vampire-Wagner uses his music to inspire a new German national movement and creates a Frankenstein-like Siegfried to rid the country from Jews. With *Lisztomania*, you know you're watching a unique kind of madness!



The Garden (1990) Derek Jarman

In the current issue of *One+One*, James Tucker talks about seeing *Jubilee* on TV late at night as a teenager, he describes it as being a pivotal moment for him in his understanding of cinema. I had a similar experience when as a teenager I was introduced to Jarman's films by my uncle who showed me a VHS tape of *The Garden* one Sunday afternoon. Never before had I considered that a film could be a personal expression and exploration of ideas. I wasn't inspired to make films that looked like *The Garden*, but to make films that are as personal to me as *The Garden* is to Derek Jarman. Filmmakers should be feeling liberated now, as it is easier to make films than ever before, we should be seeing more and more unique visions. A new language of cinema could emerge. Like Jarman, we need to seek a cinema of questions, exploration and experimentation. If Derek Jarman was taught in schools, the world would be a better place!



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