

AP Critics Pick Top 10 Films Of 2015

By The Associated Press

Associated Press film writers Jake Coyle and Lindsey Bahr's favorite movies of the year span blockbusters, art house and, yes, even "Star Wars."

JAKE COYLE

1. **"Carol,"** Todd Haynes' gorgeous 1950s film with a dreamy score about hidden romance.

2. **"About Elly,"** an Iranian psychological thriller from Asghar Farhad set at a Caspian Sea resort.

3. **"Phoenix,"** a haunting, Hitchcockian drama set in post-World War II Germany, directed by Christian Petzold.

4. **"Spotlight,"** Tom McCarthy's workmanlike procedural about the *Boston Globe's* investigation into the Catholic Church.

5. **"Chi-Raq"** and "99 Homes," issue films from Spike Lee and Ramin Bahrani that bristle with palpable rage.

6. **"Stray Dog,"** a documentary by Debra Granik about a haunted, motorcycle-riding Vietnam veteran with American history written all over him.

7. **"Anomalisa,"** stop-motion animation from screenwriter Charlie Kaufman that captures more soulful emotions than most films even contemplate.

8. **"Creed"** and **"Star Wars: The Force Awakens,"** fun yet respectful restorations of the durable American myths "Rocky" and "Star Wars," born six months apart in the late 1970s.

9. **"45 Years,"** Andrew Haigh's disquieting drama about a long-together couple.

10. **"Diary of a Teenage Girl"** and **"Testament of Youth,"** two tender coming-of-age stories, worlds apart, led by tremendous newcomers.

Honorable mentions: "Heart of a Dog," "Bridge of Spies," "71," "Mad Max: Fury Road," "Kumiko, the Treasure Hunter," "Going Clear," "Inside Out," "It Follows," "The Salt of the Earth."

LINDSEY BAHR

1. **"Mad Max: Fury Road,"** George Miller's riveting, post-apocalyptic action film.

2. **"Clouds of Sils Maria,"** Olivier Assayas' brilliant and atmospheric drama about art, life and aging.

3. **"Ex Machina,"** a thrilling and intense sci-fi spectacle from Alex Garland.

4. **"Tangerine,"** Sean Baker's boisterous and alive story about transgender sex workers.

5. **"Kumiko, the Treasure Hunter,"** the spellbinding tale of a Japanese girl who believes the movie "Fargo" is real.

6. **"Brooklyn,"** about an Irish immigrant girl in early-1950s New York just figuring out what she wants in life.

7. **"The Diary of a Teenage Girl,"** Marielle Heller's story about a girl who gets swept up in an affair with her mother's boyfriend.

8. **"Carol,"** Todd Haynes' exquisitely composed romance involving a 1950s shop girl and the housewife she falls for.

9. **"The Big Short,"** a darkly humorous film from Adam McKay about the collapse of the housing bubble.

10. **"Spy,"** Paul Feig's riotously funny comedy with heart that serves as a perfect showcase for the talents of Melissa McCarthy.

Honorable Mentions: "The Hateful Eight," "Steve Jobs," "Spotlight," "The Mend," "Love & Mercy," "Sicario," "I'll See You In My Dreams," "45 Years."

Year In Review

Forceful: 'Star Wars' Named AP's Entertainer Of The Year

BY DERRIK J. LANG
AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES — "Star Wars" isn't just strong. It's unstoppable.

The revival of the nearly 40-year-old space saga has already dominated the box office and toy shelves. Now, it's also been selected as The Associated Press Entertainer of the Year and is amassing support for Academy Awards consideration.

"Personally, it's been three years of feeling privileged to be part of something that's bigger than all of us," filmmaker J.J. Abrams told the AP in an interview. "This accolade is very much appreciated and no exception to that feeling."

"Star Wars" won the AP's annual Entertainer of the Year contest with a volley of votes from members that would rival the firepower of the First Order.

The sci-fi series bested Adele, Taylor Swift and Amy Schumer as the top vote getter. Others up for the honor included streaming services, Jon Stewart, Jennifer Lawrence, Taraji P. Henson, Viola Davis and the Kardashians. Voters were asked to consider who had the most influence on entertainment and culture in 2015.

"In a year full of sequels, reboots and returns, none have recaptured the zeitgeist like 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens,'" wrote Nick Dutro of The Advertiser-Tribune in Tiffin, Ohio.

The initial impact of a "Star Wars" resurgence first began reverberating across the pop-culture landscape in 2012 when Disney acquired Lucasfilm for more than \$4 billion, plotting a pair of movie spin-offs and a new trilogy merging veterans Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill), Leia Organa (Carrie Fisher) and Han Solo (Harrison Ford) with newcomers Rey (Daisy Ridley), Finn (John Boyega) and Kylo Ren (Adam Driver).

In the year leading up to the December release of "The Force Awakens," Disney and Lucasfilm unleashed a barrage of "Star Wars" merchandise, comic books and video games that fueled anticipation for the film.

When the movie opened in theaters, "The Force Awakens" lit up screens — and fans' eyeballs — brighter than a lightsaber. With an astronomical \$248 million debut at the box office in its first weekend, the newest "Star Wars" entry trampled over the record for biggest debut in North America, set earlier in the year by "Jurassic World."

"The Force Awakens" also has won over most



PHOTO: LUCASFILM/TNS

Adam Driver in "Star Wars: The Force Awakens." The latest entry in the space saga reached \$1 billion worldwide faster than any movie in history and shows no sign of slowing down.

critics, despite not being screened for them ahead of the film's mammoth Dec. 14 premiere in Hollywood. The American Film Institute selected it as one of its 10 best movies of the year, and the Critics' Choice Awards added it as an 11th best picture nominee, leading many to have faith in "The Force Awakens" as a viable Oscar contender.

"The 'Star Wars' franchise is holding an IOU that it could cash in this year," said Tom O'Neil, editor-in-chief of Gold Derby, a site that handicaps Hollywood awards and other events. "The Oscars owe major love to the 'Star Wars' franchise. It's one of the most successful and beloved franchises in Hollywood history. It's criminal that Oscar voters have never historically taken sci-fi seriously."

While previous "Star Wars" films garnered 22 nominations and seven wins at the Academy Awards, only the original "Star Wars" earned a best picture nod. It lost to "Annie Hall" in 1978.

"The Force Awakens" is already on the acad-

emy's short list for a visual effects nomination with 9 other films, and O'Neil is hopeful that it will be among the best picture candidates when the Oscar nominations are announced Jan. 14. He also wouldn't be shocked if Harrison Ford is recognized for reprising his role as Han Solo and composer John Williams earns his 50th nomination for the film's score.

"It's funny," said Abrams. "I've spent the last few years with everyone asking me how I am dealing with the pressure. The truth is that anything that happens at this point is icing on a cake that I'm just happy came out of the oven."

"Star Wars" joins the list of previous AP Entertainer of the Year winners who in recent years have mostly included female performers, including Adele, Taylor Swift, Jennifer Lawrence, Lady Gaga, Tina Fey and Betty White. The animated Disney juggernaut "Frozen" captured the prize in 2014, and Stephen Colbert was honored in 2007.

Year In Review | Television

'The Affair,' 'Mad Men' And 'Frontline' Are Among Year's 10 Best On TV

BY FRAZIER MOORE
AP Television Writer

NEW YORK — Sure, 10 is an arbitrary number. If we were to add an 11th show, it might very well be HBO's sublimely shrewd comedy "Silicon Valley," or ABC's unbridled melodrama "Scandal," or Fox's noir thriller "Gotham." It might even be "CBS This Morning," which continues to offer early risers a smart diet of news as opposed to the empty calories of its rivals on ABC and NBC.

But 10 it is, so here, in alphabetical order, are this year's Big 10:

— **"THE AFFAIR"** (Showtime). A New York novelist has an affair and creates havoc for two families — his own and his lover's. The second season of this heated drama has been even better than the first, as the rewards of his infidelity disintegrate and the consequences mount. Meanwhile, quietly among its splendid cast, Maura Tierney as the wronged wife continues to prove herself as one of the finest actresses around.

— **"THE AMERICANS"** (FX). Perhaps the best but least-celebrated drama on the air, it marked a third season of crafty storytelling as it continued to explore the complex, death-defying lives of two Soviet KGB officers posing as an American married couple during the Cold War. The tangled storylines remained intriguing; with co-stars Keri Russell and Matthew Rhys so good in their multiple guises as undercover spies that they even escaped notice, yet again, from the Emmy and Golden Globes judges. For shame!

— **"BETTER CALL SAUL"** (AMC). The pain of losing "Breaking Bad" was salved for its fans by the return of Bob Odenkirk (who arrived at "BB" in its second season as welcome comic relief, then grew Saul into a full-fledged scene stealer) in this aptly quirky prequel. It was everything a "BB" devotee could have hoped for, and never less than true to the series that begat it, and yet, for anyone watching, was a

constant surprise.

— **"FARGO"** (FX). A second season of doing the impossible — reimaging the 1996 film classic — this cycle has, if anything, improved on Season 1 with its completely new tale and slate of characters. Once again, it's a bizarre melange of heartland propriety, steely violence and pitch-black humor. And once again, the cast (including Kirsten Dunst, Patrick Wilson, Jean Smart, Ted Danson and Jeffrey Donovan) is delicious.

— **"FRONTLINE"** (PBS). Airing for more than 30 years, winner of more than two dozen Peabody Awards, it kept on keeping on this season with reports on the NRA, Vladimir Putin, torture by the CIA, Ebola, ISIS and the challenges faced by transgender youngsters. Somehow immune to the pressures and failings that compromise so much of TV public affairs, it continued its long reign enlightening the public.

— **"THE GOOD WIFE"** (CBS). This legal drama had a few false moments last spring, especially in plotting its farewell to glam gumshoe Kalinda (Archie Panjabi). But so far in Season 7, it's back in the swing. Adding Jeffrey Dean Morgan as its new investigator was a masterstroke. And the newly rejiggered storylines are as smart, snarled and zesty as ever. And funny! Alan Cumming's fitful campaign strategist scores laughs in his every scene and, thanks to the fullness of all the characters, no one is immune from daffy moments. As it has been all along, "The Good Wife" remains a sophisticated drama full of human comedy.

— **"LAST WEEK WITH JOHN OLIVER"** (HBO). Religion, chicken, net neutrality, voting rights for Guam, the injustice of bail — they're all the same to Oliver. In each weekly sermonette he sheds light on absurdities and scandals no one else is likely to be exposing, or, if they are, not with his thoroughness and/or wicked sense of humor. "Last Week" every week, is an indispensable half-hour.

— **"MAD MEN"** (AMC). For anyone who was there, the '60s felt all-inclusive yet passed in a flash. Same for "Mad Men," whose saga began at the dawn of the '60s and closed out that decade when its final season aired last spring. Surprisingly, nearly everyone involved lived happily ever after, including the wily but often self-destructive ad man Don Draper (played by series star Jon Hamm). Most viewers were happy, too, with its slyly appropriate conclusion, but also sad to bid farewell to a TV masterpiece.

— **"NARCOS"** (Netflix). This serialized, true-to-life thriller follows the exploits of Colombian drug kingpin Pablo Escobar and the Medellín Cartel, as well as the U.S. drug agents Escobar repeatedly outwits. Shot in Colombia and starring Brazilian actor Wagner Moura, it is a riveting portrait of evil, power and supreme crafti-

ness. Happily for viewers, there's more evil to come from Escobar, with "Narcos" renewed for a second season. Until then, a warning: One taste of this first season could lead to a 10-episode binge.

— **"SENSE8"** (Netflix). A fluid narrative takes viewers to eight cities where eight characters are somehow linked by an ability to share thoughts, feelings and visions they can't explain to themselves or anyone else. Viewers are invited to embark on this enchanting sci-fi thrill ride from the Wachowskis ("The Matrix"). Daryl Hannah and Naveen Andrews ("Lost") join a sprawling cast of mostly new faces in settings

that range from Chicago to Seoul, from Mexico City to Mumbai. The visuals are dazzling, the soundtrack score is haunting, and the interlocking storylines may tax your understanding — that is, until you submit. After that, if you hear thunder on a bright, sunny day (as does one of the characters), no worries. Somewhere, it's storming and you might be there soon.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Frazier Moore is a national television columnist for The Associated Press. He can be reached at fmoore@ap.org and at <http://www.twitter.com/tvfrazier>. Past stories are available at <http://bigstory.ap.org/content/frazier-moore>

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