

PERSONAL CHOICES: BIOGRAPHICAL FILMS



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Compiled by Audiovisual Selector

A biographical film, or biopic (biographical motion picture) is a film dramatising the life of an actual person or persons. The difference between these and films based on a true story or historical films is that they attempt to comprehensively tell a person's life story, or at least the most historically important years of their lives.

Biographical films are considered some of the most demanding films for actors and actresses because the figures portrayed are actual people whose characteristics are known.

Traditionally biopics focus on beloved or historically important people, such as Nelson Mandela in *Invictus*, with Morgan Freeman in the Oscar-nominated lead role. In the last couple of decades biographical films have increased in popularity and interestingly, some have focused on more dubious figures such as the founder of *Hustler* magazine Larry Flynt in *The people vs. Larry Flynt*; Jack Kevorkian (Dr Death) in *You don't know Jack* and serial murderer Aileen Wournos in *Monster*.

The characters in the films reviewed below all had to make choices like finding themselves or fighting their demons. It is amazing to see the impact the choices had

on who they eventually became. The inspirational people in the films showcase the choices they made and the consequences of those choices (infidelity, drugs, music, love, life, et cetera) - good or bad.

The motorcycle diaries / producers, Edgard Tenenbaum, Michael Nozik and Karen Tenkhoff; director, Walter Salles.

Starring: Gael Garcia Bernal and Rodrigo de la Serna.

Ernesto 'Che' Guevara (14 June 1928 - 9 October 1967) was born in Rosario, Argentina. *The motorcycle diaries* (2004, Spanish: *Diarios de motocicleta*) is a biopic about the journey and written memoir of the 23-year-old Ernesto, who would years later become internationally known as the iconic Marxist revolutionary Che Guevara. The film recounts the 1952 journey, a semester before he is due to complete his medical degree. Together with his older friend Alberto Granado, a biochemist, he leaves Buenos Aires to travel across the South American continent in search of fun and adventure. Alberto's purpose is also to court as many Latin American women as will fall for his pick-up lines. Their transport is Alberto's ancient and leaky Norton 500 motorcycle, christened La Poderosa (The Mighty One).

During their expedition, Guevara and Granado encounter the poverty of the indigenous peasants, and the men gain a better sense of the disparity between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' of Latin America. In Spanish with Quechua, Mapudungun with English subtitles.

Award

BAFTA Film Award for Best Film not in the English Language (2005).



Pollock / producers, Fred Berner, Ed Harris, Jon Kilik and Francis Trezza; director, Ed Harris.

Starring: Ed Harris and Marcia Gay Harden.

Paul Jackson Pollock (28 January 1912 - 11 August 1956) was an influential American painter and a major figure in the abstract expressionist movement. He enjoyed

considerable fame and notoriety in his lifetime. He was regarded as a reclusive artist, had a volatile personality and struggled with alcoholism. In 1945, he married the artist Lee Krasner who became an important influence on his career and legacy. The film deals with the choices Lee Krasner made and the relationship between husband and wife.



Award

Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress (2000) - Marcia Gay Harden.

Ray / producers, Taylor Hackford, Stuart Benjamin, Howard Baldwin and Karen Baldwin; director, Taylor Hackford.

Starring: Jamie Foxx.

Ray Charles Robinson (23 September 1930 - 10 June 2004) was born in Albany, Georgia. He grew up in the poor black community of Jellyroll on the western side of Greenville, Florida. Starting to lose his sight at five, he went completely blind at the age of seven. Inspired by a fiercely independent mother who insisted he make his own way in the world, Ray found his calling and his gift behind a piano keyboard. Touring across the Southern musical circuit, the singer gained a reputation and then exploded with worldwide fame when he incorporated gospel, jazz and orchestral influences into his inimitable style.

He revolutionised the way people appreciated music, simultaneously fought segregation in the very clubs that launched him and championed artists' rights within the corporate music business. The movie provides a portrait of Ray Charles' musical genius as he overcomes drug addiction while transforming into one of the country's most beloved performers. He overcame impossible odds and truly changed the face of music for decades.

Awards

- Academy Award for Best Actor (2005) - Jamie Foxx.
- BAFTA Film Award for Best Actor (2005) - Jamie Foxx.

- Golden Globe Award for Best Actor: Comedy or Musical (2005) - Jamie Foxx.

The sea inside / produced by Alejandro Amenabar and Fernando Bovaira; director, Alejandro Amenabar. Starring: Javier Bardem, Belen Rueda and Lola Duenas. Ramon Sampedro (5 January 1943 - 12 January 1998) was born in Galicia, Spain. **The sea inside** is based on the real life story of Ramon, a Spanish ship mechanic left

quadriplegic after a diving accident. He fought a 28-year campaign in support of euthanasia and his right to end his own life with dignity.

The film explores Ramon's relationships with two women: Julia, a lawyer with a degenerative disease who supports his cause, and Rosa, a local woman who wants to convince him that life is worth living. Through the gift of his love, these two women are inspired to accomplish things they never previously thought possible. Despite his wish to die, Ramon taught everyone he encountered the meaning, value and preciousness of life. Though he could not move himself, he had an uncanny ability to move others.

Awards

- Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film (2004).
- Golden Globe for Best Foreign Language Film (2004).

Walk the line / produced by James Keach and Cathy Konrad; director, James Mangold. Starring: Joaquin Phoenix and Reese Witherspoon.

John R ('Johnny') Cash (26 February 1932 - 12 September 2003) was born in Kingsland, Arkansas. The film focuses on Cash's younger life, his romance with June Carter, and his ascent to the country music scene. The movie begins with a young, music-obsessed 'JR' Cash growing up in a poor cotton farming family in Arkansas. Shortly afterwards, a family tragedy changes his life forever. The movie highlights the choices he made working as a door-to-door salesman, starting a band, the music, the drug

dependency, infidelity, and most of all love.

Awards

- Academy Award for Best Actress (2005) - Reese Witherspoon.
- BAFTA Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role (2005) - Reese Witherspoon.
- Golden Globe Award for Best Actor in a Leading Role: Musical or Comedy (2005) - Joaquin Phoenix.
- Golden Globe Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role: Musical or Comedy (2005) - Reese Witherspoon.

Sources

www.imdb.com
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