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Twitter-length reviews of 2013 movies

Sr. Rose Pacatte | Jan. 8, 2014 NCR Today

I watched about 100 movies in 2013 and liked many of them for the quality of the story and/or themes. However, looking back, I could not even remember seeing some of them until I checked my blog.

My original idea was to revisit the films of 2013 by writing a review of each one as if it were for Twitter -- 140 characters or fewer. I will practice more and try again next year. I am including links to my longer reviews of the film where available. (Note: Some of the films I saw during 2013 have not yet been released, so I have not included them here. Also, access to the reviews posted at *St. Anthony Messenger* require a digital subscription.)

The films are grouped according to general themes.

Sr. Rose's five favorite films from 2013 that all deserve awards:

"42" -- Baseball's first black major-league player Jackie Robinson, with Harrison Ford as Branch Rickey, who signed him. This is history to be savored and remembered. Read the full review [1].

"Blue Jasmine" -- Woody Allen's neurotic character reincarnated in a female character and brilliantly played by Cate Blanchett and is Oscar worthy. One of Woody's best screenplays in a long time. Read the full review [2].

"Fill the Void" -- Engaging story of an Orthodox Jewish girl in Israel who must choose -- and deal with an unmarried older sister -- to marry her deceased sister's husband or a new beau. Jane Austen-esque qualities. Award-worthy. In Hebrew with English subtitles. Read the full review [3].

"Philomena" -- Based on a true story, a girl becomes pregnant in 1950s Ireland, is placed in a stark convent home where she works in a Magdalene-like laundry. The mother and a journalist look for the baby 50 years later. No, the nuns do not come off well, but this is a brilliant film, gentle, humorous, forgiving. Oscar-worthy in several categories.

"Way Way Back, The" -- Gentle and funny coming-of-age summer movie about a boy whose family is in flux until he finds new friends at a water park. Sam Rockwell deserves as Oscar. Read the full review [4].

Oscar contenders:

"12 Years a Slave" -- Chiwetel Ejiofor deserves an Oscar for his performance in this true story that follows ex-slave Solomon Northup's autobio closely. Harrowing and very violent. Read the full review [2].

"20 Feet from Stardom" -- Revealing doc about the amazing unheralded, often unappreciated, super talented black women who sang and still sing backup for major vocal talents.

"American Hustle" -- A naïve, ambitious '80s FBI agent convinces a hustler and his mistress to cooperate to bring down the governor of N.J. for fraud. I expected more, but Jennifer Lawrence just keeps racking up Meryl Streep points with her performances.

"Blackfish" -- Claims to tell the real story about Shamu and SeaWorld's cruel practices that harm orcas by separating family pods and confining them in small pens that bring out aggression. Raises real questions about keeping animals captive for entertainment. Read the full review [5].

"Butler, The" -- Forest Whitaker is simply one of the greatest, and Oprah is a natural. This was about history, racism and the civil rights struggle in America but at the end, a story about a family.

"Captain Phillips" -- Based on true events. Tom Hanks and Barkhad Abdi are excellent but film raises political and ethical questions. Read the full review [6].

"Croods, The" -- Filmmakers rip off the philosopher Plato's "The Republic" to great effect. Read the full review [7].

"Frozen" -- Disney's best animated musical comedy in years. Though the two princesses are way too thin and the music so-so, the story is in the kiss, and it's not what you think. Read the full review [8].

"Fruitvale Station" -- True story of a black man killed by cops. Justice (though limited) resulted because people taped the violence on their phones and immediately posted the videos to YouTube. Read the full review [9].

"Gravity" -- A contemplative story about a woman lost in space who finds her true self and is reborn. A perfect movie for a film retreat.

"Nebraska" -- When an elderly man thinks he wins $1 million, his son reluctantly takes him to collect it. The folksy characters show the reality of family love. Award worthy.

"Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom" -- Based on Nelson Mandela's autobio, it's a beautiful linear biopic of his life. Idris Elba as Mandela excels.

"Saving Mr. Banks" -- Walt Disney struggles to get rights to "Mary Poppins," but this is a touching story about the author's life, and Emma Thompson deserves an Oscar for her portrayal of P.L. Travers.

"Short Term 12" -- A jewel of a film about young adults taking care of teens in a group home. Deeply felt and compassionate. Read the full review [10].

Documentaries, from best to good

"Place at the Table, A" -- How and why we need a food policy program that addresses hunger in America: the 50 million Americans who exist in hunger. Prophetic and galvanizing doc.

"More Than Honey" -- Another prophetic doc that seeks answers for why the honeybees in the U.S. are disappearing. Why is no one paying attention? Read the full review [11].

"Narco Cultura" -- Doc parallels a CSI agent in Ciudad Juarez who processes hundreds of bodies of those killed by drug cartels with a Mexican-American man who writes ballads celebrating the narco lifestyle. Chilling look at the failure and expense of the war on drugs. Read the full review [12].

"Gatekeepers, The" -- Interviews with six former heads of Shin Bet, Israel's secret service agency. Disturbing

and violent accounts of their terms, they all realize that violence is a reaction, not a peace tactic. Worth seeing. Read the full review [13].

"Nicky's Family" -- A doc that tells the true story of Nicholas Winton who saved 699 children from Prague just before WWII began. He never told anyone until his wife found a box of old files in the attic in 1988. Nicky is still alive. This is a wonderful film and story. Read the full review [14].

"No Place On Earth" -- Fascinating, inspiring doc about a man's search for Jewish families who hid from Nazis in caves in the Ukraine. Read the full review [15].

"Stories We Tell, The" -- Filmmaker Sarah Polley documents her discovery of the identity of her biological father and examines the stories her family has told or assumed over the years about who they are. Haunting but quite good. Read the full review [16].

"When I Walk" -- Sundance doc about filmmaker with MS and his wife who began the AXS map project so people with disabilities can map their journeys along handicapped accessible ways and venues. Very inspiring. Read the full review [17].

"Summit, The" -- Harrowing doc about what really happened on K2 in 2008 that caused the deaths of 11 climbers. There is still no good answer for why people want to climb mountains other than: because they are there. Read the full review [18].

"Blood Brother" -- Sundance documentary about a young man inspired by Mother Teresa who goes to India to work with HIV-infected children. Showing Jan. 20 on PBS. Read the full review [19].

"Act of Killing, The" -- Incredible doc about Indonesia's gangster death squads of 1965 that helped overturn the government. Decades later, they revisit killing sites and boast about their deeds, but the exercise causes them to reflect. No one was ever held accountable for these human rights offenses. Not an easy watch.

Wait for Netflix

"After Earth" -- I am one of the 10 people on the planet who liked this sci-fi flick. Hollywood keeps making these post-apocalyptic films, so why pick on this one? Read the full review [20].

"Ain't Them Bodies Saints" -- A weird little movie that is like a microscope looking at mental illness, crime, and love, but well-acted and ultimately too violent. Read the full review [21].

"At Any Price" -- Depressing fictional story of one farmer's self-destructive role in Big Agra's unethical farming practices. Important story but no entertainment value. Read the full review [22].

"August: Osage County" -- Think of "Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf" on steroids. There's no joy or hope in this depressing black comedy (which is giving it too much credit). I prefer my own dysfunctional family, thank you; we are way more fun.

"Before Midnight" -- Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy almost talk themselves and us to death but after 20 years they stay together, and we watched it anyway. Good for conversation. Read the full review [17].

"Bling Ring, The" -- Spoiled Hollywood brats break into rich people's homes because they can, then Hollywood made a movie about it. A point can be made about entitled kids and detached parents, but I found this more troubling -- and boring -- than anything.

"Closed Circuit" -- Convoluted tale about the British government catching its own spies and controlling the

lawyers who represent them. Could have been an MI-5 TV episode. Read the full review [10].

"Copperhead" -- Story of a little-known anti-war movement during the Civil War. What it's about is more interesting than the film. Read the full review [23].

"Elysium" -- Kudos for the kind nun in this futuristic sci-fi action flick, but it was too easy to figure out the Christ-figure ending. But it offers much to talk about in terms of humanity and justice.

"Gangster Squad" -- Forgettable and ultra-violent 1940s gangster film. Read the full review [24].

"Identity Thief" -- Jason Bateman is very sweet and rewards bad behavior with kindness when Melissa McCarthy steals his identity and reputation. Somewhat gross but entertaining comedy. Read the full review [24].

"I'm in Love with a Church Girl" -- Weak message movie based on a true story about a criminal who disses his Catholic faith to embrace the Bible and the girl he loves.

"Incredible Burt Wonderstone, The" - Magicians in Las Vegas reinvent themselves to save their careers. Kind of boring. Read the full review [25].

"Iron Man 3" -- As the final credits roll, we discover that Dr. Bruce Banner (aka The Hulk) falls asleep listening to this story. It's a sign. Read the full review [26].

"Man of Steel" -- Heavily marketed to the Christian audience, Superman resolves the conflict by killing someone for the first time in a movie version. Not so Christian after all. Read the full review [27].

"Olympus has Fallen" -- The White Houses is attacked. Again.

"Out of the Furnace" -- A man tries to get justice for his brother who, after returning from Iraq, gets caught up in a drug gang in New Jersey. You get the working-class angst, but this is another film that takes the easy way out and uses violence to resolve conflict.

"Safe Haven" -- A Nicholas Sparks formulaic romance novel-into-film strikes again with a supernatural touch. Read the full review [24].

"Star Trek: Into Darkness" -- The Starship Enterprise becomes a war ship, betraying its mission of peace. I was disappointed, but this point alone might make it worth seeing and talking about.

"Stoker" -- Gorgeous actors play a creepy family with a killing gene. Or something. Violence with bleak view of human nature. Good for a psych class but even then ...

"There's Something in the Air" -- How French youth lived the '60s revolution. Not so interesting. Read the full review [28].

"Upstream Color" -- Unintelligible film from Sundance that the director could not explain. Read the full review [29].

"White House Down" -- The White house is attacked. Again.

"Wolf of Wall Street, The" -- Seeming endless cycles of debauchery, drugs, bad language and financial fraud repeat for about three hours. "Wall Street" and "Boiler Room" did it so much better, though this one might be more realistic. Unlikable Wall Street crooks who continue to cause hurt and ruin to people because they can. And the consequences -- well, a few years in Club Fed. Lots to talk about but so excessive the film is distasteful.

"Wolverine, The" -- We all like Hugh Jackman, but someone please hire a great screenwriter/storyteller next time. This one is so contrived with no character development.

For the family, 13+

"Black Nativity" -- Based on play by Langston Hughes, I liked the artistry of the story about a mother and son evicted from their home at Christmas and the forgiveness and reconciliation that follow. Read the full review [30].

"Book Thief, The" -- Faithful to the novel about an orphan in Nazi Germany during World War II. Luminous acting by Sophie Nélisse, and Geoffrey Rush is good as usual, but the book is better. Read the full review [31].

"Christmas Candle, The" -- A small town in 1900 England needs a Christmas miracle. Lovely cinematography, and singer Susan Boyle makes her debut. A nice Christmas film based on novel by Max Lucado. Read the full review [32].

"Ender's Game" -- Excellent sci-fi movie based on the novel about children bred to fight a war in case of an attack, but Ender's ethics and empathy win the day -- without violence. So many themes to talk about here.

"Epic" -- An animated tale that is pro-family, pro-environment, pro-reconciliation that even addresses death and grief. (Yes, the mother dies again.) But I liked it (for all ages). Read the full review [33].

"Grace Unplugged" -- Talented Christian teen girl learns there's no place like home far away from Hollywood's meat-grinder music business. Message movie with good music. Read the full review [34].

"Now You See Me" -- Magic acts aimed directly at the money people who caused and profited from the 2008 financial crash. Not sure they get the message. Read the full review [35].

"Oz, the Great and Powerful" -- An enjoyable prequel to "The Wizard of Oz." Read the full review [19].

"Turbo" -- Animated garden snails -- guys only need apply -- in Los Angeles just want to have fun, so they go racing at the Indy 500. It's cute but good to note that there are hardly any female characters. Read the full review [36].

Films with lots to talk about

"Aftermath" -- Based on true events, two Catholic Polish brothers must reconcile their parents' role in the murder of all the Jews in their village long ago. Haunting. In Polish with English subtitles. Read the full review [10].

"Austenland" - A New York woman wants her Mr. Darcy at any cost. I liked this movie that is really about putting childish things aside and embracing life. It's campy, but I think it would be good for a women's retreat. Read the full review [37].

"Beyond the Hills" -- An Eastern Orthodox monastery in Bulgaria takes in a mentally ill woman and think she is possessed. Based on true story. Good intentions and ignorance go terribly wrong when religion blinds us. Read the full review

[38].

"Conjuring, The" -- Based on real events, this exorcism film will scare you to prayer and confession and make you look behind you in the dark. I promise. Read the full review [39].

"Dallas Buyer's Club" -- Matthew McConaughey's character is unsavory but engages our sympathy because of the FDA's refusal to facilitate appropriate drug trials to help the sick as the HIV/AIDS epidemic took off.

"Don Jon" -- A young Catholic man is addicted to porn and begins to find his way out of his immaturity and selfishness when others tell him how destructive it is. He finally seems to get it. The film "Fireproof" handles this issue in a less explicit way. Read the full review [40].

"Great Gatsby, The" -- God is watching in this film based on the F.S. Fitzgerald novel about a self-made American millionaire who wants the one thing he cannot have, and people die. I thought it was excellent. Read the full review [41].

"Hannah Arendt" -- First-rate drama about the philosopher who covered the trials of Nazi Adolf Eichmann who helped organize the Holocaust and her controversial articles in *The New Yorker* on "The Banality of Evil." Read the full review [42].

"Her" -- A man dates his computer's operating system, a voice named Samantha. The relationship short-circuits eventually when he realizes "she" is dating 600 other men at the same time. Very thoughtful film about human relationships with many dimensions to talk about.

"Hunt, The" -- Morality tale about a teacher falsely accused of molesting the daughter of family friends. Gossip and poor implementation of policy make it impossible to clear his name, because we can never really know, can we? In Danish with English subtitles. Read the full review [43].

"Hunger Games: Catching Fire, The" -- A totalitarian despot continues to oppress, but young people survive to live another day in hope. I still think it's (the book trilogy by Suzanne Collins) more a cautionary parable for adults than kids. Read the full review [44].

"In a World" -- A young woman voice-over artist breaks the glass ceiling to narrate film trailers. Entertaining and thoughtful about possibilities for women in Hollywood. Read the full review [45].

"Inside Llewyn Davis" -- Loved Oscar Isaac as a '60s folk singer, but the Coen Bros. changed out the rug ("The Big Lebowski") for a cat and '30s music ("O Brother Where Art Thou?") for the '60s. Well done but so-so.

"Lone Ranger, The" -- Johnny Depp/Jack Sparrow plays Tonto but it is a much better and smarter film than people give it credit for because of its themes -- racism for one.

"Love is All You Need" -- A woman recovering from breast cancer finds her husband is unfaithful, then she falls for her daughter's soon-to-be father-in-law. A very human story about family: it's complicated.

"Midnight's Children" -- Based on Salman Rushdie's novel. Big, broad, long, colorful epic about India's road to independence and identity through the eyes of two boys switched at birth. I liked it, but some say the book is better. Read the full review [46].

"Mud" -- One summer in the South, two adolescent boys help a man on the run to reunite with his one true love. He turns out to be a sociopath. The story works but very violent.

"Place Beyond the Pines, The" -- Smartly crafted story about two men, a criminal and a cop, who make mostly

bad choices and their sons who might make good ones. Read the full review [22].

"Starbuck" -- As a young man, David donates his sperm for cash, but the sperm bank mishandles things and his more than 500 progeny seek him out years later. Funny but raises ethical and moral questions that society needs to address. Read the full review [47].

"Thérèse" -- Novelist François Mauriac's sad tale of a wealthy 1920s woman who grows bored with her life. To escape, she attempts to poison her husband, who luxuriates in wealth and the traditional Catholic values of the bourgeois. Knowing Mauriac, I bet the book is better. In French with English subtitles.

"To the Wonder" -- Once again, Terrence Malick invites us to take the time to see what he sees and hear what he hears in the great beyond of our inner world. Read the full review [48].

"What Maisie Knew" -- A 7-year-old girl is caught in a custody battle between an alcoholic mother and a disengaged father, but strangers care more than the parents. Credible.

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