
Listmaniacal

Fringe Beat

By Josef Woodard

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FILM IN THE REARVIEW: Any discussion of the last year's cinema scene in Santa Barbara would be remiss without a sad tip of the hat to the passing of **Video Shmideo**, a local legend of a shop done in by shifting means of content delivery. Serving up videos and then DVDs in a non-corporate way for more than 20 years while paying heed to the variously serious, mainstream, and quirky tastes of its customers, [Video Shmideo](#) was a soulful local hub of cinema action and a place where many people's cinematic curiosity was sated.



Paul Wellman

Given film-watching habits in the age of Netflix and the tantric ritual of “waiting for the DVD,” the movie experience is far more fragmented than before, a less focused and solidarity-inducing medium. For this cinephile, the best film seen in the past year was **Charles Burnett**'s remarkable, rough-hewn, and sweet **Killer of Sheep**, which was made on a shoestring budget in 1977 and finally released on DVD just last year.

In theaters near us, the 2008 Hollywood crop was fairly meek, lacking last year's late-breaking dazzle and mastery of *No Country for Old Men* and *There Will Be Blood*. (Catch them on DVD!) This year-end American crop had merit, but precious little magic. Take the curious case of *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, a charming exercise in hokum, marred by dubious acting and accents. Acting plaudits go to those who go on inspiring audiences by inhabiting historical figures, i.e. **Sean Penn** as **Harvey Milk** (*Milk*) and **Frank Langella** as **Tricky Dick** (*Frost/Nixon*).

In town, we're lucky to be smugly in synch with the splendors of the Santa Barbara International Film Festival early each year (the venue of the wild Swedish jewel *You the Living*, too good and too obscure for a regular theatrical run). The rest of the year, we have SBIFF's Cinema Society screenings as well as the UCSB Arts and Lectures screenings, sometimes reprising films seen at SBIFF, e.g. one of last year's greats, *The Band's Visit*.

Here, then, is a naturally highly subjective list of 10 films that somehow sparked wonder and explored non-formulaic ideas in a medium too often hamstrung by cliché and product placement. This cinema addict's grand prize: **Mike Leigh's** superlative **Happy-Go-Lucky**, the most artful "feel good" movie in years, with multiple triumphs of the writing-directing/acting/cinematography/music kind.

ONE CINEPHILE'S HOTLIST: *Happy-Go-Lucky* (**Mike Leigh**), *Gran Torino* (**Clint Eastwood**), *Frozen River* (**Courtney Hunt**), *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (**Woody Allen**), *Shine a Light* (**Martin Scorsese**), *Wall-E* (**Andrew Stanton**), *Encounters at the End of the World* (**Werner Herzog**), *The Band's Visit* (**Eran Kolirin**), *Be Kind Rewind* (**Michel Gondry**), *You the Living* (**Roy Andersson**).



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BEST LIVE SHOWS: Santa Barbara's 2008 concert calendar was owned, as they say in cyberspace, by **Radiohead** at the Bowl in August, but there were plenty of memorable highlights along the way, in all genres. For example ... **Christian Tetzlaff**, Lobero; **Blitzen Trapper**, Muddy Waters; **Liberation Music Orchestra**, Lobero; **Lang Lang**, The Granada; **The Wedding**, opera by William Bolcom, Lobero; **Jonathan Biss**, Marjorie Luke; **Little Dragon**, Mercury Lounge; **SFJAZZ Collective**, Lobero; Shoghaken Ensemble, MultiCultural Center; **Colin Currie** with the **Santa Barbara Symphony**, **Jennifer Higdon's** "Percussion Concerto," Arlington; **Carla Kihlstedt**, "Causing a Tiger," CAF; **Bill Frisell** with **Joey Baron**, Lobero.

BAKER'S DOZEN, CDS FOR ACTIVE EARS: Yes, dark forces are converging and threatening around the world and around town, impinging on our sense of peace and order. And yet music's awesome power to heal seems stronger than ever.

Here is the annual Baker's Dozen of jazz and pop albums which raised hopes and soothed angst in 2008: **Bobo Stenson**, *Cantando* (ECM); **Django Bates**, *Spring Is Here (Shall we Dance?)*, (Lost Marbles); **SFJAZZ Collective**, *SFJAZZ Collective Live 2008* (SFJAZZ); **Marcin Wasilewski Trio**, *January* (ECM); **Joe Lovano**, *Symphonica* (Blue Note); **Anthony Braxton**, *12+ Itet* (Victoriaville), (Victo); **Vince Mendoza**, *Blauklang* (ACT); **Sigur Rós**, *með suð í eyrum við spilum endalaust* ("with a buzz in our ears we play endlessly"), (XL); **Blitzen**

Trapper, *Furr* (Sub Pop); **Randy Newman**, *Harps and Angels* (Nonesuch); Meet **Glen Campbell** (Capital); **Martha Wainwright**, *I Know You're Married but I Have Feelings Too* (Zoe); **Kathleen Edwards**, *Asking for Flowers* (Zoe).

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