



Not to be Missed: Fifty-four Favorites from a Lifetime of Film

Kenneth Turan

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The images and memories that matter most are those that are unshakeable, unforgettable. Kenneth Turan's fifty-four favorite films embrace a century of the world's most satisfying romances and funniest comedies, the most heart-stopping dramas and chilling thrillers.

Turan discovered film as a child left undisturbed to watch *Million Dollar Movie* on WOR-TV Channel 9 in New York, a daily showcase for older Hollywood features. It was then that he developed a love of cinema that never left him and honed his eye for the most acute details and the grandest of scenes.

Not to be Missed blends cultural criticism, historical anecdote, and inside-Hollywood controversy. Turan's selection of favorites ranges across all genres. From *All About Eve* to *Seven Samurai* to *Sherlock Jr.*, these are all timeless films—classic and contemporary, familiar and obscure, with big budgets and small—each underscoring the truth of director Ingmar Bergman's observation that “no form of art goes beyond ordinary consciousness as film does, straight to our emotions, deep into the twilight room of the soul.”

Not to be Missed: Fifty-four Favorites from a Lifetime of Film Details

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Tom Stamper says

Those searching for a Roger Ebert substitute should give Kenneth Turan a look. He has an equal appreciation of big budget and art house films and therefore gives you good advice for whatever mood you are in.

If you are not familiar with Turan this isn't the best book to begin with. I would suggest *Now in Theaters Everywhere* for mainstream films or *Never Coming to a Theater Near you* for art house tastes. The movies here tend to be a little more of the obscure and forgotten with the occasional *CASABLANCA* or *GODFATHER* thrown in. I have seen 26 and I liked most quite a bit, although the inclusion of something like *STRAWBERRY BLONDE* surprised me. I have never really warmed up to *ALL ABOUT EVE* either, but it's a mainstream classic. Surprisingly there isn't any Chaplin, Capra, Hawks, Stevens, Wyler, or even Spielberg. But that makes room for movies you haven't seen and that's the point of reading this kind of book anyway.

I didn't know *PASS THE GRAVY* or *STRANDED*, but I really want to see them based on this commentary. *SENNA* was available to stream on Netflix recently and I hope it still is. *THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS* sounds like a really interesting film, but I have trouble trusting Von Trier after making me sit through 3 hours of *DOGVILLE*. I'll put it on the list though. Some of the others may go unseen forever. I had seen 88 of the AFI films of the century in 1999 and I still have 5 or 6 to go 18 years later. I don't know that I will ever have the patience for *Birth of a Nation* or the *Jazz Singer* so thankfully Turan doesn't name either of them here.

One great feature of the book is that each favorite film ends with a recommendation of other movies or films that are related. Having read and seen some of his suggestions I came away convinced Turan has good taste and my reading list is now bigger.

Spiros says

A nice overview of cinema, in which Turan goes to bat for 54 of his favorite movies, and makes persuasive cases for all of them. Each selection is "paired" with a thematically linked "What to Watch Next" movie, as well as a book (or books) which ties in with the selection. Very engaging and "user friendly".

Avi says

I felt like this book was often being written for the author instead of an audience and that it often did a lot of film industry name dropping (not that that's necessarily bad, but there are other movie lists that do that in a more thorough and organized way). *1001 Movies You Must See Before You Die* is far more useful than this. However; he mentioned some movies I haven't seen before that sounded interesting, so I'm still glad I skimmed this.

[For personal use:]

Find these:

Pass the Gravy
I am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang
Heroes for Sale
Love Affair
Persuasion
Strawberry Blonde
Bombshell
Kiss Me Deadly
Footnote
The Gatekeepers

Kirsti says

Appealingly quirky selection of the movie critic's all-time favorites.

Movies that are on the list, just as I expected them to be:

- * The Godfather
- * Vertigo
- * Casablanca
- * Sherlock Jr.
- * Sunset Blvd.
- * All About Eve
- * The Third Man

A movie that I had never heard of that this book inspired me to watch:

- * Pass the Gravy (1928 short film, Leo McCarey)

Movies that I want to see based on Turan's reviews:

- * The Strawberry Blonde
- * Bicycle Thieves
- * Random Harvest
- * Children of Paradise
- * Casque d'Or
- * The Earrings of Madame de . . .
- * Le Samouraï
- * The Day After Trinity
- * First Contact
- * The Best of Youth
- * Stranded: I've Come from a Plane that Crashed on the Mountains
- * Make Way for Tomorrow

Surprising choices (to me, anyway):

- * First Contact (1982)
- * Senna (Really, Kenneth? This was really good, but I wouldn't classify it as one of the greatest documentaries ever made. But you are paid to have opinions--you aren't paid to have my opinions.)
- * Sprited Away (I love this movie, so I was thrilled he picked it)

I was very happy to see Australian, Italian, and Japanese films on his list in addition to the usual American, British, and French picks.

J.J. Lair says

Based on book, I watched "Pass the Gravy" and "Sherlock Jr." On iTunes. It was laugh out loud funny. That's the biggest and best thing to say about this book.

This book describes why I should care about some of these movies that I eventually looked up. I'll admit some of the movies, I'm not interested. I can appreciate someone that cares so much and can write about this art so well that I went to find these movies. I enjoy movies and I guess I'm not the cinema fan that this author is. The more obscure movies didn't interest me.

The hardcover price was too much for this book, so I'll definitely recommend it as an ebook or soft cover, but I'll recommend it

Jeannette says

I'm not finished reading this book because it's not that sort of book. It's one to dip into and read about a film from a certain era that you might or might not have heard about. I started at the beginning and am working my way through, trying to see as many of Turan's films as I can get hold of. Alas, many aren't easily available. Still, his essays about them are excellent guides to the excellence of many different movies.

Edwin Arnaudin says

For fear of spoilers, I had contemplated only reading about films I've seen, but I'm glad that I put my faith in Turan not to ruin surprises and didn't limit myself. He of course rewarded that trust and got me interested about films of which I was either unaware or thought weren't for me and deepened my knowledge of and fondness for familiar titles. I've already corrected a few blind spots and plan to eradicate plenty more in the near future.

Valuable as the book is, however, it's in need of an editor. I still don't know how typos and missing words make it through to works of this stature, but a few noticeable ones are evident in the middle chapters. More troubling is that while following up on one of Turan's first suggestions, the 1928 Max Davidson silent short "Pass the Gravy," I discovered several inaccuracies and misleading statements.

The film's opening credits show that George Stevens is the film's photographer, not editor as the text claims.

Also, by saying Stevens "reached back and hired" the short's director Fred Guiol to cowrite the script for *Giant* (1956), Turan seems to suggest that the two hadn't worked together in the intervening decades when in fact they were frequent collaborators – Guiol served as writer, producer or associate director for many of Stevens' films.

Now I'm a little concerned that there may be other such not quite right or just plain wrong information scattered throughout the book.

lisa says

I enjoyed reading about my favorite movies, and I enjoyed learning more about movies I have never seen, or heard of, but I don't know why the publisher went to all the trouble to publicize or print this. I had never heard of the author, and while I liked reading his opinion on these movies, I didn't quite get the point of having a whole book published on it. It would have made a fine list online, or the beginning of a good blog (and then he could have included all the movies he clearly wanted to, that didn't make it into the book).

Quinton Baran says

This is an interesting, provocative, and exploratory book about a series of films across the decades. When I first got this book, I paged through to see what movies I recognized. There were a few, and I read a few of the entries haphazardly. I then became engaged in reading the book, and started from the beginning. I have added many of these films to my list to watch, and look forward to enjoying them.

I enjoy Turan's voice and story telling mode. He does not spoil the movies that he writes about, which is probably one of the most important qualities of a film reviewer.

Bill Kerwin says

God, I miss Roger Ebert. But I am happy that I still have the next best thing: Kenneth Turan, movie critic for the LA Times and NPR's Morning Edition.

When I was a young movie snob, I preferred Siskel. Ebert liked everything, which proved he couldn't be a serious critic. No, not like Siskel--and me. As I grew older, however, I began to appreciate the virtues of enthusiasm. It would be unfair to say Ebert liked everything, yet he seemed to find waiting in everything something he could honestly like: one unsettling performance in a too-cutesy indie, the poetic cinematography of a ponderous epic, the breath-taking opening of a promising thriller before it skidded to a disappointing end. He never lost his joy in the dance of life or his reverence for its spiritual rhythms, and that joy and reverence is palpable in every review he wrote.

I feel the same way about Kenneth Turan. He is a reverent, joyful man who is comfortable with his own enthusiasms, and in *Not to Be Missed*, a book of fifty-four favorite films, he candidly shares his greatest enthusiasms with us.

Of course I liked this book because he includes many Hollywood films I greatly love which don't often make the list of first-rank official classics: *Bombshell*, *Love Affair*, *The Shop Around the Corner*, *Strawberry Blonde*, *Random Harvest*, *Kiss Me Deadly*, *Seven Men from Now*. But he chooses fine films from many places, including the animated masterpiece *Spirited Away* and a few relatively recent films that I am not familiar with, such as Beauvois' *Of Gods and Men* and Cedar's *Footnote*. Each of Turan's review-length essay conveys the essence of a film in such a way that you wish to see it for yourself. Or see it again.

Rachel says

This book was okay. I liked his style of writing in part because it is similar to mine. He likes to use long sentences which can be a little hard to understand sometimes. The book was divided into decade chapters (one decade per chapter) and at the end of each essay for each film there were a couple suggestions of other films to watch and sometimes a book as well. He also enjoys films for a different reason than I do. While I can, and do, enjoy films with a good story and good acting, I mostly watch films to escape for a bit and be entertained. Some of the films he mentions from the early years through the 1950's looked interesting to me, but almost none of the films from the 1960's on looked like something I would like at all.

Garrett Cash says

He doesn't say anything too different about any of these films that you wouldn't hear anywhere else, and his list is of course extremely biased. Tons of films I outright hated and missing many films that were life changers. Same old story. But I was grateful to add several titles that I had never heard of to my list of films to watch.

Jennifer says

This is a well worn genre but Turan's "less is more" approach gave it a freshness and a thoughtfulness that others in this genre lack. There is a fatigue in hearing about 100-1,000 films "you shouldn't miss" but this selection makes careful choices. The writing has a just right amount feel too. He usually starts with some personal observation or unusual aspect of the film and then provides just enough synopsis to interest the reader and finishes with an observation that puts film in context. I liked that he added a further reading section to each as well as another film recommendation as that was an unexpected choice.

Kelly says

I like Turan's reviews on NPR--accessible and smart. It was interesting to see how he handled limiting himself to 54 films (while David Thomson's *Have you Seen...?* is 1,000 films strong) and to see which films in each decade made his list. Of course, the book led to a good number of additions to my Netflix and library queues, too. Thanks to Turan, I've already watched *The Lady Eve*, *Love Affair*, and *To Be Or Not To Be* (Lubitsch's original); and there are more to come.

Kevin says

Lists are fun. They almost always work. Just ask BuzzFeed. Or Casey Kasem. And now you can add LA Times Film Critic Kenneth Turan to the list of excellent listmakers. His eloquent, enthusiastic and spoiler-sensitive reviews were a joy to read and they come in bite sized chunks so this is an easy book to put down and come back to.

The thing about lists is while you're reading one you're invariably making your own, playing the "if this was MY list" game. So, I walked away with a dozen films I have to check out from Turan's list and another 20 of my own.

Time to get busy.
