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TIFF

Couldn't make it to TIFF? Here's our guide to the best of the fest, plus what's getting Oscar buzz

Theatres were full, lines were long and the talent showed up for Q&As, just like the old days at TIFF, and there were a lot of great movies to catch.

By **Peter Howell** Movie Critic

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JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Never thought I'd ever say this, but it was fun to feel frantic and crowded again at the [47th Toronto International Film Festival](#).

After two pandemic years when TIFF was mostly online, and the theatres and streets around festival headquarters TIFF Bell Lightbox seemed deserted — “Tumbleweed Junction” was my nickname for the corner of King and John streets — it was a joy and a relief to see Toronto movie lovers out in force again.

Theatres were full, lines were long and the talent showed up for Q&As. People were rushing to see how many films they could fit into a single day and there were lots of great movies to catch.

It was almost the way things used to be before a disease that sort of rhymes with “goaded” came to screw with us all.

The downside of the return to near-normalcy was that TIFF's troublesome computer ticketing system couldn't handle the load. It was a headache getting tickets to public screenings — I wasted hours in online and telephone queues, often to no avail — but TIFF CEO Cameron Bailey has promised to fix the problem for 2023.

Press and industry screenings were also an issue: too few and often too small. TIFF programmers underestimated demand to see the popular Midnight Madness opener “Weird: The Al Yankovic Story” and they booked it into a tiny theatre for its only P&I screening last weekend. I got there an hour earlier for it and still didn't get in.

I'll catch a public screening soon of “Weird,” but the P&I failure means I couldn't consider it for my annual Top 10 at TIFF list. I still saw a lot of other great movies at TIFF '22, though. My Top 10 films are listed below, along with some Oscar and Canadian Screen Awards speculation, where appropriate.

Note: My Top 10 list includes films I saw at TIFF '22. I didn't include films I previously raved about at other festivals and which also screened at Toronto, such as “Living” from Sundance and “Decision to Leave,” “Moonage Daydream,” “Holy Spider” and “EO” from Cannes. I recommend you see them, too, along with these new faves:



The Fabelmans



Steven Spielberg phones home ... and truly connects. His family memory project, examining the cause of his parents' divorce and his early filmmaking spark as a kid and teen in the 1950s to '60s, is a movie of art and heart that's sure to resonate with cinema lovers and awards bestowers everywhere. Michelle Williams anchors the story as Spielberg's eccentric and encouraging mom, newcomer Gabriel LaBelle fascinates as the young Steven and Judd Hirsch, playing a rascal uncle, shows how to steal scenes just by showing up.

Oscar chances: Best Picture, director, screenplay, actress (Williams), supporting actor (Hirsch)

[Read the full review](#)



Women Talking



Toronto's Sarah Polley turns fellow Canadian Miriam Toews' powerful novel of communal violation into an essential cinema inquiry about the meaning of forgiveness, love, justice and faith. It's a film we must all discuss and think about, inspired by real events — Mennonite women drugged and raped by male members of their community — and informed by #MeToo fury. The ensemble acting is so strong there's no obvious lead; there are multiple candidates for supporting actress nods.

Oscar chances: Picture, director, screenplay, supporting actress (Rooney Mara, Claire Foy, Jessie Buckley)

[Read the full review](#)



The Banshees Of Inisherin



If anybody ever threatens to chop off their fingers if you won't STFU, take them seriously and mind their sheepdog. A great yarn by Martin McDonagh about men not talking on an Irish island, featuring a joyous-but-not-happy reunion of McDonagh's "In Bruges" stars Colin Farrell and Brendan Gleeson. Their characters, lifelong friends, become violently estranged when one of them declares the other dull.

Oscar chances: Picture, director, screenplay, actor (Farrell), supporting actor (Gleeson)

[Read the full review](#)



Good Night Oppy



Here's the cure for space flight apathy. Ryan White's gripping doc on NASA's Mars rovers Opportunity and Spirit makes heroes of the robots — R2-D2, WALL-E and the Energizer Bunny look like slackers in comparison — and turns the scientists who guide them into devoted “family.” The rovers were designed to last just 90 days on the hostile red planet. They surprised everybody by rolling for years and by making a historic discovery that water once flowed on Mars.

Oscar chances: Best documentary feature



Brother



Toronto's Clement Virgo presents an affecting memory puzzle, set in 1990s Scarborough and adapted from a novel by David Chariandy. Brothers Michael (Lamar Johnson of "The Hate U Give") and Francis (Aaron Pierre of TV's "The Underground Railroad") are like fire and ice: Francis confronts, Michael observes. They share love plus the pain of a troubled mother and absent father. A world is revealed, brilliantly.

Canadian Screen Awards chances: Picture, director, screenplay, actor (Johnson), supporting actor (Pierre)



Empire Of Light



Cinematographer Roger Deakins' evocative lensing of movie love in 1980s England, in this story written and directed by Sam Mendes, prompts us to see not just what's projected on the screen but also what's happening all around us. Notably the blind hatred of racism, which threatens a couple sensitively played by Olivia Colman and Micheal Ward. Film is truth at 24 frames per second; reality is a fist to the face.

Oscar chances: Picture, director, screenplay, cinematography, actress (Colman), actor (Ward)



The Whale



Believe the [hype](#) about Brendan Fraser's career reboot and awards prospects. He's a revelation as the 600-pound Charlie, a man whose obesity controls his body but not his mind. Estranged from his teen daughter (Sadie Sink) and ignoring the urgent health warnings of his friend and nurse (Hong Chau), he's eating himself into an early grave for reasons that unfold in due course. Director Darren Aronofsky, artisan of lost souls, finds compassion in the oddest of situations.

Oscar chances: Picture, director, actor (Fraser)



Falcon Lake



Actor turned director Charlotte Le Bon equates teen sexuality with horror film tropes — and all hail that creative impulse. Joseph Engel and Sara Montpetit find steam and suspense in the titular Quebec lake, where ghosts wander and hearts get bruised in 16-mm splendour. A gem of mood and technique, it's the most impressive work by a first-time Canadian feature director I've seen this year.

Canadian Screen Awards chances: Picture, director, screenplay, actor (Engel), actress (Montpetit)



Aftersun



A father and daughter resort holiday, viewed through a prism of wistfulness and regret, takes on magical meaning in this arresting feature directing debut by Scotland's Charlotte Wells. Paul Mescal plays a drifting dad and Frankie Corio his old-for-her-years

daughter, as the two attempt to reunite following a family split. Both are marvellously expressive, their back stories more hinted at through actions than explained through words.



The Swimmers



The strongest TIFF opener in years, harrowing and inspiring by turns. Sally El Hosaini's real-life drama of Syrian sisters Yusra and Sarah Mardini, who fled civil war in pursuit of an Olympic swimming dream, was the fist-pumper we needed to get the festival party started. It's also a potent drama of the global tragedy of refugees; an aerial shot of a beach littered with abandoned life jackets will take your breath away.



Peter Howell is a Toronto-based movie critic and a freelance contributor to the Star. Follow him on Twitter: [@peterhowellfilm](https://twitter.com/peterhowellfilm)

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