'Lincoln,' 'Master' and 'Hobbit' could be year's most important films

Posted on Aug 01, Posted by Patrick Hall Category At the Movies - Patrick Hall

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Granted, there are still a few blockbusters to come this month and next, but arguably, the most important films of the year, in terms of awards and lasting impact, will be hitting theaters this winter.

Director **Steven Spielberg's** biopic on **Abraham Lincoln** entitled, "Lincoln," is set to open Nov. 16 and has a pretty spectacular cast, including the greatest actor alive, **Daniel Day-Lewis**, in the roll of the 16th President.

Written by **Tony Kushner** and an original screenplay by **Paul Webb**, the film is based on **Doris Kearns Goodwin's** biography *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln.*

It's obviously unclear how much Spielberg will stick to the book's themes, but given the fact we've had to put up with "Abraham Lincoln Vampire Hunter" this year, it will be nice to see the talented director take a serious look at one of our nation's heroes.

With Day-Lewis leading the cast, his first film since he won an Oscar for Best Actor in 2007

("There Will Be Blood"), you can bank on at least his otherworldly skill being the anchor of the film.

Day-Lewis is an actor who has refused medical treatment for pneumonia, lived in an isolated beach hut for months, learned to track humans and game as well as build an entire 17th century Puritan home using only period-accurate tools, to prepare for roles.

His dedication and intensity is seldom matched and his performances, once about every four or five years (because of his strict selectivity) are nothing short of brilliant. The fact that he is willing to play Lincoln in this film is a testament to its potential.

Of course, you also have Spielberg, who is capable of delivering. But how political will the film be? Goodwin's biography has taken criticism from some historians, but will "Lincoln" play entirely on historical fact instead of pushing a "thesis statement?"

The supporting cast includes **Sally Field** as **Mary Todd Lincoln**, **Joseph Gordon**-**Levitt** as Lincoln's son
Robert
,
David
Strathairn
as Secretary of State
William
Seward
and
Tommy
Lee
Jones
as
Thaddeus Stevens.

Also on the slate later this year is **Peter Jackson's** return to the realm of Middle Earth to tackle

author **J.R.R. Tolkien's** novel, *The Hobbit*, with his film "The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey."

The film may be the most successful movie this winter and could set a new trend in filmmaking with a controversial technique used by Jackson.

"Hobbit" pre-dates Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* novels, and tells the story of Frodo Baggins' (**Elijah Wood** in "Rings") uncle Bilbo Baggins (**Martin Freeman**) as he sets off with the wizard Gandalf (**Ian McKellen**) and a band of dwarves to recover an extensive treasure.

Just this week, Jackson confirmed the story, which was to be split into two films, is actually going to be three. While I'm sure all three will be huge hits, it reeks of a cash-grab, although they are pulling from Tolkien's appendices to the *Lord of the Rings* novels, which contained information he wrote to fit "Hobbit" within the greater mythology of "Rings."

There's also some controversy surrounding "Hobbit" as Jackson has filmed the first film in 48-frames-per-second, which is twice as fast as the normal frame rate. Many who have seen footage of "Hobbit" have found it difficult to describe the 48-fps effect without speaking in generalities like it takes away the magic of cinema.

While controversial, "Hobbit" should draw a huge audience this winter, and could be the start of a new wave with 48-fps becoming the new standard. Or, it could become a complete one-off, if audience and theater-owners are so turned off by the frame rate.

As a long-time fan of *The Hobbit* I'm extremely excited about the film and I'm in the camp of *Lord of the Rings* book-fanatics who loved Jackson's movie trilogy. Those were a worldwide phenomenon and

visually breathtaking for their time, and Jackson is sure to deliver the same effect this winter.

The cast of “Hobbit” also includes dwarf-leader Thorin Oakenshield (**Richard Armitage**), **Andy Serkis**
reprising his role as the creature Gollum and a host of others, considering there are 13 dwarves in Bilbo’s company.

“Hobbit” will open on Dec. 14.

Lastly, and probably the movie that will compete against, if not surpass, “Lincoln” as most influential this year, is writer/director **Paul Thomas Anderson’s** film “The Master.”

It may not get a wide release so “The Master” might turn some heads from the larger public if it takes home multiple Academy Awards, which I’m sure will happen.

Slated for a Sept. 12 release, “The Master” is a 1950s drama about drifter Freddie Sutton (**Joaquin**
Phoenix
) and his loyalty to the architect of a faith-based movement, Lancaster Dodd (
Philip
Seymour
Hoffman
) as that movement gains popularity in America.

The film is “not about Scientology,” according to Anderson and others involved, but bears striking resemblances to the group. Anderson reportedly had trouble getting a studio to fund the project, mostly due to the film’s similarities with Scientology and its apparent criticism of the movement.

Producer **Megan Ellison** put her weight behind Anderson’s project to get it going, and thankfully so, because Anderson is an incredible writer and director.

Anderson is most recently known for “There Will Be Blood” which won a few Academy Awards but missed out on Best Picture, Director and Adapted Screenplay to the 2007 juggernaut “No Country for Old Men” (written/directed by **Joel** and **Ethan Coen**).

Judging from all I’ve read and seen from or about the movie so far, I’d be shocked if “The Master” didn’t land Anderson a whole mess of awards this year. His characters and dialogue are so sharp and profound, I haven’t seen or heard of a project that challenges its potential this year.

Other than “Lincoln.”

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