



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DEATH IN VENICE;
TWO SCENES FROM DIFFERENT FROM THE
OTHERS (ANDERS ALS DIE ANDERN; VICTIM)



THE QUEER

SCREEN



*“Bogarde provides us
with a character
whose personal and
public struggles seem
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SINCE THE EARLIEST DAYS OF THE SILVER SCREEN, LGBT LIVES HAVE PROVIDED FILMMAKERS WITH DEEPLY COMPELLING STORIES OF LOVE, CONFLICT, TRAGEDY AND COMEDY. CONSEQUENTLY, SOME LISTS OF TOP LGBT FILMS STRETCH INTO THE LOW HUNDREDS. HERE, HOWEVER, ANDY WASLEY ATTEMPTS THE (NEARLY) IMPOSSIBLE: A SHORT LIST OF GREAT LGBT FILMS THAT YOU COULD CONCEIVABLY WATCH WITHIN A SINGLE MONTH. TRY HARD – SOME OF THESE REALLY SHOULDN'T BE MISSED.

Different from the Others (Anders als die Andern) (1919, Germany) seems a good opener: it is probably the first ever film to be released that was sympathetic to gay subjects. A polemic against Germany's restrictive anti-gay laws, the film was produced in the earliest days of the Weimar Republic and featured a young Conrad Veidt – who found worldwide fame later in Casablanca.

Veidt's courage in playing in a gay film was matched later by Dirk Bogarde in *Victim* (1961, UK), which was based on the earlier film. *Victim* marked the first time the word “homosexual” was uttered on screen, and was the first sympathetic portrayal of the struggles facing gay men to reach an international audience. Bogarde, who is today widely

acknowledged to have been gay, never came out. Fittingly, in *Victim* he provides us with a character whose personal and public struggles seem relevant even today.

Gay men have never had a monopoly on the cinema, of course. Heading back into Weimar Germany, *Girls in Uniform (Mädchen in Uniform)* (1931, Germany) did for lesbians what *Different from the Others* did for gay men. Based on a play by lesbian playwright Christa Winsloe, the film attained cult status as a sympathetic and passionate portrayal of love between women. Sadly, both it and *Different from the Others* were suppressed by the Nazis; thankfully, some versions survived the purge, and remain poignant reminders of life for gay people during the turbulence of the Weimar era.

You could also choose *Cabaret* (1972, US) for its sympathetic portrayal of bisexual men during the same era, but it fits better with films that might not be historic landmarks in themselves, but that do tell important stories about gay history. It's hard not to mention *Wilde* (1997, UK). Director Brian Gilbert tells the story of Oscar Wilde's stellar career and fall from grace supported by superb performances by Stephen Fry – a dead-ringer for Wilde – and Jude Law as his capricious lover, Bosie.

Released more recently, Gus Van Sant's blockbuster *Milk* (2008, US), starring Sean Penn as gay rights campaigner Harvey Milk, is an indispensable portrayal of a major character from gay history. The film attracted eight Oscar nominations, with Penn taking the gong for Best Actor. Although an excellent biopic in itself, *Milk* is perhaps best watched along with the Oscar-winning documentary *The Times of Harvey Milk* (1984, US), director Rob Epstein's tribute to the slain activist.

Another historic gay figure – code-breaker Alan Turing – is in the public mind at the moment thanks to the critical success of *The Imitation Game* (2014, UK), which sadly came away from the BAFTAs with no wins out of nine nominations. Although eventually it only won ▶



“Sebastiane remains one of the most powerfully unabashed films about male sexuality”



one Oscar (for best adapted screenplay) it was nominated for nine Oscars (including Best Actor for Benedict Cumberbatch) – another fitting tribute, if any were needed, to a true gay hero.

Remaining with history, the Aids epidemic of the 1980s is a natural subject for gritty films, and three stand out for us. *Philadelphia* (1993, US), *We Were Here* (2011, US) and *Dallas Buyers' Club* (2013, US) each tell the period's story with nuance, sensitivity and powerful realism, and serve as essential reminders of one of the darkest episodes in LGBT history.

Several of the films already listed are culturally significant in their own right, which brings us to five films which, in different ways, have made significant cultural impacts. Perhaps it's best to let screenshots from Derek Jarman's intensely homoerotic *Sebastiane* (1976, UK) speak for themselves. This fleshy re-telling of the life and martyrdom of St Sebastian remains one of the most powerfully unabashed films about male sexuality, and is typical of Jarman's daring and unconventional screen vision.

Luchino Visconti's achingly beautiful *Death in Venice* (1971, Italy/France) is similarly visually striking. Visconti's adaptation of Thomas Mann's classic story about a middle-aged man's unrequited and dangerous obsession with a teenage boy was nearly banned by Warner Bros. executives because of its controversial subject matter. Its star, Dirk Bogarde, is almost acted off the screen by Björn Andrésen as the superlatively beautiful adolescent Tadzio, and the whole painful affair is emphasised by haunting music by Gustav Mahler.

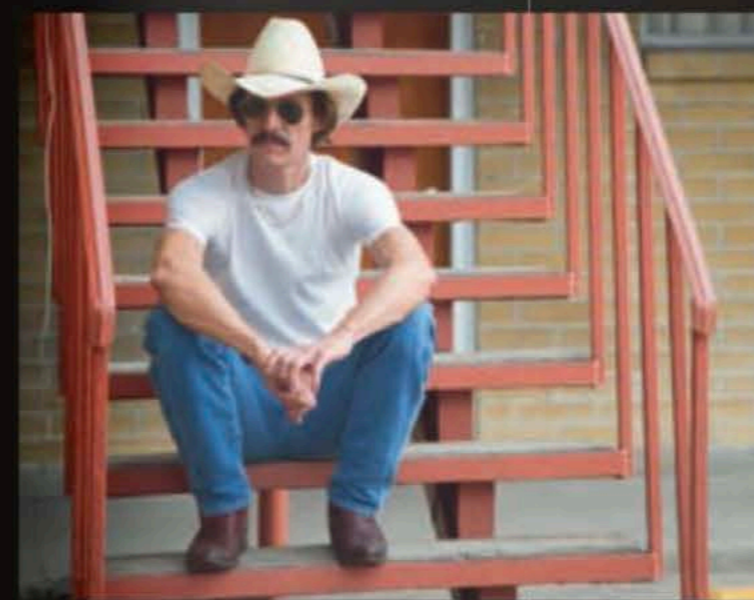
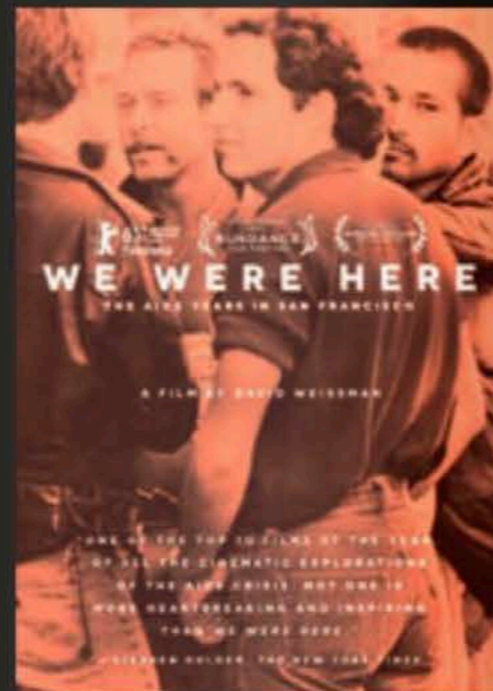
Moving away from dark passions, we can turn to playwright Jonathan Harvey's *Beautiful*

Thing (1996, UK) for an outstanding and uplifting tale of first gay love, set among the squalour of the Thamesmead Estate. Another film about love among bleak urban surroundings, *My Beautiful Launderette* (1985, UK), tells an unlikely story of love between white and Asian men during the Thatcher era. And while we're on the subject of the Iron Lady, no list like this could be complete without mentioning *Pride* (2014, UK), Stephen Beresford's award-winning tribute to the Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners movement of the early 1980s.

If Thatcher's Britain was tough for LGBT people, it pales compared with the deeply conservative American Midwest of the 1960s – but there we met two cowboys who fell madly in love in Ang Lee's blockbuster *Brokeback Mountain* (2005, US), a major international success. *Brokeback*, based on a short story by Annie Proulx, tells a story many of us will recognise – of passionate love, the grimness of life in the closet, and of the consequences of anti-gay hate.

If that's all a little too dark, our final three picks should provide a little uplift. *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001, US) and – of course – *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994, Australia), both show that LGBT stories needn't be earnest or serious to pack a punch. Thankfully, we can also point to a recent piece of history that demonstrates the same thing: *ParaNorman* (2012, US) is the first animated feature film to feature an openly gay character.

Perhaps that's a fitting place to finish, imperfect though the list might be. Each film here demonstrates, in its own way, the impact LGBT people have made on society – and vice versa. We hope you enjoy them. ●



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP FAR LEFT: THE IMITATION GAME; SEBASTIANE; WILDE; MY BEAUTIFUL LAUNDERETTE; DALLAS BUYERS' CLUB; PRISCILLA, QUEEN OF THE DESERT; WE WERE HERE