

Arts » The Year in Arts

The Best of 2016 in Theater, Dance, Books, and Film

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 comment



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The Handmaiden

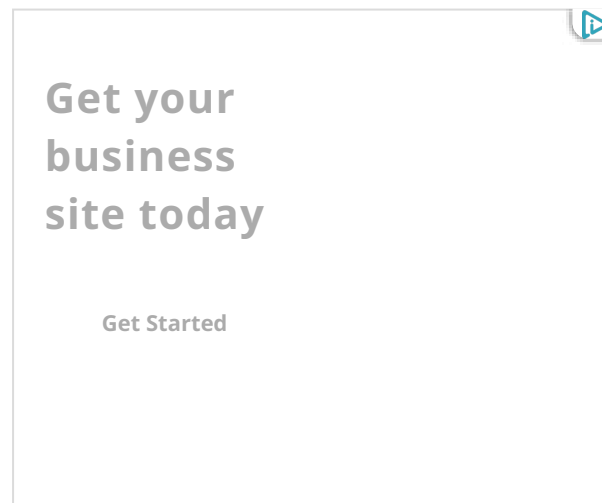
THE TEN BEST MOVIES OF 2016

American Honey Newcomer Sasha Lane's stunningly tough but vulnerable performance and Robbie Ryan's cinematography capture the raw, vibrant energy of teens on society's fringes. —*Laura Jaramillo*

Arrival In what's basically an art film with a Paramount budget, Denis Villeneuve gives us an alien invasion without fighting, a lesson in linguistics, a formidable Amy Adams, and a heady twist that really lands, all with cold, engrossing beauty and fascination. —*Brian Howe*

Certain Women Kelly Reichardt's slow, meditative film leaves room for pauses that reveal immense emotional complexity, such as the silences between would-be lovers Beth (Kristen Stewart) and Jamie (Lily Gladstone). —*LJ*

The Handmaiden Park Chan-wook delivers an exhilarating Korean-Victorian erotic thriller that rotates and swivels like some clockwork puzzle from a parallel universe. It's fifty shades of cray. —*Glenn McDonald*



Hell or High Water All the traditional tropes are here (cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians, an aw-shucks lawman and hayseed banks), but this postmodern Western starring a complex Jeff Bridges is about how the West was lost, not how it was won. —*Neil Morris*

The Lobster Greek director Yorgos Lanthimos's Hollywood breakthrough, a lush dystopian diorama of mandatory romantic coupledness, is as hilarious,

cruel, manipulative, and utterly original as his independent films were. —*BH*

Manchester by the Sea Casey Affleck gives an Oscar-worthy performance as a man with a tragic past returning to his hometown after his brother's death. Writer-director Kenneth Lonergan sharply observes and juxtaposes quotidian moments with dysfunction and loss. —*NM*

Moonlight Barry Jenkins decants black masculinity, homosexuality, and mentorship into a hurting, hopeful coming-of-age elixir that deserves every ray of praise for its alertness to humanity, its disregard for stereotypes, and its sensitive performances. —*BH*

Nocturnal Animals Amy Adams (again!) and Jake Gyllenhaal shatter in slow motion in Tom Ford's menacing pulp fiction, which pours hot-blooded Texas noir into the cool porcelain aesthetics of the L.A. art world. —*GM*

The Witch This portrait of a Puritan family gripped by witch hysteria is meticulously researched and genuinely terrifying. —*LJ*

THE TEN MOST FANTASTICAL LOCAL BOOKS OF 2016

By Samuel Montgomery-Blinn

Blood Family by Brent Winter (Self-published) This gripping, literary occult thriller explores the ties of family, layers of reality, and the edges where sanity blurs into the supernatural.

Cinder by James Maxey (Self-published) We had to wait four years for this stunning conclusion to the Hillsborough author and recent Piedmont Laureate's "Dragon Apocalypse" series, set in an imaginative high-action fantasy world that asks plenty of moral and ethical questions.

Death's Bright Day by David Drake (Baen Books) In the eleventh novel in his "Lt. Leary" series, the legendary military science-fiction author sends now-Captain Leary into the gray areas of an interstellar cold war.

The Delphi Effect by Rysa Walker (Skyscape) To follow her best-selling, award-winning "CHRONOS Files" series, Walker launched a YA series featuring

a teenage protagonist who has bounced from foster home to foster home—oh, yeah, and she can talk to ghosts, even if she'd rather be left alone.

***The Dragon Hammer* by Tony Daniel (Baen Books)** Roman vampires war with Dragon-bonded Vikings in a Shenandoah Valley full of talking buffalo, gnomes, and star-crossed elves in this fantasy adventure for readers twelve and up.

***The Flash: The Haunting of Barry Allen* by Clay and Susan Griffith (Titan Books)** The husband and wife behind the “Vampire Empire” and “Crown & Key” series pen a deliriously fun crossover tie-in novel for *The Flash* and *Arrow*, sure to please fans of both TV shows.

***The Last Great American Magic* by L. C. Fiore (Can of Corn Media)** The Durham author weaves magic, myth, and history to retell the story of the Shawnee warrior Tecumseh, struggling to preserve his tribe's way of life against encroaching Europeans at the end of the Victorian era. Shamans, nightmarish beasts, twin brothers, and beautiful writing await.

***Outriders* by Jay Posey (Angry Robot)** This is gritty, detail-oriented, squad-based special ops in a solar system on the brink of war from Posey, the Durham-based author of the “Legends of the Duskwalker” series and narrative designer of multiple Tom Clancy video game franchises.

***The Raven and the Reindeer* by T. Kingfisher (Red Wombat Tea Co.)** The popular Pittsboro children's author Ursula Vernon has also been successfully writing darker fairy tales for adults under this pen name, here offering a dark and whimsical take on Hans Christian Andersen's *The Snow Queen*.



***The Wooden Prince* by John Claude Bemis (Disney-Hyperion)** Back with his first novel in four years, the Hillsborough children's author recasts the story of Pinocchio in a gloriously rendered Venetian Empire of alchemists, airships, fairies, djinn, and the legendary Prester John.

THE TEN BEST PLAYS OF 2016

By Byron Woods

***All My Sons* (Theatre Raleigh at Kennedy Theatre, Raleigh)** A top-flight ensemble led by Julie Fishell, Mitch Poulos, Charlie Brady, and Meagan Mackenzie Chieppor explored the secrets and lies of a mid-century American family frozen by wartime grief. www.theatreraleigh.com

***Cloud 9* (Tiny Engine Theatre at Common Ground Theatre, Durham)** A gutsy ensemble in Victorian drag took on Caryl Churchill's farcical roundelay of gender roles and noblesse oblige, from the British empire a century ago to today. www.tinyenginetheatre.com

***Doubt* (Temple Theatre, Sanford)** Actors Lynda Clark and Gus Allen went ten rounds in a psychological war of nerves in a play where a priest's behavior with a young boy comes under question. www.templeshows.com



Photo by Curtis Brown Photography

David Henderson in Hamlet

***Hamlet* (Honest Pint Theatre at William Peace University, Raleigh)** This rare, audacious staging of Shakespeare's complete text occasionally flirted with disaster in theatrical deconstructions, but it delivered thought-provoking performances from accomplished actors and a nuanced vision of a dysfunctional Denmark. www.honestpinttheatre.org

***Jacuzzi* (Ward Theatre Company at Ward Theatre, Durham)** In her North Carolina debut, director Wendy Ward gave proof of concept for the techniques of acting teacher Sanford Meisner with a taut psychological thriller set in a remote Rocky Mountains cabin. www.wardtheatrecompany.com

Lungs (**Sonorous Road Productions at Sonorous Road Theatre, Raleigh**) Director Tony Lea, in his best work to date, led Michelle Murray Wells and Jonathan King through the dramatic twists of a young millennial couple destined to overthink everything about their relationship.

www.sonorousroad.com

"Master Harold"...and the boys (**Mortall Coile Theatre Company at Sonorous Road Theatre, Raleigh**) Gil Faison's career-defining performance and newcomer Ben Pluska's strong work anchored Athol Fugard's memoir of racial dialogue in apartheid-era South Africa. www.mctheatre.com

Mothers and Sons (**Raleigh Little Theatre at Gaddy-Goodwin Teaching Theatre, Raleigh**) With actors Brian Westbrook and Christopher Maxwell, stage veteran Rebecca Johnston probed the legacy of AIDS in playwright Terrence McNally's consideration of what the living owe to one another—and to the dead. www.raleighlittletheatre.org

Time Stands Still (**South Stream Productions at Sonorous Road Theatre, Raleigh**) Investigative journalism hurts when the subject is yourself. Two war correspondents asked what their relationship was based on besides good sourcing in this emotionally frank drama.

www.southstreamproductions.blogspot.com

Three Sisters (**PlayMakers Repertory Company at Paul Green Theatre, Chapel Hill**) The strong production values of Vivienne Benesch's first show as artistic director of PlayMakers let us look in on a bell jar of privilege and useless aristocracy before the Russian revolution. www.playmakersrep.org

THE FIVE BEST DANCE PERFORMANCES OF 2016

By Michaela Dwyer

John Jasperse Projects: *Remains* (**American Dance Festival at Reynolds Industries Theater, Durham**) Downtown New York dance stalwart John Jasperse's impeccable movers tripleted in sequined dresses and assumed hedonistic poses in a haunting meditation on artistic legacy.

www.americandancefestival.org

Lil Buck: *A Jookin' Jam Session* (Carolina Performing Arts at Memorial Hall, Chapel Hill) Lil Buck interweaved the jagged fluidity of Memphis jookin' with borderless music from members of the Silk Road Ensemble in spring's most spectacular show. www.carolinaperformingarts.org

Tommy Noonan: *John* (Durham Independent Dance Artists and Culture Mill at Living Arts Collective, Durham) Noonan, dressed in garish red and drenched in sweat, played hype man, politician, and *Saturday Night Fever*'s Tony Manero in a pre-election doozy of a solo that took swings at masculinity and ambition. www.culturemill.org



Lil Buck

Photo by Daniel Jackson

real.live.people.durham: *Feature Presentation* (DIDA at The Trotter Building, Durham) In this relentlessly energetic dance theater piece, Anna Barker and Leah Wilks teased out their real and fictive selves to interrogate what audiences and arts patrons expect of dancers—and vice versa. www.didaseason.com

Trisha Brown Dance Company: *In Plain Site* (Duke Performances at Duke Gardens, Durham) The legendary postmodern choreographer's troupe led us through a pastoral re-setting of her repertoire in what felt like a private tour of the gardens. www.dukeperformances.duke.edu

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YEAR IN REVIEW

2016

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