

**SIGHT & SOUND MAGAZINE'S FIRST DOCUMENTARY POLL -  
WINNERS REVEALED** [Embargoed until 00.01am, Friday 1<sup>st</sup> August 2014]



London: The results of the BFI's Sight & Sound magazine's first ever poll to decide the world's greatest ever documentaries are now in. The winner of the title of Greatest Documentary goes to Dziga Vertov's extraordinary silent film ***Man with a Movie Camera*** (1929), shot in the cities of Odessa, Kyiv and Kharkiv. Vertov created a film of dazzling beauty and bewitching complexity, which unleashed the camera in a teasingly surrealist fashion to capture everyday life in a unique and hugely influential way.

The well-known Sight & Sound magazine poll of filmmakers and critics to decide the Best Film has taken place once a decade since 1952, with Hitchcock's *Vertigo* receiving the most votes in the last edition in 2012. The vast majority of films nominated were fiction features although in the most recent poll *Man With a Movie Camera* came in at a surprising 8<sup>th</sup> place and was the only documentary in the Top Ten. Now, for the first time, the magazine has launched a poll to discover the greatest documentaries. Over 1,000 films were nominated by over 200 critics and 100 filmmakers from around the world; over 100 of them voted for ***Man with a Movie Camera***.

Nick James, editor, Sight & Sound said:

“What’s remarkable about this Top 50 is that it feels so fresh. One in five of the films were made since the millennium, and to have a silent film from 1929 at the top is equally surprising. That essay films feature so strongly here shows that nonfiction cinema is not a narrow discipline but a wide open country full of explorers.”

Ivan Kozlenko, Deputy Director, Oleksandr Dovzhenko National Centre, Kyiv: “*Man with a Movie Camera* was created at the Odessa VUFKU Film Factory in Ukraine in 1929. It is full of an almost incomprehensible lyricism which offers a powerful sense of the city. Researchers often overlook the fact that the film was made mostly in Odessa, Ukraine but to ignore it makes a thorough interpretation of the film impossible. This is a very “Odessian” film: it has so much sun, sea, and space in it; its emotion is lively and vital likely inspired by “romantic vita-ism” a popular theme in Ukrainian art in 1920s. It comes from a long line of brilliant propaganda films by Vertov but is in fact itself totally apolitical, although its “non-Russian” aesthetic was rejected by Sovkino in Moscow and it could only be made in the Ukraine, which had become a haven for artists fleeing from Russia where attacks on dissent had begun. We are absolutely thrilled that such a great film should win the Sight & Sound poll for best documentary.”

The poll report is released in the September edition of Sight & Sound published today, Friday 1<sup>st</sup> August. The full lists of all the votes received and films nominated will be available online from 14<sup>th</sup> August. Join the conversation at #BestDocsEver

### **The Critics' Top 10 documentaries are:**

1. Man with a Movie Camera, dir. Dziga Vertov (USSR 1929)
2. Shoah, dir. Claude Lanzmann (France 1985)
3. Sans soleil, dir. Chris Marker (France 1982)
4. Night and Fog, dir. Alain Resnais (France 1955)
5. The Thin Blue Line, dir. Errol Morris (USA 1989)
6. Chronicle of a Summer, dir. Jean Rouch & Edgar Morin (France 1961)
7. Nanook of the North, dir. Robert Flaherty (USA 1922)
8. The Gleaners and I, dir. Agnès Varda (France 2000)
9. Dont Look Back, dir. D.A. Pennebaker (USA 1967)
10. Grey Gardens, dirs. Albert and David Maysles, Ellen Hovde and Muffie Meyer (USA 1975)

The statistics make for fascinating reading. 11 out of the first 56 nominations are for films made since 2000, including 2012's *The Act of Killing* and *Leviathan*, bearing out suggestions that we are currently experiencing a golden age of documentary filmmaking. Critics' and filmmakers came remarkably close to the same list.

### **Critics' top filmmakers**

1	Dziga Vertov	(110 votes across 5 films)
2	Chris Marker	(91 votes across 8 films)
=3	Claude Lanzmann	(68 votes across 1 film)
=3	Alain Resnais	(68 votes across 5 films)
5	Errol Morris	(67 votes across 6 films)
6	Werner Herzog	(65 votes across 13 films)
7	Jean Rouch	(57 votes across 7 films)
8	Frederick Wiseman	(43 votes across 14 films)
=9	Robert Flaherty	(41 votes across 43 films)
=9	Patricio Guzmán	(41 votes across 3 films)

### Filmmakers' top filmmakers

1	Frederick Wiseman	(33 votes across 11 films)
2	Dziga Vertov	(31 votes across 3 films)
=3	Werner Herzog	(30 votes across 9 films)
=3	Chris Marker	(30 votes across 7 films)
5	Albert & David Maysles	(28 votes across 4 films)
6	Errol Morris	(26 votes across 5 films)
7	Robert Flaherty	(22 votes across 3 films)
8	Alain Resnais	(20 votes across 5 films)
9	Jean Rouch	(19 votes across 5 films)
10	Claude Lanzmann	(17 votes across 2 films)

### A selection of filmmakers and their votes.

#### Mark Cousins

**The House Is Black** (Farokhzad) A cubist movie about Iranian people with leprosy.

**Minamata: The Victims and Their World** (Tsuchimoto) The great protest film? The greatest environmental film? One of the greatest movie epics.

**The Emperor's Naked Army Marches On** (Hara) A film that suggests that some truths are so unpalatable and buried that they need to be exploded out of the ground.

**The Last of the Unjust** (Lanzmann)

**Siddheshwari devi** (Kaul) Visconti meets Satyajit Ray.

**Letter from my Village** (Faye) Simple and sublime.

**Wednesday** (Kossakovsky) Most documentaries have a handful of characters. This one has 70.

**November Days: Voices and Choices** (Ophüls) The Berlin Wall, with a touch of Dietrich.

**Zidane: a 21st Century Portrait** (Gordon & Parreno)

**The Battle of Chile** (Guzmán)

For me, documentary is the greatest movie genre – the richest, most diverse, alert and compelling. I'd have loved to have included movies directed by Pelechian, Kawase, Ogawa, Patwardhan, Longinotto, Frammartino, Grigsby, Sokurov, Herzog, Varda, Glawogger, Cavalcanti, Kieslowski, Vertov, Welles, Maximilian Schell, Honkasalo, Mograbi, Michael Moore and Herz Frank; to think of these is to see the vast range of the field. My ten are, like life, intense and often tragic, but have touches of Visconti or Lubitsch.

## Paul Greengrass

**Dont Look Back** (Pennebaker)

**The Battle of the Somme** (Malins & McDowell)

**Nanook of the North** (Flaherty)

**Man with a Movie Camera** (Vertov)

**The Demonstration** (Sheppard & Woodhead)

**Primary** (Drew)

**London Can Take It!** (Watt & Jennings)

**Man on Wire** (Marsh)

**Harlan County U.S.A.** (Kopple)

## Asif Kapadia

**The Up series** (Apted) This series is incredible. The simplicity of the idea. The nerve of the filmmakers and the financiers to keep it going. It only improves with time.

**Sans soleil** (Marker)

**The Thin Blue Line** (Morris) Before I saw this film, I had no idea that a documentary could be a thriller, so cinematic and so dramatic.

**Fourteen Days in May** (Hamann) Saw this on the BBC while still at school and was so angry afterwards with the injustice. Clive Stafford Smith became my hero; this film affected me in a way few dramas ever had.

**Hoop Dreams** (James) An epic story of two ordinary kids following their dreams. My first experience of the master Steve James. Truth can be far more complex and emotional than fiction.

**A Great Day in Harlem** (Bach) An entire movie created from a single image and a rostrum camera.

**When We Were Kings** (Gast) My hero Ali captured in the prime of his life. One of the most charismatic men ever, I don't want to see an actor playing him. I don't want someone pretending to move like him, I want the real thing. Love the music, editing, the use of archive, Norman Mailer, the humour, the poetry! This film was my main reference while making Senna.

**Koyaanisqatsi: Life out of Balance** (Reggio) Pure cinema. Incredible images and music. I still dream about making a film like this one day.

**Dark Days** (Singer) Love this incredible film. A friend gave me the DVD. I sat at home alone, watched it, then watched every deleted scene, then watched it over again, cried buckets. The story behind the making of the film is every bit as emotional and powerful as what is on screen.

**The Act of Killing** (Oppenheimer, Cynn & anonymous) I've never seen anything quite like this. Astonishing. Shocking. Brave filmmaking.

## Kevin Macdonald

**Gimme Shelter** (Maysles brothers & Zwerin) I love the fact that the editor, Charlotte Zwerin, gets a directing credit on this. So often in documentaries the editor is at least as important to the finished film as the director. This is the best film ever made about performance – but also manages to say so much about the hippy dream turning sour.

**The Unseen** (Janek) The Unseen is generally unseen but is a film that had an enormous impact on me when I saw it at the inaugural It's All True doc festival in Brazil. It tells the story of blind children who become obsessed with taking photographs.

**Now** (Alvarez) The most potent campaigning film ever made. Only five minutes long, it is raw, technically innovative and angry.

**Listen to Britain** (Jennings & McAllister) Jennings was a genius at yanking together unexpected images, the John Donne of cinema. This film is pure poetry and makes patriotism seem not just acceptable but admirable.

**The Thin Blue Line** (Morris) I love its intelligence, its coolness and its humour. It influenced every film I have ever made.

**When We Were Kings** (Gast)

The most exciting and uplifting nonfiction experience I have had in a cinema.

**Darwin's Nightmare** (Sauper) An imaginative, fiendishly gothic tale about the the survival of the fittest and the Nile Perch.

**Roger & Me** (Moore) Michael Moore brought entertainment back into documentary films – and made it the strange bedfellow of anger.

**Hotel Terminus** (Ophüls) Ophüls is a genius and I could just have easily chosen *The Sorrow and The Pity* for this list.

**Waltz with Bashir** (Folman) Because it did something new.

### James Marsh

**Man with a Movie Camera** (Vertov)

**Le Sang des bêtes** (Franju)

**The War Game** (Watkins)

**Salesman** (Maysles brothers & Zwerin)

**Hospital** (Wiseman)

**Fata Morgana** (Herzog)

**The Battle of Chile** (Guzmán)

**The Thin Blue Line** (Morris)

**My Winnipeg** (Maddin)

**Waltz with Bashir** (Folman)

Each of these films seems to me to enlarge on the possibilities of the medium and each of the filmmakers (with the exception of Ari Folman) has a body of work I revere and admire. The other characteristic they share is a commitment to the poetry and power of the visual image, both discovered and created. They are all truly cinematic films in every respect.

If there is one filmmaker on this list who stands above the others as a documentarian, for me, it would be Frederick Wiseman. As soon as a Wiseman film starts, you know you are with the perfect guide – his editing rhythms are poised and hypnotic, and his attention to detail and to the primacy of the potent, revelatory image is constant and surprising. Above all, it his generosity and respect towards his characters that distinguishes his work. Interestingly, for a filmmaker who has no use for the adornments of score or created imagery, he describes his works as 'reality fictions'. I can't think of a better description of the documentary medium or indeed a better alibi for us all.

## **Carol Morley**

**Portrait of Jason** (Clarke) Portrait of Jason is transgressive and fascinating; it speaks of personal experiences and elegantly taps into a wider, secret history of the time.

**Heart of the Angel** (Dineen) I haven't seen this for many years, but if I close my eyes I can still see the people in the film, and hear their voices, their stories.

**Close-Up** (Kiarostami) Like all great documentaries Close-Up has a brilliant story at its heart, fascinating characters and is wonderfully told. It foregrounds the constructed nature of documentary and that truth is a very difficult notion and hard to find.

**In the Street** (Levitt, Meyers, Agee & Loeb) The film effortlessly and beautifully records the people who live out their lives on a New York street. It's much more than observational reportage though. It's a real work of art.

**Shinjuku Boys** (Longinotto & Williams) Kim Longinotto has made such a significant contribution to documentary and I could have chosen more than one of her films, but I chose this one about transgender because it was the first one of hers I ever saw.

**Grey Gardens** (Maysles brothers, Hovde & Meyer)

**Sherman's March** (McElwee) This is unforgettable and had a major impact on me. McElwee constructs a world where he is the lead character, who refuses to disappear, and therefore acknowledges that a documentary is as much about the person who makes it as the participants.

**Dear Diary** (Moretti) Dear Diary goes beyond the observational and is a highly constructed piece. As a means of personal exploration it is very appealing to me as it takes the documentary form away from being anthropological. It's warmly and surreally funny too.

**The Thin Blue Line** (Morris)

**Tina Goes Shopping** (Woolcock) This took documentary (if it can be described as such) to a new level. It was inspiring to see how Penny blurred the lines between fact and fiction. The film gave control, agency and opportunity to the people involved.

While the films I've chosen challenge ideas of truth, in different ways, they are all authentic. It is clear that those who made them believe wholeheartedly in the stories they tell, and believe in the people that they bring to the screen and create a lasting legacy for: even if, like Randall Adams in The Thin Blue Line, they bring a lawsuit against you later...

## **Joshua Oppenheimer**

**Titicut Follies** (Wiseman)

**Close-Up** (Kiarostami)

**Shoah** (Lanzmann)

**Even Dwarfs Started Small** (Herzog)

**W.R. – Mysteries of the Organism** (Makavejev)

**Animal Love** (Seidl)

**Gates of Heaven** (Morris)

**The Apple** (Makhmalbaf)

**The Hour of the Furnaces** (Getino & Solanas)

**Perfumed Nightmare** (Tahimik)

Whenever we film anybody, they stage themselves, acting out fantasies – half-remembered, second-hand, third-rate – that they wished they fulfilled.

The films I've chosen here teach us that the 'state of nature' for nonfiction film is to reveal, prism-like, how fiction always constitutes our 'facts'. These filmmakers deploy their camera not to record, but to provoke, and in the process have the courage to immerse themselves in the manic, delirious and tragic play of fantasies that make us what we are – inevitably and assuredly staggering out of the darkness into blinding truths.

### Walter Salles

**Man of Aran** (Flaherty) Each scene in Flaherty's masterpiece contains the film as a whole, and each close-up has a stunning expressive force. The film crossed the line between documentary and fiction and stirred a discussion that filmmakers are continuing to investigate to this day (as in Jia Zhangke's extraordinary 24 City).

**A Man Marked to Die** (Coutinho) Two decades after starting to shoot a film that was interrupted by the 1964 military coup d'état in Brazil, Eduardo Coutinho re-encounters his characters from that film. An essential film on the 60s diaspora in Brazil, by our most important documentarian.

**Talking Heads** (Kieslowski) Polish citizens from seven to 77 years of age answer the same question: "Who am I, and what do I expect of life?" This documentary's apparent simplicity hides a depth that touches upon the unsayable.

**West of the Tracks** (Wang) This nine-hour documentary focuses on the inhabitants of a Chinese city who are being resettled elsewhere after the area's steel mills became obsolete. Dominique Païni said that few films fit so well Bazin's idea of cinema as a perfect mould for society, in a given time.

**Hanoi martes trece** (Alvarez) Alvarez, the greatest Cuban documentarian of all time, mixes the intimate and the epic in this entrancing film.

**Dont Look Back** (Pennebaker)

**In Public** (Jia) A meditation on men and women on the move in public transportation in northern China, this is a quiet, poetic masterpiece by one of the world's best filmmakers.

**Mondovino** (Nossiter) A brilliant analysis of the effects of globalisation, Mondovino reveals how taste is being dictated and redefined.

**En construcció** (Guerín) As a popular, historical part of Barcelona is being torn down to give way to skyscrapers, Guerín unveils how the mutation of the urban landscape has a profound effect on its inhabitants. The camera seems to disappear behind the human drama at play.

**Moi, un noir** (Rouch) Jean Rouch proves that, first and foremost, the documentary form allows the existence of memory, recording today what may no longer exist tomorrow.

### James Toback

**F for Fake** (Welles) Having called it my favourite film for many years, I was excited to read Welles himself refer to it as "the only original movie I've made since Citizen Kane".

**The Goldberg Variations** (Monsaingeon) Filmed and recorded shortly before Glenn Gould's tragic death, the film unites two of music history's heroic figures and transports us – to borrow one of Gould's phrases – into a realm of "beatific felicity".

**Hotel Terminus** (Ophüls) A great, rough, rich epic work of cinematic pursuit that leaves one with the frustration of having been robbed of the joy of murdering Klaus Barbie personally. Haunting in every regard.



**Baseball** (Burns) This is 20th-century American history dramatically and poetically rendered through the classic American sport.

**Jim Brown: All American** (Lee) An unsparing celebration of the most fascinating and complex American athlete of the 20th century with the best and most unexpected 'happy' ending in movie history.

**The Fog of War** (Morris) A tortured portrait of the crumbling man most responsible for grinding America into and through the most significant and permanently staining military misadventures in its history.

**Z Channel: A Magnificent Obsession** (Cassavetes) A thrilling survey of great films through an exploration of the ground-breaking Los Angeles-based movie channel and its tragic creator.

**Grizzly Man** (Herzog) The most seductive and relentless cinematic portrayal of man's doomed desire to communicate with non-human animals.

**Seduced and Abandoned** (Toback) False modesty has always been lost on me. Since the necessary – if not sufficient – cause for distinction in a film is that it not resemble any other film, *Seduced and Abandoned* becomes an instant candidate for inclusion.

**The Story of the Jews** (Bahaire & Kirby) Simon Schama seamlessly weaves himself into the narrative in a miniseries written, photographed, edited and delivered with a perfect balance of passion and intellect.

## **Penny Woolcock**

**The Hour of the Furnaces** (Getino & Solanas) Technically inventive and fiercely political. The world literally never looked the same to me again after I'd seen it.

**Divorce Iranian Style** (Longinotto & Mir-Hosseini) Like all the best films this one really messes with your head. I was locked into a very patronising view of oppressed Iranian women submitting humbly to a patriarchal culture. Longinotto's film introduced me to women who in many cases were getting the better of their pathetic husbands.

**Four Hours in Mai Lai** (Sim) Sometimes innovation is unnecessary – talking heads can be utterly compelling.

**The Act of Killing** (Oppenheimer, Cynn & anonymous) This film is about the perpetrators of genocide. It's uncomfortable viewing, but so it should be. This is us whether we like it or not.

**The House I Live In** (Jarecki) The mass incarceration of the underclass, including disproportionate numbers of young black men, is an epic travesty of justice. This film is a clarion call to action.

**The Betrayed** (Gordon) The Russian invasion of Chechnya – a group of Russian mothers desperately searching for their missing sons, young soldiers tear around in tanks like a band of brigands, drunken soldiers chuck grenades into cellars full of women and children. They are all 'the betrayed'.

**Don't Get High on Your Own Supply** (Regan) Regan follows a friend's descent into heroin addiction with a clear eye. A moral quagmire for sure and a fantastic film.

**Grey Gardens** (Maysles brothers, Hovde & Meyer) All the horrors and the voyeuristic pleasures of documentary are in this film.

**The Revolution Will Not Be Televised** (Bartley & O'Briain) Two Irish filmmakers were making a film about Hugo Chavez when there was an attempted coup. They were brave and light-footed enough to change direction and follow the messiness of what happened next.

**Collateral Murder – Wikileaks** (US military) This piece of film put Bradley/Chelsea Manning in jail – footage shot from a US Apache helicopter on a mission over Bagdad. Raw and truthful.

Even the purest observational documentaries reflect the filmmaker – we choose who and what interests us, where we place the camera, what shots to juxtapose and what survives the final edit. In

some ways they are more deceitful and full of lies than fiction. But they can also pack a punch, take your breath away and actually change the world. What else is art for?

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