

Editors' Picks: Movies and TV

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Best evidence Vancouver is in its *Twilight* years

What exactly is it about vampire romances and male heartthrobs? Whatever it is, Vancouver certainly benefited from the *Twilight* saga being shot in this city. Attention given to Zac Efron ("Who?" you ask), in town for shooting *The Death and Life of Charlie St. Cloud*, paled—sorry, couldn't resist—in comparison to the media and fan feeding frenzy over Robert Pattinson, Kristen Stewart, and crew shooting *New Moon* and *Eclipse* here. Twi-hards from countries as varied as Australia, the Czech Republic, Japan, South Africa, and Spain have all flocked to our city to try to get a bite of the action. Regardless of whether or not a fourth film, *Breaking Dawn* (still in development), shoots here, you can be sure fans will always be famished for more.

Most obvious signs Vancouver women are taking over American TV

Whether sitting in with morning talk-show royalty Regis Philbin in the Big Apple or landing a coveted spot as *The Bachelorette*, it's been a good year for a couple of local Vancouver ladies. This year we saw everyone's favourite weather girl—Tamara Taggart—flash her pearly whites as she did VANOC—we mean Vancouver—proud in her national on-screen debut on *Live!* with Regis and Kelly on August 21. After an extensive North American search for a guest cohost (to fill in for Kelly Ripa, who was going on vacation) that began on June 26 and saw thousands of hopefuls apply, Taggart was one of only two Canadians to become top-20 finalists. Meanwhile, the sweet and sometimes naïve Jillian Harris met her 25 eligible—for the most part—bachelors. Each week, the gratuitous bikini shots grew longer, and the make-out sessions heavier—all in the name of love, of course. Already deemed as Canada's sweetheart by fans of the cheesy reality show, Harris found herself as the first Canadian to take on the coveted role of the *Bachelorette*—now if only her husband-to-be would get rid of that pesky girlfriend.

Best proof *So You Think You Can Dance Canada*'s Vancouver finalists bleed for their art

The fierce national competition of *So You Think You Can Dance Canada* is full of blood, sweat, and tears. At this year's televised competition (which is still underway), a lot of the blood portion of that equation came from the two male Vancouver competitors selected for the final top 20: Taylor James and Olympic figure skater Emanuel Sandhu. James ended up with a bloody mouth from his tango performance with his partner, while Sandhu broke (and rebroke) his fingers during rehearsals. James was one of the first two contestants to be eliminated, but Sandhu was still competing by the Straight's deadline. However, another local contestant, Harbour Dance Centre instructor Tara-Jean Popowich, has escaped injury thus far. Has she eluded the Vancouver SYTYCDC curse because she's originally from Lethbridge, Alberta, and has only lived in Vancouver since 2006? Whatever the case, she was

also still dancing as the Straight went to press. Best of luck to Popowich and Sandhu as they near the top 10, but, please, don't literally break a leg!

Best (and only) local Romanian TV show

In B.C., there are more than 26,000 Romanians. Serving this minority group is Rompost TV, an hourlong weekly variety program (Saturdays at 1 p.m.; Sundays at 10 p.m.), and the only Romanian TV show in town. RompostTV debuted February 4, 2004, on Channel M (now OMNI, Channel 8). For the past five years, Adelina Suvagau, a filmmaker, independently produced and directed 285 episodes under Sonia Productions, Inc. The show doesn't have English subtitles, but some interviews are in English with Romanian subtitles.

Best sci-fi proof Vancouver is animated and in full effect

It's been a year full of good news for both the visual-effects and animation industries in Vancouver. The Oscar-winning Pixar is opening a 20,000-square-foot studio here. Local digital animation studio Rainmaker Entertainment announced in May that it hired Lucasfilm's Catherine Winder as its new president. And District 9 made the Vancouver Film School proud as its director and screenwriter, Neill Blomkamp, coscreenwriter Terri Tatchell, and numerous visual-effects crew members who worked on the sci-fi thriller are graduates of the institution. That's all in addition to the long-running Stargate franchise and Sanctuary series shot here. Sanctuary is leading the 2009 Gemini Award nominees from B.C. with six nominations, while Stargate Atlantis follows closely behind with five. If you start wondering if mayor Gregor Robertson is really a frakking Cylon, chalk it up to the power of the local film and TV industries.

Best new cinematic adventure

4-D Experience

Vancouver Aquarium
845 Avison Way
604-659-3521

If you've never experienced 4-D before, the aquarium's new movie theatre will definitely catch you off-guard. Sure, the 3-D glasses make the fish of the film Planet Earth: Shallow Seas so lifelike that you feel you can reach out and touch them. But the fourth element—sensation—means that what's on-screen actually touches you back. Although it often freaks you out, it will leave you laughing.

Best stash of terra cotta warriors

District 319

319 Main Street
604-899-1077 ext. 308

In 2004, film producer Bill Vince (now deceased) bought the decrepit Golden Harvest movie theatre in the Downtown Eastside for \$280,000 and spent \$1.7 million on renovations. The result is a

beautiful Asian-themed multipurpose space (available to rent) anchored by a theatre with ultracomfy plush red seats and a full-service lobby bar ringed with niches holding small replicas of Qin Dynasty terra cotta warriors. Inside the theatre, an army of bottom-lit, wall-mounted, life-size terra cotta warriors stand guard.

Best signs of Bollywood's influence in Vancouver (and vice versa)

As Hollywood and Bollywood tentatively crossover, and in the wake of the massively successful, Oscar-winning *Slumdog Millionaire*, South Asian cinematic influence is increasingly surfacing in our city. This past year in Vancouver, Bollywood Under the Stars screened *Dilwale Dulhuniya Le Jayenge* at Lumberman's Arch in Stanley Park on June 13, and the Opus Hotel chose Bollywood Dreams as the theme for its seventh annual street party on July 31. (Not to mention blockbusters like *Chandni Chowk to China* screened at the Granville 7 cinemas.)

But Vancouver's relationship with South Asian cinema isn't a one-way street. In the Punjabi film *Tera Mera Ki Rishta*, a sweet village girl from Punjab falls for a hockey-playing university student from a "highly sophisticated [Punjabi] Canadian family" in Vancouver. Meanwhile, B.C.-raised Harbhajan Mann starred in *Jag Jeondeyan de Mele*, a tale of doomed romance that spans a journey from Punjab to Vancouver, while Surrey-based Punjabi singer Sarbjit Cheema headlined *Apni Boli Apna Des*. With Bollywood and Punjabi films—which lack any mainstream promotion—outperforming English-language domestic films on Canadian box office charts, maybe our country's filmmakers need to be incorporating a little more song-and-dance into their features?

Best selection of free foreign films

The Vancouver Public Library

Various locations

Not only a source for books and magazines, the Vancouver Public Library is a wellspring of foreign films on DVD. The VPL's impressive collection ranges from masterpieces like *Seven Samurai* (Japan, 1954) and *Belle de Jour* (France, 1967) to contemporary classics including *Raise the Red Lantern* (China, 1991) and *Oldboy* (Korea, 2003). In addition to these cinematic milestones, the VPL counts offbeat films among its vast selection, such as the modern fantasy *Night Watch* (Russia, 2004) and *The Terrorist* (India, 1999), a powerful meditation on suicide bombers. *Waltz With Bashir* (Israel, 2008), which was nominated at this year's Academy Awards for best foreign language film, is one of the recent additions to the VPL's foreign-film assortment. Log on to the library's Web site or go to your nearest branch and discover a world of film available for free.

Best person to name a new film award for

Between her arrival in Vancouver in 1954 and her death on November 3 of last year, Pearl Williams was probably the hardest-working local person in nonprofit filmmaking. What's more, virtually everything she did, she did for free. Her love of Hollywood began during the London Blitz, when not even Stukas and V-2 rockets could drive her out of the cinema and into the nearest bomb shelter. Then, in postwar England, she saw Carl Dreyer's *Day of Wrath*, and her star would forever after be hitched to art-house cinema. What she did over the years with and for the Vancouver Film Society,

the Pacific Cinémathèque, every incarnation of the Vancouver International Film Festival, and The Bulletin (the Japanese-Canadian newsletter to which she often contributed both commentary and assistance) could easily fill an entire edition of the Georgia Straight. Pearl knew everybody, and everybody knew her. Somebody (Women in Film and Video, the Cinémathèque, the VIFF, the NFB, et cetera) should create a Pearl Williams Award for those who make more of a difference behind the scenes than most of us make in front of them. She was a really great lady, an unbelievable film asset, and her myriad accomplishments deserve to be remembered in perpetuity.

Best truly underground DVD rental

Videomatica, Black Dog, Independent Flixx, and Video Magic have already established themselves as the best place for cinephiles or for those seeking off-the-beaten track, cult, foreign, and classics on DVD. A new upstart in this elite market is Reel Bulldog Video (170–332 Water Street, 604-568-0142). It's literally underground because the 1,400-square-foot store is in the basement of a building. Outgoing owner-manager Mike Maxwell is a scuba diver and movie aficionado, and his bulldog mascot (a real one) can be seen at the entrance. Maxwell displays an ongoing street-art exhibition that customers can admire while searching among 2,500 titles for that obscure movie.

Best proof that Vancouver moviegoers want more than escapism

Conventional wisdom advises people and businesses to use restraint during a recession. This year's DOXA Documentary Film Festival proved that there's also the counter-wisdom that are always exceptions to the rule. During a challenging year for most festivals, DOXA expanded from six to 10 days (May 22 to 31) and showed 70 documentaries that addressed everything from environmental issues to the impact Borat had on a Romanian village. The bold move paid off. The audience doubled to 8,053. Conventional wisdom in the film-exhibition industry also says that the industry tends to increase during hard times, but DOXA proved that escapism isn't the only draw; there's still a hunger for realism, even in trying economic times.

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