



THE CLIMB

J.J. ABRAMS on SAFETY LAST

 When Edgar reached out about my most vivid experiences watching films in the cinema, two things occurred to me. The first is just how many varied and profound memories I have. I can recall the literal crying hysterics of the audience watching *Airplane!* (I actually fell out of my chair laughing that day). I remember the auditorium full of crazy shrieks of horror during the original *Friday The 13th*, and the roar of applause when Richard Kimble survived the train crash in *The Fugitive*, and when Doc, Marty and Jennifer flew away in the DeLorean at the end of *Back To The Future*. I nearly get chills recounting the house full of sobs when I was a kid with my parents watching *E.T.* or when I was a parent with my kids during *Toy Story 3*. Or, when, at ten years old at *The Spy Who Loved Me* at the Avco Theater in Westwood, I was on the edge of my seat as Bond skied off the cliff at the end of the opening sequence. I actually gasped. And the jaded stranger in the

row behind me blurted out, "Parachute," just before 007's Union Jack chute emerged from his backpack and Carly Simon started singing. The moral there is that some audience viewings can be annoying.

In short, there are just too many of these memories to count. It is said that our most enduring memories are made outdoors, in nature. Maybe. But movies are at least a close second.

There is one experience worth mentioning. It was a 2008 screening of Harold Lloyd's *Safety Last* in Royce Hall at UCLA. A live organist played along with the film, which is one of the classic silent comedies. What was stunning — and inspiring and wonderful — was the audience reaction. The crowd — nearly a thousand people were there — was, even 12 years ago, accustomed to all the cutting-edge, anything-is-possible visual effects of the modern age. In short, they'd seen it all. And yet here they were, actually screaming — loudly — as Lloyd climbed the side of the building, fighting off the pigeons and



clinging to the building clock's hands, even as it broke and lurched forward. If there had been a decibel meter on hand, it would have shown that the only audio louder than the screams were the cheers and applause when Harold finally made it, in glorious fashion, onto the roof and into the arms of the woman he loves.

It was an electric screening, and we all felt it. Whoever was in that audience, wherever we were from, or however old we were, or whatever god we believed in or sports teams we loved or food we ate, we were all Harold that day. We were all the underdog, all of us climbing that building for love. I'll never forget that communal thrill-ride, or the smiles that strangers exchanged on the way out. We hadn't just been told a story — we'd been through something, together. And that is the unique alchemy of cinema.

Which leads me to the second thought I had when Edgar called: that there are two things being discussed here. There are the movies themselves, and then there's the magic of seeing them en masse. The additive reaction that galvanises the memory of the experience. Not that we can't and shouldn't enjoy movies at home, but it's a far different and, arguably, inferior experience to the collective exuberance of hundreds of strangers in the dark together, screaming, crying, laughing, existing.

If 2020 has proven anything it's that the world is, in large part, a fucking nightmare. If there has ever been a time when people need to be reminded just how much we actually have in common, it is now. And that is something that only movies can provide.

I believe that when we are on the other side of Covid, there will be a powerful need to be together. The cinema will, perhaps more than ever before, be a place to celebrate, to congregate, and to appreciate films and each other.



SHARK SHOCKS

JON FAVREAU and DAVID YATES on JAWS



FAVREAU: I remember seeing *Jaws* back in New York. I was eight years old and

the movie was already a big deal. It was such a phenomenon that all ages went, but none of us were prepared for how powerful of a story it was. There were so many moments in that movie but the ones that stand out the most to me were Brody chumming the water and the shark appearing behind him without any clue that a pop-out was coming. Popcorn flew. People screamed, then laughed.

The other moment was the opposite. The movie told us in advance that something was going to happen. They were diving, searching the wreckage of a sunken boat with a flashlight. We all knew something scary was going to appear. It didn't matter. We all still hit the ceiling when the shark's previous victim floated into frame. A packed house of shrieking adults makes a real impression on an eight-year-old kid. There wasn't a lot of swimming that summer.



YATES: My most vivid experience of being in the cinema as a teenager was

watching *Jaws* with my dad at the ABC St Helens. It was a cathartic joy to jump and scream at precisely the same time as 300 other people, as Hooper

(Richard Dreyfuss) comes across old Ben Gardner's boat in a midnight swim, just as Ben's head pops out of a hole in the boat's hull, to terrify us all. It was reaffirming to see Chief Brody (Roy Scheider) reconnect with his young son across the supper table in a delicate moment. It's an acknowledgement of our shared humanity that each of these scenes reached us all in a glorious unity.

The film rolled continually throughout the day, and I'd stay for a second, then third and fourth screening. It wasn't only the film that kept me there — it was the audiences as they came and went, the way they lived, breathed and experienced the story as it replayed over and over again — I loved anticipating how high they would jump, at the scary bits, how much they would gasp, how loud they would laugh when Hooper squashed his beer can to express his masculinity to Quint (Robert Shaw).

We go to the cinema not just to be entertained, or moved, or thrilled. We go because sharing these experiences together with others, makes what we witness in the dark feel more meaningful, visceral, and complete.

As for my own movies, however long I fashion and shape an edit, a score, a script, with some of the wonderful people I work with, the film ultimately, truly comes alive when it is finally put in front of an audience.



SPOON-THROWING

DANIEL KALUUYA on THE ROOM



When I watched *The Room* at the Prince Charles Cinema, I hadn't heard of the film and trusted a friend who told me to come with him. The next moment plastic spoons were hitting the back of my head, the next moment after that I was throwing the plastic spoons from the floor at the screen. I've never had so much fun at the cinema.