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Library of Congress adds 'Big Lebowski,' 24 others to National Film Registry



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Jeff Bridges as 'The Dude' hangs out at the bowling alley with his buddies Walter (John Goodman) and Donny (Steve Buscemi) in "The Big Lebowski." (Courtesy of Universal Studios)

By [Michael O'Sullivan](#) December 17 at 3:00 AM

Achievers, rejoice.

"The Big Lebowski" — a film so adored that its most cultlike fans (known as "achievers") attend an [annual festival](#) in Louisville in its honor — has finally entered the pantheon of Important Motion Pictures. The Library of Congress announced Wednesday that

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the 1998 Coen brothers classic, along with 24 other cinematic gems of “cultural, historic or aesthetic significance,” has been selected for inclusion in the National Film Registry, an archive of movies designated for preservation as national treasures.

Established in 1989, the registry now includes 650 titles, ranging from the sublime (“2001: A Space Odyssey”) to the sublimely ridiculous (“Duck Soup”). Selected by Librarian of Congress James H. Billington from hundreds of popular submissions vetted by a panel of film experts and historians, this year’s honorees include the 1919 silent drama “The Dragon Painter,” featuring Hollywood’s first Asian star, Sessue Hayakawa, as well as Steven Spielberg’s Oscar-winning “Saving Private Ryan” (1998).

Animated inductees range from “Luxo Jr.,” John Lasseter’s 1986 computer-animated short about a desk lamp that has become the digital mascot of all Pixar releases, to “Moon Breath Beat” (1980), a surreal, hand-drawn short created by Lisze Bechtold when she was a student at the California Institute of the Arts.

Spielberg’s World War II epic is not the only Oscar winner on this year’s list. “Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport,” the 2001 best documentary feature Oscar winner about child refugees during the Holocaust, was also cited. Reached by phone, director Mark Jonathan Harris



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highlighted the unusual nature of the National Film Registry recognition, noting that many of the documentaries that first inspired him to make movies — “The River” (1938), “Nothing But a Man” (1964), “A Time for Burning” (1966) and others — are in the august company that his film has now joined.

John Wayne has a few words with the gunslinger and balladeer Ricky Nelson in 1959’s “Rio Bravo.” (Courtesy of Warner Bros.)

“The Academy Awards, as everyone

knows, are a snapshot of one year,” Harris says. “This film’s selection by the National Film Registry means that the movie has had a long life and will continue to going forward.”

According to Harris, the film’s unusual perspective makes it stand out from the bulk of Holocaust documentaries. “Most of them ask the question, ‘How the hell could this happen?’ We wondered, ‘How do the people who lived through this survive?’ ”

Some of the 2014 honorees are less than household names (and possibly for good reason). Efraín Gutiérrez, who made “Please Don’t Bury Me Alive!” (1976) on a \$15,000 budget, has been likened to a [Chicano Ed Wood](#), the filmmaker known for such earnest if inept films as “Plan 9 From Outer Space.”

“There are probably some well-known filmmakers out there who are going be upset with me because

as new chancellor

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they're way more famous and they can't stand me," Gutiérrez says when asked about the honor. His 1976 debut, a gritty drama about crime and poverty in the San Antonio barrio, is widely acknowledged as the first Chicano feature to make a splash, even if it never made him a celebrity.

"We didn't know what we had," Gutiérrez says, recalling that he had to distribute the film, in which he also acted, himself. "After three weeks in one theater, we grossed over \$45,000." Gutiérrez — a former Hollywood actor who was once told at an audition with John Wayne that "Mexicans don't act like that" — says that the film arose from a desire to counteract the invisibility of his people. "We wanted to be shown the way we look, the way we talk, the way we dress."

Although Joel and Ethan Coen could not be reached for comment about "Lebowski" — they're deep into production of their next film, ["Hail, Caesar!"](#) — we reached out to Will Russell, the co-founder of the annual Lebowski Fest, for his reaction to the film's ascent.

Russell, who says he has seen the film "well over a couple of hundred times now," notes that it is only with age that certain films find their true audience, noting that "Lebowski," a goofball film noir that centers on a bowling-obsessed slacker (Jeff Bridges), was originally a commercial flop. "It's only after 10 or

12 viewings that the film's true beauty emerges," he says.

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The typical cult film begins as an unlovable outcast, Russell says. "One of the main requirements is for it to be dismissed by the masses," he says. "Pop culture has to not like it."

If he is worried that the establishment's new embrace of "Lebowski" will kill its outsider cachet, he doesn't show it. Speaking for what he calls the "fellowship of achievers," Russell says, "If we could have our way, we would have the whole world love this movie."

Films selected for the 2014 National Film Registry

"Bert Williams Lime Kiln Club Field Day" (1913)

"The Big Lebowski" (1998)

"Down Argentine Way" (1940)

"The Dragon Painter" (1919)

"Felicia" (1965)

"Ferris Bueller's Day Off" (1986)

"The Gang's All Here" (1943)

"House of Wax" (1953)

**“Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the
Kindertransport” (2000)**

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“Little Big Man” (1970)

“Luxo Jr.” (1986)

“Moon Breath Beat” (1980)

“Please Don’t Bury Me Alive!” (1976)

“The Power and the Glory” (1933)

“Rio Bravo” (1959)

“Rosemary’s Baby” (1968)

“Ruggles of Red Gap” (1935)

“Saving Private Ryan” (1998)

“Shoes” (1916)

“State Fair” (1933)

“13 Lakes” (2004)

“Unmasked” (1917)

“V-E + 1” (1945)

“The Way of Peace” (1947)

“Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory” (1971)