

Twenty-five of the Best Films on Amazon Prime

[Richard Brody](#) December 23, 2020

Because of the scant financial prospects during a time of scant theatrical attendance, the year-end crop of movies being positioned for the Oscars and other awards (alongside the alternative batch of holiday blockbusters) is thinner than usual. But there are still some wonderfully accomplished and delightfully surprising new movies: foremost, "[Sylvie's Love](#)," which is playing not in theatres but on Amazon Prime. Even before the [pandemic](#), that service, like others, had taken on a major role as a producer and distributor of movies that studios wouldn't touch and independents couldn't afford; similarly, it also plays a significant role as a virtual repertory house. Though the actual repertory houses (notably, Film at Lincoln Center, Film Forum, and Metrograph) have continued to play leading roles in the release (digital, for the time being) of classic rediscoveries and restorations, Amazon and other services are the video store in the sky.

After I pulled together a list of movies [streaming on Amazon](#) earlier this year, I heard from some readers that I didn't approach it in the spirit of the site's habitual users: I didn't distinguish between movies that required a fee (or an additional membership) for viewing and those that were on Prime, available for free to subscribers. Though

most of the fees in question are small, they pose a psychological hurdle—they demand a commitment, or a leap of faith in the list-maker's acumen, that a no-extra-charge viewing wards off. The psychology of online free-ness has had a devastating effect on the ability of recording artists to make a living from their music, and it also threatens the livelihoods of filmmakers and distributors (because box-office receipts are reported transparently, and usually far exceed the pass-through of online viewing). The success of the major streaming sites emerges from this disproportion: a one-month subscription costs less than a single movie ticket, and many viewers are willing to accept barely acceptable movies that then come to them without additional charges. This list is offered as an enthusiastic alternative to the good-enough—a batch of films (and there are many more to be found there) that are available to subscribers for free and that merit a place among the best of any year.