

**'rozen zijn rood, viooltjes zijn blauw,
jij kan wel romantisch doen, maar eindstand heb ik niks aan jou..'**
(Danique – *Hey Hey (Kaasfondue)*)



2023

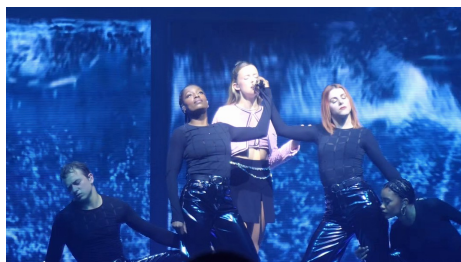
menni's review of the year

Probably for the next few upcoming years, this will be my new template review: short but sweet, three top tens. For obvious reasons we'll reconsider in 2029, maybe in the meantime i oughta go viral on social media, never look back again. However, feel free to start writing e-mails, stop being so defensive, continue animated gifs, stay in touch with individuals instead of communities, and don't worry too much. Friendly reminder.

Exactly a year ago Blackpink closed out the insanest concert year ever and i look back at that with so much happiness. While 2023 has been a lot more modest, the personal festival poster still looks impressive and the amount of candidates for all-time lists has turned out to be more or less the same, in all three major areas. It was a good year.

I'd love to have more concert buddies, or friends to watch movies with. On the other hand, i love not having to rely on anyone anytime anywhere, making people jealous.

'und ich glaub', ich bin gerne alleine..'
(Juli – *Traurige Lieder*)



Index:

- 2. Movies
- 6. Albums
- 8. Concerts
- 12. 2024





Movies 2023

Year defining **Barbie** and **Oppenheimer** were good but not good enough, move on. Arthouse frontrunners **Anatomy of a Fall** and **Past Lives** must be seen, very solid. And so the upcoming Oscar nominations once again will be a nice mix of blockbusters and world cinema, more diverse than any cynic could wish to be, certainly more fun. And then there's personal preference, out of approximately 200 titles. Take a few.

Potential honorable mentions are plenty, but the most interesting one is a November release that missed the boat last year and should not even be recognized here: **Causeway** now is my favorite Jennifer Lawrence movie of all time, *because* it's so normal. Regular conversation of realistic post-war trauma, jeans & shirt for the win.



10. Noise (Ruido, Natalia Beristáin)

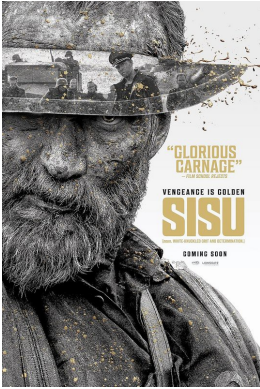
In a year where a male, narcissistic, dangerous American movie about trafficking stole the hearts of gullible people, this important little Argentinian/Mexican film about similar subjects should have received all that attention. In corrupt and bleak surroundings, a woman goes searching for her long lost daughter, finding horrible truths and hopeful initiatives, justice though is still very far away. Political and personal matters intertwined, women are not acting.

9. John Wick: Chapter 4 (Chad Stahelski)

Desert horse chase, high hotel ceiling with rooftop shootout, shattered glass at an art exhibition and a knife challenge; that's just the first hour of this heavy rain neon light revenge choreography into the über elite. Or whatever these fighting men would like you to believe once discussing their terms. Action movies need to be over the top, but not too much; need to be taken seriously, but not too much. While one could argue that the entirety of Paris chasing one dude is too much by definition, only a blind man won't smile at the Sacré-Cœur stairs scene.



'exciting, ja.'



8. Sisu

(Jalmari Helander)

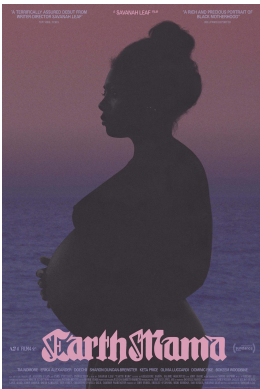
Funny unless you're a nazi; now here is one Finnish immortal dude kicking a lot of ass, blowing evil guys up against all odds, teaming up with female POW's in the process. All this action, which includes exploding horse, crashing plane and hangmen, somehow manages to stand in the shadow of the beautiful landscapes that deserve to be saved from scorching. Fortunately there's still some native talk at the end, but doing everything else in English is understandable.



7. Dark Heart of the Forest

(*Le coeur noir des forêts*, Serge Mirzabekiantz)

A pregnancy proposal at the very start of their relationship leads to intimate time in the woods for two troubled more-or-less orphans. Her side of the story turns out to be slightly different though. Back to basics, this bleak Belgian arthouse story slides into a dreamlike state with scary lonely trees in the dark, before simply resurfacing with hope and some of the most tender scenes of the year. Nature versus nurture; it's not deeply disturbing behavior, it's young love.



6. Earth Mama

(Savanah Leaf)

A pregnant mother considers giving her third child a better future by perhaps giving it up for adoption, because she is detoxing and needs to steal diapers. Friends talking crap and other ghetto shit gets largely ignored in this closeup grey hoodie film, becoming an increasingly intimate portrait of a torn, wise woman, caught in the sad system for sure, but not denying her very own responsibilities. Based on a story co-written by the great awesome Taylor Russell.



5. Women Talking

(Sarah Polley)

Mennonites aren't always what they seem and the same is true for feminist films. While it may look and feel that way at first glance, *Women Talking* is not an easily digestible true story; it demands patience, contemplation and empathy, leaving male nonsense at the stable door. And then it's time for female nonsense: internal struggle reflected on an abused community inventing democracy. Talk about it until heads spin: do nothing, stay and fight, or leave.

I have a very, very weak spot for Sarah Polley. Correction: immense respect for her craft, her personality and especially her low profile. She is probably insanely busy all the time, but her filmography still feels modestly compact. This decade, this year, Polley picked up a deserved screenwriting Oscar, fifteen years after her last nomination. It was one of those rare late night award moments that invited for a loud cheer.

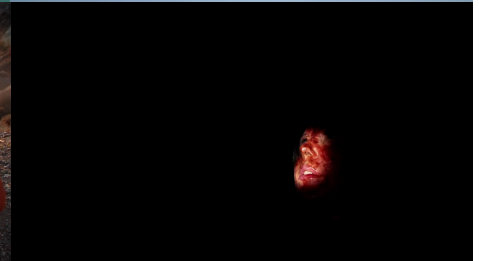
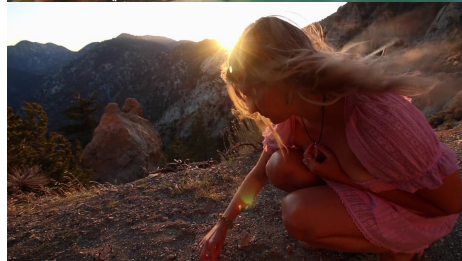
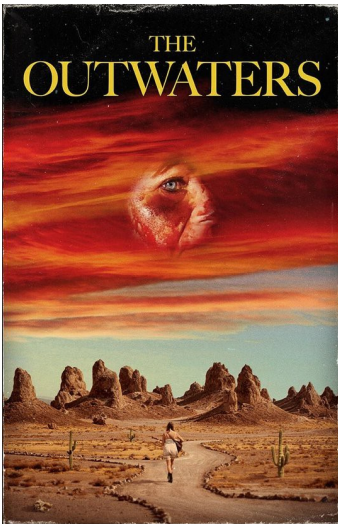




4. No One Will Save You

(Brian Duffield)

Building your own model village and invading a planet meet halfway, or whatever you would like to make of this moody mystery; the less you know the better. It's all been seen before, nothing's truly extraordinary and look elsewhere for smashing action let alone terrifying horror or haunting drama. Pure charming adventure is the attraction, with a weirdo ending that makes more and more sense the longer you think about it. Kaitlyn Dever carries the entire film without dialogue, creature effects are great fun, the sound is otherworldly terrific. Life Is Strange for Body Snatchers, E.T. in The Mist.



3. The Outwaters

(Robbie Banfitch)

And now for something completely different. Found footage is nothing new, annoying characters with infuriating camera angles are the norm now, but the incomprehensible psychedelic trip is bloody unique. Mojave Desert based *The Outwaters* offers art over horror, insanity over plot, and no less than phenomenal contrasts. Honorable mention goes to the sound department, because holy hell this is audiovisual candy deserving to be experienced at home alone with headphones in the dark. This is one of those 'what the fucking fuck did i just watch' movies with guts. Don't expect to feel good.

Horror in 2023 has been a fascinating bunch again. From mainstream comedy slasher (*Scream VI*) to minimalistic art fart (*Skinamarink*), pick your poison and keep an open mind, shift accordingly. Personally, i slightly lean towards nostalgia, gore and poetry.



2. Falcon Lake

(Charlotte Le Bon)

Coming-of-age, if done well, is the best genre in the world. And this French-Canadian version does it exceptionally, beautifully, hauntingly well, by being empathetic for the girl as much as the boy and not shying away from drowning. Spending time together in perfect harmony, living in totally different worlds only a moment later; Bastien and Chloe understand each other completely then not at all, rinse, repeat. She hangs with older guys, so he acts like one for just one moment, then innocent romance is dead, simple as that. She loves me – she loves me not, it's biting your hand until you bleed, solving a Monet puzzle with a Psycho poster on the shared bedroom wall. Spooky sad.



1. Babylon

(Damien Chazelle)

Hollywood has an elephant in the room, is and always will be an elephant in the room and evolves just like it did a hundred years ago. Fake history lesson *Babylon* depicts a hard and funny transition to talkies, the continuous rise and fall of star directors and actors, grabbing critics by the throat for some dirty dancing. As a wild amalgamation of what Hollywood is and what people *think* it is, crying on command, all genres get tied together, main tune adjusting accordingly. It's every jazz everywhere all at once, amateur reality vs pro cgi, supporting roles from weinstein to woke, tongue in cheek. Margot Robbie might be ready for her closeup, but Eric Roberts is cinema paradiso.

Albums 2023

More or less one album per day; usually amazing discoveries end up dominating the year's lists. Surprise: household favorites end up on top this time! Have i finally found my defining niches, my places called home, should i stop searching? I'm probably not able, because between Stones and Swifties, any brand new album feels like a present.



10. The Zombies – *Different Game*

They're alive! Hammond and harmonica make life much easier; back to the sixties, but without the activism and probably less psychedelics than sixty years ago. With Blunstone and Argent still present, Zombies are friendly and optimistic, singing sweet love songs and other non-groundbreaking stuff. Very enjoyable, some games never change; life indeed is a merry-go-round.



9. PinkPantheress – *Heaven Knows*

A breath of fresh air, Victoria Beverley Walker delivers on award winning early promise, with a friendly reminder that pop too is constantly evolving. Drum&bass sound good in the bedroom, but friends (Rema, Central Cee, Ice Spice, all young and nice fellow potential superstars), are coming over to dance as well. *Heaven Knows* is an adorably sampled, uplifting debut album.



8. Nuage – *0% Anxiety*

Annual dose of deep house, ambient, broken beat or whatever electronic label is appropriate, was brought by Russian native DJ Dmitry Kuzmin. Breathing that relaxing 'staying indoors and making music all night long' vibe, just clearing the head of any noise, this kind of music is suitable for every season, mood and or mood change. Should be mandatory in any type of therapy.



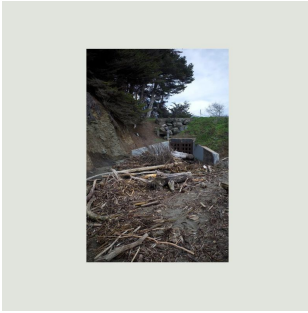
7. Nicole Dollanganger – *Married in Mount Airy*

In a fragile fairytale of happy sad, high-pitched Nicole Ann Bell blends bedroom folk with dream goth into the eternal twilight. *Married in Mount Airy* was the very first album back in the very first week of January that caught attention and it has remained on the listening list ever since. Feels like a lifetime ago, which just so happens to magically coincide with overall eerie feeling.



6. Fearing – *Destroyer*

Annual dose of darkwave arrived in obvious She Wants Revenge support act and fellow Californians a.k.a. where the sun always shines. Beats and bass are hopeless as ever, in the only place to go to when lonely reality hits the hardest, dressed in all black. Title track *Destroyer* and *Gravity* would have been breathtaking if actually alive, but in this state, there's nothing left but faith.



5. Mac DeMarco – *Five Easy Hotdogs*

While i love Mac DeMarco and his wonky goofiness to chill out, his main problem tends to be too much Mac DeMarco. Solution: put some instrumentals together, recorded on the road between those Mac DeMarco shows with too much Mac DeMarco. And so we travel from Gualala to Rockaway, with stops in Chicago and Vancouver, relaxing even without usual overdose Mac DeMarco.



4. Ama Lou – *I Came Home Late*

Most impressive album of the year, London born Ama's debut doesn't shy back on the full length part; the amount of stories being told here is very, very lavish. Mature r&b is the obvious backbone, but like the best cities at night, every now and then something jumps out of an ally. The sudden shock rock twist in *Patience* chills to the bone, walks in the dark.



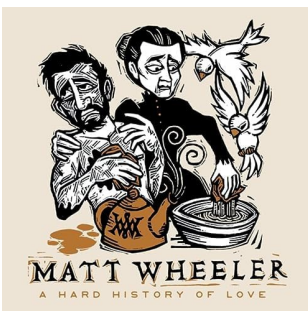
3. Adèle Castillon – *Plaisir Risque Dépendance*

Post-Videoclub album fires on all synth cylinders. Revisiting old romantic locations, dancing the night away, the escapist party ends in painful cynicism; all emotions covered. This makes so much sense, sounds way too easy, it hurts. Universal struggle with addiction *Promis* instantly became most repeated track of the year by far, 'commence le beat!' live memories do the rest.



2. The Veils – *...And Out of the Void Came Love*

Has it been seven years?! A broken wrist, a newborn daughter, a solo album and a pandemic caused Finn Andrews to take it a little slower on the band side, but the end result is yet another best of the year. Between the endless stars and Saturn, a void feels extraterrestrial and down-to-earth, huge and tiny at the same time. Philosophy aside, adroit indie instruments still rock.



1. Matt Wheeler – *A Hard History of Love*

Good news is that we're not alone, and a handful other uplifting tellings. Based on farmer Wendell Berry's collection of stories *That Distant Land*, successfully kickstarted marriage of singing and speaking soothes the mind. It's just a glimpse into the life of young Mat (1888), the romance of Tol & Minnie (pre-WWII), a soldier's return home, humble inheritance, and the friendly singer-songwriter's inspired musings, accompanied by gifted

musicians. We're all connected, but if joy fails for a while, there's poetry like this for peace on earth; enjoy the nice walk in an autumn forest, followed by chocolate milk. Also included are instrumental versions, for those wild Thanksgiving karaoke nights.

A Hard History of Love will be a staple of my Christmas time for many years to come, maybe even a tradition. Award winning artists tend to arrive in Amsterdam soon after.

'in so pleasant a place, you don't expect to see a boy so solemn for his age..'



Cian Ducrot



Mabe Fratti

Concerts 2023

Cherry-picking has been fun this year. Personal favorites like **Blonde Redhead** and **Hydrogen Sea** are easy to decide on, after which selecting the correct gigs to attend becomes a matter of gut feeling and mental knowledge. I realize for instance that my weekends should not unnecessarily be ruined by crowded city centres, so experiments are usually held on weekdays. On average one concert per week is more than enough in order to be able to process it all and not overdose. FOMO is real, addiction is bad.

After all these years, i know exactly where to look, which magazines to read, charts to keep an eye on and how to interpret early signs, in order to predict the future for new artists, often based on self-fulfilling prophecy. Then still, if that hyped music does not grab me quickly, i'm out. The trick ratio is one old legend for every ten young talents: from **Bruce Springsteen** (May 25th) to unrelated **Alana Springsteen** (August 25th), contrast is what keeps life interesting. Popularity means nothing, goes both ways.

In three years I might look pretty stupid without her in my top 10 now, because she has potential on the extreme levels of Tate McRae and Phoebe Bridgers, PinkPantheress (all genius picks in previous years). covid-stalled and otherwise troubled BBC prospect **Lola Young** blew the roof off upstairs Paradiso. If she can keep her head on, Lola'll be insanely huge. At the very least, *Conceited* is an absolute banger.



10. Moor Mother

(Bimhuis, Saturday February 11th)

Starting off the year with a new year's resolution is always a good idea: more jazz, more Bimhuis! While frequent visits will be saved for older age, Moor Mother's free jazz is just good for the soul. Plus, one of the few concerts not attended alone.



9. Samara Joy

(LantarenVenster, Sunday February 26th)

More jazz! Fresh best new artist Grammy winner, following pop entries like Eilish and Rodrigo, will be welcome in Rotterdam, North Sea, for many years to come. This was the last chance to hear her incredible voice live in in such a tiny venue.

'i've been fuckin' hoes and poppin' pillies, man i feel just like a rockstar.'



8. Post Malone

(Ziggo Dome, Sunday February 26th)

Literal last minute half price concerts (missing the support act) are so awesome, especially if totally convincing. Friendly, loveable, huggable Posty, i now completely understand his appeal. He embodies feelgood hip-hop, true post-rock.



7. Ama Lou

(Tolhuistuin, Monday October 16th)

Having had the pleasure of experiencing live an avalanche of incredible new voices; Samara Joy and Raye probably the other two nominees for an award this year, Ama Lou stood out overall. For a more than lovely young audience, just a dj to back her up, a nearly perfect blend of fun

groove, intoxicating melody, breathtaking a cappella and sincere gratitude unfolded. In fact, where were all you grownups, even none of the regular faces showed up, yet this girl is sooo good, sooo far from debatable pop idol category. Incomprehensible.



6. The Chicks + Maren Morris

(Ziggo Dome, Sunday February 26th)

Counts as one. Country was a theme this year and getting the opportunity to hear legendary *Not Ready to Make Nice* live was main catalyst, chills down spine. More eclectic than one would expect though, feelgood went through the roof.



A long time ago Blonde Redhead opened up for Interpol; personal most memorable double bill ever. Best album of 2022 award winner Maren Morris supporting The Chicks though, it's close. She is the established newcomer, they are the legends, combination is pure bliss such a treat. Six years after lovely Melkweg initiation, Maren now is a genre headliner and if dixie dicks don't appreciate her, she happily embraces becoming

the next Chick. The result is even better music, bigger crowds and definitely more joy, this particular night as a prime example. It even had subliminal bananas on screen.



5. The Veils

(Doornroosje, Saturday June 17th)

The only one seen twice this year managed to up the ante from the Melkweg gig. *Someday My Love Will Come* with strings, a fierce solo keyboard *Axolotl* encore and so much more, only live thing missing currently is Sophia.

'm'n zussie werd ziek en niemand wist wat ze had..'



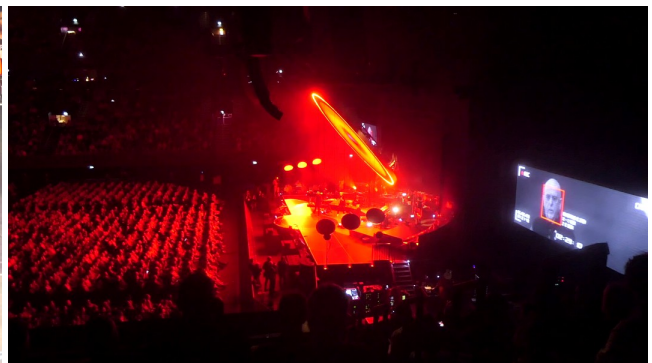
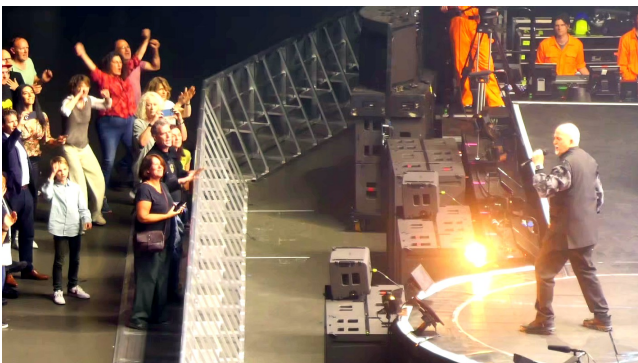
4. Danique

(Tolhuistuin, Friday February 17th)

A guestbook strategically placed in the middle of the venue, what a nice souvenir that will have become for Dutch Danique's debut! This was her absolute very first concert, sold out at a far from tiny venue. Lovely lyrics, friendly band members, Olivia Rodrigo cover; it was very nice meeting Amstelveen based Danique Robijns, deaf on one ear.

Papa Mama became an instant emotional highlight of the year. Dedicated to parents, in times of a still very ill sister, she had a hard time introducing it, to which someone shouted 'we love you Daan!' – regardless, she didn't make it to the end of the song, choking up in overwhelming sadness/success. The audience finished it for her.

I swapped in last minute for just €5, went in with a smile, but came out with tears in my eyes and a free bag of krupuk. Because that is her favorite snack and she wanted to share. On the ferry back to central station, munching sense of community unfolded.

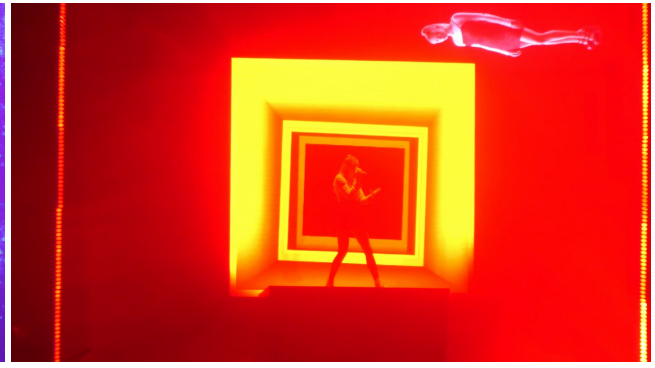


3. Peter Gabriel

(Ziggo Dome, Monday June 5th)

The hits were nice, from overrated *Sledgehammer* to anthem for hopeless romantics *In Your Eyes*, a suitable replacement voice for Kate Bush, Gabriel still hopping around and that still so relevant anti-apartheid closer. The show was stolen however by front row boy rocking out to *Big Time*, now that's the kind of parenting i loudly applaud.

Nonetheless, shockingly the hugest intellectual-emotional highlights came from new songs, as a pre-release for the album. Bathing in red *Panopticom* reflected upcoming already here AI Big Brother times, while lengthy, dreamlike, exceptionally beautiful warm bath *Love Can Heal* (written for murdered politician Jo Cox) left gasping for air. Peter Gabriel is one of the most sane artists on the planet, please listen to this man.

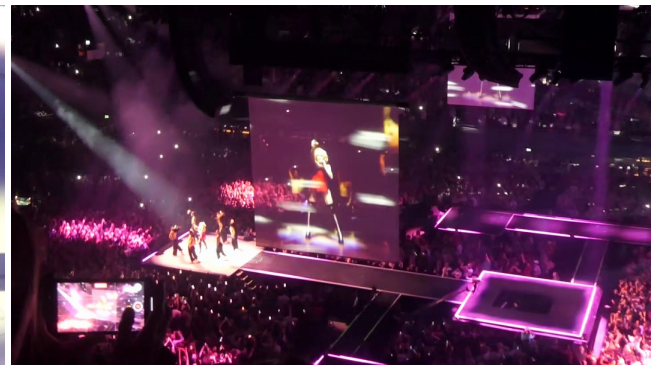


2. Angèle

(Afas Live, Friday May 26th)

Quelle surprise! Leaving the venue, this gig felt like a solid top 10 entry, in the #5-10 range. Lo and behold, half a year later i just keep on returning to my own recordings, over and over again. Without fully realizing it at the time, this was the most uplifting day of the year, with total acceptance of a hopeless young at heart bipolar existence. Belgian singer-songwriter, frisky pop idol Angèle Van Laeken has turned adorable art into an overwhelming feelgood experience with mesmerizing visuals, Dua Lipa guest appearance on screen, Britney cover on piano, bookended by dog poop and waffles.

Early on, euphoric tone was set by irresistible *Tout oublier*, an absolute monster hit in Wallonia – breaking a Stromae record, insane achievement in that area of the world. Utilizing all aspects of one great show: superb voice, band, choreography, the rest of this two hours (!) rainbow rollercoaster offered the entire palette of human emotions. French speaking complete families traveled to this tiny venue (almost hosting best of the year concert again), in her home country Angèle is headlining (!) major festivals.



1. Madonna

(Ziggo Dome, Friday December 1st)

In. Sane. Huge. Epic. Too much to mention, but highlights included immediate chills sent through the childhood spine by *Into the Groove*, the *Live to Tell* red balloon into a rotating *Like a Prayer*, Tokischa buildup to *Hung Up*, and an awkward melodramatic Aids Day speech. Hey she nearly died herself as well, only a couple of months ago, so give the girl a break. In fact, give her a break for each and every single controversy.

I didn't expect ever to be starstruck again, but this legend turned out to feel surreal. Constantly reinventing herself, not aiming to please while pleasing immensely, this is how royalty should be; queer pioneer beyond spectacular, one for the history books.

'time goes by so slowly for those who wait..'



Concert Window, 2015



Amsterdam, 2023

I'd trade all of the above, plus dozens of movies, albums, concerts left unmentioned, in for the most special meeting of the year though; Concert Window queen Jayne in Amsterdam, it really happened! We had pancakes and saw Star Wars in concert. This just proves once again: you never know what magical things will unfold in upcoming years. People you meet for the first time today, may slowly become a warm part of your life. Internet is a disconnected haven, but it still ties to the real world. Oh and back then, she'd never expected to see Taylor Swift and Menni live in the same year.

2024

So yeah, to complete some sort of circle, next year i'll try to catch Swift over here as well, but stadium shows in general are unappealing and she's you know kinda popular. Maisie Peters will likely not compensate enough, her tickets are still affordable though.



Fun, eclectic personal festival lineup will probably be arranged no matter what. Two potential headliners in the form of Olivia Rodrigo and John Mayer have been booked already, essential eighties will be represented by OMD and Pet Shop Boys, latest country megastar massive award winner Lainey Wilson is one splendid addition and many smaller gems will follow for sure. In March, Adèle Castillon returns to Brussels, and as 0.05% top fan trust Spotify, i guess i just have to go.

2024 Wishlist and chance percentages:

- | | | |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Selena Gomez | - she's up for it, we're ready, needs to happen | 35% |
| 2. Sade | - minor rumors, North Sea Jazz would be fab | 15% |
| 3. Matt Wheeler | - award winners tend to come over years later | 10% |
| 4. Bananarama | - eighties legends hardly ever travel abroad | 15% |
| 5. FLO | - 2023 biggest buzz still has to tour properly | 40% |



For now it's Christmas time, that means calories and movies. Alone as always, i've never been tempted to challenge tradition; deep frying and Die Hard it'll be!

Related huge project up next, starting on March 24th and ending June 2nd, is my All-Time Movies Top 100. Expect many usual suspects and lots of titles you've never heard of, in video compilations and descriptive pdf. Next year, keep an open mind with everything, enjoy your life. Waar is m'n fokking kaasfondue?!