

THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS
CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GREAT FILMS WITH BRUCE JACKSON & DIANE CHRISTIAN
PRESENTED BY THE UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO AND THE MARKET ARCADE FILM AND ARTS CENTER

SEPTEMBER 27, 2000: ALL ABOUT EVE (1950)

20th Century Fox, 1950, 138 minutes

Bette Davis.... Margo Channing

Anne Baxter....Eve Harrington

George Sanders....Addison De Witt

Celeste Holm....Karen Richards

Gary Merrill...Bill Sampson

Hugh Marlowe...Lloyd Richards

Gregory Ratoff...Max Fabian

Barbara Bates...Phoebe

Marilyn Monroe...Claudia Caswell

Thelma Ritter....Birdie

Walter Hampden....Dinner Speaker

DIRECTOR **Joseph L. Mankiewicz**

SCRIPT **Joseph L. Mankiewicz**

based on a story by Mary Orr

PRODUCER **Darryl F. Zanuck**

MUSIC **Alfred Newman, Franz Liszt**

CINEMATOGRAPHER **Milton R. Krasner**

EDITOR **Barbara McLean**

COSTUME DESIGN **Edith Head**

JOSEPH L. MANKIEWICZ (11 February 1909, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania—5 February 1993, Bedford, New York) started in the film industry translating intertitle cards for Paramount in Berlin. He became a screenwriter for Paramount, then went to MGM, left there when Louis B. Mayer got mad at him because of his affair with Judy Garland, then went to Fox and worked as a producer for Darryl F. Zanuck. He got his directing break when Ernst Lubitsch took sick and couldn't direct *Dragonwyck* (1946). After that very successful film, Mankiewicz directed 21 more, among them: (asterisk indicates he was also scriptwriter): *Sleuth* 1972, *King: A Filmed Record...* *Montgomery to Memphis* 1970, *Cleopatra** 1963, *Suddenly, Last Summer* 1959, *The Quiet American** 1958, *Guys and Dolls** 1955, *The Barefoot Contessa** 1954, *Julius Caesar** (1953), *Five Fingers** 1952, *A Letter to Three Wives** 1949, *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* 1947, and *The Late George Apley* 1947. He won back-to-back Academy Awards for best writing and best director for *A Letter to Three Wives* 1949 and *All About Eve*. (His elder brother Herman won a best screenplay Oscar for *Citizen Kane* 1941).

BETTE DAVIS (Ruth Elizabeth Davis, 5 April 1908, Lowell, Massachusetts—6 October 1989, Paris, France, breast cancer) won best actress Oscars for *Jezebel* 1938 and *Dangerous* 1934. She was also nominated for best actress for *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* 1962, *The Star* 1952, *All About Eve* 1950, *Mr. Skeffington* 1944, *Now, Voyager* 1942, *The Little Foxes* 1941, *The Letter* 1940, *Dark Victory* 1940, and *Of Human Bondage* 1934. The American Film Institute gave her a Life Achievement Award in 1977. She was a top star in the 1930s and early 1940s, then the pictures got weaker and weaker until she replaced Claudette Colbert (who had disk problems) in *All About Eve*, whereupon the roles improved for a while. Her work was so uneven in the 1950s that she eventually had no work at all, so she placed her famous "Job Wanted" ad in the Hollywood trade papers. That led to her comeback role as the demented former child star in *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* Some of her notable films are *Death on the Nile* 1978, *The Nanny* 1965, *Hush... Hush, Sweet Charlotte* 1964, *The Virgin Queen* 1955, *The Man Who Came to Dinner* 1942, *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* 1939, and *The Petrified Forest* 1936. In the 1950s and 1960s, she had roles in many of the major television series: "It Takes a Thief," "Gunsmoke," "Perry Mason," "The Andy Williams Show," "The Virginian," "Wagon Train," "Alfred Hitchcock Presents," "Ford Theater," "General Electric Theater," and even "What's My Line." Illness forced her to pull out of the 1982-83 television series "Hotel"—her replacement was Anne Baxter. Who says movies ain't real?

ANNE BAXTER (7 May 1923, Michigan City, Indiana—12 December 1985, New York), granddaughter of Frank Lloyd Wright, did a good deal of television miniseries work in the 1980s. In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s she appeared in the major dramatic omnibus series,

as well as such shows as “Banacek,” “Cannon,” “Marcus Welby, MD,” “The Big Valley,” “The Virginia,” “The F.B.I.,” and “Batman” (as ‘Olga, Queen of the Cossacks’ and ‘Zelda the Great’). She won a best supporting actress Oscar for *The Razor’s Edge* 1946, and a best actress nomination for *All About Eve*. Some of her other films were *A Walk on the Wild Side* 1962, *Cimarron* 1960, *The Ten Commandments* 1956, *The Sullivans* 1944, *The North Star* 1943, and *The Magnificent Ambersons* 1942.

GEORGE SANDERS (3 July 1906, St. Petersburg, Russia [British parents]—25 April 1972, Barcelona, Spain) was in more than 120 movies, several of them about two suave detectives, The Saint and The Falcon. Some of his films: *The Quiller Memorandum* 1966, *The Amorous Adventures of Moll Flanders* 1965, *Solomon and Sheba* 1959, *Call Me Madam* 1953, *I Can Get It for You Wholesale* 1951, *Samson and Delilah* 1949, *Forever Amber* 1947, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 1945, *A Date with the Falcon* 1941, and 1940. In his later films and in many tv roles he played charming villains and heels. In 1937 he told David Niven that he intended to commit suicide when he got older. And so he did in 1973, swallowing three bottles of Nembutol and leaving this note: “Dear World, I am leaving because I am bored. I feel I have lived long enough. I am leaving you with your worries in this sweet cesspool. Good luck.”

CELESTE HOLM (29 April 1919, New York) appeared in Broadway plays before coming to Hollywood, among them *The Women*, *Oklahoma!* and *Bloomer Girl*. She won a best supporting actress Oscar for her third film, *Gentlemen’s Agreement* 1947, and two best supporting nominations—for *Come to the Stable* 1949 and *All About Eve* 1950. In the ’70s and ’80s she appeared in many popular tv series, such as “Wonder Woman,” “Trapper John, M.D.,” “Falcon Crest,” “Matt Houston,” “Magnum, P.I.,” “Spenser: For Hire,” and “Cheers”; in 1994 she appeared in two episodes of “Touched by an Angel.” She several times interrupted her film career to work on Broadway. Some of her other films are *High Society* 1956, *The Tender Trap* 1955, *Everybody Does It* 1949, *The Snake Pit* 1948, and *Gentleman’s Agreement* 1947.

GARY MERRILL (2 August 1915, Hartford, Connecticut—Falmouth, Maine, lung cancer) was 35 and Bette Davis 42 when they starred *All About Eve* close enough for her line about him in the film to ring true: “Bill’s thirty-two. He looks thirty-two. He looked it five years ago, he’ll look it twenty years from now. I hate men.” Playing a married couple must have felt pretty good to both of them: after the film was done they divorced their respective spouses and got married. Merrill is perhaps best known as a disembodied voice on scores of radio and television voice-over commercials. Two of his better early films are *Twelve O’clock High* (1949) and *Slattery’s Hurricane* (1949).

THELMA RITTER (14 February 1905, Brooklyn—4 February 1969, New York, heart attack) never lost her Brooklyn edge and it made her one of the great supporting actresses (6 Oscar nominations). Some of her films are *What’s So Bad About Feeling Good?* 1968, *The Incident* 1967, *Boeing Boeing* 1965, *How the West Was Won* 1962, *Birdman of Alcatraz* 1962, *The Misfits* 1961, *Pillow Talk* 1959, *Daddy Long Legs* (1955), *Rear Window* (1954), *Pickup on South Street* 1953, *Titanic* 1953, *The Mating Season* 1951, and *City Across the River* 1949.

MARILYN MONROE (Norma Jean Baker, 1 June 1926, Los Angeles—5 August 1962, Los Angeles, drug overdose) is the only actor of note in *All About Eve* who was never nominated for an Academy Award, quite an achievement considering her performances in *The Misfits* 1961, *Some Like It Hot* 1959, *The Prince and the Showgirl* 1957, *Bus Stop* 1956, *The Seven Year Itch* 1955, *River of No Return* 1954, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* 1953, *Niagara* 1953, *How to Marry a Millionaire* 1953, *Clash by Night* 1952, and *The Asphalt Jungle* 1950.

All About Eve received 13 Academy Award nominations and won 6 of them: picture, director, supporting actor, sound, screenplay, costume design. It probably would have won two more if four members of the cast hadn’t been in direct competition with one another: Davis and Baxter for Best Actress and Celeste Holm and Thelma Ritter for Best Supporting Actress. The story is that the studio tried to get Baxter to go for Supporting but she refused because she already had one of those and wanted to move up. Years later, the same story goes, she allowed as maybe she made a bad career move there and Bette David allowed as she was finally right about something.

Some memorable lines from the film.....

Margo Channing: Funny business, a woman’s career, the things you drop on the way up the ladder so you can move faster. You forget you’ll need them again when you get back to being a woman. It’s one career all females have in common--being a woman. Sooner or later we’ve got to work at it no matter how many other careers we’ve had or wanted. And in the last analysis nothing is any good unless you can look up just before dinner or tum around in bed and there he is. Without that you’re not a woman. You’re something with a French provincial office or a book full of clippings but you’re not a woman. Slow, curtain, the end.

Addison DeWitt: I’m Addison DeWitt. I’m nobody’s fool, least of all yours.

Margo Channing: Fasten your seatbelts, it’s going to be a bumpy night!

Addison DeWitt: You're maudlin and full of self-pity. You're magnificent!

Margo Channing: I'll admit I may have seen better days... but I'm still not to be had for the price of a cocktail, like a salted peanut.

Bill Sampson: How about calling it a night?

Margo Channing: And you, pose as a playwright? A situation pregnant with possibilities and all you can think of is everybody go to sleep.

Addison De Witt: [voiceover] Margo Channing is a star of the theater. She made her stage debut at the age of four in "Midsummer Night's Dream," playing a fairy. She entered, quite unexpectedly, stark naked. She has been a star ever since.

Addison DeWitt: While you wait you can read my column. It'll make minutes fly like hours.

Bette Davis was every bit as intelligent and acerbic as she seems in this film. She and Joan Crawford had one of Hollywood's most enduring feuds. Crawford was the widow of Pepsi's CEO, so Davis had a Coke machine installed on the set of *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* In retaliation, Crawford put heavy weights in her pockets for the scenes when Davis had to drag her across the floor. Davis's two best known lines on Crawford are "I wouldn't piss on her if she was on fire" and "She has slept with every male star at MGM except Lassie." (No, Davis did not get her genders bent: at least two of the dogs who played Lassie were males.) Some of her other lines:

"At 50, I thought proudly, 'Here we are, half century!' Being 60 was fairly frightening. You want to know how I spent my 70th birthday? I put on a completely black face, a fuzzy black afro wig, wore black clothes, and hung a black wreath on my door."

"Margo Channing was not a bitch. She was an actress who was getting older and was not too happy about it. And why should she? Anyone who says that life begins at forty is full of it. As people get older their bodies begin to decay. They get sick. They forget things. What's good about that?"

About Mankiewicz:

Godard: "one of the most brilliant American directors."

Truffaut: "master of théâtre filmé" Mankiewicz had a lifelong fascination with theatre's "creative community. . .the quirks, the frailties, the needs and talents of the performing personality....This fascination, deeply sentimental behind a cynical facade, informs the quintessential Mankiewicz movie *All About Eve*."

Celeste Holm: "Joe was in love with the concept of the theater as a wolverine's lair of skull duggery and bitchcraft."

David Shipman: "The highest quotient of (verbal) wit of any film made before or since."

Godard: "...the most intelligent man in all contemporary cinema.... He is too perfect a writer to be a director as well."

Accused often of an uncinematic priority of words over images. Mankiewicz responded "I don't believe that the word is of prime importance. I believe that the word is worthy of equal respect," that film is "a medium for the exchange of ideas and exchange of comment as well as purely visual effects."

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