



Directed by Michael Curtiz and William Keighley
Screenplay by Norman Reilly Raine and Seton I. Miller
Produced by Hal B. Wallis
Original Music by Erich Wolfgang Korngold
Cinematography by Tony Gaudio and Sol Polito
Film Editing by Ralph Dawson

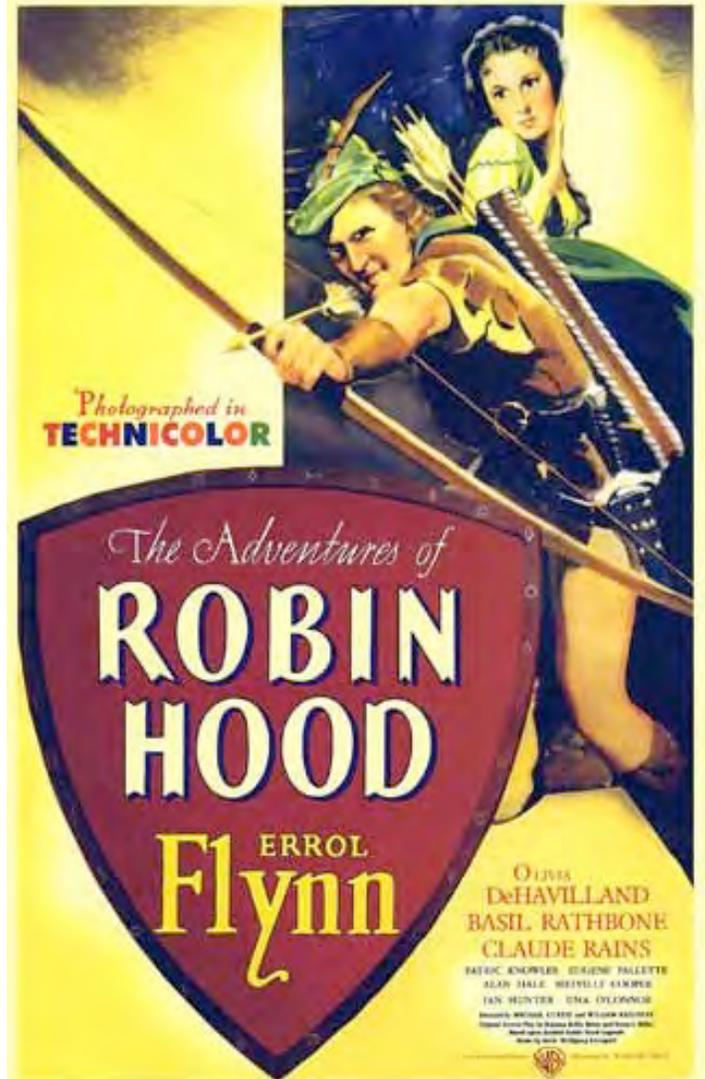
Errol Flynn...Robin Hood
 Olivia de Havilland...Maid Marian
 Basil Rathbone...Sir Guy of Gisbourne
 Claude Rains...Prince John
 Patric Knowles...Will Scarlett
 Eugene Pallette...Friar Tuck
 Alan Hale...Little John
 Melville Cooper...High Sheriff of Nottingham
 Ian Hunter...King Richard the Lion-Heart
 Una O'Connor...Bess

Academy Awards: Best Art Direction—Carl Jules Weyl, Best Film Editing—Ralph Dawson, Best Music, Original Score—Erich Wolfgang Korngold

Selected by the National Film Preservation Board for the National Film Registry 1995

MICHAEL CURTIZ (Mihály Kertész, 24 December 1886, Budapest, Austria-Hungary—10 April 1962, Hollywood, cancer) won one best director Oscar (*Casablanca* 1942) and was nominated for four others: *Yankee Doodle Dandy* 1942, *Angels with Dirty Faces* 1938, *Four Daughters* 1938, and *Captain Blood* 1935 (which was a write-in candidate, not on the official nomination; it came in second). Some of his other films (he has director credit on 172 of them) are *The Comancheros* 1961, *King Creole* (1958), *The Jazz Singer* (1952), *Jim Thorpe—All-American* (1951), *Young Man with a Horn* (1950), *Night and Day* (1946), *Mildred Pierce* (1945), *Dive Bomber* (1941), *Santa Fe Trail* (1940), *Dodge City* (1939), *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936), *Female* (1933), *Madonna of Avenue A* (1929) and *Az Utolsó bohém* (1912)

WILLIAM KEIGHLEY (4 August 1889, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania—24 June 1984, New York City, pulmonary embolism) directed 39 films, the last of which was *The Master of Ballantrae* (1953). Some of the others were *Rocky Mountain*



(1950), *The Street with No Name* (1948), *The Man Who Came to Dinner* (1942), *Each Dawn I Die* (1939), *The Prince and the Pauper* (1937), *Bullets or Ballots* (1936), *'G' Men* (1935), *Babbitt* (1934), and *The Match King* (1932).

ERROL FLYNN (20 June 1909, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia—14 October 1959, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, heart attack) appeared in 62 films and TV dramas, the last of which was *Cuban Rebel Girls* (1959). Some of the others were *The Roots of Heaven* (1958), *Too Much, Too Soon* (1958), *The Sun Also Rises* (1957), *The Master of Ballantrae* (1953), *Against All Flags* (1952), *Rocky Mountain* (1950), *Adventures of Don Juan* (1948), *San Antonio* (1945), *Gentleman Jim* (1942), *They Died with Their Boots On* (1941), *Santa Fe Trail* (1940), *The Sea Hawk* (1940), *Virginia City* (1940), *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* (1939), *Dodge City* (1939), *The Dawn Patrol* (1938), *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), *The Prince and the Pauper* (1937), *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936), *Captain Blood* (1935), *Don't Bet on Blondes* (1935), *Murder at Monte Carlo* (1934) and *In the Wake of the Bounty* (1933).

OLIVIA DE HAVILLAND (1 July 1916, Tokyo, Japan) appeared in 59 films. She won two best actress Oscars (*The Heiress* 1949, and *To Each His Own* 1946) and was nominated for three others (*The Snake Pit* 1948, *Hold Back the Dawn* 1941 and *Gone with the*

Wind 1939). She last appeared in a made-for-tv film, “The Woman he Loved” (1988). Some of her other films were: *Airport '77* (1977), *Hush...Hush, Sweet Charlotte* (1964), *Not as a Stranger* (1955), *The Heiress* (1949), *The Male Animal* (1942), *They Died with Their Boots On* (1941), *The Strawberry Blonde* (1941), *Santa Fe Trail* (1940), *Raffles* (1939), *Dodge City* (1939), *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936), *Anthony Adverse* (1936), *Captain Blood* (1935), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1935), and *Alibi Ike* (1935).

BASIL RATHBONE (13 June 1892, Johannesburg, South Africa—21 July 1967, New York, New York, heart attack) played villains and heroes, nothing in the middle. He was Sherlock Holmes in 17 films. Some of his 120 films and television series were *Autopsia de un fantasma* (1968), *Hillbillies in a Haunted House* (1967), *The Ghost in the Invisible Bikini* (1966), *Queen of Blood* (1966), “Dr. Kildare,” *Voyage to the Prehistoric Planet* (1965), “Burke's Law,” *Tales of Terror* (1962), “The DuPont Show of the Month,” “Kraft Television Theatre,” “Screen Directors Playhouse,” *We're No Angels* (1955), *Billy Budd* (1955), “Studio One,” “The Philip Morris Playhouse,” “Suspense,” “Lux Video Theatre”, *Dressed to Kill* (1946), *Terror by Night* (1946), *Sherlock Holmes Faces Death* (1943), *Sherlock Holmes and the Voice of Terror* (1942), *Paris Calling* (1941), *The Black Cat* (1941), *The Mark of Zorro* (1940), *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1939), *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1939), *Son of Frankenstein* (1939), *The Dawn Patrol* (1938), *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), *The Adventures of Marco Polo* (1938), *The Garden of Allah* (1936), *Romeo and Juliet* (1936), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1935), *Captain Blood* (1935), *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1935), *Anna Karenina* (1935), *The Personal History, Adventures, Experience, & Observation of David Copperfield the Younger* (1935), *Sin Takes a Holiday* (1930), *This Mad World* (1930), *The Bishop Murder Case* (1930), *The School for Scandal* (1923) and *Innocent* (1921).

CLAUDE RAINS (10 November 1889, London, England—30 May 1967, Laconia, New Hampshire, intestinal hemorrhage) was in 76 films and tv episodes. He was nominated for four best supporting actor Oscars: *Notorious* (1946), *Mr. Skeffington* (1944), *Casablanca* (1942) and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939). Some of his other films were *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), *Angel on My Shoulder* (1946), *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1945), *Phantom of the Opera* (1943), *Now, Voyager* (1942), *Kings Row* (1942), *The Wolf Man* (1941), *Here Comes Mr. Jordan* (1941), *The Sea Hawk* (1940), *They Made Me a Criminal* (1939), *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), *They Won't Forget* (1937), *The Prince and the Pauper* (1937), *The Man Who Reclaimed His Head* (1934), *The Invisible Man* (1933) and *Build Thy House* (1920)

EUGENE PALLETTE (8 July 1889, Winfield, Kansas—3 September 1954, Los Angeles, California, cancer) appeared in 244 films, among them: *Suspense* (1946), *Pin Up Girl* (1944), *The Male Animal* (1942), *The Lady Eve* (1941), *The Mark of Zorro* (1940), *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), *Topper* (1937), *My Man Godfrey* (1936), *Steamboat Round the Bend* (1935), *The Half Naked Truth* (1932), *Shanghai Express* (1932), *The Santa Fe Trail* (1930), *The Virginian* (1929), *Lights of New York* (1928), *Jewish Prudence* (1927), *Wandering Husbands* (1924), *The Three Musketeers* (1921), *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), *The Bank Burglar's Fate* (1914), and his first film and the first of 13 films in which he would perform in 1913, *When the Light Fades*.

ALAN HALE (10 February 1892, Washington, District of Columbia—22 January 1950, Hollywood, California, liver ailment and viral infection) appeared in 235 films. His last appearance was a Little John in *Rogues of Sherwood Forest* (1950). He appears as Little John in *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938). He appeared as Little John in *Robin Hood* (1922).

GOLDEN CLOUD, LADY MARIAN'S HORSE (1932 - 3 July 1965) would soon be bought by Roy Rogers, renamed “Trigger,” and would appear in 90 films and 100 TV episodes. He also appeared in *Robin Hood of the Pecos* (1941) and was Young Bill Hickok's horse in the film of that name (1940), and the Carson City Kid's Horse in the film of that name (1940).

HAL WALLIS (14 September 1899, Chicago, Illinois—5 October 1986, Rancho Mirage, California) was one of the most prolific Hollywood producers. He is credited as producer or executive producer on 366 films, the last of them *Rooster Cogburn* (1975). Some of the others were *Anne of the Thousand Days* (1969), *True Grit* (1969), *Becket* (1964), *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* (1957), *Rhapsody in Blue* (1945), *Casablanca* (1942), and *Now, Voyager* (1942).

TONY GAUDIO (20 November 1883, Rome, Italy—10 August 1951, Burlingame, California) won one best cinematography Oscar (*Anthony Adverse* 1936) and was nominated for four others: *A Song to Remember* (1945), *Corvette K-225* (1943), *The Letter* (1940), *Juarez* (1939) and *Hell's Angels* (1930). He shot more than 140 other films, among them *The Red Pony* (1949), *The Man Who Came to Dinner* (1942), *The Dawn Patrol* (1938), *Little Caesar* (1931), *Hell's Angels* (1930) and *Princess Nicotine; or, The Smoke Fairy* (1909)

SOL POLITO (12 November 1892, Palermo, Sicily—23 May 1960, Hollywood, California) was nominated for three best cinematography Oscars: *Captains of the Clouds* (1942), *Sergeant York* (1941) and *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* (1939). He did 166 other films, some of which were *Anna Lucasta* (1949), *Cloak and Dagger* (1946), *Arsenic and Old Lace* (1944), *Now, Voyager* (1942), *Sergeant York* (1941), *Santa Fe Trail* (1940), *The Sea Hawk* (1940), *Virginia City* (1940), *Dodge City* (1939), *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938), *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936), *The Petrified Forest* (1936), ‘G’ Men (1935), *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933), *Madonna of the Streets* (1930), *The Border Patrol* (1928), *Her Husband's Honor* (1918) and *Rip Van Winkle* (1914).

RALPH DAWSON (18 April 1897, Westboro, Massachusetts—15 November 1962, Hollywood) edited 77 films, for which he won three best film editing Oscars: *The High and the Mighty* (1954), *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938), *Anthony Adverse* 1936) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 1935). He received a nomination for *The High and the Mighty* (1954).

From World Film Directors, V. I. Ed John Wakeman. H.W. Wilson Co. NY 1987 “Curtiz, Michael” by Philip Kemp

American director and producer, was born in Budapest, Hungary, of Jewish parentage, the eldest of three sons. Later in life, Curtiz enjoyed creating mystery about his origins and upbringing and sometimes maintained that his father was “a poor carpenter.” The generally accepted account, though, is that his family was comfortably off, his father being an architect, and his mother an

opera singer. Curtiz himself is said to have made his stage debut, aged eleven in an opera in which his mother was starring. At seventeen, he ran away to join a traveling circus, performing with them as strongman, acrobat, juggler, and mime. He is also reported to have been a member of the Hungarian fencing team at the 1912 Stockholm Olympics.

It seems certain, at any rate, that Curtiz studied at Markoszy University in Budapest and then at the Royal Academy of Theatre and Art. Having completed his studies, he joined the National Hungarian Theatre, whose repertoire consisted mostly of “boulevard comedies” like those of Molnár, several of which Curtiz would later film. He began his theatrical career in traditional style, taking on all the dogsbody jobs from candyseller to cashier. Curtiz soon graduated to acting roles and before long was established as one of the company’s most promising young directors.

Ma üs holnap (Today and Tomorrow, 1912) was proudly announced as “The First Hungarian Dramatic Art Film.” Curtiz took one of the leading roles and is generally believed to have directed as well, although no director was credited. He was certainly named as the director of *Az utolsy bohüm (The Last Bohemian, 1912)*, and he made at least two more pictures before setting out for the Nordisk Studios in Copenhagen, at that time the preeminent center of film production in Europe. Curtiz spent six months at Nordisk, learning all he could about filmmaking and working with leading Scandanavian directors like Mauritz Stiller and Victor Sjöstrom. He assisted August Blom in the direction of a big-budget epic, *Atlantis (1913)* and is also supposed to have directed a film of his own for Nordisk, although no record of it has survived.

Back in Hungary, adorned with the prestige of his Danish experience, Curtiz found himself much in demand. From 1914 to 1919 he directed at least thirty-seven films, many of which—following the contemporary Scandinavian example—showed a preference for naturalistic outdoor locations. *Bónk bön (1914)*, based on a popular Hungarian folk story, was the first of several major successes. On the outbreak of war, Curtiz was drafted into the Austro-Hungarian artillery, but through shrewd use of personal connections got himself first transferred to the Army film unit and then in 1915 discharged. Soon after resuming civilian life, he married a seventeen-year-old aspiring actress, Lucy Doraine, despite her family’s opposition to her choice of both husband and career.

Early in 1917, Curtiz was appointed director of production at Phoenix Films, the leading studio in Budapest. He worked exclusively for them until he left Hungary. None of his Hungarian films has survived intact, and most are completely lost; but the fragments that remain suggest that Curtiz’s talent for fluid narrative and vivid composition was already well-developed. So, too, was his notoriously autocratic attitude to filmmaking: in a 1917 article for the periodical *Mozhíhüt* he stated “An actor’s success is no more than the success of the director whose concept of the whole brings into harmony the performance of each character on the screen.”



In April 1919, Béla Kun’s short-lived socialist Republic of Councils announced the nationalization of the film industry. This was little to Curtiz’s taste. Abandoning his current project, a version of Molnar’s *Liliom*, he left Hungary for good. According to some sources, he visited Sweden, where a persistent but improbable legend has him directing a film featuring the fourteen-year-old Greta Gustafsson (Garbo) as Marie Antoinette. No trace of any such work has survived, nor of an early episode of Fritz Lang’s serial *Die Spinnen (The Spiders, 1919)*, which Curtiz is said to have directed in Germany. With or without detours, he ended up in Vienna, where he and Lucy Doraine were signed up by Count Alexander Kolowrat, owner of Sascha Films.

While working for Sascha, Curtiz later wrote, he “learned the basic laws of film art, which, in those days, had progressed further in Vienna than anywhere else” (thus apparently dismissing as negligible the experience gained on his forty or so Hungarian films). The pictures that he directed for Sascha—twenty-one at least—fall mainly into two categories: sophisticated light comedies and historical (in the loosest sense) spectaculars. The comedies, such as *Die Dame mit den schwarzen Handschuhen (The Lady With the Black Gloves, 1919)*, or *Cherchez la Femme (1921)*, were designed as vehicles for Lucy Doraine, whom Curtiz succeeded in launching as an international star. (Their personal relationship was less successful; they were divorced in 1923. There was one child—a daughter, Katherine.) His own reputation, though, was established by his De Mille-style spectaculars, notably *Sodom und Gomorrha (1922)* and *Die Sklavenkünigen (Moon of Israel, 1924)*, with their cannily commercial mixture of sexual display and moral deprecation. *Sodom und Gomorrha*, though at the time the most expensive film ever made in Austria, more than recouped its cost; thanks largely to Curtiz, Sascha was fast becoming the leading Austrian studio and establishing lucrative connections with the mighty UFA company of Berlin.

Moon of Israel, produced by a fellow Hungarian exile, Sandor (later Sir Alexander) Korda, achieved wide international distribution. Jack Warner, scouting for talent in Europe with his brother Harry, saw it in Paris and was “laid in the aisles by Curtiz’s camera work. . .[by] shots and angles that were pure genius.” Warners, lean and ambitious, had already snapped up Lubitsch, and now decided to sign Curtiz for their planned superproduction, *Noah’s Ark*—a film intended to beat De Mille at his own game. Curtiz readily accepted their offer but before leaving Europe completed a last assignment for Sascha: three German-international coproductions aimed at launching the French revue star Lily Damita (later briefly, and stormily, married to Errol Flynn).

In 1926, when Curtiz arrived in Hollywood, Warner Brothers was still a small and financially shaky studio; the jackpot of Vitaphone and *The Jazz Singer* was a year in the future. Kertész now became Curtiz; but before letting their newly-christened director loose on *Noah’s Ark*, the studio cautiously assigned him to a batch of programmers,

beginning with a melodrama, *The Third Degree* (1926). Curtiz, with some sixty films already to his credit and obsessively dedicated to his work, slid effortlessly into the Hollywood system, rapidly proving himself capable of making a smooth, professional job out of even the least promising material. He was to stay with Warners for the next twenty-eight years and directed eighty-six films for them, including all his best work.

...The long-awaited *Noah's Ark* (1929) achieved a substantial box-office success, even if it failed to eclipse De Mille. Davis and Flinn considered it "conclusive proof of Curtiz's ability to create stunning spectacle with great visual style.

During his first few days in Hollywood Curtiz had met Bess Meredyth, a screenwriter, and they were married a year or two later. Despite Curtiz's imperious behavior, persistent neglect of his wife, and frequent affairs with young actresses, the marriage lasted until 1961, when they divorced a year before his death. Some sources mention a son, David, who also worked in the film industry, though this may well have been the director's youngest brother.

Curtiz scored another commercial hit with *Mammy* (1930), a backstage murder vehicle for Al Jolson with songs by Irving Berlin, set in a heavily romanticized Old South. His first commercial failure, *The Mad Genius* (1931), starred John Barrymore as a megalomaniac dance impresario; the film, which marks an early appearance of Curtiz's recurrent theme of cynicism versus idealism, was probably too similar to the recent *Svengali* (also with Barrymore) to impress the public....

Warners were now the fastest-growing studio in Hollywood, and Curtiz's stock rose with them. *Cabin in the Cotton* (1932) was an early example of a Warners specialty—hard-hitting social (near-)realism, in this case enlivened by the first of Bette Davis's rich gallery of malicious Southern belles. She appeared in a more sympathetic light in another "message picture," *20,000 Years in Sing Sing* (1933) playing the girlfriend of Spencer Tracy; in a wildly romantic gesture of self-sacrifice, Tracy goes to the chair for the murder she has committed. Curtiz's realistic portrayal of the dreariness and squalor of prison life may now seem commonplace, but was found fresh and revelatory at the time.

Around this time Curtiz also directed two of Warners' rare excursions into the horror genre. John Baxter found *Doctor X* (1932) "one of the greatest of the classic horror films, incorporating most of the key Germanic elements"; if few other critics have been quite so enthusiastic, the movie certainly includes some vividly atmospheric scenes, quite clearly influenced by Lang and Murnau. *Doctor X* was shot in two-color Technicolor, although only monochrome prints seem now to be extant, but a color print of *The Mystery of the Wax Museum* (1933) has luckily survived. The process, noted Tom Shales, "adds the ideal eerie glow to the story of dark doings.... The film does not suffer under the restrictions [of the limited color options] but, in fact, benefits from it." As the demented sculptor, Lionel Atwill raves splendidly, and Fay Wray reprises a scream or two from *King Kong*.

Curtiz, perhaps surprisingly, directed few of the tough, pacy gangster movies for which Warners was by now famous; but he did an efficient job on a couple of production-line series thrillers: *The Kennel Murder Case* (1933), with William Powell playing Philo Vance, and *The Case of the Curious Bride* (1935), with Warren William as Perry Mason. Between these two he took on—among other things—a steamy, sub-Maugham tropical

melodrama, *Mandalay* (1934), featuring Kay Francis bumping off unwanted lovers; and *British Agent* (1934), a richly implausible affair supposedly set in 1917 revolutionary Moscow, with Leslie Howard in the title role and Kay Francis as Lenin's stenographer.

All through the 1930s, Curtiz tirelessly hammered out four or five movies a year, seemingly as ready to take on low-budget programmers as more prestigious assignments. By the middle of the decade, though, he was established as Warners top director, increasingly assigned to the studio's major stars (Davis, Cagney, Muni, William Powell) and more expensive productions—at least by Warners' notoriously parsimonious standards. The studio's financial stability was now assured, but old habits died hard—especially those of Hal Wallis, Warners' formidable and tight-fisted production chief. Curtiz, versatile, industrious, and supremely adept at creating lavish results on minimal budgets, fitted the studio philosophy perfectly. "Curtiz never gave second-hand treatment to an assignment once it was accepted," commented William Meyer; "he went ahead and graced plot and character with fluid camera movement, exquisite lighting, and a lightening-fast pace. Even if a script was truly poor and the leading players were real amateurs, Curtiz glossed over inadequacies so well that an audience often failed to recognize a shallow substance until it was hungry for another film a half-hour later."

Equally well established by this time was Curtiz's reputations as one of the most detested directors in Hollywood, second only perhaps to Josef von Sternberg. Jack Edmund Nolan (*Films in Review*, November 1970) described him as "a manic-depressive sort of a man, up one day and down the next. In the euphoric phase he would appear on the set splendidly accoutred, even flamboyantly (scarf, costume jewelry), and be full of extroverted, self-confident assertiveness. In the depressed phase he would be unkempt and would refuse to talk even about things that were of concern to him. In both states he was mindful of the feelings of others only occasionally."

Autocratic and overbearing on the set, Curtiz clashed constantly with his actors; thriving under pressure, he expected them to do the same. Many actors, including Errol Flynn, eventually refused to work with Curtiz. Bette Davis, never one to be dominated, fought with him ceaselessly. (Curtiz is said to have referred to her, in her presence, as a "goddamned nothing no good sexless son of a bitch.") Joan Blondell described him as "a cruel man, with animals and actors, and he swung that whip around pretty good. He overworked everyone. But he was also amusing, and he turned out some good pictures."

All his life Curtiz retained a strong Hungarian accent, and his creative mishandlings of the English language deserve to be as famous as those of Sam Goldwyn. He once stormed at a confused propman: "Next time I send a damn fool, I go myself!" He expressed dissatisfaction with a child actor by remarking scathingly: "By the time I was your age, I was fifteen." A scene in one of his films, he predicted, would "make your blood curl."

For all his unsympathetic treatment of actors, Curtiz showed a knack for detecting and fostering unknown talent. Among the players who achieved stardom under his direction were Walter Slezak, John Garfield and—rather unexpectedly—Doris Day. His most famous discovery, though, was undoubtedly Errol Flynn, who in Curtiz's hands rose from minor bit parts to become one of the great romantic heroes of the cinema, the first (and perhaps only) true successor to Douglas Fairbanks. The first of their dozen collaborations, *Captain Blood* (1935), defined the

most enduring aspect of Flynn's screen persona: the dashing, devil-may-care swashbuckler, sword in hand and heart on sleeve.

Adapted from a ripe piece of period tushery by Rafael Sabatini, *Captain Blood* assembled all the right ingredients—piracy, swordplay, wrongful imprisonment, flowery sentiments, a fine score (his first) from Erich Korngold, plus Olivia De Havilland as the sweet, spirited heroine and Basil Rathbone sneering impeccably as the villain. Robert Donat was originally to play the title role; when he dropped out through illness, Curtiz cast the inexperienced Flynn in spite of the studio's misgivings. As it turned out, both Curtiz and Warners were right: Flynn couldn't act, but it didn't matter in the least.

Captain Blood displays most of the characteristics of Curtiz's cinematic style at this period, as enumerated by Sidney Rosenzweig: "High crane shots to establish a story's environment; unusual camera angles and complex compositions in which characters are often framed by physical objects; much camera movement; subjective shots....;and high contrast lighting, with pools of shadow." ...

Following the success of *Captain Blood*, Curtiz and Flynn were reunited for *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936), a blatantly unhistorical account of the famous Crimean débacle (most of the action takes place in India). Flynn was once again cast as the social rebel, this time fighting against the incompetence and indecision of his senior officers, and Curtiz directed all of this with his inherent sense of rhythm and timing. The film builds inexorably to the final climactic charge, which an unsigned article in *Classic Images* (January 1983) summed up as "a myriad of sweeping long shots, low tracing shots, close-ups, and dynamic editing merged together in one of the most exciting panoramic pieces of cinema ever filmed." It was also, by all accounts, one of the most dangerous. One man died and several more were badly injured in the filming of it; so many horses were killed that the SPCA raised a public protest....

Curtiz and Flynn were now reckoned a foolproof winning combination, and in spite of Flynn's complaints of Curtiz's "bloodthirstiness," they were regularly teamed together. Two lesser efforts, *The Perfect Specimen* (1937), a social comedy, and *Gold is Where You Find It* (1938), a Western, were followed by the best of all their films together and perhaps the finest swashbuckler of all time, *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938).

Curtiz, William Meyer maintained, "is to the swashbuckler what John Ford is to the Western." *Robin Hood* alone might well serve to substantiate such a claim. Filmed in glowing Technicolor, it easily surpassed the earlier Dwan-Fairbanks version, which seems slow and ponderous by comparison. The film had originally been assigned to William Keighley, who was replaced after some six weeks shooting—mainly of the Sherwood forest sequences—supposedly for adopting too "light-hearted" an approach. If so, the joins scarcely shows; the whole film has an irresistible, almost operatic, sweep and panache, climaxing in the superb final duel, all lunging shadows on torchlit stone walls. Flynn's sheer vitality made up for

his indifferent acting; Rathbone and De Havilland were once more villain and heroine, and there was the delectable bonus of Claude Rains as a silkily malevolent Prince John. Korngold contributed a rousing score, for which he won an Oscar, as did Carl Jules Weyl for his majestic Nottingham Castle sets, and Ralph Dawson for his editing....



Despite increasing tension between director and star, the Flynn-Curtiz partnership continued with *Four's a Crowd* (1938), a dull comedy, and *Dodge City* (1939), the first of three bug-budget Westerns. ...

Curtiz won the first of his two Oscars for a patriotic short, *Sons of Liberty* (1939). It starred Claude Rains, exceptional among actors in that he generally got on well with Curtiz and enjoyed working for him. There followed *The Private*

Lives of Elizabeth and Essex (1939). A lavish costume drama complete with Korngold score and the faithful Olivia De Havilland, this was no swashbuckler but a sumptuous vehicle for the Queen of the Warners lot, Bette Davis.

It was originally to be called *Elizabeth the Queen*; Davis, furious at the title change and even more so at getting Flynn as Essex when she had demanded Laurence Olivier, played the entire film in a towering rage, clashing incessantly with Curtiz. Flynn, trapped between two roaring egos, was visibly cowed; the film turned out grandiose, static, and —apart from Davis's impressive histrionics—dead....

Virginia City (1940) was perhaps the best of the Curtiz-Flynn Westerns, although the director never seemed as fully at home in this genre as he did with swashbucklers. Set during the Civil War, it uses the clash between Flynn (a Northern Agent) and Randolph Scott (a noble Southern leader) to explore Curtiz's favorite theme of divided loyalties. Humphrey Bogart, who disliked Flynn and detested Westerns, was improbably cast as a villainous bandit, complete with Mexican moustache.

The last of the Western trilogy, *Santa Fe Trail* (1940), presented a recklessly fictionalized account of the pursuit of the abolitionist leader John Brown by Jeb Stuart (Flynn) and George Armstrong Custer (Ronald Reagan). Brown, in an intensely high-voltage performance from Raymond Massey, is depicted throughout as a crazed fanatic; Curtiz consistently shoots him from a low angle, harshly lit, eyes glittering wildly as he rants in bloodthirsty prophecy. "Although dealing with a liberal subject," wrote Kingsley Canham, "it is totally anti-liberal; and it makes very little concession to the historical importance of its subject matter...concentrating instead on perpetuating the Flynn character as...the invincible American hero." Within this ideologically outrageous framework, the film contained some fine set pieces of action, most notably the final battle at Harpers Ferry. Relations between Curtiz and Flynn were now near the breaking point. They made one more film together—the mediocre *Dive Bomber*

(1941)—during which they were reportedly scarcely on speaking terms. Thereafter Flynn refused to work with Curtiz again.

With the start of the 1940s and the ending of the ebullient Flynn cycle, a darker, more pessimistic tone gradually seemed to suffuse Curtiz's output—although many critics would argue that in this, as throughout his career, Curtiz the archetypal studio workhorse was merely reflecting an overall shift in Hollywood's—and America's—mood....

Moral despair...was conspicuously absent from the first of Curtiz's wartime hits, *Yankee Doodle Dandy* (1942). Davis and Flynn considered it "the finest musical biography ever filmed"; it was without any doubt the most energetic. As George M. Cohan, composer, showman, and superpatriot, James Cagney strutted superlatively, earning himself an Oscar; his performance, and that of Walter Huston as his father, did much to ensure the film's lasting appeal, despite the deafening blare of nationalistic bombast.

A year later, Curtiz directed a further exercise in national propaganda, of a rather different kind: *Mission to Moscow* (1943), an amazingly overt Stalinist apologia, based on the memoirs of Joseph E. Davies, ex-US Ambassador to the USSR. In it, Russia was depicted, as James Agee put it, as "a great glad two-million-dollar bowl of canned borscht, eminently approvable by the Institute of Good Housekeeping." The film, which went so far as to endorse the 1937 show trials, caused much embarrassment a few years later when the wind changed: a twitchy Jack Warner informed HUAC that it had been made at the express request of President Roosevelt. *Mission to Moscow* was suppressed for some years, becoming available again during the 1960s. Higham and Greenberg, commending "its epic sweep, its magnificently lavish studio pastiche recreation of Russia, its brilliant, well-nigh irresistible propagandist verve," classed it "with *Triumph of the Will* and *Ten Days That Shook the World*, as one of the great propaganda pieces of the screen."

Also in 1943, Curtiz was assigned to what had originally been planned as a low-budget melodramatic programmer, to star Ronald Reagan and Ann Sheridan. For some reason, the project was upgraded to major-budget status, Bogart and Bergman were brought in to play the leads, a new scriptwriter was drafted (Howard Koch, who also scripted *Mission to Moscow*) and one of the great cult movies was born. *Casablanca* (1943) is undoubtedly Curtiz's best-known film, more written about than any of his others (quite possible more than all his others put together); it won him his only Best Director Oscar; and it established, more decisively even than *The Maltese Falcon* or *The Big Sleep*, the iconographic Bogart persona. Its low-key, nostalgically romantic appeal has not diminished; in August 1983 a British Film Institute Members' poll voted it, by a wide margin, top of a list of all-time favorite films.

As Rick, jaded and world-weary proprietor of a night spot in Vichy Casablanca, Bogart embodies perfectly the moral choice that lies at the heart of so many Curtiz films: public versus private morality, cynical detachment versus commitment. In the easy-going 1930s, the choice had been largely a formality; Errol Flynn's reluctance to become a sheriff and clean up Dodge City had been little more than a momentary hesitation. In *Casablanca*, though we sense that ultimately Bogart will do the right thing, the choice is more drawn-out, more agonized: not until the very last moments of the film does he relinquish Bergman to resistance leader Victor Laszlo (Paul Henreid) and ally himself irreversibly to the cause of freedom and democracy. This ambiguity no doubt

stems partly from the uncertainty of the actors (and even of the director) as to how the film would end; most of the script was apparently written as shooting progressed. "That picture was made good on set," Curtiz remarked later. "I have three writers working on set every day as we shoot."

Besides the principal actors, Warners assembled an exceptionally fine supporting cast: Sydney Greenstreet, Peter Lorre, Conrad Veidt, Dooley Wilson (as Sam, playing it again), and "the ambiguous emotional center of the film, the human embodiment of Casablanca's mystery and corruption," as Richard Schickel put it—Claude Rains as the Vichy police chief, Louis Renault. Together with Max Steiner's score, (incorporating, of course, "As Time Goes By"), Wehy's sets, and Arthur Edeson's evocative camerawork, they enabled Curtiz to create, Kingsley Canham suggested, "one of the most distinguished works ever to emerge from a Hollywood studio," a distillation of the style and aspirations of wartime America.

Bogart's Rick, wrote Sidney Rosenzweig, "is an irresistible identification figure for that urge in all of us for a splendid and noble martyrdom." "Isolationism is no longer a practical policy, my dear Rick," remarks Sidney Greenstreet blandly. Underlining the political parallel between the man and his country (the film is set in 1941); a hero for his time, Rick somberly but inexorably heads towards the foggy nocturnal airfield where he shoots the Nazi Colonel Strasser, hands over Bergman to Henreid, and strolls off arm-in-arm with Rains to join the Free French over the next hill. The film was enthusiastically acclaimed, barring a grumpy dissenting note from James Agee ("The camera should move for purposes other than those of a nautch dancer"), and showered with Oscars; over the years its stature as a cinematic classic has become unassailable.

Yet, as Richard Schickel admitted, "objectively speaking, the film...remains what it always was—a somewhat better-than-average example of what the American studio system could do when it was at its most stable and powerful." The plot is often shaky and implausible. Though much of the dialogue is witty and memorable (Rains, inviting an increased kickback: "I'm only a *poor* corrupt official..."), much more is unadulterated schmaltz. Bergman to Bogart, in mid-tryst as the Germans invade Paris: "Was that cannon fire or was it my heart pounding?" Bogart to Bergman, recalling the same events: "I remember every detail—the Germans wore gray, you wore blue." Several film actors, notably Lorre and Greenstreet, are largely wasted. *Casablanca*, by any standards, is not great art. But it is, beyond all doubt, superb cinema.

By this stage in his career, Curtiz had to some extent modified his cinematic style and toned down the vividly dramatic expressionism of his earlier years. His camera remained fluid, but the angles were becoming less startling, the compositions less crowded and complex, though he retained his taste for stark contrasts in lighting. "I have progressed too," he remarked around this time. "I was too European, too stagey, too sentimental. Now at fifty-six I do better work." Most critics would say that, on the contrary, at fifty-six Curtiz had almost all his best work behind him and was about to direct his last major film.

Mildred Pierce (1945), adapted from a novel by James M. Cain was intended as a vehicle for Joan Crawford, recently ousted from MGM and badly in need of a boost for her flagging career. She got it; the film won her an Academy Award (her first and only) for her performance as the drivingly ambitious housewife who works her way up from a waitress to owner of a chain of restaurants, and in doing so destroys her life and her

family. But *Mildred Pierce* transcends its origins as a Crawford vehicle; a model *film noir*, it presents an icily graphic picture of the souring of the American dream of success. “The family and mother love are both undermined,” observed David Thomson. “Suburbia inextricably confuses happiness and the dollar.”...

By way of total contrast, Curtiz’s next two films offered optimistic, upbeat Americana. *Night and Day* (1946) purported, without much justification, to be a biography of Cole Porter, represented by Cary Grant at his most debonair, casually scribbling snatches of the title song in World War I trenches. *Life With Father* (1947) was a sunlit period piece, set in 1880s New York, with William Powell perfectly cast as the irascible but finally softhearted paterfamilias; the film made up in charm for what it lacked in pace.

In 1946 Frank Capra, George Stevens, and William Wyler had formed Liberty Pictures, a directors’ cooperative aimed at achieving freedom from studio tyranny, and had invited Curtiz to join them. Alarmed, Jack Warner offered his star director a nominally autonomous unit within the studio, Michael Curtiz Productions. Considerably hampered by having to seek the studio’s final script approval on all projects, the fledgling company finally produced *The Unsuspected* (1947), a stylishly Gothic murder story which handed Claude Rains a bravura role as a megalomaniac, and eventually homicidal radio personality. Perhaps encouraged by the frank improbability of the plot, Curtiz pulled out some of his best UFA-style camera tricks, and one sequence (according to Higham and Greenberg) “remains the quintessence of Forties *film noir*. The camera moves out of a train window, across a narrow street filled with neon signs, and up to a room where a killer lies smoking, terrified in the dark, listening to the story of his crimes related by Victor Grandison [Rains] on the radio.”

... As Warner Brothers’ top director, Curtiz had been earning \$5,000 a week. In 1954 Warners, along with the rest of Hollywood, was running into financial difficulties, and Jack Warner asked all the studio’s highest-paid personnel to accept a fifty percent cut in salary. Curtiz refused and quit the studio where he had worked for twenty-eight years. His decision may not have resulted entirely from wounded pride; that same year he was cited by a young actress in a paternity suit, and the judgment went expensively against him.

During the remaining eight years of his life, Curtiz freelanced for all the major studios (especially Paramount), directing a further fifteen films. They were a mixed and largely mediocre bunch, though Curtiz could still command big budgets and top box-office acting talent, and his technical competence remained impressive. Ironically, one of these late films, *White Christmas* (1954), a saccharine musical with Bing Crosby and Danny Kaye, proved the biggest commercial hit of his career. It would be difficult to imagine a less typical Curtiz movie—if such a thing exists.

The general critical consensus on Michael Curtiz has been that he was a studio director par excellence, bringing a high degree of technical mastery to whatever Warners threw at him, undoubtedly at his best with fast-paced action dramas, but lacking any overall personal vision or directorial signature. In other

words, Curtiz was not an *auteur*, unlike the almost equally versatile if less prolific Howard Hawks. “Perhaps more than any other director, Curtiz reflected the strengths and weaknesses of the studio system in Hollywood,” Andrew Sarris wrote, going on to describe *Casablanca* as “the happiest of happy accidents, and the most decisive exception to the *auteur* theory.” ...

Sidney Rosenzweig identified Curtiz’s visual style as the key aspect of his directorial signature, with its “unusual camera angles and carefully detailed, crowded, complex compositions, full of mirrors and reflections, smoke and fog, and physical objects, furniture, foliage, bars, and windows, that stand between the camera and the human characters and seem to surround and entrap them.”...

Curtiz himself tended to deflect with irony any attempt to delve beneath the polished surface of his films. “I put all the art into my pictures I think the audience can stand,” he once remarked; and, again, “I don’t see black-and-white words in a script when I read it. I see action.”... “One must allow Curtiz the credit,” wrote David Thomson, “for making melodrama and sentimentality so searingly effective and such glowing cause for nostalgia.... *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, *Casablanca*, and *Mildred Pierce* are an unrivalled trinity of inventiveness transforming sopppiness to such an extent that reason and taste begin to waver at the conviction of genre in full flow.”

Michael Curtiz never retired. Indefatigable to the last, he continued to direct a regular two films a year well into his seventies. Almost his last movie, bringing him full circle to his starting point, was an adaptation of a play by Molnar, *Olympia* (filmed as *A Breath of Scandal*, 1960). Curtiz died of cancer in a Hollywood hospital a few months after completing *The Comancheros* (1961), a John Wayne Western.



The Great Movies II . Roger Ebert. Broadway Books NY 2005 “The Adventures of Robin Hood”

The Adventures of Robin Hood was made with sublime innocence and breathtaking artistry, at a time when simple values rang true. In these cynical days when swashbucklers cannot be presented

without an ironic subtext, this great 1938 film exists in an eternal summer of bravery and romance. We require no Freudian subtext, no revisionist analysis; it is enough that Robin wants to rob the rich, give to the poor, and defend the Saxons—not against all Normans but only the bad ones: “It’s injustice I hate, not the Normans.”

The movie involved some milestones: It was the third Warner Bros. film shot in the three-strip Technicolor process, the fifth of twelve times Flynn would be directed by Michael Curtiz, and the third of nine films that Errol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland would make together.

And it is a triumph of the studio system. The producer, Hal B. Wallis, was the most creative executive on the Warners lot, and when the studio’s biggest star, James Cagney, walked off the set in anger and left *Robin Hood* without a leading man, Wallis immediately cast Flynn—the rising star from the Australian island of Tasmania, who had starred for him in *Captain Blood* (1935) and *Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936). It was Wallis who decided to use the new and expensive Technicolor process, Wallis

who fired an early writer who wanted to dispense with maid Marian, Wallis who was powerful enough to replace the original director, William Keighley, with Curtiz—because Keighley fell ill, according to one story, or because Wallis wanted Curtiz to pump up the action scenes, according to another. Keighley did most of the outdoor scenes; Curtiz did most of the studio shooting.

The result is a film that justifies the trademark Glorious Technicolor. “They just don’t make movies with this level of tonal saturation anymore,” writes the British critic Damian Cannon. Consider the opulent tapestries of the castle interiors, and reds and golds and grays and greens of Milo Anderson’s costumes, the lush greens of Sherwood Forest (actually Bidwell Park at Chico, California). The cinematographers, Sol Polito and Tony Gaudio, were using the original three-strip Technicolor process, which involved cumbersome cameras and a lot of extra lighting but produced a richness of color that modern films cannot rival.

For all of its technical splendor, however, the film would not be a masterpiece without the casting—not just of Flynn and de Havilland, who are indispensable, but also of such dependable warners supporting stars as Claude Rains, as the effete Prince John; Basil Rathbone, as the snaky Sir Guy of Gisbourne; and Patrick Knowles, Eugene Pallette, and Alan Hale as Will Scarlett, Friar Tuck, and Little John, the fearless Merry Men. Unlike modern films where superstars dominate every scene, the Hollywood films of the golden era have depth in writing and casting, so the story can resonate with more than one tone.

Because in later life Errol Flynn became a caricature of himself and a rather nasty man, it’s exhilarating to see him here at the dawn of his career. He was improbably handsome, but that wasn’t really the point: what made him a star was his lighthearted exuberance, the good cheer with which he embodies a role like Robin Hood. When George C. Scott was asked what he looked for in an actor, he mentioned “joy of performance,” and Flynn embodies that with a careless rapture....

The swashbuckling in the movie is thrilling precisely because it is mostly real. The weakness of modern special effects pictures is that much of the action is obviously impossible, and some of the computer animation defies the laws of gravity and physics. It is no more possible to be thrilled by Spider-Man’s action than by Road Runner’s. It is more exciting to see the real Jackie Chan scampering up a wall than to see the computer-assisted Jackie Chan flying.

Stuntmen were used in some shots in *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. But many daring scenes obviously use the real Flynn, who, like Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. in the 1922 *Robin Hood*, wanted it known he took his chances. Some stunts are the same in both pictures, as when Robin cuts the rope holding a gate and then rides the rope up as the gate comes down. Others include carefree leaps from ankle-beaking heights, and of course the swordfights. The new Warners DVD assembles the historians Rudy Behmer, Paula Sigman, Leonard Maltin, Bob Thomas, and Robert Osborne for a documentary about the making of the film, and from them I learned that it was fencing master Fred Cavens who was primarily responsible for the modern movie swordfight; he believed “it should look like a fight, not like a fencing match.” and Flynn, coached by Cavens, hurls himself into the sword scenes with robust glee.

Seeing Flynn in the swordfights, I tried to imagine the studio’s first choice, James Cagney, in the role. “It’s an interesting concept to think of James Cagney in his little green outfit,” muses Robert Osborne. “This little short fellow running around

Sherwood Forest.” Cagney was a fearless physical actor, and, as a dancer he would have had the footwork for the fencing; the casting is not unthinkable, but many scenes show bodies full-figure, which would have emphasized the difference in height between Cagney and Rathbone (but not Rains); cast changes might have been necessary. As Cagney watched this film even he must have conceded that Flynn was perfect for the role....

The intimate scenes have a directness that is almost bold. When Robin and Marian look into each other’s eyes and confess their love, they do it without edge, without spin, without arch poetry. The movie knows when to be simple. And it is the bond between Robin and Marian, after all, that stands at the heart of the movie. The ideal hero must do good, defeat evil, have a good time, and win the girl. *The Adventures of Robin Hood* is like a textbook on how to get that right.

Coming up in the Buffalo Film Seminars:

Sept 16 Michael Curtiz **THE ADVENTURES OF ROBIN HOOD** 1938

Sept 23 Jules Dassin **BRUTE FORCE** 1947

Sept 30 Richard Brooks **THE PROFESSIONALS** 1966

Oct 7 Károly Makk **LOVE (SZERELEM)** 1971

Oct 14 Francis Ford Coppola **THE CONVERSATION** 1974

Oct 21 Lina Wertmüller **SEVEN BEAUTIES (PASQUALINO SETTEBELLEZZE)** 1975

Oct 28 Elia Kazan **A FACE IN THE CROWD** 1957

Nov 4 Krzysztof Kieslowski **BLIND CHANCE (PRZYPADK)** 1981

Nov 11 Wim Wenders **PARIS, TEXAS** 1984

Nov 18 Wong Kar-Wai **IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE (FA YEUNG NIN WA)** 2000

Nov 25 Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck **THE LIVES OF OTHERS (DAS LEBEN DER ANDEREN)** 2006

Dec 2 Stanley Kubrick **2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY** 1968

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