

THE CampChuck REVIEWER

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Editor, critic, layout, distribution, and general factotum ...



First Time Director Streep Makes Othello Starring Woody Allen

page 5

16 Best Directors	Oscar Noms	Oscar Wins	AFI 100 Slots
William Wyler	12	3	2
Billy Wilder	8	2	4
David Lean	7	2	2
Steven Spielberg	7	2	5
Fred Zinnemann	7	2	1
Woody Allen	7	1	1
Martin Scorsese	7	1	3
Frank Capra	6	3	3
John Ford	5	4	2
Elia Kazan	5	2	2
George Stevens	5	2	2
John Huston	5	1	3
Michael Curtiz	5	1	2
George Cukor	5	1	1
Robert Altman	5	0	2
Alfred Hitchcock	5	0	4
	101	27	39

Bestrogen

One cannot help but notice the absence of women on top films lists. Nary a woman, for instance, graces AFI's top 100 films.

To infuse some Bestrogen into the droning Bestosterone, a nod goes to Kathryn Bigelow. She directed "The Hurt Locker" (2009). No female director made an Oscar winning film for 80 years of the Academy Awards. Bigelow's was only the fourth Oscar nomination for a female director. Lina Wertmuller broke into the locker room with "Seven Beauties" in 1976, followed by Jane Campion with "The Piano" in 1993 and Sofia Coppola with "Lost in Translation" in 2003.

William Wyler? Who Is William Wyler?	2
Manufactured Mailbag	2
Oscar Nominated Films:	
Of Directors with 6 or More Nominations	3
Of Directors with 5 Nominations	4

Bestosterone

No list of Best Movies can cure head scratching or thumb twiddling. One of the reasons that CampChuck has focused for more than three decades on the Oscars is that the Academy Awards are the standard-bearer. They are more coveted than any other Best -- although Academy Award designation hardly settles any Best discussion. Still, it is a pretty good landscape of lists to cultivate.

Are you looking for a theme to boost your appreciation of the Best movie making? Consider channeling the Best Director category. In 85 years of Oscar, 16 directors own 30% of the Gold and 22% of the nominations. The American Film Institute (AFI) produces an estimable list of the 100 Best (English-language) films. Films by these directors occupy 39 of those 100 slots. (One might say it's a higher percentage upon noticing that AFI jiggers their list periodically.)

Are you looking for a list to guide you to a wealth of movies to watch? Consider traveling the Best of Best Directors expressway. Watching films by the 16 directors outlined here covers an impressive, satisfying range of styles -- from film to film with each director and from director to director.

Don't get too mired in the Bestness angle, per se. Enjoy it as a core schooling in art, craft, and movie magic.

William Wyler? Who's William Wyler?

Ask random people who Steven Spielberg is. Most people probably know he makes movies. Good chance they can name one or more of them. OK, Spielberg is a hugely successful, LIVING film director. Ask random people who Alfred Hitchcock was. Most people probably know he made movies. Good chance they can name one or more of them. Hitchcock never won a Best Director Oscar (although he was nominated 5 times and appears 4 times on the American Film Institute's Top 100 films list).

Before you prime the pump asking about Spielberg or Hitchcock, ask random people who William Wyler was. Way fewer people will know this name. Way fewer will be able to name any of the films he made.

	Dodsworth	1936		William Wyler was nominated
	Wuthering Heights	1939		for Best Director 12 times --
	The Letter	1940		half again more than any other
	The Little Foxes	1941		director. He won 3 Best
W	Mrs. Miniver	1942		Director Oscars. ("W" next to
W	The Best Years of Our Lives	1946	37	the nominations.) Although
	The Heiress	1949		John Ford won 4, only Frank
	Detective Story	1951		Capra has also won more than
	Roman Holiday	1953		twice. Two of Wyler's films
	Friendly Persuasion	1956		sit on AFI's top 100 list.
W	Ben-Hur	1959	100	
	The Collector	1965		

I should accost people and ask them the following:

1. Do you know who William Wyler was?
2. If yes, which of Wyler's films can you name?
(Note: if the person knew who William Wyler was, you can presume they know Hitchcock and skip question #3.)
3. Do you know who Alfred Hitchcock was?
4. If yes, which of Hitchcock's films can you name?
(Note: if the person knew who Hitchcock was, you can presume they know Spielberg and skip question #5.)
5. Do you know who Steven Spielberg is?
6. If yes, which of Spielberg's Oscar nominated films can you name?
7. Which other film directors can you name?
8. Can you name any other directors, especially ones who have been nominated for a few Oscars?
9. Can you name any directors further back in film history?
10. Which of the following most closely fits your movie watching:
 - a) I'm a big watcher of movies ... big.
 - b) I've seen a lot of movies in my time.
 - c) I've seen a fair share of movies.
 - d) I'm not much of a movie watcher.

Consider grounding the survey a tad by noting whether the people are male or female and whether they are under 25, over 50, or in between. Will most people know even half of the Best Directors in this newsletter?

Manufactured Mailbag

Dear Editor,

How many movies have you seen?

H.H. Ourzenours, Concord, CA

Dear H.H.,

I wonder if I should try to figure that out, what with films seen in theaters and seen at home using computer streaming, DVDs, and broadcast TV. Of course, I've seen many movies two or more times. It seems like it's gotta be at least 5000 across 50 years? 100 films per year? It seems like the years I've seen more than 100 films (more than 200?) covers years I've seen fewer than 100.

Ed.

Dear Editor,

Dude, how about a new award category: "Best Jumping Off a Tall Building, Cliff, or Like That"?

A friend, Los Angeles

Dear Friend,

And what a crisply named category it is. There does seem to be a requisite use of this action item in all the biggest movies. What say we wait til it's more of a requisite item in all the better movies?

Ed.

All but five films in this newsletter have passed before CampChuck's eyes – long before this theme was fleshed out. The only films I'd not heard of were Elia Kazan's "America, America," George Cukor's "A Double Life," and Michael Curtiz's "Four Daughters." My memory runs a tad fuzzy recalling a few others, and I'm glad I can better associate all these films with all these directors after this exercise. (You can enjoy the films without studying the association.)

**Nominations for Best Director Oscars (W = Win) of all directors with 6 or more nominations
(see page 2 for William Wyler, who had 12)**

Allen, Woody	7 noms, 1 win		AFI	
	W Annie Hall	1977	13	Allen has plugged along steadily for 45 years, pretty much creating a picture every year. One might say he doesn't worry too much whether every film turns out well, but his recognizable brand extends well beyond his 7 Oscar nominations. "Annie Hall," his one Oscar win, marked his passage beyond merely clever schtick and garnered him spot #13 on AFI's top 100
	Interiors	1978		
	Broadway Danny Rose	1984		
	Hannah and Her Sisters	1986		
	Crimes and Misdemeanors	1989		
	Bullets Over Broadway	1994		
	Midnight in Paris	2011		
Capra, Frank	6 noms, 3 wins			Capra's 6 Best Director nominations may sit below several others with 7 or more, but only Capra, William Wyler and John Ford have enjoyed more than 2 Best Director wins. His 3 slots in the AFI top 100 hundred – actually top 50 – include 2 films that were nominated but didn't win.
	Lady for a Day	1933		
	W It Happened One Night	1934	46	
	W Mr. Deeds Goes to Town	1936		
	W You Can't Take It With You	1938		
	Mr. Smith Goes to Washington	1939	26	
	It's a Wonderful Life	1946	20	
Ford, John	5 noms, 4 wins			Ford's incomparable 4 Best Director Oscars boosts him into top tier company even though he had a mere 5 nominations. "The Searchers," not nominated for a Best Director Oscar, is ranked #12 on AFI's Best Picture list. "Stagecoach" was ranked #63 on a previous AFI top 100.
	W The Informer	1935		
	Stagecoach	1939		
	W The Grapes of Wrath	1940	23	
	W How Green Was My Valley	1941		
	W The Quiet Man	1952		
Lean, David	7 noms, 2 wins			If "Doctor Zhivago," formerly #39 on AFI's list, were not bumped off the top 100, he would have had 3 films in the top 50. While AFI (<i>American Film Institute</i>) shunts "foreign language" films aside, it does include some British presence, and Lean is an epic master. (Yes, it's worth wondering why non-English film is considered separately.)
	Brief Encounter	1946		
	Great Expectations	1947		
	Summertime	1955		
	W The Bridge on the River Kwai	1957	36	
	W Lawrence of Arabia	1962	7	
	Doctor Zhivago	1965		
	A Passage to India	1984		
Scorsese, Martin	7 noms, 1 win			Scorsese is an example of someone expected to have won a Best Director Oscar sooner than he did. His win for "The Departed" came after AFI's last publication of a top 100. "Taxi Driver," #52 on AFI's list was not even nominated for Best Director.
	Raging Bull	1980	4	
	The Last Temptation of Christ	1988		
	Gangs of New York	1990		
	Goodfellas	2002	92	
	The Aviator	2004		
	W The Departed	2006		
	Hugo	2011		
Spielberg, Steven	7 noms, 2 wins			Whatever numbers you read, Spielberg is the greatest living director. Besides his Oscar noms and wins, besides occupying 5 rungs on the AFI ladder (6 if you include "Close Encounters" at #64 on a previous iteration of the list), Spielberg has been a master of commercial success. "Jaws" set a new standard for blockbuster entertainment and appears on AFI's top 100 at #56.
	Close Encounters of the Third Kind	1977		
	Raiders of the Lost Ark	1981	66	
	E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial	1982	24	
	W Schindler's List	1993	8	
	W Saving Private Ryan	1998	71	
	Munich	2005		
	Lincoln	2012		
Wilder, Billy	8 noms, 2 wins			Though Spielberg nips at his Oscar stats, with Scorsese and Allen also in the running, Wilder remains unsurpassed in Best Director nominations (with the remarkable exception of William Wyler's 12). His 4 slots on the AFI top 100 help cement his top of the top status. His Oscar winning "Lost Weekend" may be the weakest film amongst his 8 wide ranging nominations (though it was ahead of its time in examining alcohol addiction).
	Double Indemnity	1944	29	
	W Lost Weekend	1945		
	Sunset Boulevard	1950	16	
	Stalag 17	1953		
	Sabrina	1954		
	Witness for the Prosecution	1957		
	Some Like It Hot	1959	22	
	W The Apartment	1960	80	
Zinnemann, Fred	7 noms, 2 wins			Zinnemann made iconic films like "High Noon" and "From Here to Eternity" (the latter holding slot #52 on a previous AFI top 100). His 7 Best Director nominations and 2 wins clearly mark him as a first tier director. Yet, he is probably a good example of how few directors are really well known.
	The Search	1948		
	High Noon	1952	27	
	W From Here to Eternity	1953		
	The Nun's Story	1959		
	The Sundowners	1960		
	W A Man for All Seasons	1966		
	Julia	1977		

Nominations for Best Director Oscars (W = Win) of directors with 5 nominations.

Altman, Robert	5 noms, 0 wins		AFI	
	MASH	1970	54	Among the top directors, there are various levels and kinds of independent mindedness. Altman probably leads the positioning when it comes to independent film making. He certainly stands out with his use of ensemble casts.
	Nashville	1975	59	
	The Player	1992		
	Short Cuts	1993		
	Gosford Park	2001		
Cukor, George	5 noms, 1 win			
	Little Women	1933		For whatever reasons “My Fair Lady” was bumped off the AFI top 100 (formerly #91), it’s difficult to imagine a discussion of Best Musical without Cukor’s Oscar winning film.
	The Philadelphia Story	1940	44	
	A Double Life	1947		
	Born Yesterday	1950		
W	My Fair Lady	1964		
Curtiz, Michael	5 noms, 1 win			
	Captain Blood	1935		“Casablanca” may be the best known way-old film and with good reason. Like many directors, his famous titles extend well beyond his 5 Best Director nominations. And he was an accomplished European director before coming to Hollywood.
	Angels with Dirty Faces	1938		
	Four Daughters	1938		
	Yankee Doodle Dandy	1942	98	
W	Casablanca	1943	3	
Hitchcock, Alfred	5 noms, 0 wins			
	Rebecca	1940		No director transcends the numbers more than Hitchcock. Despite never winning a Best Director Oscar, his “Master of Suspense” tag is almost as well-known as his portly profile. With Vertigo #9 and North by Northwest #45, he holds 4 slots in the AFI top 100.
	Lifeboat	1944		
	Spellbound	1945		
	Rear Window	1954	48	
	Psycho	1960	14	
Huston, John	5 noms, 1 win			
W	The Treasure of the Sierra Madre	1948	38	Huston may be better known than some of the top directors, maybe because he was more of a personality than most and he acted some too. Perhaps it helps that his career spanned 45 years. The Maltese Falcon, wasn’t one of his 5 nominations, but it makes for his third AFI slot at #31.
	The Asphalt Jungle	1950		
	The African Queen	1951	65	
	Moulin Rouge	1952		
	Prizzi’s Honor	1985		
Kazan, Elia	5 noms, 2 wins			
W	Gentleman’s Agreement	1947		Kazan’s name is a bit more high profile than most directors, in part because of his connection to the infamous “Black List” of the 1950s. Probably, actor Marlon Brando has more to do with two of Kazan’s films being in AFI’s top 50, another example of directors’ lesser renown.
	A Streetcar Named Desire	1951	47	
W	On the Waterfront	1954	19	
	East of Eden	1955		
	America, America	1963		
Stevens, George	5 noms, 2 wins			
	The More the Merrier	1943		None of Steven’s 5 Best Director nominations appear on AFI’s top 100 list (although “A Place in the Sun” placed #92 on a previous AFI iteration). Though not nominated for Oscar, “Shane” sits at AFI’s #45 and “Swing Time” sits at #90. There is surely no science in all these numbers.
W	A Place in the Sun	1951		
	Shane	1953		
W	Giant	1956		
	The Diary of Anne Frank	1959		

Letting the numbers guide this theme raises considerations like the following: Should Clint Eastwood, with 4 nominations and 2 Best Director wins, trump Altman and Hitchcock, each with 5 nominations but no Oscars? How about Frances Ford Coppola and Mike Nichols, who also have 4 nominations and merely one Oscar? The decision had more to do with holding the total list of directors and films to a manageable level. Perhaps a director with more nominations offers a tiny edge in claiming someone is a “go to” director. Not that anyone would notice, but Clarence Brown was nixed from this theme, even though he had 5 Oscar nominations (no wins) – same as Altman and Hitchcock. Since none of his films appear on the AFI top 100 and since he is so less recognizable a name than maybe every other contender, he got axed. Watch out for list mongers. They are a demented lot.

It misses the point of the theme completely to worry how Orson Welles could be left out here, given that AFI and many others consider his “Citizen Kane” the best picture of all time. That masterpiece was his only Oscar nomination and it didn’t win. And Welles directed very few pictures. It is worth a stir pointing to Coppola’s The Godfather I II and III phenomenon in championing a resume with 4 Best Director nominations. Don’t sweat the tail end of this theme. Just enjoy a substantial and entertaining ride in this world of Best of Best Directors.