



A Century of Cinema: let's explore cinema by the decade: the 1930's - The Golden Age of Cinema - the revolutionary times of sound, color and style. Movies provided an escape from the hardships of the Great Depression, allowing a glimpse into high society life, and the most popular film genres of the time were musicals, gangster films, newspaper movies, westerns, comedies, melodramas and horror movies. Here are my sixty plus picks - all available on DVD or through our streaming services (HOOPLA and Kanopy); additionally an excellent resource is *The Golden Age of Cinema: Hollywood, 1929-1945* by Richard B. Jewell.

The Adventures of Robin Hood (1938) *The Best Loved Bandit Of All Time!* Based upon ancient Robin Hood legends, it stars Errol Flynn (the undisputed "king of adventure films"), Olivia de Havilland, Basil Rathbone and Claude Rains. Sir Robin (Flynn) and his band of Merry Men rob from the rich and give to the poor; and this busy guy still has time to woo the lovely Maid Marian (de Havilland), foil the cruel Sir Guy of Gisbourne (Rathbone) and keep the nefarious Prince John (Rains) off the throne.

All Quiet on the Western Front (1930) *The Human Side of the War as Seen Through the Eyes of Youth!* Based on Erich Maria Remarque's novel of the same name, it tells the story of a German youth who eagerly enters World War I, but his enthusiasm wanes as he gets a firsthand view of the horror. Trivia: due to its anti-war sentiment, it was banned in Germany and Italy until 1956; it's also the first talkie to win an Oscar and the first ever film to win Oscars for Best Picture and Best Director (Lewis Milestone).

Animal Crackers (1930) *Groucho! Chico! Zeppo! Harpo! Nuttier than ever in this looney comedy, funnier than any four men have a right to be!* Pre-Code comedy stars the Marx Brothers with Lillian Roth and Margaret Dumont and was based on their Broadway musical of the same name; mayhem and zaniness ensue when a valuable painting goes missing during a party in honor of famed African explorer Captain Jeffrey T. Spaulding. Other Marx Brothers classics include ***Duck Soup*** (1933) and ***A Night at the Opera*** (1935).

The Blue Angel (1930) (German: *Der blaue Engel*) Josef von Sternberg classic based on Heinrich Mann's 1905 novel *Professor Unrat* (translated "Professor Filth") stars Marlene Dietrich, Emil Jannings, and Kurt Gerron; it presents the tragic transformation of a respectable professor to a cabaret clown and his descent into madness. The first feature-length German full-talkie brought the sultry sexy Dietrich to international fame and it introduced her signature song "Falling in Love Again" to the world.

Bringing Up Baby (1938) *A Lady, a leopard and a timid professor make all the fur-flying fun!* Howard Hawks' comedy stars Katharine Hepburn and Cary Grant. While trying to secure a million dollar donation for his museum, David Huxley - a befuddled paleontologist - is pursued by Susan Vance - a flighty and often irritating heiress - and her pet leopard, Baby.

City Lights (1931) Critics not only considered *City Lights* the highest accomplishment of Charlie Chaplin's career, but also one of the greatest films of all time. Chaplin wrote, produced, directed and starred in this Pre-

Code silent romantic comedy about a Tramp who falls in love with a blind girl (Virginia Cherrill) and develops a turbulent friendship with an alcoholic millionaire (Harry Myers). Another Chaplin classic from this decade is ***Modern Times*** (1936).

Curly Top (1935) Few Hollywood stars were ever as big (or little) as Shirley Temple - the dimpled darling with bouncy corkscrew curls; her sunny demeanor and delightful tap-dance routines brought cheer to moviegoers during the darkest days of the Great Depression. Temple was the Number 1 box-office draw from 1935 to 1938. Other notable Temple classics available are ***The Little Colonel*** (1935), ***The Littlest Rebel*** (1935), ***The Little Princess***, (1939), ***Heidi*** (1937), ***Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*** (1938) and ***Wee Willie Winkie*** (1937).

Dracula (1931) *The Human Vampire! He Comes From His Grave at Night...Drinks Living Blood...Bestows Crimson Kisses no Woman Can Resist!* Based on Bram Stoker's 1897 novel of the same name, it stars Bela Lugosi as the blood thirsty Count Dracula. The film would be the beginning of a long run of critically and commercially successful horror movies made by Universal; and Lugosi's performance - with his minimal movements and slow, pronounced dialogue, spoken with his Hungarian accent - is incomparable.

42nd Street (1933) *Come and meet those dancing feet, on the avenue I'm taking you to, Forty-Second Street.* A tribute to the Great White Way – it is the quintessential backstage musical, set in Depression-era New York and choreographed by the legendary Busby Berkeley.

Frankenstein (1931), *It's Alive! It's Alive!* James Whale's classic horror film based on Mary Shelley's 1818 novel of the same name, stars Colin Clive and Boris Karloff; Dr. Henry Frankenstein (Clive), a tortured soul, dares to tamper with life and death by creating a human monster (Karloff) out of lifeless body parts. Whales went on to direct other horror greats including ***The Old Dark House*** (1932), ***The Invisible Man*** (1933) and ***The Bride of Frankenstein*** (1935).

Freaks (1932) Tod Browning's (*The Unholy Three*, *Dracula*) pre-Code horror film about a circus' beautiful trapeze artist agrees to marry the leader of side-show performers; but his deformed friends discover she is only marrying him for his inheritance – and she suffers dangerous consequences! Disturbing in that actors were real people with disabilities and deformities and due to its controversial content, the film was banned in the United Kingdom for over 30 years, and was labelled as "brutal and grotesque" in Canada. *Freaks* was a box-office failure upon initial release, yet got a comeback in the 1960's and has achieved cult status.

Gone with the Wind (1939) David O. Selznick's epic civil war drama stars Vivien Leigh, Clark Gable, Olivia de Havilland and Leslie Howard; Leigh plays the gorgeous, yet vain and manipulative Southern belle, Scarlett O'Hara alongside Gable's Rhett Butler, a charming and witty rascal – one of cinema's most tempestuous duos. Based on the Margaret Mitchell acclaimed classic, this nearly four hour film never disappoints.

King Kong (1933) Lesson learned – if you capture a colossal ape from a tropical island and ship it off to New York City for public display, it's not going to end well. Fay Wray stars as the shrieking "beauty who killed the beast." Features one of the most iconic images of NYC ever committed to celluloid: a gigantic chest-pounding, helicopter-smacking, no-nonsense primate beating his chest atop the Empire State Building. Enough said.

L'Age D'Or (1930) Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's surrealist masterpiece – a satirical comedy about the insanities of modern life, the hypocrisy of the sexual mores of bourgeois society, and the value system of the Catholic Church – banned for decades in some countries for its racy content, this is not to be missed.

Love Finds Andy Hardy (1938) *JUST A BIG-HEARTED GUY...IN LOVE WITH THREE GIRLS AT ONCE!* Comedy about a teenage boy (Mickey Rooney) becomes entangled with three different girls all at the same time Also stars Lewis Stone, Fay Holden, Cecilia Parker, Judy Garland, Lana Turner, Ann Rutherford, Mary Howard and Gene Reynolds.

Love Me Tonight (1938) Stars Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette MacDonald - a Parisian tailor finds himself posing as a baron in order to collect a sizeable bill from an aristocrat, only to fall in love with an aloof young princess. Chevalier's melodic voice and Gallic charm makes this musical comedy a delight; it features Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart songs *Love Me Tonight*, *Mimi*, *Lover* and the Great American Songbook classic *Isn't it Romantic?* [In fact, the staging of *Isn't It Romantic?* was revolutionary for its time, combining both singing and film editing, as the song is passed from one singer/or group of singers to another, all of whom are at different locales.]

M (1931) (*M – Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder*) *M – A City Searches for a Murderer* Fritz Lang's first sound film – the thriller stars Peter Lorre in his breakthrough role as Hans Beckert, a serial killer of children. An early example of a procedural drama, the film centers on the manhunt throughout Berlin for Beckert, conducted by both the police and the criminal underworld. [Fact: once Adolf Hitler and his Nazi party took power in 1933, they banned the film; stored in a vault for several years, German audiences didn't get the chance to see the *M* again until 1966.]

My Man Godfrey (1936) *A scatterbrained socialite hires a vagrant as a family butler - but there's more to Godfrey than meets the eye.* Screwball comedy stars Carole Lombard and William Powell; During the Great Depression, Godfrey "Smith" Parke is unemployed, living with other homeless men down on their luck at a New York City dump in a Hooverville on the East River near the 59th Street Bridge; meanwhile uptown, a party game brings dizzy socialite Irene Bullock to the dump where she meets Godfrey and ends by hiring him as family butler.

Ninotchka (1939) Ernst Lubitsch's story of a stern Russian woman sent to Paris on official business and subsequently finds her attracted to a man who represents everything she is supposed to detest; stars Greta Garbo, along with Melvyn Douglas, Ina Claire and Bela Lugosi. Lubitch garnered a reputation of being Hollywood's most elegant and sophisticated director – notables of this decade also include ***Trouble in Paradise*** (1932), ***Design for Living*** (1933) and ***The Merry Widow*** (1934). ***Ninotchka*** featured the enigmatic star in a rare nondramatic role and was marketed with the tagline *Garbo Laughs!*

The Public Enemy (1931) William A. Wellman's crime opus stars James Cagney, Jean Harlow, Edward Woods and Joan Blondell. The story of Tom Powers, an Irish-American street punk who rises up in the ranks of the Chicago underworld; the film brought two things to the screen: the little tough guy, fast-talking, unscrupulous gangster characterization by Cagney which was to follow him throughout his entire career, and the infamous grapefruit scene. Other greatest gangster films of this era include: ***Little Caesar*** (1931), ***The Roaring Twenties*** (1939), ***Scarface*** (1932) and ***Smart Money*** (1931).

Reefer Madness (1936) *Sin - degradation - vice - insanity!* Originally titled *Tell Your Children*, this cautionary “documentary” features a fictionalized (and melodramatic) take on marijuana use; a trio of drug dealers lead innocent teenagers to become addicted to “reefer” cigarettes by holding wild parties with jazz music. Instead of being taken seriously, the film became one of the earliest cult comedy hits during the golden age of the “midnight movie” in which theaters, especially those near colleges, would run the film at special screenings late at night during weekends.

The Rules of the Game (1939) Hailed by many to be one of the greatest films ever made, Jean Renoir's classic film lays bare some ugly truths about a group of haute bourgeois acquaintances; Taking place over a weekend at a marquis' country chateau, it is a scathing critique of corrupt French society disguised as a comedy of manners; Jean Renoir was a prolific French filmmaker, a true *auteur*, and yes, the son of the world-renowned Impressionist painter, Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Other Renoir films available include ***The Rules of the Game*** (1939) and ***La Marseillaise*** (1938).

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) *The happiest, dopiest, grumpiest, sneeziest movie of the year.* Based on the 1812 German fairy tale *Snow White* by the Brothers Grimm, it is the first full-length traditionally animated feature film and the first Disney animated feature film. The beautiful and kindhearted princess Snow White charms every creature in the kingdom except one - her jealous stepmother, the Queen. When the Magic Mirror proclaims Snow White the fairest one of all, she must flee into the forest, where she befriends the lovable seven dwarfs. After eighty plus years, this magical film never disappoints!

The Thin Man (1934) *M-G-M's new kind of mystery with more warm-blooded romance than cold-blooded murder.* Based on Dashiell Hammett's 1934 novel of the same name, this comedy/mystery stars William Powell and Myrna Loy as Nick and Nora Charles, a leisure-class couple who enjoy copious drinking and flirtatious banter. Nick is a retired private detective who left his very successful career when he married Nora, a wealthy heiress accustomed to high society; they investigate a murder case, mostly for the fun of it. A critical success, spawning five sequels, two in this decade ***After the Thin Man*** (1936) and ***Another Thin Man*** (1939).

The 39 Steps (1935) British thriller directed by Alfred Hitchcock (aka *The Master of Suspense*) stars Robert Donat and Madeleine Carroll. Loosely based on the 1915 adventure novel *The Thirty-Nine Steps* by John Buchan; an everyman civilian in London, Richard Hannay, becomes caught up in preventing an organization of spies called “The 39 Steps” from stealing British military secrets. After being mistakenly accused of the murder of a counter-espionage agent, Hannay goes on the run to Scotland and becomes tangled up with an attractive woman while hoping to stop the spy ring and clear his name. Hitchcock always regarded this as one of his favorites; others available from this decade include ***The Man Who Knew Too Much*** (1934), ***Sabotage*** (1936) and ***The Lady Vanishes*** (1938).

Top Hat (1935) *The sensational song & dance team of all time!* Musical comedy stars Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers - an American tap dancer Jerry Travers comes to London to star in a show, and meets and attempts to impress Dale Tremont to win her affection. *Top Hat* was the most successful picture of Astaire and Rogers' partnership achieving second place in worldwide box-office receipts for 1935; and Irving Berlin's songs *Top Hat*, *White Tie and Tails* and *Cheek to Cheek* have become American song classics. A dazzling dancing duo, Astaire and Rogers starred together in ten films – other notables include ***The Gay Divorcee*** (1934), ***Swing Time*** (1936) and ***Shall We Dance*** (1937).

Triumph of the Will (1935) (*Triumph des Willens*) considered one of the greatest (if not infamous) propaganda films of the 20th Century; Directed, produced, edited and co-written by Leni Riefenstahl (1902-2003), it chronicles the 1934 Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg, which was attended by over 700,000 supporters. Told without narration, it documents all six days of activities from Adolf Hitler's arrival to his departure – a haunting, chilling reminder of the power of propaganda. Along with Riefenstahl's ***Olympia*** (1938) about the 1936 Berlin Olympics, the two films garnered worldwide attention and acclaim. However her involvement in the films (and her dubious relationship with Hitler) significantly damaged her career and reputation; for further information on this controversial figure, the documentary ***The wonderful, horrible life of Leni Riefenstahl*** (1993) is a must see.

The Wizard of Oz (1939) Timeless musical fantasy stars the legendary Judy Garland as Dorothy Gale, a Kansas farm girl who dreams of a land "somewhere over the rainbow." Her dream comes true when she, her dog Toto, and the family house are transported via tornado to the magical world of Oz. Upon arrival, she realizes she's going to need help getting back to Kansas! And so begins the journey along the yellow brick road - to Emerald City to beseech the all-powerful Wizard of Oz.

The Women (1939) *It's all about men!* George Cukor's (very bitchy) comedy-drama, based on Clare Boothe Luce's 1936 (all female-cast) play of the same name, stars Norma Shearer, Joan Crawford, Rosalind Russell, Joan Fontaine, Paulette Goddard; Set in the glamorous Manhattan apartments of high society and in Reno, Nevada, where they obtain their divorces, it presents an acidic commentary on the pampered lives and power struggles of various rich, bored wives and other women they come into contact with. Throughout the film, not a single male character is seen or heard, a novel idea for 1939.

You Can't Take It with You (1938) Frank Capra's madcap, idealistic comedy stars Jean Arthur, Jimmy Stewart, Lionel Barrymore, Edward Arnold and Ann Miller. Grandpa Vanderhof (Barrymore) and his eccentric family, the Sycamores, have been happily living their zany lives; all that changes when daughter Alice (Arthur) becomes engaged to the straight-laced Tony Kirby (Stewart), and the two families must meet – an inevitable clash of classes and lifestyles ensues; other Capra classics of this decade include ***It Happened One Night*** (1934) and ***Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*** (1939).