



***A Century of Cinema:*** let's explore cinema by the decade – the 1940's: a decade of comedies, melodramas, war pictures, westerns, horror films, film noir, musicals, Disney animated classics – and some Avant-Garde and Italian Neorealism. Here are my seventy plus picks - all available on DVD or through our streaming services (HOOPLA and Kanopy); additionally an excellent resource available at the library is *Postwar Hollywood 1946 - 1962* by Drew Casper

***Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein*** (1948) hilarious/horror film stars Abbott and Costello - the first of several films in which the comedy duo meets classic characters from Universal's horror film stable. In this film, they encounter Count Dracula (Bela Lugosi), Frankenstein's monster (Glenn Strange), and the Wolf Man (Lon Chaney Jr.). Subsequent films pair the duo with the Invisible Man, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and the Mummy.

***The Best Years of Our Lives*** (1946) William Wyler's epic drama based on MacKinlay Kantor's 1945 novella *Glory for Me* stars Myrna Loy, Fredric March, Dana Andrews, Teresa Wright, Virginia Mayo and Harold Russell; three United States servicemen re-adjust to civilian life after coming home from World War II - a sobering look at the problems veterans faced when they returned home. A critical and commercial success, it won eight Academy Awards and was the highest-grossing film in both the US and UK since the release of *Gone with the Wind*.

***Bicycle Thieves*** (1948): *Ladri di biciclette* Vittorio De Sica's masterpiece in Italian Neorealism and on every Cinema Studies syllabus; in poverty-stricken postwar Rome, a workingman's bicycle is stolen – he and his son set out to find it. Simple in construction, yet profoundly rich in human insight and brutal honesty – this one packs a punch. Another DeSica classic from this period is *Shoeshine* *Sciuscià* (1946).

***The Big Sleep*** (1946) Howard Hawks' film noir based on Raymond Chandler's 1939 novel of the same name stars Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall; private detective Philip Marlowe is hired by a wealthy family. Before the complex case is over, he's seen murder, blackmail, and what might be love. A complicated, often confusing plot – but the Bogart/Bacall chemistry is worth the watch. Other Bogart must-sees include ***The Maltese Falcon*** (1941), ***Key Largo*** (1948) and ***Dark Passage*** (1947).

***Black Narcissus*** (1947) *A story of exquisite yearning in a strange and beautiful land. Towering over the screen...as the mountains that saw it happen.* Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's British psychological drama stars Deborah Kerr, Kathleen Byron, Sabu, David Farrar, Flora Robson, Esmond Knight, and Jean Simmons; a group of nuns struggle to establish a convent in the Himalayas, while isolation, extreme weather, altitude, and culture clashes all conspire to drive the well-intentioned missionaries mad.

***Cabin in the Sky*** (1943) Vincente Minnelli's first feature film based on the 1940 Broadway musical of the same name features an all-African American cast (daring and unusual for its time), stars Ethel Waters, Eddie "Rochester" Anderson and Lena Horne; also features Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington and his Orchestra. MGM took a considerable financial risk in producing the film – some theaters in the South would not show it, and, though the movie may have some things that seem stereotyped today, it was a major step forward in its time – and entertaining.

***Casablanca*** (1942) Michael Curtiz's romantic drama stars Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, and Paul Henreid, Based on Murray Burnett and Joan Allison's unproduced play, *Everybody Comes to Rick's*: Rick Blaine (Bogart), a cynical expatriate American cafe owner, struggles to decide whether or not to help his former lover, Ilsa Lund, (Bergman) and her fugitive husband, Victor Laszlo, (Henreid) escape the Nazis in French Morocco. At the time *Casablanca* was predicted to be yet another Warner Brothers war picture. Exceeding all expectations, it went on to win the Academy Awards for Best Picture, Best Director and Best Adapted Screenplay and is considered one of the greatest romances in film history. *We'll always have Paris*.

***Citizen Kane*** (1941) A dazzling debut feature by then twenty-five-year-old writer-producer-director and star Orson Welles; the story of the meteoric rise and precipitous fall of Charles Foster Kane, a newspaper magnate - and a veiled interpretation of the real publishing tycoon, William Randolph Hearst. Following the death of Kane, reporters scramble to uncover the meaning of his final utterance *Rosebud*. The movie's groundbreaking techniques under Welles' direction - primarily the innovative lighting and dramatic editing style - continue to influence filmmakers today.

***Double Indemnity*** (1944) *From the Moment they met it was Murder!* Billy Wilder's thriller based on James M. Cain's 1943 novel stars Fred MacMurray and Barbara Stanwyck; Walter Neff, a Los Angeles insurance salesman allows a provocative housewife, Phyllis Dietrichson, seduce him into a scheme of insurance fraud and murder. Barton Keyes (played by Edward G. Robinson) Neff's colleague and insurance investigator is suspicious – let's just say Neff gets burned big time! Other great noir thrillers of this decade include ***Gaslight*** (1946), ***The Postman Always Rings Twice*** (1946) and ***Sorry Wrong Number*** (1948).

***Easter Parade*** (1948) Technicolor musical starring Judy Garland, Fred Astaire, Peter Lawford and Ann Miller; music by Irving Berlin includes some of Astaire and Garland's best-known songs - *Easter Parade*, *Steppin' Out with My Baby*, and *We're a Couple of Swells*. Don Hewes (Astaire), a nightclub performer, hires Hannah Brown (Garland), a naive chorus girl, to become his new dance partner to make Nadine Hale (Miller), his former partner, jealous and to prove he can make any partner a star. Other great musicals of this decade include ***Meet Me in St. Louis*** (1944), ***On the Town*** (1949), ***Yankee Doodle Dandy*** (1942) and ***Ziegfeld Follies*** (1945).

***Fantasia*** (1940) Walt Disney's third animated feature film, it consists of eight animated segments set to pieces of classical music conducted by Leopold Stokowski, seven of which are performed by the Philadelphia Orchestra. Touted as a film with *music you can see and pictures you can hear* it's one of the most fascinating, elaborate and lavishly produced animated features ever created. Other Disney classics of this decade include ***Pinocchio*** (1940), ***Dumbo*** (1941) and ***Bambi*** (1942).

***Gentlemen's Agreement*** (1947) Elia Kazan Oscar winning drama based on Laura Z. Hobson's best-selling 1947 novel of the same name stars Gregory Peck, Dorothy McGuire, John Garfield and Celeste Holm; Peck plays a journalist who poses as a Jew to research an exposé on the widespread distrust and dislike of Jews in New York City and surrounding affluent communities, and personally discovers the true depths of bigotry and hatred.

***Gilda*** (1946) *Gilda, are you decent?* Charles Vidor's noir stars Rita Hayworth in her signature role and Glenn Ford. A small-time crooked gambler Johnny Farrell (Ford) hired to work in a Buenos Aires casino discovers his employer's new wife is Gilda (Hayworth), his former lover. With stunning cinematography, exquisite costumes, and some snappy dance numbers - *Put the Blame on Mame* - Gilda has undoubtedly gained cult classic status.

***The Great Dictator*** (1940) Charlie Chaplin's brilliant satire (and first sound film) which he wrote, directed, produced and starred in; Chaplin plays both leading roles - Adenoid Hynkel, a ruthless fascist dictator, an obvious parody of the Führer - and a persecuted Jewish barber. It's a stirring condemnation of fascism and antisemitism – quite ahead of its time.

***His Girl Friday*** (1940) Howard Hawks' screwball comedy stars Cary Grant and Rosalind Russell, and features Ralph Bellamy and Gene Lockhart; newspaper editor Walter Burns (Grant) is about to lose his ace reporter and ex-wife Hildy Johnson (Russell), who is newly engaged. Burns suggests they cover one more story together; the two get entangled in the case of murderer Earl Williams as Burns desperately tries to win back his wife. Other great comedies of this decade include George Cukor's ***The Philadelphia Story*** (1940); Ernst Lubitsch's ***The Shop Around the Corner*** (1940), Howard Hawks' ***Ball of Fire*** (1941) and Preston Sturges' ***Sullivan's Travels*** (1941).

***It's a Wonderful Life*** (1946) Frank Capra's timeless Christmas classic stars James Stewart, Donna Reed, Lionel Barrymore, Henry Travers and Gloria Grahame. George Bailey (Stewart) is a man who has given up his personal dreams, in order to help others in his community, and his suicide attempt on Christmas Eve brings about the intervention of his guardian angel, Clarence Odbody (Travers). Clarence shows him how he, George, has touched the lives of others and how different life would be for his wife Mary (Reed) and his community of Bedford Falls if he had not been born – this film never disappoints. Other Capra classics of this decade include ***Arsenic and Old Lace*** (1943) and ***Meet John Doe*** (1941).

***Laura*** (1944) Otto Preminger's noir stars Gene Tierney, Dana Andrews, Clifton Webb and Vincent Price. A Manhattan detective Mark McPherson (Andrews) investigates the murder of Madison Avenue executive Laura Hunt (Tierney) in her fashionable apartment. On the trail of her murderer, McPherson quizzes Laura's arrogant best friend, gossip columnist Waldo Lydecker (Webb) and her comparatively mild fiancé, Shelby Carpenter (Price). As the detective grows obsessed with the case, he finds himself falling in love with the dead woman.

***The Little Foxes*** (1941) *Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines; for our vines have tender grapes. Little foxes have lived in all times, in all places. This family happened to live in the Deep South in the year 1900.* William Wyler's grim melodrama based on Lillian Hellman's 1939 play of the same name stars Bette Davis as Regina Giddens – clearly one of cinema's most cold, calculating and conniving woman. Other Davis classics of this decade include ***Now, Voyager*** (1942) and ***A Stolen Life*** (1946).

***The Lost Weekend*** (1945) Winner of 4 Oscars (Best Picture, Actor, Director and Screenplay), Billy Wilder's grim, realistic depiction of alcoholism stars Ray Milland as Don Birnam, a booze-dependent novelist suffering from writer's block; it follows Dan's devastatingly pathetic four-day drinking binge.

***Meshes of the Afternoon*** (1943) Ukrainian-born American Maya Deren (1917-1961) was undeniably the most innovative avant-garde filmmaker in the history of American cinema. Along with being a filmmaker, Deren was a choreographer, dancer, film theorist, poet, lecturer and photographer – and managed to bring all of these disciplines together with her dreamlike, ecstatic films including her masterpiece *Meshes in the Afternoon*. Other noteworthy pieces - all standards on cinema studies syllabi and available on Kanopy - include ***At Land*** (1944), ***Meditation On Violence*** (1948), ***Ritual In Transfigured Time*** (1946) and ***Study For Choreography And Camera*** (1945); the documentary ***In The Mirror of Maya Deren: An Innovative Avant-Garde Filmmaker*** (2001) celebrates her cinematic legacy.

***Mildred Pierce*** (1945) Stars Joan Crawford – for which she deservedly won the Oscar for Best Actress - as Mildred Pierce, a hard-working mother and successful restaurateur who supports her spoiled daughter, Veda (Ann Blyth) truly one of the most entitled, obnoxious, evil daughters in cinematic history. Also stars Zachary Scott as Mildred's slimy, hard-drinking beau - Monte Beragon; and Eve Arden as Ida Corwin, Mildred's sharp-tongued, cynical best friend (classic line: *Personally, Veda's convinced me that alligators have the right idea. They eat their young*).

***Miracle on 34th Street*** (1947) Maureen O'Hara, (a strikingly precocious, eight year old) Natalie Wood and Edmund Gwenn star in this holiday classic - yes there is a Santa Claus! Shot entirely in New York City, it includes scenes in the actual Macy's Herald Square on 34th Street (hence the title) and of the real Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade (held in 1946).

***Rebecca*** (1940) *A lonely man, a lovely girl... struggling against the secret of Manderley*. Alfred Hitchcock's psychological thriller based on Daphne du Maurier's 1938 novel of the same name stars Laurence Olivier and Joan Fontaine. Olivier plays the brooding, aristocratic widower Maxim de Winter and Fontaine, his second wife; the two live at Manderley, his large country estate in Cornwall, yet Max is still troubled by the death of his first wife, Rebecca, in a boating accident the year before – and the second Mrs. de Winter soon discovers that Rebecca still has a strange hold on everyone in the household. Other Hitchcock classics of their decade include ***Notorious*** (1946), ***Rope*** (1948), ***Saboteur*** (1942), ***Shadow of a Doubt*** (1943) and ***Spellbound*** (1945).

***Red River*** (1948) Howard Hawks' western based on Borden Chase's 1946 story *Blazing Guns on the Chisholm Trail* stars John Wayne and Montgomery Clift; and gives a fictional account of the first cattle drive from Texas to Kansas along the Chisholm Trail. Thomas Dunson (Wayne) leads a cattle drive, the culmination of over 14 years of work, to its destination in Missouri. But his tyrannical behavior along the way causes a mutiny, led by his adopted son, Matt Garth (Clift).

***The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*** (1948) *The nearer they get to their treasure, the farther they get from the law*. John Huston's western based on B. Traven's 1927 novel of the same name stars Humphrey Bogart, Tim Holt and Walter Huston (the director's father). Set in 1925, it follows two downtrodden men who join forces with a grizzled old prospector in search of gold in the wilds of Mexico. Through enormous difficulties, they eventually succeed - but bandits, the elements, and greed threaten to turn their success into disaster.

**War Trilogy** (1945-1948) Roberto Rossellini (1906 –1977) was one of the most prominent directors of the Italian neorealist cinema (and yes, Isabella's father); his War Trilogy - **Rome, Open City** (1945), **Paisan** (1946) and **Germany, Year Zero** (1948) – was shot in battle-ravaged Italy and Germany; these three films are some of our most lasting, humane documents of devastated postwar Europe, containing universal images of both tragedy and hope.

**Why We Fight** (1942-1945) a series of seven documentary films - **Prelude to War** (1942), **The Nazis Strike** (1943), **Divide and Conquer** (1943), **The Battle of Britain** (1943), **The Battle of Russia** (1943), **The Battle of China** (1944) and **War Comes to America** (1945) - directed by Frank Capra and produced by the US Department of War during World War II; the films were originally shown to American soldiers to help them understand our involvement in the war, but then President Franklin Roosevelt ordered theatrical distribution for the public.

**White Heat** (1949) Raoul Walsh's film noir stars James Cagney, Virginia Mayo, Edmond O'Brien, Margaret Wycherly and Steve Cochran. Cagney plays Cody Jarrett, a psychopathic criminal with a mother complex, who makes a daring break from prison and leads his old gang in a chemical plant payroll heist; based on a story by Virginia Kellogg, and is considered to be one of the best gangster movies of all time.

**The Wolf Man** (1941) *In many a distant village, there exists the Legend of the Werewolf or Wolf Man, a legend of a strange mortal man with the hair and fangs of an unearthly beast... his hideous howl, a dirge of death!* Horror classic is atmospheric - full of fog and the howls of wolves – and stars Lon Chaney Jr., son of the silent film legend, as the tortured Talbot/Wolf Man - the part that made him a star. Other horror classics of this decade include **Cat People** (1942), **The Seventh Victim** (1943), **The Spiral Staircase** (1946) and **The Uninvited** (1944).