Season’s Greetings

With lost kids, dysfunctional families and too much food, the holidays have always been a perfect backdrop for comedy, drama and even action. Here’s how some directors have celebrated the occasion.

CITY LIGHTS (opposite) The Gotham Plaza set for Tim Burton’s Batman Returns (1992) was based on the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree. It was built on Stage 35 on the Warner Bros. lot, one of Hollywood’s biggest stages, (above) Bob Clark directs Peter Billingsley (who would later become a director himself) in the perennial A Christmas Story (1983). Filmed in Cleveland, Clark said he wanted the film to take place “amorphously (in the) late ’30s or early ’40s,” but a specific year is never mentioned.

PHOTOS (LEFT) MGM/UA ENTERTAINMENT COMPANY/PHOTOFEST; (ABOVE) ALAMY
HIGH HOLIDAYS: Harold (John Cho) and Kumar (Kal Penn, on leave from his job at the White House) have a wild time in New York looking for the perfect Christmas tree in Todd Strauss-Schulson’s *A Very Harold & Kumar 3D Christmas* (2011). The film required more than 400 special effects shots.


STANDING TALL: Jon Favreau used forced perspective for many of the shots in *Elf* (2003) rather than CGI to make Buddy the Elf (Will Ferrell) appear much larger than the others. “We set out to make something that we knew, if we did our job right, could turn into a movie people would see year after year.”

ON HIS OWN: Macaulay Culkin is separated from his family again at Christmastime in Chris Columbus’ *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York* (1992). A snow machine was used for some scenes, but a blizzard engulfed the set before the shoot, making this the only *Home Alone* film to feature real snow.

SPRITED AWAY: Ronald Neame’s *Scrooge* (1970), starring Albert Finney, was a musical version of the Dickens tale featuring 11 original songs. Neame transformed the Ghost of Christmas Past into a female role, played by Dame Edith Evans. The film was nominated for four Academy Awards.

RUDOLPH AND FRIENDS: Reindeer borrowed from the Toronto Zoo get ready to fly Santa Claus (Tim Allen) over a rooftop as John Pasquin (left, in white shirt) prepares a scene from *The Santa Clause* (1994). This was Pasquin’s first feature after directing Allen on the TV series *Home Improvement*.
HoMe ALone: Nancy Meyers (right) directs Kate Winslet in *The Holiday* (2006). She created a lived-in environment for two women who swap houses over Christmas. Principal photography began in Brentwood, where the Santa Ana winds luckily gave Meyers a winter day as warm as what the script called for.

CHRISTMAS SHOPPING: Brian Levant, with Arnold Schwarzenegger, staged parts of *Jingle All the Way* (1996) at the Mall of America in St. Paul, Minnesota. At times, Levant found “impossible” due to the scale and noise of the crowds watching production. It was then the largest production to film in the state.

reUnion: Malcolm D. Lee, directing Melissa De Sousa in *The Best Man Holiday* (2013), returned to characters he had created in *The Best Man* 14 years earlier. When the main characters sing “Can You Stand the Rain” to their female counterparts, their surprise is genuine as Lee didn’t tell them what the song would be.

BLooDsUCKers: In *Mark of the Vampire* (1935), a remake of his silent film *London After Midnight*, Tod Browning introduced a female vampire to keep Bela Lugosi company. Browning was notoriously hard on his crew and got angry with his effects men for not working the mechanical bats properly.

HAPPY holiDaYS: Mark Sandrich (on crane) directs Fred Astaire and Virginia Dale in one of the production numbers from *Holiday Inn* (1942). The film was based on an idea by Irving Berlin, developed by Sandrich, celebrating American holidays. It was the first film in which Berlin’s “White Christmas” was used, sung by Bing Crosby.
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CALiforniA DreAMinG:
Nora Ephron’s screwball comedy *Mixed Nuts* (1994), with Steve Martin and Adam Sandler, takes place on Christmas Eve in Venice Beach. “Somehow, Christmas in Los Angeles immediately sets the movie (appropriately) off kilter. It has very low ambitions, as in low comedy. I just wanted people to laugh.”

CrissCross:
One of the convergent story lines in Richard Curtis’ *Love Actually* (2003) wraps up in a Marseille restaurant where Colin Firth proposes to his former housekeeper on Christmas Eve. Much of the film was shot on locations around London, including the opening and closing at Heathrow Airport.

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