

The Greatest Year

With 476 films released, and many of them classics, 1939 is often considered the pinnacle of Hollywood filmmaking. To celebrate that year's 75th anniversary, we look back at directors creating some of the high points—from Mounument Valley to Kansas.



OVER THE RAINBOW: (opposite) Victor Fleming (holding Toto), Judy Garland and producer Mervyn LeRoy on *The Wizard of Oz* Munchkinland set on the MGM lot. Fleming was held in high regard by the munchkins because he never raised his voice to them; (above) Annie the elephant shakes a rope bridge as Cary Grant and Sam Jaffe try to cross in George Stevens' *Gunga Din*. Filmed in Lone Pine, Calif., the bridge was just eight feet off the ground; a matte painting created the chasm.





ON THEIR OWN: George Cukor's reputation as a "woman's director" was promoted by MGM after he directed *The Women* with (left to right) Joan Fontaine, Norma Shearer, Mary Boland and Paulette Goddard. The studio made sure there was not a single male character in the film, including the extras and the animals.



SWEPT AWAY: Victor Fleming (bottom center) directs the scene from *Gone with the Wind* in which Scarlett O'Hara (Vivien Leigh) ascends the staircase at Twelve Oaks and Rhett Butler (Clark Gable) sees her for the first time. The set was built on stage 16 at Selznick International Studios in Culver City.



WAR TIME: William Dieterle (right) directing *Juarez*, starring Paul Muni (center) as a deposed Mexican president fighting a French invasion in the 1860s. The historical epic employed 54 sets, the largest of which was an 11-acre replica of a Mexican village constructed on the Warner Bros. ranch in Calabasas, Calif.



CROSS COUNTRY: Cecil B. DeMille's *Union Pacific*, about the building of the transcontinental railroad, starred Barbara Stanwyck and Joel McCrea. According to studio records, DeMille collapsed from the strain of leading three units, and had to direct the film from a stretcher for approximately two weeks.



THE LUBITSCH TOUCH: As part of a deal with MGM, Ernst Lubitsch agreed to direct *Ninotchka*, with Greta Garbo, if the studio would allow him to make *The Shop Around the Corner*. The story of three Russians accommodating to capitalism in Paris, the film was built around the tagline "Garbo Laughs."



KNOCKOUT: Rouben Mamoulian directs Barbara Stanwyck and William Holden in *Golden Boy*, about a violinist who wants to be a boxer. Holden went through 11 weeks of training, and Mamoulian "took advantage of his tiredness, his irritability, and his exhaustion from long hours of work to shoot the tense scenes."

PHOTOS: AMPAS

PHOTOS: (TOP) SELZNICK/MGM/KOBAL COLLECTION; (BOTTOM LEFT) EVERETT COLLECTION; (BOTTOM RIGHT) AMPAS



COSTUME BALL: William Wyler (in director's chair, far right) staging a party scene from *Wuthering Heights* in which Heathcliff (Laurence Olivier) returns after his former lover Cathy (Merle Oberon) has married another man. Olivier chaffed at Wyler's multiple takes but later credited him with teaching him how to be a film actor.



SCHOOL DAYS: Robert Donat, who won an Oscar for his performance, finds love late in life with Greer Garson in *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, directed by Sam Wood. The film was part of MGM's international experiment in which the studio opened MGM-British in England to produce films with both British and American talent.



UP IN THE AIR: The bar set in Howard Hawks' *Only Angels Have Wings*, with Cary Grant and Jean Arthur, was built on the Columbia Ranch in North Hollywood. Hawks based characters on people he met scouting *Viva Villa!* in Mexico. He considered the film almost a documentary and shot as much as he could in sequence.

PHOTOS: (TOP) AMPAS; (BOTTOM, LEFT) KOBAL/MGM/BOULTON DAVIS; (BOTTOM, RIGHT) COLUMBIA PICTURES/PHOTOFEST



PHOTOS: AMPAS

GUN CONTROL: Henry King directs Tyrone Power (left) and Henry Fonda in the Technicolor Western *Jesse James*. Although this scene was shot on the Fox backlot, much of the picture was filmed on location in Pineville, Mo., because it looked unchanged from the 1880s. It was the fourth highest grossing film of 1939.



LOST: William Wellman (second from right) decided to shoot *Beau Geste* on the sand dunes near Buttercup Valley, Calif. The cast, including (left to right) Gary Cooper, Ray Milland and Broderick Crawford, and crew felt isolated living in tents in the middle of the desert, which was exactly what the director wanted.



ROYALTY: Michael Curtiz directing Bette Davis, who shaved two inches off her hairline and removed her eyebrows to give the illusion of baldness, in *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex*. The picture was one of the most stunningly designed Technicolor films produced by Warner Bros., where Curtiz worked for nearly 30 years.

DEBATABLE: Frank Capra visited the U.S. Capitol to study the Senate chamber, which he replicated on the Columbia lot for *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. The film was planned as a sequel to *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), but when Gary Cooper pulled out, Capra turned it into a vehicle for James Stewart and Jean Arthur.

ALL AMERICAN: *Stagecoach* was the first film John Ford (in light hat) shot in his beloved Monument Valley and was his first sound Western. "I did about four days on location, and then we went back and finished on the Goldwyn lot. I made the picture for a good price—\$222,000. Came in \$8,000 under budget."

PHOTOS: (TOP) COLUMBIA PICTURES/PHOTOFEST; (BOTTOM LEFT) AMPAS; (OPPOSITE) THE KOBAL COLLECTION/UNITED ARTISTS

