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AMERICAN FILM INSTITUTE DINNER
MRS. FORD'S REMARKS
MARCH 9, 1976

When I was a girl going to high school, I never dreamed of growing up and being married to a President. But my dream of a lifetime was going to Hollywood and gliding across a polished floor with Fred Astaire. So you see how fortunate I feel to be here tonight.

Because of the magic of the movies, I've danced and laughed and cried my way through several lifetimes. And it's a special treat to join this salute to William Wyler--one of the wizards of the business.

Like millions of people, the President and I love the movies. Movies light the candle of imagination--enrich our dreams--and expand our understanding.

May we always be a land that loves make-believe and storytellers--like the man we honor tonight.

Thank you.

# # #

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Gary H. Arlen
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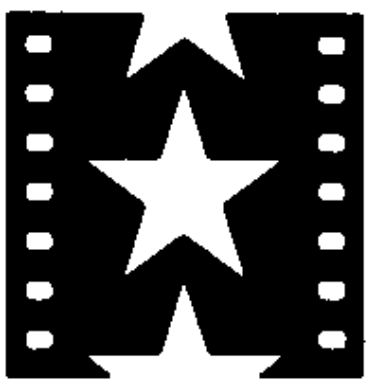

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Washington, D.C. 20566
Telephone 202-833-9300

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Actress
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National Association of Theatre Owners
Paul Ziffren
Partner, Ziffren & Ziffren

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The American Film Institute

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 2, 1976
Contact: Gary H. Arlen

FIRST LADY BETTY FORD JOINS AFI TRIBUTE TO WILLIAM WYLER IN LOS ANGELES, MARCH 9

Mrs. Gerald R. Ford will join a distinguished group of filmmakers and entertainment industry personalities for the American Film Institute tribute to director-producer William Wyler on Tuesday, March 9, 1976, at the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles. The AFI Life Achievement Award salute to Wyler will be telecast on the CBS-TV network on Sunday, March 14, from 10 to 11:30 p.m. Eastern Time.

AFI Director George Stevens Jr. announced that Mrs. Ford would attend the salute to Wyler.

The AFI Life Achievement Award is presented annually to a filmmaker "whose talent has fundamentally advanced the art of film and whose work has stood the test of time."

In addition to Mrs. Ford, more than a dozen stars will lead the tribute to Wyler, including Audrey Hepburn, Charlton Heston, Henry Fonda, James Stewart, Myrna Loy, Greer Garson, Walter Pidgeon, Merle Oberon and Eddie Albert.

-0-

10.30 Bergleiman

George Stevens
4th of Annual Life

launching camp

John Ford
James Cagney
Orson Welles
Videotaped — March 14 -
aired on CBS -
Dinner — Fund raising
event - $150/ticket.
Distinguished event in
Calif.

Wm Wyler - Dir.
of 50 films,
Mrs. Miniver -
Roman Holiday -

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Dinner - show to
Tribute begins
Film Clips on big screen
Charlton Heston, Henry Fonda,
Jimmy Stewart Greg Peck Streisand
~~Alan~~ Walt Pigeon (Greer Garson) ~~Audie~~
Pp in his film ~~*~~ Hepburn

Happy Event. 200 key
Reception 7-8 ~~pp~~ - Stars
Dinner - 8:00-9:30 of show -
Show runs ~~3~~ immediately.
Over 11:30 latest -

~~Every~~ All the Stars
come. Irene Dunn,
~~[illegible]~~ Ryan O'Neil
Quite a Festive Night.

Big Annual Fundraiser
$450,000 - CBS pays FBI
200,20 - cost to Produce it.

Special guest of honor -

Wd intro. her →

Escort - George Stevens

(212) EL 5-2800
Sheraton

GERALD R. FORD LIBRARY

Marriott
8730 Wilshire Blvd. Suite 416 Beverly Hills, California 90211
(213) 657-3500

March 9, 1976

RAYMOND CALDIERO
Vice President & Special Assistant
to the President

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mrs. Ford

FROM: Raymond Caldiero

SUBJ: American Film Institute Dinner

The following list represents celebrities attending the American Film Institute Dinner this evening. Those shown with an asterisk* need to be worked on. Needless to say anything you can do in this area would be greatly appreciated.

*Charlton Heston
*Gregory Peck
Barba Streisland
Eddie Albert
*Walter Pidgeon
*Greer Garson
Henry Fonda
Merle Oberon
Bette Davis
Audrey Hepburn
James Stewart
Harold Russell
Myrna Loy
*James Brolin
Jack Nicholson
*Roz Russell
Jim Backus
*Lee Grant

Charles Bronson
*Angie Dickenson
*Irene Dunne
*Liza Minelli
*Gene Kelly
Burl Ives
Groucho Marx
Roger Moore
Valerie Harper
Brenda Vaccaro
*Robert Wagner
*Natalie Wood
Helen Reddy
*Steve Lawrence
*Edie Gorme
Warren Beatty
Steve Allen
*Jayne Meadows

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The following represents a listing of the top films directed by William Wyler the AFI honoree this evening:

Ben Hur
Mrs. Minniver
Jezebel
Wuthering Heights
Friendly Persuasion
Roman Holiday
The Best Years of our Lives
Funny Girl
The Love Trap
A House Divided
Dodsworth
Dead End
The Westerner
The Little Foxes
The Heiress
Thunderbolt
Detective Story
Carrie
The Desperate Hours
The Children's Hour
The Collector

Message from Maria Downs:

A. The President dropped by the B'nai B'rith womens function this afternoon...and absolutely"wowed them.. and knocked them dead"...per Maria

B. Zsa Zsa Gabor has accepted the invitation to the March 17th Dinner.

C. Angie Dickinson and Burt Bachrach have been invited to attend the March 17th State Dinner.

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For individual reservations call TOLL FREE
800·228·9290

4th annual dinner

George Stevens - heads up AFI based in Wash

fund raiser

$150 each

director
Wm Wyler -

recep 7-8
8-9:30
9:30-11:30

spec guest of honor
gene kelly

This is living this is Marriott HOTELS

need: background on Wm Wyler

need: table list
credent arrangents
writers in VIP rm

what was press cov during Nix

AFI
Life Achievement Award Dinner

4th annual
1st John Ford
James Cagney
Orson Welles
Wm Wyler
at Century Plaza

58%

7pm cocktails
8pm dinner
fest taped for cbs - 90 min spec 9:15-9:30pm

about 40 press as guests
reg from 35-40 to cover
5 photogs - AP, UPI, cbs, 2 afi

* want pool to cover table

wld sit at bf table
Ch Heston, Audrey Hepb, Geo Stevens,
B. Streis, Begelman, Cary G

$150 each a ticket

VIP recept - palisades rm? (off ballrm) (fine) wld kno tom
Pacific Palisades Rm
7-8 pm 150 people staff photogs + writers AFI chooses b/ 7:15
Genl Recept 7-8pm foyer
7:45 pm - 8 pm photog rm → (no writers)
8 pm 11-1300 people people wld keep repts away

Am PFC Phoenix
Mr Krughlick
602 264 2581
0 277 4855

John
how chosen
brentwood rm.

SKW name
larry peck
(213) 482 5780
+ Van Thompson

Call SKW - for name
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comm ok

Fran
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SKW for name

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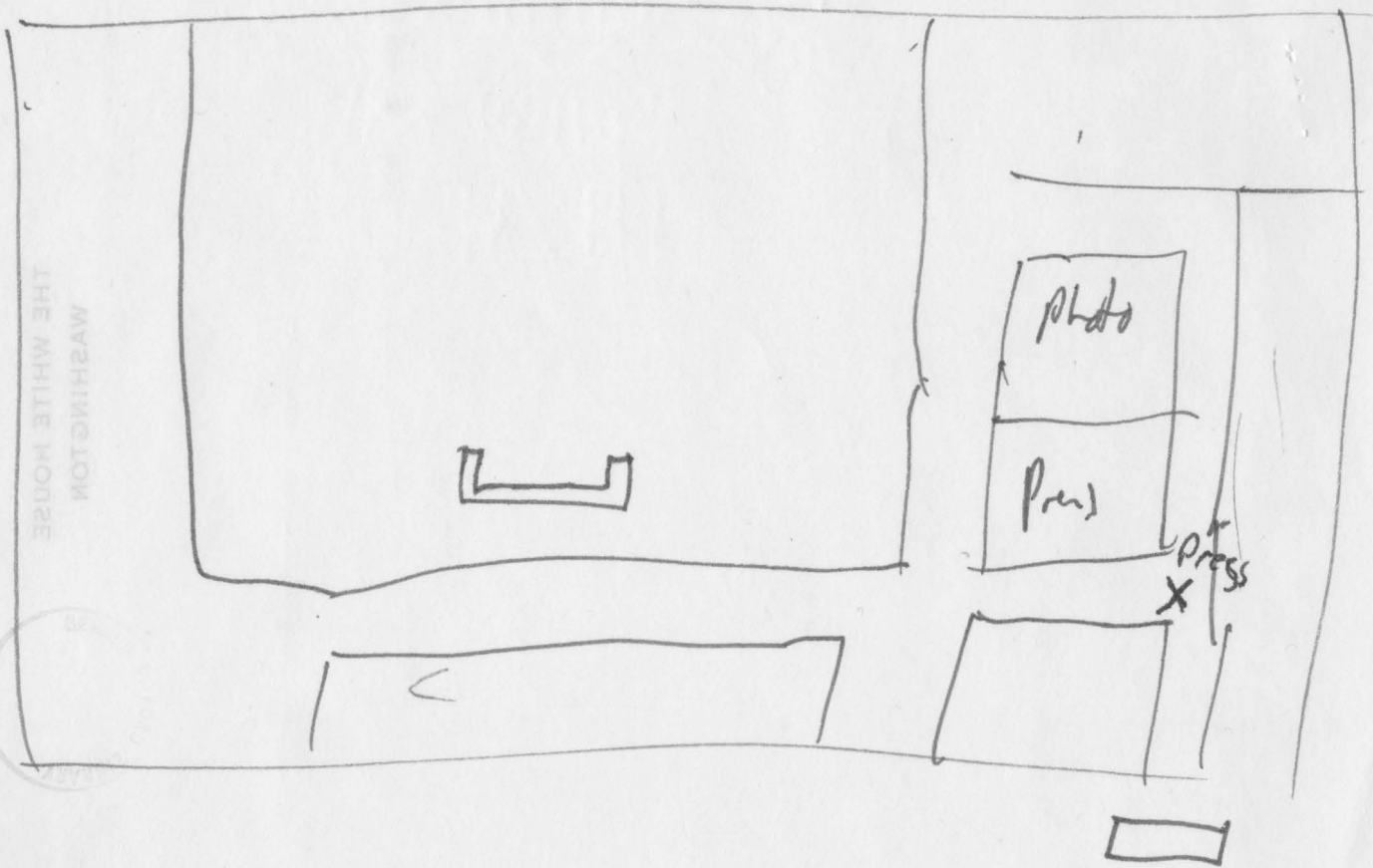
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CONTACT IS: MR. BEGELMAN
(213) 843-6000,
X2693

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Washington

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& Mr. Begelman
2/19/76.

COLUMFILM BUBK

TELTEX PD BURBANK CA FEB 19 1976
MRS GERALD R FORD
WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON DC
ATTENTION SUSAN PORTER
ON BEHALF OF GEORGE STEVENS JR DIRECTOR OF THE AMERICAN FILM INSTITUTE AND CHARLTON HESTON OUR CHAIRMAN I WOULD LIKE TO EXTEND A MOST CORDIAL INVITATION FOR YOU TO BE OUR GUEST AT THE INSTITUTE LIFE ACHIEVEMENT DINNER ON TUESDAY MARCH 9 AT THE CENTURY PLAZA HOTEL IN LOS ANGELES HONORING THE GREAT AMERICAN DIRECTOR WILLIAM WYLER WHOSE COLLEAGUES INCLUDING AUDREY HEPBURN GREGORY PECK LIZA MINNELLI HENRY FONDA BARBRA STREISAND WALTER PIDGEON GREER GARSON AND JAMES STEWART WILL TAKE PART IN THE EVENING'S ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAM. RECEPTION IS AT 7PM AND THE DINNER BEGINS AT 8 PM. DRESS IS FORMAL. KINDLY HAVE YOUR OFFICE CONTACT ME AT 213 843-6000 X2693 FOR ANY ADDITIONAL DETAILS.
CORDIALLY
DAVID BEGELMAN
PRESIDENT OF COLUMBIA PICTURES
AFI DINNER CHAIRMAN
NNN

FIRST LADY

April 12, 1976

Dear Mr. Starr:

Mrs. Ford asked me to respond to your thoughtful telegram about her participation in the American Film Institute's salute to director William Wyler. Just as Mrs. Ford hopes interest in any of the arts encourages support for all the arts, she hopes support of one segment of the American film community strengthens the entire community. She is interested in and supports the innovative work done by non-commercial film and the video community.

Your gracious and thought-out telegram stimulated Mrs. Ford and many of her staff. We all thank you for taking the time to contact us.

Sincerely,

Sheila Rabb Weidenfeld
Press Secretary to Mrs. Ford

Mr. William Starr
Executive Director
American Federation of Film Societies
Three Washington Square Village
New York, New York 10012

SRW/fp

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Sheila

MRS BETTY FORD
WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON DC 20500

DEAR MRS FORD,

WE FEEL WE MUST RESPECTFULLY PROTEST YOUR APPEARANCE ON THE HOLLYWOOD "SALUTE TO WILLIAM WYLER" TELECAST ON CBS LAST NIGHT (SUNDAY, MARCH 14), A PROGRAM SPONSORED BY AND ON BEHALF OF THE AMERICAN FILM INSTITUTE.

MUCH AS WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR YOUR GRACIOUS PUBLIC SUPPORT OF FINE AMERICAN CINEMA IN GENERAL, WE ARE DISTRESSED BY THE IMPLIED SUPPORT THAT YOUR PRESENCE AS THE NATION'S FIRST LADY AT THIS AFI EVENT SEEMS TO GIVE TO THE AMERICAN FILM INSTITUTE ITSELF, AN INSTITUTION WHICH THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRETY OF ITS NEARLY NINE YEARS OF TAX-SUPPORTED EXISTENCE HAS PERSISTANTLY ALIENATED AND ISOLATED ITSELF FROM THE BULK OF ITS NATIONAL CONSTITUENCY - THE NON-HOLLYWOOD FILM AND VIDEO COMMUNITY - WHOSE NEEDS AND INTERESTS THE AFI WAS ORIGINALLY CREATED TO SERVE.

MANY MILLIONS OF TAXPAYER DOLLARS HAVE BEEN SPENT ON THE AMERICAN FILM INSTITUTE TO DATE. THE CITIZENS OF THIS COUNTRY ARE ENTITLED TO SOMETHING MORE FOR THEIR MONEY THAN AN UNREPRESENTATIVE AND UNRESPONSIVE HOLLYWOOD-ORIENTED FILM ORGANIZATION WHOSE PRINCIPAL PRIORITIES SERVE MERELY TO GLORIFY A WEALTHY COMMERCIAL ENTERTAINMENT FILM INDUSTRY WHICH DOESN'T NEED IT, TO IGNORE THE INTERESTS OF THE NON-COMMERCIAL NATIONAL FILM AND VIDEO COMMUNITY WHICH DOES NEED IT, AND ALL AT THE DETRIMENT OF THE AMERICAN CULTURE AS A WHOLE.

FOR: NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR A REPRESENTATIVE AFI

WM STARR
EXEC. DIR.
AMERICAN FEDERATION OF FILM SOCIETIES
3 WASHINGTON SQ VILLAGE
NEW YORK NY 10012
TELEPHONE 212-254-8688

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MGMWSHT HSB

MRS. FORD'S VISIT TO LOS ANGELES

9-11 March 76

Beverly Wilshire Hotel

275-4282
(213)

Mrs. Ford	IC - 2	278-0147	Rm. 775U
Nancy Chirdon	IC - 3	278-0150	Rm. 775D
U.S.S.S. CP	IC - 4	278-3533 278-3534	Rm. 772
S.A.I.C. Ball	IC - 6	278-0158	Rm. 770
S.A. Dominico		278-3453	Rm. 579
Pete Sorum	IC-5	278-0244	Rm. 778
Shelia Weidenfeld		278-0279	Rm. 676
Pat Matson		278-0406	Rm. 674
Ramp Phone		670-4565	
G. Wharton (WHCA) D. French "		273-1400 X506 "	
J. Stoffer	IC-7		Rm 685

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P. Peters 406

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FIRST LADY FILE

March 22, 1976

Dear George:

Many thanks again for a wonderful evening. Mrs. Ford thoroughly enjoyed herself at the AFI dinner and is still talking about the good time she had. You already know how much fun I had!

Many thanks for everything.

All my best,

Sheila Rabb Weidenfeld
Press Secretary to Mrs. Ford

Mr. George Stevens
President
The American Film Institute
John F. Kennedy Center
Washington, D.C. 20566

SRW/fp

Re: California Trip/3/8-12/76

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Ms Sheila Weidenfeld

676

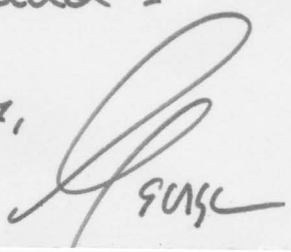
Mr. George Stevens, Jr.

March 9, 1976

Dear Shelia,

Welcome to
Twisel land -

Love,



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WILLIAM WYLER TO RECEIVE AFI LIFE ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Beverly Hills, CA--William Wyler has been selected by the Trustees of The American Film Institute to receive the Institute's Award for Life Achievement.

The Institute will present its award to Mr. Wyler at a dinner to be held at the Century Plaza Hotel in Beverly Hills, California on March 8th, 1976. The CBS Television Network will air the Awards ceremony the following Sunday night, March 14.

The three previous recipients of the annual Award were the late John Ford, James Cagney and Orson Welles.

The Life Achievement Award is given each year by vote of the Institute's Board of Trustees to an individual "whose talent has in a fundamental way contributed to the filmmaking art; whose accomplishments have been acknowledged by scholars, critics, professional peers and the general public; and whose work has stood the test of time."

Films produced and/or directed by Mr. Wyler include "Dodsworth," "Dead End," "Jezebel," "Wuthering Heights," "The Westerner," "The Letter," "The Little Foxes,"

(MORE)

"Mrs. Miniver," "The Memphis Belle," "The Best Years of Our Lives," "The Heiress," "Detective Story," "Roman Holiday," "The Desperate Hours," "Friendly Persuasion," "The Big Country," "Ben Hur," "The Children's Hour," "The Collector," "How To Steal a Million," "Funny Girl " and "The Liberation of L.B. Jones."

Wyler has received Academy Awards for "Mrs. Miniver," "The Best Years of Our Lives" and "Ben Hur" and twelve nominations for producing and directing. In addition he received the Irving G. Thalberg Memorial Award in 1966.

AFI Director George Stevens, Jr. stated: "William Wyler has maintained an unsurpassed standard of artistry and taste throughout half a century of moviemaking. The titles of his films are a roster of distinguished achievement and the Trustees wish to celebrate his uncompromising craftsmanship as well as the humanity of his work which has enriched the culture of our country."

Wyler was selected by vote of the AFI Board of Trustees. Fay Kanin chairs a special American Film Institute Committee on the Life Achievement Award.

***

(For further information contact:

Mel Konecoff, Washington, D.C. (202) 833-9300

John Blowitz, Beverly Hills, Ca. (213) 278-8777)

102275

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WILLIAM WYLER: FILMOGRAPHY

Born: July 1, 1902 Mulhouse, France

1922-1925: Assistant Director on Western two-reelers at Universal

1925-1928: Directed two-reel and five-reel Westerns

Feature Films:

ANYBODY HERE SEEN KELLY? (1928) Director
THE SHAKEDOWN (1929) Director
THE LOVE TRAP (1929) Director
HELL'S HEROES (1930) Director
THE STORM (1930) Director
A HOUSE DIVIDED (1932) Director
TOM BROWN OF CULVER (1932) Director
HER FIRST MATE (1933) Director
COUNSELLOR AT LAW (1933) Director
GLAMOUR (1934) Director
THE GOOD FAIRY (1935) Director
THE GAY DECEPTION (1935) Director
THESE THREE (1936) Director
COME AND GET IT! (1936) Co-Director
DODSWORTH (1936) Director
DEAD END (1937) Director
JEZEBEL (1938) Director
WUTHERING HEIGHTS (1939) Director
THE WESTERNER (1940) Director
THE LETTER (1940) Director
THE LITTLE FOXES (1941) Director
MRS. MINIVER (1942) Director
THE MEMPHIS BELLE (1944) Producer, Director, Screenplay
THE FIGHTING LADY (1944)
THE BEST YEARS OF OUR LIVES (1946) Director
THUNDERBOLT (1947) Director, Editor
THE HEIRESS (1949) Producer, Director
DETECTIVE STORY (1951) Producer, Director
CARRIE (1952) Producer, Director
ROMAN HOLIDAY (1953) Producer, Director
THE DESPERATE HOURS (1955) Producer, Director
FRIENDLY PERSUASION (1956) Producer, Director

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(MORE)

WILLIAM WYLER: FILMOGRAPHY (Cont.)

THE BIG COUNTRY (1958) Co-Producer, Director
BEN-HUR (1959) Director
THE CHILDREN'S HOUR (1962) Producer, Director
THE COLLECTOR (1964) Director
HOW TO STEAL A MILLION (1966) Director
FUNNY GIRL (1968) Director
THE LIBERATION OF L.B. JONES (1970) Director

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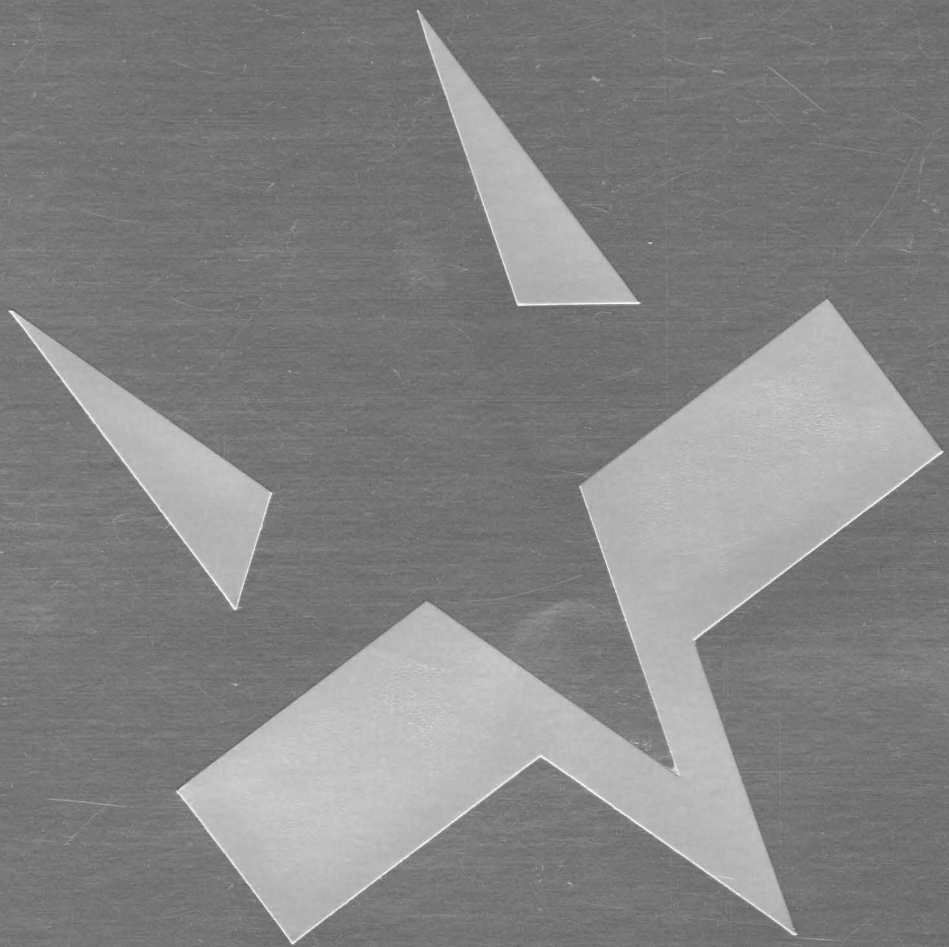

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Cicely Tyson
Robert Wise
Tracy Keenan Wynn

Life Achievement Award Dinner, March 9, 1976

Honorary Chairmen

Senator Alan Cranston
Senator John V. Tunney
Mayor Tom Bradley

Chairman

David Begelman

Womens Committee Dinner Chairman

Nessa Hyams Picker

Program

Entrance of
The Guest of Honor, William Wyler

Dinner

Welcome by David Begelman, Dinner Chairman

A Salute to William Wyler

Charlton Heston, Chairman
The American Film Institute

Guest Appearances by:

Charlton Heston
Audrey Hepburn
Harold Russell
James Stewart
Walter Pidgeon
Merle Oberon
Henry Fonda
Greer Garson

plus other Guest Stars and

Nelson Riddle and the Orchestra

A Film Salute to Mr. Wyler

George Stevens, Jr.
Director of The American Film Institute
presenting the Award for Life Achievement
to William Wyler

Three Fellows at The American Film Institute's Center for Advanced Film Study will receive special support scholarships for their training as filmmakers during the next year as one of the results of this dinner. The William Wyler scholarship recipients are: Nira Barab, Donna Mungen, and Robert Price.

GERALD R. FORD LIBRARY

These friends and admirers of William Wyler have made this tribute book possible through their generous sponsorship.

Irwin Allen
Samuel Z. Arkoff
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Fonda
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and

The film companies and guilds which cooperated in making Mr. Wyler's films available

Table decorations arranged by
Milo Bixby

The American Film Institute's Salute to William Wyler

Television special to be broadcast at 10 P.M. on March 14, 1976 on the CBS Television Network

Producer: Paul W. Keyes
Director: Stan Harris
Writers: Paul W. Keyes
Marc London
Terry Hart
Associate Producer: Al Simon
Musical Director: Nelson Riddle
Art Director: Ray Klausen
Assistant to the Producer:
Suzanne Pelsang
Production Assistant:
Laila Matthews, Kay Phillies
Film Montages Edited by: John Simpson
Executive Producer: George Stevens, Jr.

Program edited by: Hollis Alpert
Designed by: John Beveridge
Assisted by: James Powers
Cheryl Ison
Victoria Venker
Photo research: David Lunney
Stephen Zito

Printed by: Corporate Press
Washington, D.C.

The Test of Time: William Wyler

George Stevens, Jr.

When the Trustees of The American Film Institute established the Life Achievement Award in 1973, they specified that the choice of the yearly recipient be based on the total career contribution of a man or woman—regardless of place of birth—whose talent has fundamentally advanced the art of American film or television, and whose work has withstood the test of time.

The Trustees voted this year's honor to William Wyler, who, during some fifty years as a director and a producer, has given the world's filmgoers a remarkable number of noteworthy and well-nigh classic motion pictures. Mr. Wyler, born in Alsace, came to this country in 1920, and soon enough turned his talents to storytelling in the relatively new medium of movies. In a career marked by artistic sureness, high standards of taste, and uncompromising craftsmanship he has made films of lasting value with a frequency virtually unmatched by his contemporaries.

The titles alone of Wyler films tell a good part of the story: *The Good Fairy*, *These Three*, *Dodsworth*, *Dead End*, *Jezebel*, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Westerner*, *The Letter*, *The Little Foxes*, *Mrs. Miniver*, *Memphis Belle*, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, *The Heiress*, *Detective Story*, *Carrie*, *Roman Holiday*, *The Desperate Hours*, *Friendly Persuasion*, *The Big Country*, *Ben-Hur*, *The Children's Hour*, *The Collector*, *How to Steal a Million*, and *Funny Girl*.

A great director is more than a great craftsman. He can act as a formidable catalyst in weaving together the best efforts of talented collaborators. William Wyler's career has involved associations with writers of the caliber of Lillian Hellman, Robert Sherwood, Jessamyn West, Ben Hecht, and Charles MacArthur; cinematographers such as Gregg Toland, Franz Planer, and Robert L. Surtees; stars of magnitude and persuasive personality; and producers—most notably, his long association with Samuel Goldwyn. The horizons of the motion picture thereby become widened. The screen grows more forceful in its effects. Brilliant and memorable performances last long beyond their first season. It has been said of Wyler that he shortened the distance between the eye and the mind.

The Life Achievement Award, honoring as it does the totality of a filmmaker's contributions, began—fittingly, I think—with the 1973 dinner and subsequent telecast that highlighted the splendid achievements of John Ford. It continued with the presentation of the award to James Cagney in 1974, and to Orson Welles in 1975. These tributes display the life work of individual filmmakers in a way which reveals the profound impact that a creator of films can have. It says something about the quality of film art that those thought suitable for the honor were many in number. How to choose from among the great who have devoted the best years of their lives to the enrichment of the screen? It was the collective judgment of the Trustees that, this year, the name of William Wyler led all the rest.

Each year the telecast has reached a wide audience. This is one of the purposes of the Institute—to provide the public with insight into the art of motion pictures—and focusing on the work of a single creator, we can demonstrate, by example, how high the film art can soar.

The annual Life Achievement Award is also designed to reflect and to advance the purposes for which The American Film Institute was created: to preserve the film past, support research into the medium, provide assistance and training to new filmmakers, cooperate with film educators, and to publish materials that aid these and related activities. By honoring William Wyler and bringing renewed attention to his work, we of the Institute feel that our purposes are being well served.

To celebrate Mr. Wyler's career, then, we are:

—Presenting Mr. Wyler with AFI's silver star for Lifetime Achievement.

—Producing a televised salute featuring memorable moments from Mr. Wyler's films and appearances by his stars and co-workers to be broadcast over CBS on March 14 from 10 to 11:30 P.M.

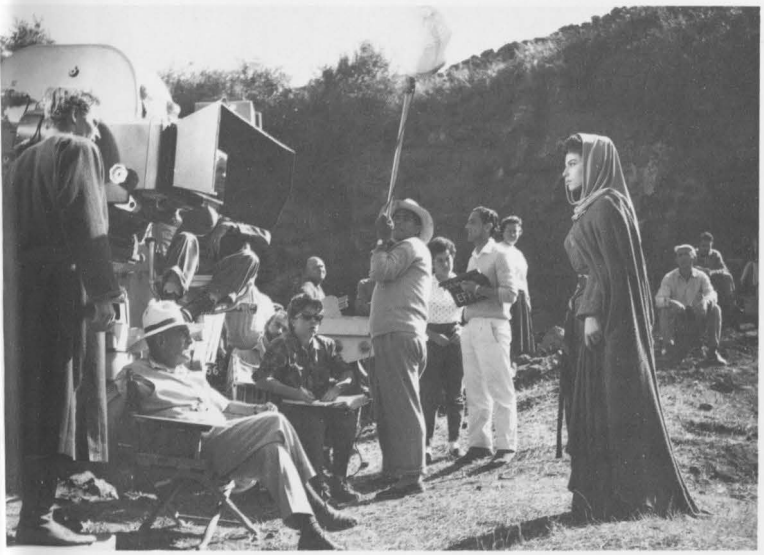
—Awarding three scholarships in Mr. Wyler's name to deserving students at the Institute's Center for Advanced Film Studies.

—Presenting a retrospective of sixteen Wyler films in the AFI Theater in our national cultural center in Washington, D.C.

—Publishing a special April issue of *American Film* focused on Wyler's career.

—And, most important of all, pledging The American Film Institute's determination to save and preserve for all time, the films of Mr. Wyler.

The Institute, however, is not alone in paying homage to William Wyler. This special program tribute has been sponsored by many of Mr. Wyler's friends and co-workers, each of whom has made a substantial donation for its preparation. The names of these contributors are indicated herein, and The American Film Institute is very grateful to them.



A tribute from
Irwin Allen

William Wyler

A Life in Film

Larry Swindell

Some years before he was The American Film Institute's first Life Achievement honoree, the late John Ford regaled me for hours on end with tall tales of moviemaking. When we drifted into a quicksand of enjoyable baseball chatter, I told Ford of the *Drums Along the Mohawk* review saluting him as "the Babe Ruth of the movies." That got us to talking about Ruth, and then of Ty Cobb, whom Ford posed as a contrast. Ruth was the incomparable natural talent, but Ford's stronger admiration was for Cobb, who forfeited personal popularity while disciplining his resources toward becoming absolutely the keenest performer in his milieu. "Cobb had an incredible drive," Ford said. "He could not be persuaded that perfection was unattainable." Smacking ample lips with his characteristically deliberate enunciation, Ford said, "Ty Cobb was the William Wyler of baseball."

Yes. The drive, the intractable determination, the abhorrence for compromise: These are components of the living legend that is Willy Wyler. But so are his dramatic curiosity, his fine intelligence, and his instinctiveness for the medium of film. Indeed, he is a virtuoso director—the equivalent of the impassioned symphonic conductor whose authority stirs a loving fear within his musicians.

Self-effacement has never been a facet of the Wyler personality. He always knew he was good, as Caruso knew, and Jolson, and Faulkner—and Ty Cobb. As John Ford implied, Wyler has not exactly been bereft of the drive for recognition. No doubt he is pleased that The American Film Institute now is notarizing his extraordinary credentials. Yet I believe there is something deeper, and the clue may have been given to me many years ago by one of Wyler's and Ford's more illustrious contemporaries.

It was about the time the idealized but short-lived venture that was Liberty Pictures was collapsing, and its three noble architects—Wyler, Frank Capra, and George Stevens—were all moving over to Paramount. I was then an impressionable teenager who often serviced the automobile driven by Stevens, and pumped that splendid craftsman for information about movies and their makers while I also pumped his tank. Stevens reckoned that Wyler was that rare person destined for success at whatever enterprise he adopted, but that formal success was not his spur. "Willy has this little demon inside him. It keeps telling him he has to be the very best there is. I think that being the best has become Willy's raison d'être." (It was the first time I had heard that exquisite term.)

Demons are not calculated to render a person lovable. But if Erich von Stroheim was "the man you love to hate," Wyler must be—the description is Fredric March's—"the man you hate to love—but must." March, who was directed on film by Lubitsch, Ford, Hawks, DeMille, and every other kind of Old Master (as well as such esteemed "actor's directors" as Cukor, Cromwell, and Goulding), told me in 1968, "It's easier to know that Wyler is Hollywood's finest director for actors than it is to explain. He doesn't articulate his criticism, but you sense his dissatisfaction. He seems to know when there's more to be gotten than you're giving, and he's relentless until he has it. The release print is his deferred proof."

Wyler's summit confrontations with his players are a staple of filmland folklore. The most fabled clashes have involved players whose wills have been as formidable as their artistry: a breadth of actresses from Ruth Chatterton, Margaret Sullavan, Bette Davis, and Olivia de Havilland to Audrey Hepburn and Barbra Streisand; and titans on the order of John Barrymore, Walter Huston, Gary Cooper, Laurence Olivier, and Peter O'Toole. The pattern is consistent: The actors capitulate to the director's stubbornness, and later acknowledge his wisdom. For potent statistical evidence, fourteen Wyler-directed performances have taken Academy Awards, from a total of thirty-two acting nominations.

Perhaps it is only folly to attempt classifying Wyler. His detractors—few in number, but a rhetorically articulate wing of revisionist film critics—

Charles Bickford in Hell's Heroes *(1930), a version of Peter B. Kyne's Western novel,* The Three Godfathers.

A tribute from
Samuel Z. Arkoff
American International Pictures, Inc.

would define a director's "personal" touch by reducing his work to formula; and the Wyler oeuvre confounds formulation. "Eclecticism" is employed as a pejorative term by those who would demean his accomplishment, but it also illuminates the essential Wyler. He remains apart from the monolithic cast of the veteran moviemaker, by being more than merely that. Wyler is both an intellectual and a sophisticate, whose knowledge and appreciation of literature and the arts have subtly enriched his films. He is politically informed, and his attentions are to the larger arena. He is a world traveler and the true cosmopolitan among all of Hollywood's Old Masters.

Those reticent to acknowledge Wyler's greatness often imply that his reputation is strategically indebted to Samuel Goldwyn on the one hand, or to Gregg Toland on the other. Wyler earned his diploma as a major director when the brilliant Toland was his cameraman on projects sponsored by Goldwyn. Here, too, the real significance is easily missed. The eight films Wyler directed for him are the substance and justification of Goldwyn's historical reputation as the screen's foremost independent producer. They are vintage cinema; no other body of contemporary work looks quite so alluring today. Certainly they surpass the Goldwyn inventories that both preceded and followed them. They also have a characteristic look not evident in the earlier Goldwyn titles, although Toland was Sam's esteemed cameraman when Wyler was only a director of minor Westerns for Universal. It was during the Wyler-directed sequence of Goldwyn films that Toland began the revolutionary experimentation that would significantly advance the art of cinematography. The Wyler-Toland adventures collectively were the visual oracle of *Citizen Kane*. Yet when Wyler became his own producer, he functioned no less effectively in creative concert with other legendary cameramen — Lee Garmes, Leo Tover, Harry Stradling, Franz Planer, Robert Surtees.

Because Wyler's recognition as one of the screen's important directors is marked at more than forty years ago, it intrigues the imagination that his almost anonymous apprenticeship sustained approximately three dozen story films, more than half of which were two-reel Westerns usually shot in three or four days. Indeed, Wyler's career is seen as the antithesis to the ledgers of the likes of Mamoulian, Welles, Minnelli, and Kazan, whose first efforts certified their majority. Yet Wyler's achievement and reputation followed a steadily upward curve. He tested himself; he consistently raised higher targets; and he kept getting better. Demons have a way of doing that to the persons they inhabit.

Wyler's demon may have been an heirloom transmitted through his maternal line. His mother, Melanie, was an Auerbach, and they had been an imposing family in Germany's intellectual life late in the nineteenth century. Willy's great-uncle, Berthold Auerbach, was an acclaimed German novelist who also translated Spinoza. Melanie Auerbach, of German-Jewish extraction, married the amiable Leopold Wyler, a Swiss. It was a good marriage, and Willy always had admiring love for both his parents. The Wylers settled in Mulhouse, in the Alsace, which was in a perennial territorial dispute between Germany and France. There they enjoyed the comforts of upper-middle-class living. Leopold Wyler was a modestly successful businessman, able to have both Willy and his older brother, Robert, educated at Lausanne and Paris. Obeying his own instinct, Willy became an assimilated Frenchman.

But the advisability of bright young men pursuing their future in Europe diminished during the economically precarious years following the First World War. Depression choked the Continent while America was only embarking on the Jazz Age joyride. Melanie Wyler's inspired notion was that her cousin, Carl Laemmle, personified her sons' passport to opportunity. The feisty, bantam Laemmle was carving a smart success in the new moving picture business in America. Willy arrived in New York in 1920, and Robert followed a few years afterward. Both were among the horde of relatives taken on for employment by genial Uncle Carl.

For about a year Willy worked in the New York office of Uncle Carl's Universal Pictures Company, starting in the shipping department. His coworker was Paul Kohner, a young German im-

It's been a long time, Willy—**Paul**

To work with William Wyler on any of his films would have been for every actor, writer, or composer, a privilege, but to be associated with him on a super-production like *Ben-Hur* was a windfall. Its producer, Sam Zimbalist, shared my opinion, after our work on *Quo Vadis*, that a composer should be consulted from the planning stage of such epics, and for more than a year we discussed the story, the script, the casting, the music, and, of course, the future director. Many names came up, but no one was acceptable for this picture to Sam. One day he called in great excitement and asked me to come over to his office. He could hardly wait in his excitement as I entered, and told me: "We got Willy Wyler!" I congratulated Sam and assured him that now he would have a great picture. How sad that he didn't live long enough to participate in the triumphal fulfillment of his dreams.

In Rome I watched Willy often and marvelled at his endless patience, his exquisite taste, and his artistic integrity with which he directed every scene. There wasn't the smallest detail which escaped his attention. He molded the performance of his actors as a sculptor molds his clay or a conductor molds a phrase, until after innumerable takes he got what he wanted. Once I told him that he reminded me of Toscanini, as only he could command six or seven rehearsals for a concert, when less famous conductors had to be satisfied with two or three, but for this reason he achieved the most perfect performances ever realized. He smiled modestly and said: "But I don't hear as well as he does." "True enough," I answered, "but you see better!"

I paid him a visit on an open set one day in Rome, when he was directing the scene where Messala remains alone in Ben-Hur's house, after he had arrested and dragged away his best friend and his family. Many takes had already been made. When he saw me, he came over pensively and asked me: "Could you express musically what goes through the mind of a man who has just sacrificed his best friend for his personal ambitions?" I said that I could. "Okay!" he said. "After lunch I'll do the scene differently and give you much more time." In the evening I was called to the production manager's office and was told that my presence on the set cost the company $10,000, as Mr. Wyler had spent the whole afternoon reshooting that scene. I was also informed that if I once more showed my face on the set when he was directing, they would ship me back to Hollywood!

When the dubbing was finished Wyler listened to it attentively, but never said a word about the music. I presumed that he didn't like it. Then came the first public showing of the film, which took place in Dallas. After a stormy audience reaction, he came to me smiling broadly and congratulated me on the music. "But Willy," I said, "what happened? For months you never said a word about it." "Ah, well," he answered, "my mother-in-law is a piano teacher in Dallas, and she just told me that the score is great, and she certainly knows everything about music." Like a good showman, he wanted to know the audience reaction. When the sound track was to be released, there was a great commotion among the executives because on the album cover my name seemed to be too large compared to his. One executive went to him timidly, fearing the worst, and showed him the cover for his approval. He blew up: "Why is my name so large compared to Rozsa's? After all, this is his music and not mine!" When Oscar time came, the first caller with his congratulations was Willy, and this meant far more to me than the statuette itself. During the last forty years I have worked with many directors, but I could name only four or five as truly great artists. Willy is one of them.

Miklos Rozsa

Left: In A House Divided *(1931), a paralyzed Walter Huston watches the growing attraction between his young wife and his son.*

Below: Bebe Daniels and John Barrymore in Counsellor At Law *(1933). Wyler had begun composing scenes from a selection of multiple angles.*

Right: Wyler's last "little picture" was Glamour *(1934), with Phillip Reed and Constance Cummings. It was based on an Edna Ferber Broadway story.*

ported by Uncle Carl. Wyler and Kohner formed a close friendship which would marinate into richness and permanence; Kohner's own destiny was as a successful talent agent in Hollywood. They shared an apartment in Yorkville—the German quarter of Manhattan's upper East Side. Together they translated the studio press releases into French and German for consumption abroad, where every bit of information concerning the suddenly enormously popular Hollywood product was coveted. And together they joined Universal's publicity department.

Wyler became a good enough publicist, but he grew restless as a provider of a mere support function for the product. He wanted to get involved with the product itself, and this could only be accomplished by going where the pictures were made. He pleaded for transfer to California, and finally Uncle Carl consented and gave Willy the train fare, which was incrementally deducted from Wyler's paychecks.

Willy arrived at Universal City in 1921, and it was an exciting time to be there. An incredibly young production supervisor named Irving Thalberg had given the studio operation a measure of sane regimentation where before there had only been chaos. To Universal's pictures he was also applying a lacquer of respectability. But Wyler was only an office boy during most of Thalberg's brief, but spectacular, tenure, and he had only one con-

frontation with the Boy Wonder. Thalberg asked him to read a novel that existed only in its German language edition, and to provide a synopsis for consideration as a Stroheim project. Thalberg berated Wyler for taking two days longer to prepare the synopsis than he had been allotted. In any event, no picture came of it. By the time Wyler had talked his way into an assistant directorship, Thalberg had departed the scene, and the picturemaking activity at Universal was again organized only loosely.

Being a Laemmle relative was as much a curse as a blessing for Wyler. It seemed to guarantee only his employment; the relatives were held in scornful contempt by most of the earnest technicians. Even though an assistant director had semilegitimate status at best, Willy felt fortunate to gain his first acceptance as nothing more than an assistant's assistant. In those days of varied film "programs," Universal ground out hundreds of featurettes annually—mostly two-reelers—and they became Wyler's training ground. Most of his activity was committed to the formulated Western adventures, and his jack-of-all-work routine often found him appearing as an extra. Apparently no hint of promise was detected in the performance of his various chores.

At one point, Universal fired him as an assistant director for reporting late. He likes to tell of how the company hired him back after he had picked up work in the extravagant Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer *Ben-Hur*. He had answered a call for all unemployed assistant directors to help govern the crowds for the chariot-racing sequence, and somehow this was translated into prestige. Soon Wyler was back at Universal, and in 1925 was given his first shot at directing a two-reel Western.

Pictures were an astonishingly youthful business then. After five years of eternal patience, Willy was all of twenty-three when given nominal command of *Crook Buster*, shot in the fall of 1925. When assigned his first feature-length Western only a year later, he had already directed eight two-reelers. Shooting of the featurettes began on Monday morning and wound up on Wednesday afternoon, with Thursdays and Fridays given to editing. Willy found that if he worked expeditiously, he might get most of Friday off, before reporting on Saturday for planning next week's project. The five-reel features in Universal's "Blue Streak" Western series allowed a full week for the principal photography. Wyler's first effort was *Lazy Lightning*, with Art Acord and Fay Wray. In a span of hardly more than two years, he directed approximately two dozen two-reelers and eight features. He did not become famous or even rich. When he was earning sixty dollars a week as a director, his cameraman was pocketing seventy-five. The primitive Western photoplays were the lowest order of studio sausage.

But conditions were excellent for learning craft. Wyler absorbed the basic grammar of cinematography, from which all meaningful experimentation must spring. He could make mistakes, and it wouldn't matter, so long as he stayed on schedule and under budget. He learned from his mistakes, while within him an inventiveness began to stir, though in moderation. Soon his employers rated him among their reliables. He agitated for promotion, and in June of 1928 he graduated from the corral to the big city. He was given a comedy assignment, *Anybody Here Seen Kelly*?—an agreeable program about an Irish cop, partly filmed in New York.

In early 1929, he completed two silents—a prize-fight yarn called *The Shakedown*, and a backstage romantic comedy, *The Love Trap*, with the blonde Laura La Plante, who was Universal's brightest

Alan Mowbray, Benita Hume, Frances Dee, and Francis Lederer in The Gay Deception *(1935). This screwball comedy garnered an Academy Award nomination for best film.*

star, and Neil Hamilton, who was handsome and equally popular. Then conversion became all the talk and much of the action, and both pictures were partially reshot as talkies, with consequences less than normally ludicrous. Indeed, it was fortunate that Wyler's emergence and the arrival of sound should coincide. Most of the incumbent directors resented and instinctively fought the challenge of the talkies. Wyler was not intimidated by the nature of speech or by his sudden responsibility toward it. Rather than mourn a dying art, he rejoiced in the advent of one auguring broader dimensions.

His first project, planned as an all-talking picture, was *Hell's Heroes*, filmed in the fall of 1929 and released early in 1930 after the audience adjustment was complete and talkies no longer had novelty value. For Wyler this picture represented a considerable leap. It was that sometime phenomenon that is widely recognized as a "director's picture" and was his first prestige success—the third of five screen adaptations of Peter B. Kyne's Western fable, *The Three Godfathers*. Wyler's is the least sentimentalized version. It also synthesizes his mastery of silent film. Much of the narrative progression is entirely visual without dialogue, most impressively the distended climactic sequence wherein the dying fugitive (played by Charles Bickford, an interesting actor new to the talkies) stumbles across the final stretch of desert before delivering the newborn orphan baby to the safe care of the frontier town. It's still a compelling film, and for scholars it must be regarded as the beginning of the essential Wyler career.

But it didn't exactly deliver Wyler from Hollywood's jungle of sleaziness. His next assignment—*The Storm*, a melodramatic remake of an old Universal silent—was not a project to inspire him, and no part of it transcended the workaday standard. Wyler will tell anybody that *The Storm* (featuring Lupe Velez and William Boyd, long before he hopped along as Cassidy) is his poorest film and one he wishes could be erased from his ledger. Yet none of it is inept. Even grudgingly, Wyler by this time had arrived at a level of sheer competence that was involuntary. The picture made money, and did not discourage his employers from continuing to "build" him.

The trouble was that in the Hollywood kitchen of that era, Universal was mainly a short-order cook, seldom courting culinary achievement. Even if such a company knew it nurtured a craftsman of developing abilities, it could only provide him an occasional "adult" assignment as a variance from a diet of pulp. For the balance of his Universal tenure, Wyler's more ambitious efforts appeared in rhythmic alternation with modestly budgeted commodity films. After an extended holiday from moviemaking (with some world travel to celebrate a more lucrative director's contract), he made *A House Divided* in 1931. It proved a strong picture—a problem play in an atmosphere of nautical domesticity. It was Wyler's first association with the great Walter Huston, who acted the hard-drinking antihero; and it also cast the die for Wyler's close and lasting friendship with Huston's son John, who provided most of the dialogue for *A House Divided*. Becoming more the autocratic director, Wyler shaped a turbulent mood piece with emphasis on the somber. It enhanced his reputation, but the picture was not popular and realized only a marginal profit; so Universal elected to hold its directorial prodigy in tighter rein.

Wyler's next credits have a humdrum ring. Yet *Tom Brown of Culver* (his only 1932 credit) is an efficiently tooled example from the youth-academy lathe; and *Her First Mate* is easily the best of the many endearing trifles that teamed the amiable Slim Summerville with the forlorn Zasu Pitts. Neither entry betrays an ounce of pretentiousness nor a wasted inch of film. The title role in the Culver film was taken by a new boy actually named Tom Brown. But it should be noted that as one of the cadets, Wyler cast the eighteen-year-old Tyrone Power, Jr., in his first film role, several years before his "discovery" by Darryl Zanuck for Twentieth Century-Fox.

Universal's Christmas release in 1933 was Wyler's film of Elmer Rice's exceptionally successful play, *Counsellor At Law*. The role of Jewish attorney George Simon had been a great personal stage triumph for Paul Muni, and the contemporary critical opinion was that John Barrymore was considerably miscast in the film role. Nor was the picture especially well-received or successful,

although it was acknowledged that Wyler had fared handsomely with his most prestigious directorial assignment yet. There was some critical carping that *Counsellor At Law* was merely another "photographed stage play," but that was to miss entirely the point of what Wyler was beginning to achieve, and would accomplish time and again.

Wyler, in fact, has never photographed a stage play in the stationary camera manner of so many early talkies. He is resolutely opposed to "opening up" a stage play on film if the process falsifies the material's dramatic charter. He will not take the story out of doors merely for the sake of photography, if its indoor confinement is not just a stage convention but part of its dramatic spell. He considered the claustrophobic nature of *Counsellor At Law* an important facet of its theatrical intensity.

The 1933 reviewers undervalued *Counsellor At Law* categorically. Viewed today, it is an arresting, energetic drama. The Barrymore performance dazzles without becoming overblown; and Wyler's hand is anything but static as his camera smoothly negotiates the office corridors. At the time Wyler was also working into a routine of shooting each scene from several angles, and composing the final print with editorial selectivity.

His first 1934 assignment was his last "little picture": *Glamour,* from an Edna Ferber story with a Broadway setting, a preening thing with Paul Lukas and Constance Cummings. It could neither improve nor damage the reputation of anyone connected with it, but Wyler was no longer content to mark time. Endowed with confidence, he also wanted something more than a consistent standard in his assignments. He craved independence. If he could not be the creative genesis of his own projects, he could at least choose his projects from several studio schedules. Free-lance directors

I was twelve years old and had been a struggling child actress for about five years. One day a call came from Samuel Goldwyn Studios' casting department for an interview with William Wyler, who was preparing to direct *These Three*, starring Merle Oberon, Miriam Hopkins, and Joel McCrea, which was Lillian Hellman's adaptation of her Broadway hit, *The Children's Hour*. Dozens of girls had already tested on film for the coveted role of Mary Tilford, the vicious, evil girl who destroys the lives of the three leading characters.

As I entered Mr. Wyler's office, I really had little hope. He was a quiet spoken man with penetrating eyes. Lillian Hellman was also present. After explaining the character of Mary Tilford in depth, he asked if I would do a "cold" reading. I was petrified, but knowing that there were at least six other girls waiting in the outer office to get the big chance, I took the scene, looked at it for a few minutes, and did my best. I could tell nothing about the reaction of either Mr. Wyler or Miss Hellman from their faces. At that point, Mr. Wyler said, "Let's all take a little walk," and shortly thereafter, I found myself in the largest, most impressive office I had ever seen—the inner sanctum of Samuel Goldwyn. I reread the scene for Mr. Goldwyn (hopefully, improving it a bit this time), and the only comment I remember was from Mr. Wyler who said, "Will you go sit on the couch on the other side of the room. We want to talk about you." After a few minutes, they called me back. Mr. Goldwyn asked if I would like to play this very important role. You can imagine my trembling, enthusiastic answer. Mr. Wyler said, "The part is yours," and handed me the script. That is my first recollection of William Wyler.

During the many weeks of shooting, Mr. Wyler was most demanding of all of his actors, had infinite patience, and never once raised his voice. Without ever putting it into specific terms, I realize now that each day he was teaching me something important about acting—the technique of how to move, when to build to a climax, how important it is to listen in a scene—but most of all, he taught me that integrity was absolutely vital in acting. He taught me that you can't fake. A scene, a line, a look, even a single moment must be from the heart.

Several months later, because of the great opportunity Mr. Wyler gave me, and his inspiring direction, I received an Academy Award nomination for "Best Supporting Player." I did not win—I was devastated. Once again, it was William Wyler who taught me a little bit more about show business and about life with a quotation from Rudyard Kipling. " 'If you can meet with triumph and disaster and treat those two imposters just the same,' then you may just be a fine actress one day."

Many years have gone by. My husband, Jack, and I have had happy days with Willy and Talli as friends. Our children went to school together, we crossed on the *Queen Elizabeth* to London, and even shared country food and laughter in the south of France.

But for me, I will always remember that first day when I shook hands and looked into the eyes of an incredible man—William Wyler.

Bonita Granville Wrather

A tribute from **Jill Ireland and Charles Bronson**

Right: The Dead End Kids—Huntz Hall in the middle, Leo Gorcey on the right—in Dead End *(1937), shot in a naturalistic style. The Kids were authentic adolescent lowlife.*

"Okay, print it. And let's move over to the other set."

The lights went off. I was left in the dark. The bustle and talk, the moving of equipment was all around me, but I still stood in the archway, feeling bewildered, worried. One take! It was over. One take!

I made my way through the maze of cables, the confusion, to where Willy was talking casually to a couple of people. I touched him on the arm.

"Willy—did you, uh—did you just give up?"

"What? Oh! No, no—it was fine. Just fine."

I was satisfied with that, for Willy was not a "that was marvelous, darling" type.

Almost everyone who has worked with Willy Wyler has a story about his excessive use of film: "Sixty-seven takes and then he says, 'Print take two!'"

It made actors sweat; it made them work harder in some cases; it reduced others to angry tears of frustration. Some would blow up, "What the hell do you *want*, Willy!"

And Willy, sitting quietly in his chair beside the camera, would say, "One more."

It is my opinion that Willy simply expected an actor to know his job. He guided, rather than directed. He wasted no time giving lessons in acting. He never inflated his own ego with monologues punctuated with bizarre, abstruse terminology. A scene might improve with repetition or it might deteriorate, and Willy was seeking the one that was "just right." There is no such thing, of course. There is no such thing as perfection. But Willy's sharp intuition, his sense of fitness, made him come damn close!

Dodsworth, of all the hundred-plus films I have made, is, without reservation, my favorite. I'm not saying this just for the occasion. It always has been.

Edith Cortright, "the other woman," is a wonderful character. She has those rare qualities, wisdom and balance. Two qualities which at that point in time I was sadly lacking.

I was involved in an ugly, painful court case over the custody of my little girl—who is now a grandmother!

So along with the other normal problems of the picture, there were schedule difficulties to allow for my appearances in court and my own emotional turmoil and lack of concentration.

Willy handled this without fuss and conversation. He never treated me with effusive concern or gave me an extra measure of kindness. He knew, I'm sure, that I was walking a very thin line.

We *worked* together. And with the others I would look to him after a scene and see that little shake of the head—"Once more."

Ruth Chatterton, in the extremely difficult, many-faceted character of Fran was very articulate, and she and Willy had many spectacular discussions. Quite often the odor of cordite permeated the set.

One hot afternoon she was standing ready for a close-up. The camera and Willy were only a few feet away. Willy was wearing white slacks and a white shirt.

"Willy," quoth the seething Ruth, "all that *white* you've got on—it's right in my line of vision, and it's very distracting."

"Would you like me to leave the studio, Miss Chatterton?"

"Indeed I would, but unfortunately I'm afraid it can't be arranged."

Rumor hath it that Miss C. received a large bouquet of roses later that evening.

So, everyone has his little yarns about Willy. He was not, to me, the buddy-buddy coach on the sidelines boosting egos. His wit was sharp, his attention and concentration on the work at hand were total. His taste was impeccable. And his smile was often (forgivably) an evil little grin of satisfaction.

Of his monumental achievements few words need to be said. There they are, right up there on the screen.

But to all the expressions of admiration, thanks, and gratitude, may I add just "one more?"

Mary Astor

Walter Huston and Mary Astor in Dodsworth *(1936), a portrait of Middle America between the world wars. The film brought Wyler the first of twelve Academy Award nominations for best director.*

were not rare, and he decided to become one. But first to fulfill his contractual obligation to Universal, he filmed *The Good Fairy* late in 1934. It was released early the next year—an exquisite romantic picture with a glittering screenplay fashioned by Preston Sturges, who became one of Willy's closest friends.

Wyler fought with Margaret Sullavan, its star, while falling in love with her. They married impetuously, but kept on fighting. It rankled him that he was nowhere near her income bracket; she was Universal's highest paid star. But theirs was a clash of equally fierce wills, and cynics gave the union six months. It lasted longer than that, but not much. Later Sullavan would champion Wyler as director, citing *The Good Fairy* as the only one among her early screen performances that still gave her satisfaction. Certainly she is enchanting in the first striking instance of Wyler adroitly shaping a vehicle for an accomplished female star. The Molnar comedy also exemplifies Wyler's mastery of narrative tempo for film. He does not confuse pace with speed, as so many of his contemporaries did. It's the rhythm that counts. *The Good Fairy* doesn't rush, but neither does it dawdle: Always on the move, it emulates the light, gay spirit of the play with a cinematic technique that never calls attention to itself.

Those virtues were also underscored in Wyler's first and only thirties' chore as a free-lance director. Jesse Lasky, then producing autonomously for Fox, offered Wyler an original screenplay, *The Gay Deception*. Although the story got an Academy nomination, the picture today is wrongly neglected. It is a screwball joy, impeccably orchestrated by Wyler—a frothy business inhabiting an elegant New York hotel (called the Waldorf-Plaza, for fictional compromise). That it was not especially successful at the box office may be partly attributed to the studio, which seemed to just throw it away.

But the picture's manifold charms did not escape the attention of Samuel Goldwyn. In seven years Goldwyn had employed twenty directors in the making of twenty-four talking films, only a handful of which had won high regard. Now Sam wanted a firm director to give his sequence of productions a characteristic shape and balance. Besides having succumbed to the charms of *The Gay Deception*, Goldwyn (who had not then met Wyler) was probably aware of Willy's accelerating notoriety as a taskmaster for actors. The Anna Sten debacle behind him, Goldwyn was experimenting anew with England's Merle Oberon. Furthermore, Miriam Hopkins, now Goldwyn's leading contract star, was herself a near-legend for being difficult. Goldwyn proposed Wyler's joining him under a long-term arrangement, and to initiate the contract with a screen version of Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour* that would enlist Hopkins and Oberon. The pragmatist in him caused Wyler to abandon his quest for independence. Goldwyn was a prestige producer, and he was offering the kind of

money Willy hadn't speculated on. He signed with Sam, but bargained for the right to accept work elsewhere on occasion.

The Children's Hour with its theme of lesbianism was a theatrical scandal, and Goldwyn was ridiculed for having purchased an unfilmable play. But playwright Hellman insisted her drama was essentially about the vicious power of a lie that could ruin innocent lives. She addressed her own screenplay to that principle, eliminating the lesbianism, and Wyler directed it beautifully. He extracted extraordinary performances from Merle Oberon, Joel McCrea, little Bonita Granville, and especially Miriam Hopkins, with whom he had surprising rapport. (In later years he employed her often as a character actress.) Retitled *These Three*, it was one of the best films of 1936. His next was arguably *the* best for the same year.

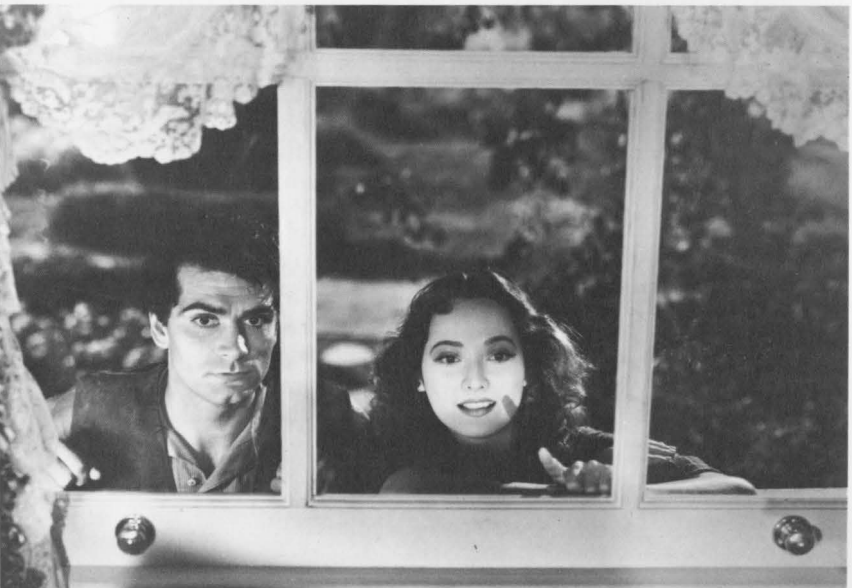
Dodsworth is Wyler's first masterpiece: intelligent, forcefully adult, and literally and visually dramatic. Walter Huston, Ruth Chatterton, Mary Astor, Paul Lukas, and Maria Ouspenskaya give textbook examples of good screen acting, when the expectation (especially in 1936) would have been oversized, stagey performances. *These Three* had hinted at the promise of the Wyler-Toland collaboration, and *Dodsworth* is its early fulfillment, with the deep focus first attaining prominence for dramatic effect. Has the picture aged in four decades? Only as vintage wine. It is perhaps the screen's most alluring account of middle-class, Middle-American mores between the two World Wars. It was the first of Wyler's twelve Academy nominations for direction, and it persuaded Samuel Goldwyn that he had found his ideal catalyst.

Sam now wanted Willy to direct *everything*. Right after *Dodsworth* finished shooting, he ordered Wyler to take over *Come and Get It*, from which Howard Hawks had just been fired (or which he had quit; you can choose either version). Wyler refused, until he was persuaded that, under the conditions specified in his contract, he *couldn't* refuse. Except for the convenience of Wyler's obligation to him, Goldwyn would likely have placated Hawks. Willy completed the picture grudgingly, vowing not to take credit for it—nor does he, although Hawks and Wyler are officially cocredited.

To Willy...whose films gave us the best years of our lives.
Paul W. Keyes

Bottom: Laurence Olivier as Heathcliff and Merle Oberon as Cathy in Wuthering Heights *(1939). On the nineteenth take of one sequence Olivier exploded: "Good God, man, what do you* want?"

The ball sequence in Jezebel *(1938) with Bette Davis and Henry Fonda. The small-scale Civil War epic was Warners' answer to* Gone With the Wind. *Davis won the Best Actress Oscar.*



Hawks also disowns the film, but there is double irony here: *Come and Get It* is in many ways an excellent film, a reliable Edna Ferber dynasty narrative, a vigorous, colorful saga of lumberjacking that suggests a unified directorial vision.

Although Goldwyn maintained that Wyler had salvaged *Come and Get It*, he became cautious and finally reluctant to give vocal credit to Wyler, whose rising reputation engaged Sam's jealousy. Once when Willy was introduced at a party as the man who had made *Dodsworth*, Sam intervened with the claim, "*I* made that picture. Wyler only directed it." They became warring egos, coexisting uneasily with abundant mutual respect. Wyler bent—contorted himself diplomatically—not to be

forced into some of the projects Goldwyn *wanted* him to direct. He parried *Woman Chases Man* and two Gary Cooper pictures, the ridiculous *The Story of Marco Polo*, and the slightly more tolerable *The Cowboy and the Lady*.

In 1937 Wyler did film Sidney Kingsley's steaming *Dead End* for Goldwyn, cashing another winner. Here the style was committed to a throbbing naturalism, almost a sociological documentary. There were serviceable star performances by Sylvia Sidney and Joel McCrea. But Wyler employed to more stunning effect his subordinate players—notably Humphrey Bogart, Claire Trevor, Marjorie Main, and the half-dozen Dead End Kids, who were the authentic adolescent lowlife of the original Broadway production. Sylvia Sidney would later claim that working with the demanding Wyler had caused her to lose interest in a film career. But during the *Dead End* production she showed Willy the script of a love story Walter Wanger wanted to produce as a film, with her and Charles Boyer in the leads. Wyler read the script and agreed with Sidney that she (probably) and Boyer (definitely) were wrong for the roles, but that it could make a great picture, and he knew he wanted to direct it.

The script was an adaptation of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* that Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur had impulsively whipped up during their strange, brief tenure as a writer-director-producer duo at Paramount. Initially they planned to film it themselves. Later they sold it outright to Wanger. With an image of Katharine Hepburn as Catherine Earnshaw fixed in his mind, Wyler attempted to coax Goldwyn into purchasing the script from Wanger, after Sylvia Sidney had officially rejected it. Goldwyn read the screenplay with some fascination, but balked at purchase upon discovering it was a tragedy. All of his Anna Sten pictures had been tragedies (in more than one way), and now he wanted only happy endings. And that was that, or so it seemed. But Goldwyn was sufficiently generous: He permitted Wyler to accept an outside assignment, directing Bette Davis in *Jezebel* for Warners.

This, too, is a thirties' masterpiece, built entirely around a virtuoso star performance of extraordinary complexity (which won the Best Actress Oscar for 1938). Davis battled Wyler but in their moments of quieter private exchange, she said she'd prefer being directed only by him. Wyler was amazed that Warners gave him blank-check authority for the picture. By that time he was already a scandal for his addiction to multiple takes, while Warners was the most economical studio, intolerant of wasted time and film. But *Jezebel* was Warners' haughty answer to Selznick's long-delayed *Gone With the Wind* venture. It was a Civil War epic on a smaller scale but hardly a less sumptuous one. While proving his rousing command of costume spectacle, Wyler (aided by John Huston) freely embellished a script fashioned by other hands, building a great ball sequence out of mere textual suggestion.

The thought struck Wyler that Bette Davis's authority, like Hepburn's, could render her convincingly English, and he showed her the Hecht-MacArthur script for *Wuthering Heights*. She wanted to do it and mounted her own campaign to get Jack Warner to buy it from Wanger. When Wyler reported to Goldwyn that Warner was on the verge of acquiring it, Sam finally became interested. He asked, can Merle Oberon play Catherine? Knowing how the cards were stacked for Goldwyn's play of the hand, Wyler said she would be splendid. Goldwyn made the purchase from Wanger and scheduled it as Wyler's next assignment. As matters progressed, Oberon played Cathy, and she *was* splendid.

Wyler now admits that he became acquainted with the Hecht-MacArthur *Wuthering Heights* before he had read Emily Brontë's, and that it probably was a good thing. He was not intimidated by a literary classic, and for picture purposes the screenplay improved on the novel. Other than Sam's ordering a reluctant David Niven (his contract player) into the pallid Edgar Linton role, the producer gave Wyler an entirely free hand to cast the rest of the picture. Willy paid a lengthy visit to England for wholesale recruiting, and already had a vivid notion of his Heathcliff.

A few years earlier Wyler had seen the young Laurence Olivier in *The Green Bay Tree* on Broadway and knew he wanted to work with him in

Warmest wishes
Ginny and Hank Mancini

pictures. He was then only vaguely aware that Olivier had washed out in an earlier attempt to become an American screen star. When Olivier initially resisted the Heathcliff role, Wyler suspected the first Hollywood failure as the reason. Later he realized that Olivier did not want to be separated from Vivien Leigh, to whom he was not then married; and in that morally righteous time, she could not expect to accompany him to America for a filming assignment. Believing it an inspired idea, Wyler offered Vivien Leigh the good but subordinate female role of Isabella. He told her she could not possibly get a better role with which to launch her American film career. She rejected the bait, and Wyler is still amused by his conviction that she was making a dreadful mistake.

Of course Olivier finally consented to the occasion, and his Heathcliff is one of the screen's great performances. Geraldine Fitzgerald played Isabella gorgeously, and all of Wyler's cast were right on the button: Flora Robson, Leo G. Carroll, Donald Crisp, Hugh Williams, Cecil Kellaway. Even more importantly, Wyler shaped a picture with visual sweep and unthrottled passion. Critics everywhere saluted it as the screen's most haunting love story. Today even Wyler consents to the argument that it may have been overpraised. Even though it did not become a prodigious commercial event, it edged out *Gone With the Wind* for the New York Film Critics' citation as Best Picture for 1939—a remarkable denouement for a venture that had been marked by more than the standard quotient for dissent. Wyler continued to struggle with his producer over the romantic/tragic resolution, finally capitulating to Goldwyn's whim for a happy ending; yet the briefly glimpsed image of Cathy and Heathcliff's ghostly reunion barely enters the consciousness and does not seem alien to the tragic spirit.

Wuthering Heights provides the archetypical example of Wyler's effective "madness without method" in dealing with his players. For one scene defining Heathcliff's wretching agony, Wyler submitted a seemingly letter-perfect Olivier to nineteen consecutive takes and then said, "Well, let's try it again." Olivier's monumental patience cracked at last: "Good God, man, what do you *want*?" Wyler managed a despairing smile and said almost timidly, "I want you to be better." The cameras rolled once more, and Olivier was *better*. After the abrasive exchange, his reading was shaded with the frustration that was at the very core of Heathcliff. The twentieth take was in the release print.

The achievement of *Wuthering Heights* admitted Willy to the exclusive circle of super-directors, and his fellows regarded him as a late-blooming wonder. This rekindled his desire for independence, but with his maturity had come patience; and both were attributed to a serenity in his private life that was in contrast to his embattled professionalism.

Before filming *Wuthering Heights*, Willy had married Margaret Tallichet, a beautiful Texas girl ostensibly "discovered" by Carole Lombard for David Selznick, who had used her in bit roles. Talli, as the film community would come to know her, had entered briefly into the Scarlett O'Hara reckoning, and also had played a few B-picture leads. But she extinguished her career when she became Mrs. William Wyler. Their first child was named Cathy, after the heroine of *Wuthering Heights*. The Wyler marriage, one of the filmland's most reassuring ones (now in its thirty-eighth year) would eventually show three daughters and two sons, one of whom died in early childhood.

After Willy and Talli's deferred honeymoon, Wyler completed without credit (at his own insistence) some films that other men had directed for Goldwyn. His next official credit for Goldwyn was his first Western in fully a decade, *The Westerner*, with Gary Cooper. Walter Brennan (as Judge Roy Bean) took his third Oscar as a supporting actor. It was a huge success financially, and otherwise proficient, but in no way remarkable. It might have resembled a comedown for Wyler except for the release of his second Bette Davis film. Again, Goldwyn had loaned Wyler to Warners, and *The Letter* was hastened into release for the 1940 Academy sweepstakes. Destined for seven nominations but without certification, *The Letter* is an almost flawlessly directed sexual melodrama, a convincing argument for the prewar adult story film. Atmospherically it has a bewitching convic-

Top: Bette Davis takes revenge on her faithless lover in The Letter *(1940), Wyler's realization of Somerset Maugham's play about sex and guilt in the tropics.*

Bottom: Charles Dingle, Patricia Collinge, Carl Benton Reid, Bette Davis in The Little Foxes *(1941). Wyler and Davis were nominated for Academy Awards; neither won.*

tion; the viewer may sweat in acknowledgment of the heat at the rubber plantation where Davis and her satellites dress all in white and keep fanning themselves.

Goldwyn had loaned Wyler for Davis because he wanted Davis for Wyler. After Sam's purchase of *The Little Foxes*, Lillian Hellman again accomplished her own screen adaptation, and Wyler constructed from her text a marvelous study of avarice—one of the most stunning films of 1941, or any year. Yet throughout the production Davis and Wyler had been at crossed swords over the playing style and interpretation of Regina Giddens. In her 1962 autobiography, Davis implied that the experience of *The Little Foxes* brought about their permanent creative estrangement, which she regretted.

In the 1941 autumn every Hollywood studio was urging Goldwyn to loan Wyler for one pet project or another, and Sam consented to send him to MGM for a picture Willy much wanted to do. *Mrs. Miniver* was no ordinary picture even as it was being written for the screen. It was calculated to prepare the American people for wartime alliance with Great Britain, emotionally and psychologically. The progress of its production was audited by President Franklin Roosevelt. There was hardly any story, only the essence of everyday British life. The theme of domestic heroism was embodied in a single English family; the time was the 1940 of Dunkirk and the beginning of Hitler's air blitzkrieg against the British Empire.

The result is only too well known. *Mrs. Miniver* went before the cameras in November, and the United States was at war with the axis powers when production was barely under way. Completed in the spring of 1942, it was hurried into midyear release on the president's urging, becoming the year's most popular film as well as the most influential one. It dominated the Oscars and all the other awards competitions. Besides winning recognition as the best picture, it brought Wyler the first of his three Oscars as best director.

Talli Wyler accepted the Oscar for her husband because in early 1943 he was in the Air Force, a filmmaker in the European theater of operations with commission as a major. His absence from Hollywood and its commerce spanned the duration

A tribute from **Ryan and Tatum O'Neal**

Cathy O'Donnell, Harold Russell in The Best Years of Our Lives *(1946). Russell was a soldier who lost both hands in the war. Under Wyler's direction, this nonprofessional won an Academy Award for best supporting actor.*

There is no greater thrill for any actor than to work for a talented director. I've been lucky. I've worked with a few of them, and high on the list I'd have to put Willy Wyler. He was different, much different from Howard Hawks or Billy Wilder or Joe Mankiewicz or Elia Kazan. He was very different...he was Willy Wyler.

I worked with him in the movie *Detective Story*, which was based on the New York play. In the movie we used many of the actors who worked in the New York production, namely Joseph Wiseman, Lee Grant, and Michael Strong. To prepare myself I did the play at the Sombrero Playhouse for a week. Willy came over to see the production, and saw it several times, but never said anything. As a matter of fact Willy rarely said anything but "Do it again." He would watch a scene very carefully, squint his eyes, and say "Do it again."

Willy is legendary for having more takes of a scene than any other director, but I saw none of this when we did *Detective Story*. Since the entire cast was well prepared and the sets were simple, we were days ahead of schedule on the first week. The film was shot in record time. The last day of shooting Willy was actually rushing. He was on his way to go skiing. I never knew whether he liked the work I was doing or not.

It wasn't until years later when I bumped into Willy that he said to me, "Oh, by the way, Kirk, I saw *Detective Story* on television last night. You were good, very good." This is the only compliment he paid me, and this happened years after we had finished the picture. I don't think I know much more about Willy now than I did the first day I worked with him, except that he has a tremendous sense of humor which is always lurking behind those darting eyes. He is a bit of an enigma to me, but he is still one hell of a director.

Kirk Douglas

of the war—three years. These were not easy years. As a documentary filmmaker, Wyler was in the eye of war's hurricane, vulnerable to every mortal peril. The experience of war influenced him emotionally, intellectually, philosophically, and also physically: An explosion permanently impaired the hearing in his right ear.

Very few established American movie directors actually went off to war. But some of those who did—notably Ford, Stevens, Capra, and Wyler—wrought some of their most notable achievements because their work was pure. Without the technical legerdemain and other convenient appointments of studio operation, they relied on their elementary training for transmitting to film the raw stuff of life. For Wyler, the conditions were not unlike those in which he had made quickie silent Westerns; but the grim reality of war and the depth of Wyler's own humanity augured a very different sort of film. Deservedly the most famous of Wyler's war documentaries is the forty-two-minute *Memphis Belle*, the account of one bomber crew's twenty-fifth mission over Germany. It is feasibly *the* greatest war film. James Agee said he "could not guess which shots were reenacted and which were straight records."

Wyler came home from war in 1945 still owing Samuel Goldwyn one picture, but having no enthusiasm for *The Bishop's Wife* that the producer was urging on him. The sobering ordeal of war, which is now seen to have divided the Wyler screen career

into two dissimilar halves, had put him in a frame of mind that was not immediately tuned for comedy. Furthermore, he had entered into creative association with fellow war veterans Capra and Stevens: As an independent triumvirate they would direct, produce, and *control* their own pictures. They also set up a releasing arrangement through RKO similar to Goldwyn's with the same company. To fulfill his obligation to Goldwyn, Willy talked his way out of *The Bishop's Wife* and into *The Best Years of Our Lives*. The dilemma of the returning veteran was a real concern of Wyler's, and he was intrigued by the potential of the "original story" MacKinlay Kantor had produced under a Goldwyn commission—actually a novel in verse called *Glory for Me*. The eminent Robert E. Sherwood freely adapted this material into the screenplay for *The Best Years of Our Lives*. Wyler was the ideal director for this, perhaps his most famous, film.

The initial conception was not of a picture that would run to almost three hours. *The Best Years of Our Lives* expanded in scope and vision while it was in production. It is Wyler's most directorially modified project—a pictorial odyssey often at variance with the design of the screenplay. Even the photoplay's most eloquent passage, in which the exbombardier played by Dana Andrews visits a graveyard of bomber planes, was not in the shooting script. Wyler discovered the junked planes by chance, and his creative imagination took it from there.

The Best Years of Our Lives was proclaimed an instant classic. Fredric March's much-honored performance as the infantry sergeant reclaiming his bank position remains a shining testimonial to his skill and integrity as a serious actor. It was the role that transformed March, always a reliable leading man, into one of the screen's commanding character actors. But the Dana Andrews account is almost its equal; under Wyler's care, journeyman actors consistently attain astonishing conviction. The film is uniformly well acted, and there was no friction between Wyler and Myrna Loy, who had been reluctant to work for him. (She had said "I hear William Wyler is a sadist," to which Goldwyn replied, "Oh, that isn't true at all. He's just a very mean fellow.") Harold Russell's nonprofessionalism is immediately evident, but Wyler refused to have the maimed sailor portrayed in any kind of *actorish* way. He said that even if done well by someone who really had his own hands, it would always be acting. Russell convinces us; he's the real thing.

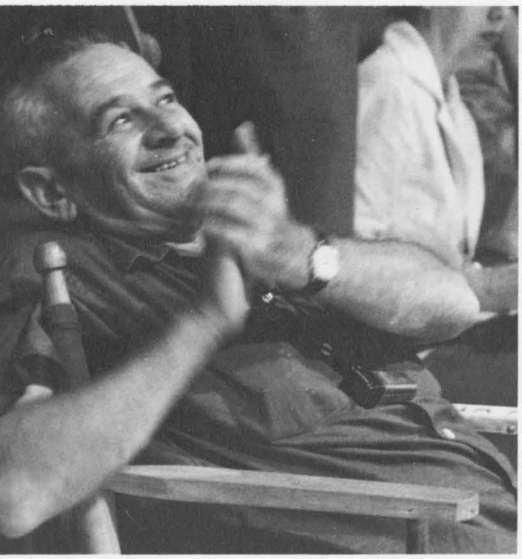
It was a picture for its time, synchronized to the immediate postwar sentiment. There was always a mawkishness in the script, now more glaring. It is an inflated film, for which the producer must bear primary responsibility; nor was Wyler entirely satisfied with its final shape. It is too pat for him; the happy endings for the three returning veterans are not all logical. Wyler would have the Fred Derry character (Andrews) resolved tragically and would have ended the picture with Derry's silent communion with the junked bombers.

Yet on photographic terms this last of the Wyler-Toland collaborations is unquestionably a masterpiece. Again James Agee's observations are particularly apt: "William Wyler has always seemed to me an exceedingly sincere and good director; he now seems one of the few great ones. He has come back from the war with a style of great purity, directness, and warmth, about as cleanly devoid of mannerism, haste, superfluous motion, aesthetic or emotional overreaching, as any I know." (To any tabulation of Wylerian virtues, I would add the superlative taste that has been his hallmark.)

Wyler's Paramount films of the fifties (including *The Heiress*, issued late in 1949) are cumulatively the best advertisement of the studio system as it survived into that era. As his own supervisor, Wyler protected his ventures with the best personnel and technology available for every element of organized filmmaking. The long tenure with Goldwyn was doubtless beneficial to him in various ways, and is the likely source of Orson Welles's designation of Wyler as the great producer among directors. Wyler now says he did not enjoy being his own producer. He would have much preferred someone else taking that responsibility while he concerned himself with shaping the film, but it was his only means to the creative ownership of his work.

However, the industrial regimentation of theatrical films was changing drastically. By order of the Supreme Court, producers could no longer be their exhibitors. In the fifties the exhibitors' ability to mutilate and otherwise tamper with films after their distribution came into play. Predictably, the exhibitors became a powerful lobbying force in determining the very heartbeat of production. Wyler's first Paramount entry was not affected; yet the commercial lethargy that befell the exquisitely made *The Heiress* did not encourage the theatrical destiny of his next effort, the film version of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (retitled simply *Carrie*, apparently to appease exhibitors who didn't want patrons to mistake it for a picture about a nun). When Wyler and Paramount reached an impasse after shooting had been completed over many aspects of *Carrie*, the picture went on the shelf and stayed there almost two years. Mean-

A tribute from **Charlton Heston**



The director as a happy spectator during shooting of a sequence from Ben-Hur. *Filming took ten months.*

Charlton Heston in the ship sequence from Ben-Hur *(1959). Roman epics became a pastime in the fifties. "This time," Wyler said, "I'll make them care about the people." Heston won an Oscar.*

William Wyler sent an emissary to my home in Napa to report to him on my availability for and ability to work on a script for a motion picture based on my book, *The Friendly Persuasion*. I knew nothing about scriptwriting and had seen few movies. I had never heard of William Wyler, which in itself is an admission of my ignorance of the cinema. Wyler knew nothing about me except that I had written a book he wanted to film. He also knew that I was a Quaker, and he had a very high regard for those peculiar people.

Not only was my knowledge of movie producers almost nil, but what knowledge I had centered about a cliché: When a writer goes to Hollywood he "prostitutes his art." My art was pretty young (though I wasn't), and I did not want to sully it at so tender an age by putting it out at once for hire.

I was invited to come to Hollywood for one week only. For one week I hoped my art would prove strong enough to resist temptation.

Mr. Wyler—I never learned to call him Willy, nor did he ever call me anything but Miss West—was not my preconceived picture of a movie director. He was a quiet man, a little deaf, gray-haired, of medium height with blue, listening eyes. No puttees, cigars, megaphones.

At the end of a week of writing I was asked to stay on for another six weeks. Finally, as it came about, I stayed on the job, sometimes as "technical advisor" (Don't have dried apricots on trays in Indiana. No spires on Friends Meeting Houses anywhere.), sometimes as scriptwriter, till the filming was completed.

In the nine months I worked for and with Mr. Wyler, I was, if prostituted, a very happy hooker. Whether or not that nine months of association with a Quaker made Wyler less an admirer of Quakers, he has never said.

Prostitution in film writing occurs when the writer who creates characters through love (like God, the writer loves even his villains) is asked for reasons of commercial expediency to manufacture a different character. The writer then, loving at director's command still another person, for pay, becomes a professional trick-turner. Better paid than most, but occupationally related.

Wyler never asked this. He saw into the nature of the characters I had created whose drama he was presenting and asked only, "Through what action can these people be most truly and tellingly represented?"

In filming the story of a Quaker, the high point of whose life was his refusal to use force, Wyler was faced with a cinematic and personal problem. His star was Gary Cooper, a man whose trademark was action. "People expect me to *do* something," Gary said plaintively. Wyler had thus the double problem of satisfying a star and of creating an acceptable drama in which the high point lay in the hero's refusal to act. He had also a scriptwriter who wouldn't hear of plans—even those short of lethal—for Gary to win the Battle of Finney's Ford singlehandedly.

The Times of London, writing of the movie that resulted, and in particular of Wyler's enormous talent, listed other of his films, noting his ability as a director to elicit from actors performances unequaled by them before. Audrey Hepburn in *Roman Holiday* was one such, Teresa Wright in *The Little Foxes*, another. Gary Cooper had never before, said *The Times*, equaled the performance he gave for Wyler in *Friendly Persuasion*.

The Times did not, of course, mention Wyler's influence on scriptwriters. This is covert action not open to public inspection. Working with Wyler made me a better writer. I was no longer, after my work with him, content with editors who never asked me any questions about the manuscripts I submitted. I was too mulish to be *told*; but I enjoyed justifying an action, a timing, a phrasing. Or, if I could not do so, I enjoyed discovering an action, a timing, a phrasing which carried my story and revealed its characters better than the original. This scrutiny Wyler asked of me.

I had never before worked with anyone. I had never shown a piece of my writing to a soul before I sent it to an editor. I had expected to find working with someone else difficult, if not intolerable. I discovered, working for Wyler, the joys known by those who achieve by concerted action: symphony players, cathedral builders, sports teammates. It can only happen when persons are equally committed to the same goal. It can only happen for a writer when someone else is willing and able to enter deeply into his concept. Wyler did this.

A director gains a reputation as one able to draw remarkable performances from players only if he first of all understands and feels for the character the actor is playing. Wyler had to understand Heathcliff before he could direct Olivier in his masterful performance as that character. Bette Davis was a great Jezebel because Wyler understood Jezebel. Cooper was a fine Jess because Wyler had in himself some of the characteristics of that humorous music-loving Quaker.

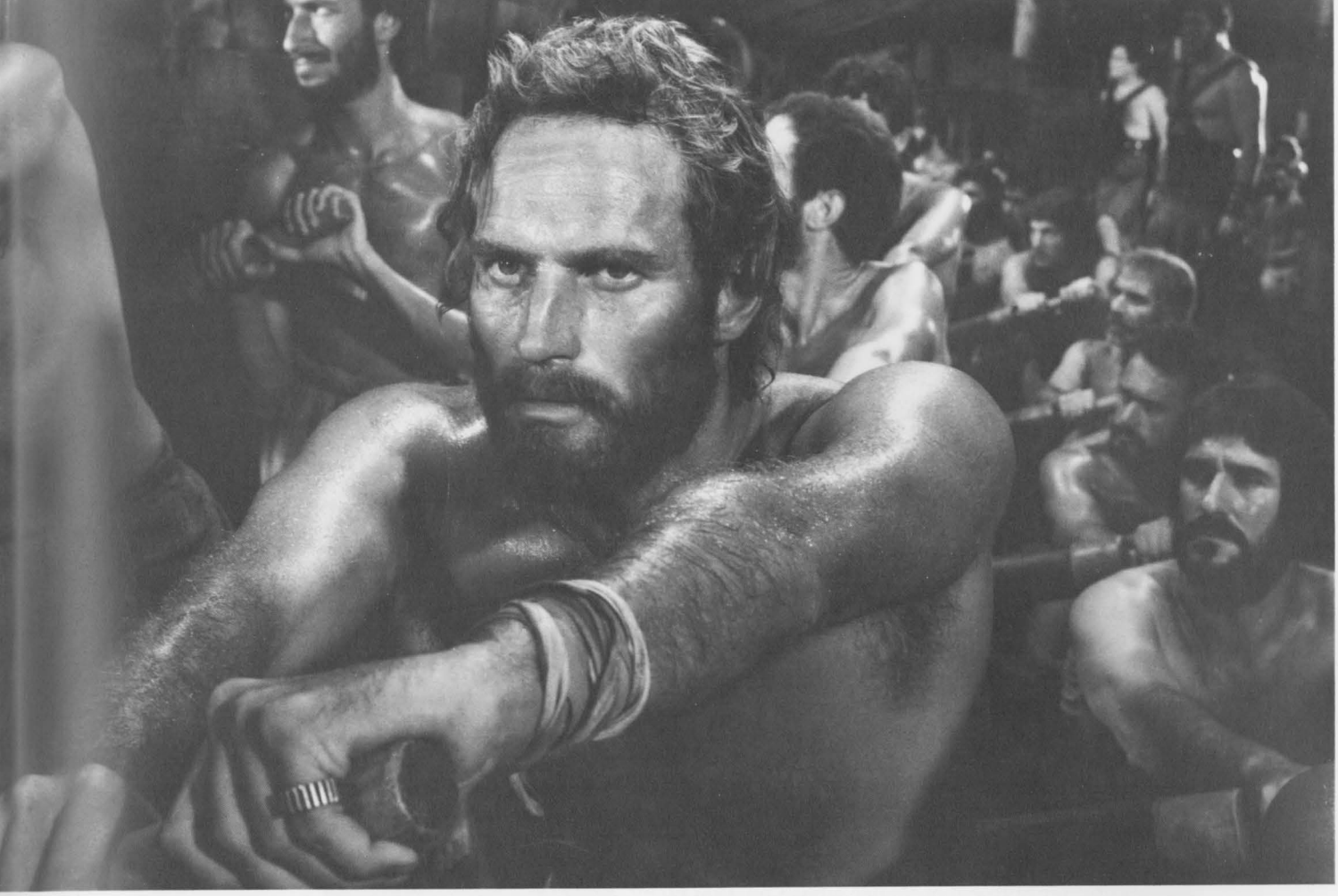
In addition, of course, to understanding the character, the director has to have a knowledge of the craft of acting which makes it possible for him to help the actor to bring alive by the use of his voice and body the being he only pretends to be. I saw this Wyler magic taking place day after day on the sets: Wyler causing the people I had imagined to come to life before my eyes. It was a wizardry far exceeding witchcraft with pumpkin and mice.

I can remember Wyler's voice becoming stern only twice when talking to me. Once, thinking I had become an experienced writer for the movies, I began to suggest camera angles in my script. "You can safely leave camera angles to me, Miss West," he said.

The second was when he asked me to help an actor to understand better the nature of Quakerism. After some abstract palaver on my part in which I expressed my doubt of being able to do this, Wyler said, "Don't talk. Just go and be one."

Some writers, I suppose (Dickens did), read or watched others read their writing, and so have the pleasure of seeing smiles occasioned by their humor, eyes glint when the going gets tough. I had never had this pleasure until I watched Willy (I'm getting older and bolder) read through a scene of my writing.

A good director must be, I suppose, half-actor, half-writer. The great director, and Wyler is that, must have the additional ability to build what began with words, and is expressed by persons assuming the roles first fashioned by words, into a whole which has meaning. This view "from above" Wyler had. He once said to me, "All great books, all fine films,



have a message. Not that the writer or filmmaker may have been conscious of it. But the book that lasts, the film that is remembered, is more than aimless activity. The viewer, the reader, remembers after he has closed the book and left the theater what all the words and voices and acts were saying. If they were saying anything. Otherwise they forget."

Wyler never told me what he considered the "message" to be of the film he made called *Friendly Persuasion*. I *think* that he wanted it to say, "There are times when the courageous man who refrains helps advance the world's good more than does the man of violence."

He did not do this baldly and cheerlessly. No tub thumping. Much laughing. Some questionable hijinx. Human beings, in fact. And he made this statement in spite of the fact that it was a time when anything less than a ferocious militaristic stance was un-American; with a star whose reputation had been built on aggressive action; and, above all, with a scriptwriter who had never seen a script until she wrote one.

As *The Times* said, Wyler "impresses especially with (his) employment of new talent."

With greater talent, perhaps a better film. But then I would have missed a joyous time of learning.

Jessamyn West

while Wyler's third Paramount picture—*Detective Story*—was filmed and put into release in 1951. Ultimately Wyler capitulated on the matter of *Carrie* and had no authority over its final editing. The picture failed dismally at the box office in 1952. In any event, actual directorial omnipotence had become a myth.

Measured artistically, *The Heiress* is a most remarkable film and *Carrie* barely less so. The style of the one is addressed visually to the essential literary realism of Henry James as is the other to the naturalism of Dreiser. James was an impeccable prose stylist in his social reportage of aristocracy, and *The Heiress* is an impeccable film. *Carrie* offers a pictorial equivalent to the rawness of Dreiser's turn-of-the-century Middle America, and Wyler's desire to depict that society motivated the film. It has been foolishly compared, unfavorably, with *A Place in the Sun,* as if the two Dreisers were companion pieces on literature's shelf. *Carrie* cries out for revaluation as the fine work that it is, even in a form that Wyler all but disowned. Olivier's towering performance as Hurstwood is, if anything, too strong: *Carrie* becomes *his* tragedy. Nevertheless, the Jennifer Jones enactment of the title role should not go ignored, nor should Eddie Albert's.

The Heiress, though, is a festival of great acting. No performance by an American actress is more subtly developed, nor given with such understated control, than Olivia de Havilland's devastated

With admiration and respect
Mr. and Mrs. Martin Ritt

Peter O'Toole, Audrey Hepburn in How To Steal a Million *(1966). Shooting in France, Wyler liked the noon starts. "I find it hard to watch a love scene at 9 A.M., much less play one."*

Catherine Sloper. The Jamesian portraits by Ralph Richardson and Miriam Hopkins are superb. The controversial performance (and its casting—Wyler defends both) is Montgomery Clift's fortune-hunting Morris Townsend. Wyler claims that in the stage adaptation (the basis of the film) Morris was written and played entirely too obviously. He couldn't be expected to seduce either the audience or the plain-Jane heiress. Wyler felt that an actor of Clift's attractiveness was essential. Critics found this normally authoritative young actor not only too attractive, but lacking in assurance—exactly the quality Wyler wanted him to convey in characterization.

Detective Story was both a critical and financial hit, and rather atypical of Wyler whose custom by now was to commit at least a year of solid work to each film. He shot *Detective Story* in just six weeks, concentrating on long takes for attaining dramatic intensity, relying on an unobtrusively mobile camera. Here is a slice-of-life melodrama, harshly lighted, whose grainy power offers such a contrast to *The Heiress*. The trenchant acting seems all of one piece—Kirk Douglas, Eleanor Parker, Joseph Wiseman, Lee Grant, Michael Strong, William Bendix, and other vivid types.

Also uncharacteristic of its director but in quite another manner is *Roman Holiday*, the exceptionally popular 1953 film which showcased a new actress for the American screen more effectively than any since Vivien Leigh's emergence as Scarlett O'Hara. With the reliable Gregory Peck aboard for all that was needed in the way of marquee protection, Wyler sculpted another graceful vehicle, and the beguiling Audrey Hepburn proved entirely worthy of all the attention, exquisitely fitting into its contours. It really is a slight film, enhanced, but not undone, by some of the travelogue aspects then coming into vogue. It echoes vibrantly the Wyler of *The Good Fairy* and *The Gay Deception*.

The last of Wyler's Paramount cycle, *The Desperate Hours*, is also his least appreciated and is certainly flawed, but deserves better. An expertly orchestrated domestic melodrama, it builds to an exciting climax. It seems almost foolproof in its commercial programming, yet was only an ordinary financial success. It was easily one of the best films of 1955 (a lean year), but did not enter into any of the prize competitions, although it probably contained the season's finest acting by anyone: Fredric March's heroic portrayal of the father whose household is under siege by three criminals. Perhaps March, like Olivier in *Carrie*, is *too* convincing; *The Desperate Hours* may be the least evenly acted of any film from Wyler's mature period. Not even the unique Humphrey Bogart presence is a patch on March in this instance.

Friendly Persuasion had been initially forecast as a Paramount item for Bing Crosby and Jean Arthur, but Wyler produced and directed it for issue through Allied Artists. It is a 1956 gem as friendly and persuasive twenty years later as in its newness. Jessamyn West's engaging story of a nonviolent Quaker family's coming to grips with the Civil War is built on rather a small scale, in immediate contrast to the super-scope *The Big Country* that Wyler directed (and coproduced with Gregory Peck) two years later for United Artists. Both pictures, though, are essentially exterior photoplays, and Wyler seems to be happily reembracing the

great outdoors of infinite landscapes and virgin vistas after overmuch of claustrophobic intensity. I much prefer *Friendly Persuasion*, which has a common denominator of truthfulness in all its elements (memorably in the affecting period portraiture by Dorothy McGuire, Anthony Perkins, and Gary Cooper—his last significant characterization).

The Big Country, on the other hand, is addressed to its title. Size is everything. There's no doubting it's an impressive, even an awesome, exercise in moviemaking; but pretension is an admissible pejorative, and sometimes it plods—the way Wyler's *The Westerner*, for example, never did. *The Big Country* must be applauded for its financial success and the unquestioned satisfaction of the paying public at a time when profit could no longer be taken for granted. *The Big Country* also smartly deployed the sort of all-star assembly that belonged to the new criteria: Gregory Peck, Jean Simmons, Charlton Heston, Burl Ives, and Charles Bickford. In all fairness to Wyler, he was accepting the responsibility of a "major" director in 1958, and that spelled dimension. The movies were trying to give the public something that television couldn't. This ordained the Age of Elephantiasis that was ushered in during the middle fifties and has not officially ended. But its apotheosis was Wyler's 1959 production of *Ben-Hur*.

From *Quo Vadis* to *Spartacus* to *The Fall of the Roman Empire* and at multiple stops in between, Roman spectacle has represented the modern screen's most lavish pasttime and has produced more than its share of truly dreadful movies. *Ben-Hur* is simply the exception that proves the rule. It shows what *can* be done. The odd score of other epics are courting nothing so much as the triumph of matter over mind, but Wyler must have it both ways. His *Ben-Hur* inhabits the best epic traditions that began with *Intolerance*. It is stupendous as spectacle and magnificent as pageantry; it does have narrative energy; the chariot race is really gripping. But Wyler said, "This time they'll also care about the people"; and finally it is this aspect that makes *Ben-Hur* a film as unusual as it is grand. It remains a story about people, and we believe in them. Charlton Heston is not the stick-figure hero of the monolithic epic, but a reasonable human being endowed with a spiritual substance and heroic fortitude.

The fantastic success of *Ben-Hur* marks the apogee of Wyler's fame. It is one of the world's most honored films. Wyler was by now one of the world's most honored directors, but that began to have a pallbearing ring to it. What could he do for an encore? What was certain was that MGM courted the specter of anticlimax even if Wyler didn't. He had not been his own producer for *Ben-Hur*. He had merely been employed by what had been the greatest movie studio in the world. And he was responsible for the lion's last great roar.

What he did for an encore was to again think small. Wyler had always been interested in *The Children's Hour* as Lillian Hellman had written it originally for the stage. Its effective transmutation as *These Three* only clarified his ambition to remake it someday with the lesbianism element not purged. By the sixties the old barriers had been removed, so Wyler assembled a new production around a John Michael Hayes adaptation which was more or less faithful to the Hellman original. Even when the finished print was previewed, the forecast was optimistic. *The Children's Hour* was anticipated as an event. Here the miscalculation was in the timing. Perhaps ten years before, it would still have earned regard as a thematically bold venture. In the spring of 1962, it was merely an intelligent, polished, forthright dramatic film without audience appeal, and—more surprisingly—almost totally without impact. Even so, there were typically Wylerian bonuses: Shirley MacLaine's performance was her best ever, and Audrey Hepburn maintained her own high standard.

In the fourteen years since *The Children's Hour* was released, William Wyler has been tentatively "announced" for dozens of screen projects and has devoted time that would accumulate into years to ventures that never came to flower or were ultimately shaped by other hands. During this time he has only made four films, never functioning as his own producer. At least two projects for which he had been officially assigned—*The Sound of Music* and *Patton*—became Academy-honored as best pictures in their respective years, with other directors reaping their own honors. This would suggest validation of the Wyler legend as a difficult, probably implacable artist, unable to get the rhythm of the new cinema. No doubt Wyler is in fundamental disagreement with many present-day aspects of an entertainment industry in which he has been profiled as a giant for so long. But what is nearer to truth is that there is no rhythm in filmmaking nowa-

It was my old friend and colleague, William Wyler, who taught me what I know about movies. It was Wyler who gave me my only happy, hard working time in Hollywood. There is always something wonderful about watching a man totally devoted to what he is doing, sure enough to be open-minded, skilled but deeply modest, giving and learning with equal humility. Wyler's achievements are enormous but my own admiration for him has been long known. More importantly, it should be known that Sergei Eisenstein held him in such high esteem that, during my visit to Russia during the war, a great many hours were spent answering Eisenstein's questions about Wyler's methods of work. And even more were spent—not always welcome to me since they occurred so often—when Eisenstein showed small audiences at parties or celebrations Wyler's work. Sergei's particular favorite was what he called "the shaving scene" from *The Little Foxes*, and his obsessive enthusiasm was never satisfied by my necessarily meager answers.

Lillian Hellman

Barbra Streisand as Fanny Brice in Funny Girl *(1968), Wyler's first musical. On his work with Streisand, Wyler says: "She wanted everything to be the very best. The same as I do."*

days, or it comes only rarely and then by accident, not design.

The logistical complexity of the picture business in the seventies is staggering and bewildering to anyone who contributed significantly to our screen during its long and justified confidence—and this includes most of those who made the movies great. Most of them made many pictures in which they have no vested pride because they had no choice in making them. But for now, William Wyler knows his options and has no humor for making films unless he can do it his way. He doesn't have to prove anything; that has all been accomplished. Making films has remained for him a source of personal satisfaction.

The Collector, which Wyler consented to direct after he abandoned *The Sound of Music* during its long preproduction, is one of Wyler's best films. Against the security of well-known star "names," he cast as his principals two young Britons virtually unknown to U.S. audiences at the time—Terence Stamp and Samantha Eggar—because he knew they were "right." He refused to falsify the ending of John Fowles's illustrious literary tragedy to appease the likely audience taste. Then he would have had only an ordinary melodramatic film, and he was no longer satisfied with the conventional. Now it is eleven years old and has become dated in only one way: It is superbly crafted, the way contemporary films seldom are.

How To Steal a Million represents an extreme example of "almostness" for a 1966 film. It was never a project close to Wyler's heart, or one to incite inspiration within him. Darryl Zanuck proposed it at a time when Willy wanted to make an enjoyable film enjoyably, and it clearly benefits from the touch of class his direction imparted to it. It is a comedy about art fakery as a path to riches. The dialogue by Harry Kurnitz is clever but not incandescent. Audrey Hepburn and Peter O'Toole are charming and able, but each has been better both before and since. The picture has a certain nimbleness but not much vitality. It appeared on a number of the year's top ten lists and this says something about the year. Wyler need not be ashamed of it. He certainly is not proud of it. *How To Steal a Million* may have started a ripple of talk that Wyler might be slipping, but in 1968 *Funny Girl* put a decisive halt to such foolish speculation.

Barbra Streisand is the only female personality to gain a secure screen stardom during the past decade. Her performance curve has been fitful; its highs are unquestionably impressive. That she remains the female star omnipotent owes much to her successful launching on film. Again it is Wyler trimming the sails for a seaworthy vehicle. *Funny Girl* has a few detractors who find it old-fashioned. It is not an innovative work, but it effectively synthesizes everything Wyler absorbed in the ways of craft over a period of forty-plus years. The picture has shape; it has its own visual personality that is complementary to its star's; and it is sterling entertainment. Because it had blockbuster success, it received some attention as a "comeback" for a

A tribute from **Gloria and Jimmy Stewart**

Willy Wyler is known to most actors as a fine, but tough and demanding, director.

My experience with him was very rewarding. He made many "takes" because of his artistic integrity and desire for as near perfection as possible. He has a great sense of humor.

Ruth Chatterton told me "he was the meanest, worst little man" she ever worked with.

On the other hand, Walter Huston—costar in *Dodsworth*—told me that he was "the greatest" and that I would love working with him. Walter Huston was right!

Joel McCrea

surprised Wyler who did not realize he had been away.

Many people wrongly suppose that *Funny Girl* is Wyler's most recent film. The distinction belongs instead to *The Liberation of L. B. Jones*, from Jesse Hill Ford's novel of Southern racism. In the wake of the *Funny Girl* triumph for Columbia, Wyler signed a multifilm contract with that company, but the agreement was terminated after *L. B. Jones* was filmed in 1969 and released the following year. This intelligently, sincerely made picture caused little stir and was a commercial disaster. Probably it was poorly timed, barely preceding the explosion of "black exploitation films," which has radically altered the nature of domestic film production, distribution, and exhibition. The issue perhaps still is unresolved if *L. B. Jones* came before or after its time. Reassessment may be in order, but it is still too soon. Wyler speaks only guardedly about this picture for which he held high artistic hopes. It was more than just an assignment.

He has never officially retired. Scripts still come his way, and he reads them. Yet he is no longer rumored for association with this or that potential undertaking. He has lost none of his intellectual vigor, but he conveys doubt about being physically sound for the demanding grind of a feature film. Mainly, he is annoyed that his hearing continues to diminish. He is now almost totally deaf in the war-damaged right ear. He strives for patience, but it does not come easily to him.

He is a nice man. He always has been. The autocratic Wyler who is the terror of the production set exists rather apart from the convivial Willy whose accumulation of warm friendships has numbered into the thousands. He may be less favorably disposed to a world that no longer enrolls the incomparable likes of a John Ford or a George Stevens, but he does not look back. It will never be in his nature to dwell in the past, for his work endures with an ongoing life of its own. He is not one of those filmland artisans who dispensed celluloid entertainment only for the moment. He has sought to make pictures that have lasting value as entertainment and as commentary, and toward this endeavor he has succeeded nobly and with a frequency that is probably unmatched by anyone.

His films live. It is almost incredible how good and solid and even modern so many of the early Wyler successes still seem when reexamined today. Literary critics say the test of a novel comes when it is read for a second time. If the reader finds new insights and stimulations, the work graduates to the level of literature. By this reckoning, William Wyler is one of the most prolific authors of the enduring literature of the screen. I think he knows this, and I believe he is proud. He should be. I also believe it is a matter of considerable fulfillment to him in realizing, now, how proud we are of him.

Larry Swindell, book editor of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, is the author of *Screwball: The Life of Carole Lombard* and biographies of John Garfield and Spencer Tracy.

The Ben-Hur Journal

Charlton Heston

What happens when an actor is tapped to play the role of a lifetime, while working with a great director in a movie of epic proportions? These excerpts from the journals kept by Mr. Heston tell the "inside" story.

Friday, January 17th, 1958: Forced move gym workout up to ungodly six A.M. to make room for seven o'clock makeup call to get underneath Andy Jackson's stiff wig and eagle beak for *Buccaneer* retakes on Battle of New Orleans; only purpose additional shots was to make clearer Laffite's contribution to battle; seems to me, aside from its questionable authenticity, not helluva vital aim... but then I'm prejudiced in favor Jackson. With unemployment looming, necessity making decision on various offers is more pressing. "Playhouse 90" offer intriguing, if only because first modern role in Lord knows how long...chance put hands in pockets in scene for once! Wyler still brooding over *Ben-Hur*. Metro now anxious to make deal for me to do Ben-Hur or Messala, pending Willy's decision. Tempting, but think I will sweat it out.

Tuesday, January 21st: By lunch time, with still no word on *Ben-Hur*, decided to accept "Point of No Return" on "Playhouse 90." This decision immediately followed, as these things inevitably go, by exultant phone call from Citron. "Hello, Chuck," pregnant pause..."Willy wants you!" Ritual meeting Benny Thau's with Herman and Ed Henry; mutual congratulations flowing like champagne. For that matter, real champagne flowed when Lydia got news later. Great part plus great director should equal quite a picture. All this and ten months in Italy.

Wednesday, January 22nd: Once Hedda broke her scoop on the *Ben-Hur* casting, phone very busy with congratulations—kind of call you never really become bored with. Ed Henry called with details of deal he made with Metro for picture. Frighteningly good when I remember $65 per week Miss Cornell paid me in *Anthony* only ten years ago. Onward and upward with the arts!

Thursday, January 23rd: Lunch at Metro with Thau, Willy, and Sam Zimbalist. Metro unquestionably the studio to go if you want great-big-fat-glamour-star treatment. The era is past, but this is where the tradition was created. Lunch in executive dining room was exactly as you would write scene for films...court jesters and all. Who was it described Metro as only place in world where writer can earn $4,000 a week and free lunch? Everyone warm, eager, and confident, including me. In Willy's hands, honestly don't see how picture can miss. Hate to go out on a limb before we've turned a camera, but this one Lord won't hurt me.

Friday, February 7th: Spent day reading, twice, "final" script "Ben-Hur." It's very good, but if I know Willy it's a long, long way from what we will shoot. My opinion of writing not improved, of course, by drifting haze of spots before my eyes stemming from tasty mixture of tetanus, polio, typhoid shots for passport. I wonder, could I get into Europe without one?

Monday, February 17th: Seven A.M. call at Metro for *Ben-Hur* wardrobe tests—didn't finish because of ten o'clock call at CBS to block "Point of No Return" cameras. In any medium, blocking rehearsals miserable business...perhaps penance actors pay for making living in such generally interesting way.

Tuesday, February 18th: Today was roughest camera day I can recall. Either television's getting tougher or I'm tiring quicker. Of course, situation not eased by contingent from Metro hovering in shadows with togas and loincloths poised to hang on me between "Point of No Return" scenes. I damn near rehearsed a scene as Marquand's

The religious elements in Ben-Hur *were staged reverently by Wyler, but without sacrifice of the over-all spectacle. Here, his rendering of the Crucifixion.*

banker in Ben-Hur's chariot boots.

Friday, February 21st: Picked up our passports and finished the wardrobe tests at Metro this morning, then had whole half-day free of professional responsibilities. Used it to check off Paramount lot, out of dressing room that seemed (as indeed it still does) so magnificent when they moved me into it seven years ago for *Greatest Show on Earth*. Everyone bade me warm farewell, if not nearly as wet and boisterous as was accorded us tonight at Fields. As are all Maggie's parties, this was a lulu.

Tuesday, March 11th: New York—even after week of playgoing, it was no hardship getting up at 6:30 to cram last of belongings into bags and finally into limousine...not on day we sail for Europe. Usual scramble of crosstown traffic...By the time we got to where the *United States* loomed unbelievable and red-black at the foot of 45th Street, where we started all this in that walk-up at 433, half our friends there ahead of us. The sailing of a liner is everything everyone ever said it was. I'll never forget it...from the warmish vintage champagne to the streamers hanging wet in the spray as we passed the Ambrose Channel Lightship.

Wednesday, April 9th: Beginning to wish Willy would do *Ben-Hur* in modern dress! After vast complications arranging quick flight from Paris for

one-day wardrobe tests in London, had possibly most frustrating day I've ever gone through on movie set. Makeup man was late, so did own makeup (don't kid around with stage actor...no one indispensable!). Then neighboring set had labor dispute so we stopped shooting to allow our crew to cheer them on or whatever. Finally finished with what should have been half-day's shooting barely in time to catch late flight for Paris, vastly disenchanted. Had dinner with Charles Boyer at Tour d'Argent, however, and day suddenly seemed brighter. That's what pressed duck will do for you.

Saturday, April 12th: Bigger brouhaha than usual getting to station. Bag fell off roof of luggage taxi... French cars not designed for American suitcases (at least not as many as Lydia has!). Train comfortable, very tall ceilings, cramped walls; felt vaguely like character out of E. Phillips Oppenheim. Finally, this seemed road that really leads to Rome.

Sunday, April 13th: Rome still most beautiful city I've ever seen, and huge new Stazione Termini, replacing railroad station bombed in the war, is a lesson in how to design a modern building. Whoever chewed up Penn Station in New York should have taken look at this one. Press reception fantastic, like DeMille scene. Finally get into safari of Cadillacs, out to unbelievably beautiful villa in manner of silent screen star mansion. This one really staggering, earthy sprawl of terra-cotta in midst geometric complex of five gardens, marble floors, arched and frescoed ceilings, statues in hallways, etc. Put up last century by rich archaeologist who wanted to be near his work. Will be near mine, too...Cinecitta studio only fifteen minutes away.

Monday, April 14th: With family happily settling into plaster palazzo, went to studio where I'll be spending best part of the year. Very elaborate outside, fairly adequate inside. Met Yakima Canutt, ex-greatest stuntman in world, in charge of training drivers and setting up chariot race. Set, representing great Circus at Antioch, not finished; but we have large practice track (very muddy) to train on meantime. Over hundred horses brought here from Yugoslavia for race; met four white studs I'm to drive...very beautiful, also very mean looking. If he's going to teach me to handle them, Yak had *better* be the best!

Wednesday, April 23rd: Today dawned gray and rain-gusted, cancelling chariot workout just in time allow me go Ciampino to meet Willy and Sam Zimbalist. Willy very excited, eager to begin shooting; very high on Israeli actress he found to play Esther. Also possibility persuading Christopher Fry to do rewrite of script. Discussed intricacies of script for three hours in his suite; role will offer more difficult challenges than driving chariot.

Tuesday, April 29th: Soloed in chariot today (very big event, cheers from stable boys, etc.) but still unable to get right costume for race. Discussed same over lunch with Willy and Sam Z., all three of us sketching busily on tablecloth. If this continues, may have to race naked.

Saturday, May 3rd: Chariot somewhat better; at least able to drive around track without shaking visibly. Steve Boyd, who'll play Messala, checked in...seems like nice guy...starts chariot lessons tomorrow; he has my sympathy. Finally decided work chariot without contact lenses and risk sand.

Thursday, May 8th: Worked with white team today (major achievement), also got commitment from Willy to rehearse some Messala/Ben-Hur scenes next week which will be very valuable. Sam Z. seems opposed to idea rehearsing; perhaps would prefer no changes at all in script, but Christopher Fry arrived today so this obviously faint hope. Immediately impressed with Fry: quiet, tweedy pipe smoker, perfectly cast for leading English poet-playwright. I'm confident he will make vast contribution *Ben-Hur*.

Tuesday, May 13th: Yak's taking the heat off the horses for a few days, so no chariot workout. Did manage unscheduled fall off horse, barebacking. (Why didn't the Romans, along with all their other ingenuities, invent the saddle?) Also got in conference with Willy; his ideas on making Judah Ben-Hur more than a lay figure in a costume picture are coming clearer and clearer to me. Main area of work here seems to lie in the beginning when we must make him an untried, uncommitted man, thus allowing room for change both at slave galley and on Calvary.

Wednesday, May 14th: Yak still resting chariot teams so spent morning with little desultory barebacking, javelin work, and building up tan so I don't have to cope with makeup in this picture. Cameraman Bob Surtees is as willing to shoot me the way Franz Planer was on *Big Country* last summer. Speaking of that picture, we spent good two hours on it this afternoon. Willy wanted to do over one close-up of me at finish fight scene with Greg Peck. My shirt was flown out from Hollywood, and we shot it again in eleven takes on Cinecitta's back lot, nine thousand miles and six months after the finish of production.

Saturday, May 17th: Spent morning rehearsing Christopher Fry's rewrite of crucial quarrel scene with Messala. Indeed this is crucial scene of whole first half of story since it motivates everything that follows. Christopher's version vast improvement over script, and Willy has brought out its virtues in his usual manner as we worked...picking, carping, nagging, fiddling; a reading here and a gesture there until you are trammeled and fenced in by his concept...which you then realize is excellent. Rehearsals not nearly as trying, however, as dinner interview with one of those lethal London journal-

ists who strain everything you say through an acid ear...they seem to take actual delight in being loathed by everyone they write about. Was able to skirt his more obvious pitfalls, but would not call it relaxed meal by any means.

Tuesday, May 20th: First day's shooting is over. It lifted off my chest like a weight that had been growing there imperceptibly, I suppose, since the day I knew most of this year would be spent benhurring with Willy. We actually shot only a little today, from the scene with the Sheik before start of race: Hugh Griffith and me in paddock with team, etc. Two or three very beautifully planned shots of harnessing. Would say, on basis of one day's work, Willy no more awed by $15,000,000 production than he was as a kid at universal directing three-reel Westerns. So far, so good.

Saturday, May 24th: Very long difficult day shooting what should be spectacular (there's that word creeping in) shots of chariots entering arena. Difficult driving, but not much acting. Willy seems to be succeeding in vital task injecting details of small reality in huge canvas he has to color before we are done.

Monday, May 26th: Spent morning on short scene with Messala and Sheik in which Willy demonstrated again his utter inability to compromise with utmost possible in a shot. Tough standard to work up to, but worth it. Finished shooting early enough to try few racing turns on Circus track. Sand right color now, but little deep; slows horses down too much dragging those half-ton chariots, Yak thinks. Ideal, however, for Fray's play yard. Have been stealing a bucket a day and carrying home in trunk of limousine. That'll be one classy sandpile.

Thursday, May 29th: Moved indoors to Castle Antonio set for first meaty acting scene: first meeting Ben-Hur and Messala. Got very little on film, but Willy established thoroughly just exactly amount of pains he's prepared to take with scene. Already I can see dimensions of my problem with Judah...how to make him soft in the beginning without being weak and how to give him conviction and earnestness without making him harsh and preachy. We were making progress on the scene about 7:45 this evening when assistant cameraman forgot to shift focus after the slate, and whole shot was out. Only time I've ever seen Willy give up on a shot.

Friday, June 6th: Today, one of toughest days I've ever had professionally. Willy really bore down, and it was *not* an ego-boosting experience. He's unhappy not so much with what I've done so far in part...there he seems satisfied...but with my potential for part, with my present point of view. That's putting it rougher than he did, but in short, that's about it. He held out high hope, and much promise, and ended with comment that this could be most

"Willy's goading approach, if you can take it, works. Part of it, of course, is understanding ways he does *not* like to work."

important day of my career. He may be right, but it ain't gonna be fun for a while!

Monday, June 9th: Still working on scene welcoming Messala to House of Hur. Exhausting day, though not a lot of shots, Lord knows...we only got one setup in the morning and one in the afternoon, latter running to twenty-one two-minute takes. Willy not pleased with anybody in scene and certainly not with me! Problem is the most basic one in acting...simply a question of belief. For the first time since I can remember my security in my own work is a little shaken, but this can be beaten, I know.

Wednesday, June 11th: Shot till nearly eight again tonight on short scene with Mother and Tirzah after Messala quarrel. I've little to say in scene, but this precisely situation where Willy's likely to be digging for nuance of reaction...flicker of response to someone else's lines. As the fellow says, "Acting is reacting."

Friday, June 13th: Which was a *lucky* day for a change. My close-up went down little better today...either am actually making it, which is happy thought, or Willy has given up, which is unbelievable. In any case, Willy's goading approach, if you can take it, works. Part of it, of course, is understanding ways he does *not* like to work. He hates, for example, to discuss character in abstract terms, or even in terms of given scene, ahead of shooting it. He doesn't fully work the answers out, indeed, until he has explored scene and actor's inclination and possibilities in it on the set. When you consider it, it's better than trying to force preconceived concept in medium as fluid as film. Came home late...we shot until nearly 7:30 again...but fairly full of energy (it's not how long you work, but how it comes out), enough to accept a sudden invitation to drop in on some impromptu party Pili was at, given in a Borghese apartment by some International Set types. Not a very prepossessing bunch, I'd say, but the view was marvelous.

Wednesday, June 18th: This was about as profitless a day creatively as can imagine since spent all of it acting with camels, confirming my strong view that they are most ill-endowed creatures God ever made. Willy seemed to have fine time setting up shots of me walking past them, though. He was really killing time, I suppose, since Steve's eyes were still too bad to allow him to wear the lenses and finish the quarrel scene today. Caught some

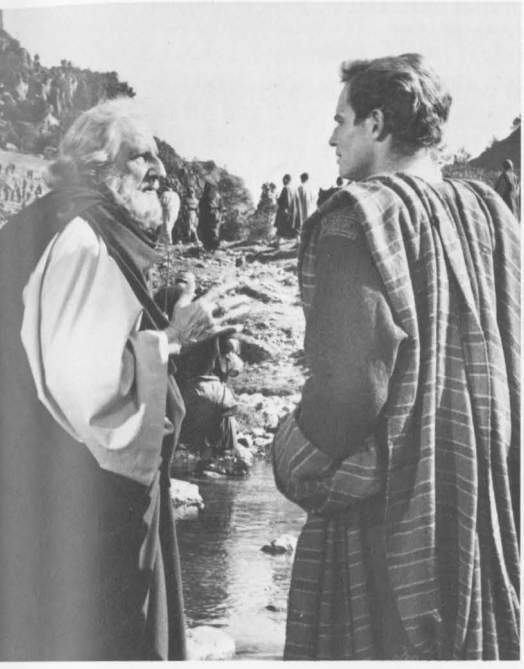
daily footage after work tonight that looked really excellent to me. Willy's the only director I've ever known who doesn't rave over how good the dailies of pictures of only ordinary merit look, but these really *do*. First scene of greeting Messala was as good as I could have hoped for.

Saturday, June 21st: Steve's eyes still bad, so we switched to first scene with Esther. Haya Harareet, I think, will be excellent in part, though today she had little to do but stand silent while Judah questioned her. Willy tough for me to please today. My problem seems clearer: In these delicate scenes must simply play with enough conviction and belief in the early takes before he fences me in with so many physical cues to the conviction that I can't reach it completely. Willy beyond question toughest director I've ever worked for...but I'm inclined more and more to opinion he's also the best.

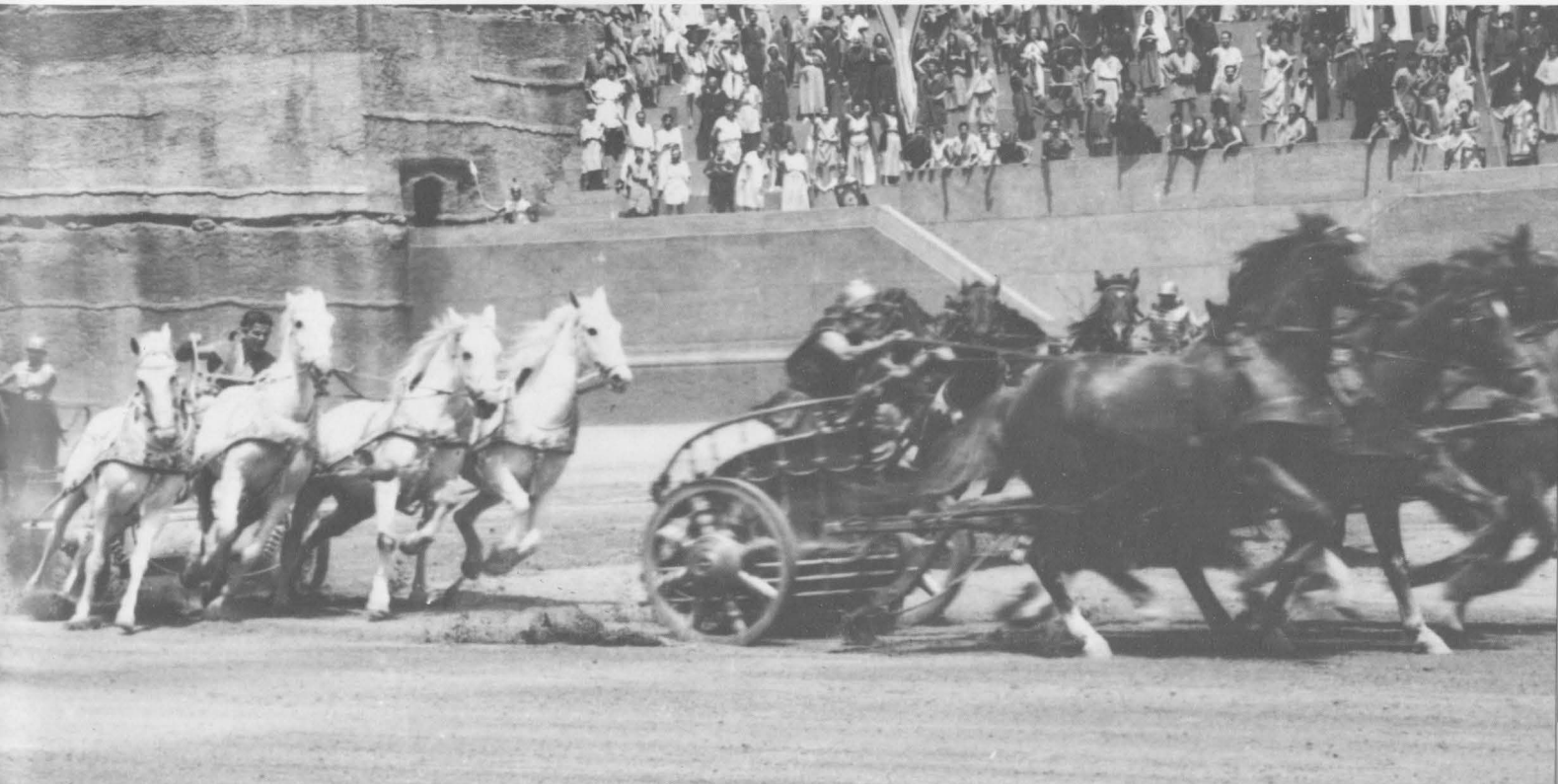
Wednesday, June 25th: Finished first scene with Esther...closest to real love scene we have in script. She played, in my opinion, very simply, very well. She worked with intense grinding concentration with Willy, but each take seemed to progress, and there wasn't that dead-end feeling of nowhere you sometimes get. Poor Haya, having started so well on her first scene, will now have to wait, I'm afraid, several months before she works again, while Judah is off in the galleys and whatnot. When you think of it, women's parts all really rather short in this piece.

Friday, June 27th: Still on Stage 1 trying to escape from that damned prison cell. We did, in all, thirty takes of fight with guards and attempted escape. At lunch time, Willy came up with really brilliant idea that escape at this point should only be attempt that fails. Audiences have seen Errol Flynn do too many spectacular escapes in old Warner movies to try that one again. Today, he didn't like it early, Lord knows, but he liked it a lot when we finally got it. He even, surprisingly, asked me for idea on how to manage fight. I left a lot of sweat, not to mention drop or two of blood, on floor of that cell though. Propman, very pleased at fulfilling Willy's exacting standards of detail, proudly produced some two dozen bugs to crawl on wall of cell for Willy's approval. He watched them gravely, then deadpanned, "Yeah...but all crawling *downward*." With all this work, high point of day, for a change, was dinner. Katharine Cornell and Guthrie McClintic, enroute to Israel to perform Christopher Fry's *The Firstborn*, came to dinner... awesome experience for Heston family with that cold-water flat and first walk-on with Miss C. only ten years back. She still has that other-earthly sort of aura of some great fairy, and a wise kind of quiet humor... maybe from playing all that Shaw. The Frys came too (Christopher charming table companion); Lydia's dinner great success and evening,

Left: Heston with Finlay Currie, about to attend Sermon on the Mount, and (right) finding sister (Haya Harareet) and mother (Martha Scott) in leper colony.



Produced for $15 million, Ben-Hur *brought MGM more than $80 million in rentals. Twelve Academy Awards (a record) were showered on it, including Oscars for William Wyler (direction) and Charlton Heston (acting). The chariot race sequence (below) was mainly responsible for awards for visual and sound effects.*



on the whole, memorable one. I think they liked it too.

Wednesday, July 2nd: Very exciting day today... even though script assured me I was to win race, running those four white studs past screaming extras at the finish line was as thrilling as anything I've done in pictures. Fortunately, I was able to get word to Lydia that we were shooting finish of race first so she could bring Fray and Creedys out to watch...apparently along with almost everybody else in Rome. Ex-ambassador Caffery, who helped us so much in Egypt on *Ten Commandments*, even appeared, looking as trim as on the sands of Beni Suef four years ago. At conclusion of race, enthusiastic Italian extras contributed unscheduled spot of spontaneous enthusiasm so effective that Willy will keep it in picture. As I came down stairs wearing victory wreath, they lifted me on their shoulders and ran across sand to chariot. Shooting such a scene with American extras, as Sam Z. said, you'd have to pay everyone a $35 adjustment to get them to lift the wreath. Since Creedys here so briefly, we drove forty kilometers to Tivoli to see fountains, even though I shot till seven again. Tivoli lived up to expectations, but I'm afraid I didn't. So tired, I slept all the way there and all the way back.

Friday, July 4th: A holiday back in Hollywood, but not at Cinecitta. We shot scene in Messala's quarters after Judah's recapture. Willy seemed much better pleased with what I did. Crew applauded on finish shot where Judah pleads his family's innocence, but this not really indicative (though pleasant) compared to Willy's praise and my own conviction that it had gone well. We couldn't get Steve's angles on it because of his eyes, but we have the scene, I know that. Tonight, at the opera, I stayed awake through *Pagliacci*, but slept the sleep of the just through *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

Sunday, July 6th: Morning in the sun, toasting out strains of week, then dinner with Martin Krautters (not only all roads, but all our friends lead to Rome this year) at Hotel Caesar Augustus. We had very pleasant dinner during which Fray performed series of graceful, solemn, and totally preoccupied dance steps alone on the floor while orchestra played behind us. I fell asleep again driving back to villa (turning into real life of party!), put Fray to bed, and hurried off to United Artists screening room where Willy was running *The Big Country*, now about ready for release. *Country* beyond question superior film. My character far from central; both Burl Ives and Chuck Conners come off better than I in shorter roles, but I'm content to be good in a fine film. Everyone seemed delighted with it, and had appropriate things to say re my performance, which I liked myself, as it happens. In many respects, it's one of my best, thanks to Willy's painstaking and artful close-ups; it's simply that Steve Leech is only peripherally important to story; however, like all other principals, he is a memorable and individual man...in large part due to sensitive direction.

Tuesday, July 8th: Physically demanding day with chariots, but acting contribution limited. Spent my time roaring past Steve's bloody, twitching form on sand after his chariot crashes, then turning horses to go back for victory wreath while he is carried limply off. All this will play much better in C. Fry's vastly improved script, now completed.

Saturday, July 12th: Started retakes of dinner for Messala scene with Martha Scott now playing my mother (again!); good to work with her once more...we're getting to be old hands at mother-son relationship after *Ten C*. Scene has also been rewritten slightly by Christopher F.; also, I think improved slightly. We didn't get too much shot. After long sessions with Fry, Willy came back to sound stage with not a word about changes they'd obviously been making. When we asked him, "What about new scene?" he grinned wicked Willy-type grin and said, "I'm not going to throw out this one till you get it right."

Friday, July 25th: Spent exploring every facet scene with prisoners in Nazareth...quite rightly, of course. Moment where Jesus gives water to Judah of immense importance to development character. Production department made grave tactical error today, neglecting to bring up from Rome specific bit-player Willy had cast as Roman centurion some four weeks ago. They apparently thought he would forget which man he picked. Result: We sat quietly and waited while hysterical messenger raced back to Rome to bring out proper player.

Wednesday, August 13th: All bloodied, sweated, and wardrobed by 6:30 this morning to retake that dawn shot in the Circus. Production department originally insisted scheduling it before we had done death scene it follows, so we had to do it over this morning without the wreath in my hand. Had time this afternoon to show Willy costume for triumphal return with Arrius. He doesn't like it; too Roman, he says. Also ran an hour of dailies on love scene with Esther we shot eight weeks ago. She's excellent, scene very good, but I don't think great acting-wise, for me. It will work out in finished film, but not my best contribution to date.

Tuesday, September 2nd: This morning we had Jack's and my close-ups in adoption speech, which I suddenly realized, except for the same scene over our backs last week, were the first words I'd

"Only two shots this afternoon: one of me amused, detached, while being stroked by several Roman beauties. ...Cannot conceive of this being in finished film but fun to make anyway."

spoken in the film since August eleventh, when we finished Messala's death scene, and that working every day too! Only two shots this afternoon, one of me amused, detached, while being stroked by several Roman beauties; other watching with rapt attention while African dancing girls were stripped strategically and cavorted half-nude in fountains. Cannot conceive of this being in finished film, but fun to make anyway.

Wednesday, September 17th: Today was another one of those days Willy shoots when it looks as though he has a lot of elbow room. We were supposed to finish around noon, leaving plenty of time for trip to Foligno location. We actually finished at twenty past six, shooting the last setup from hold of the galley up past rowers at Arrius, in light so bad Bob Surtees said we could use film over again!

Friday, September 26th: Scene today (Judah meeting Balthasar at oasis) didn't seem to me quite as breathtaking as have come to expect from Willy; I'm accustomed to his pulling rabbits out of hats in every scene. Finlay Currie has lovely quality in part, but is understandably not easy to change, thus hard for Willy. Still little worried about scene tomorrow...Judah's second visit to oasis. Why does he come back to visit with Sheik when he imagines mother and sister dead? Seems to me he would immediately tear off after Messala. Must try and sound Willy out on this.

Thursday, October 2nd: Pleasant to shoot in Cinecitta's relative comfort again, though scene with Jack, farewell to Arrius, turned after lunch into one of those slippery scenes that Willy takes most pains with...or creates most pains with...don't really know. *Do* know that end of day found Jack and me both exhausted and confused, but on my part, at least hopeful. Saw dailies of Jesus giving Judah water at Nazareth...best footage I've seen so far. I really think this can be a great film. *Now* I think so.

Monday, October 6th: Productive day in Sheik's tent with Hugh Griffith, though his snort-and-sweat method of attacking a scene makes you feel as if you are shooting the Colorado in a kayak. Will be damned good in part, though, as Willy must agree...he actually printed second take on one setup. Must be first time he's done that with important shot on this picture. We even quit work fairly early, though this not Willy's choice; studio dynamos burned out just after six, and company scrambled hurriedly off set in pitch-black before he could think of way to light set with candles.

Saturday, October 11th: Deeper we get into it, more impressed I am with location selected for leper scenes, even if necessary leave house at 6:30 to be ready to shoot at 8:00. Old Roman rock quarries (possibly source of granite for Colosseum) abandoned half a century, extending underground in deep receding blocks of dark and dimming light. Dimming is the word, of course...we lose shooting light awfully fast in any given area. Also, camera boom extremely difficult to maneuver in caves, and so are masses of crippled and poverty-laden extras we are using as lepers. Should make excellent sequence, however, if we can shoot it. Finally got about three minutes, sitting on rock, to outline to Willy my questions re later scenes with Esther. She comes back to work next week from Paris. Trust she's had pleasant summer. From what Lydia said on phone tonight, Paris excellent place to be idle. Lydia gets back from week there with Maggie next week, too. This return even more important than Haya's from my point of view.

Wednesday, October 15th: Shot Esther's entrance into valley today...her first appearance before camera since mid-June. No dialogue today for her, but looks fine. Scene with leper gardener went well...my working rapport with Willy improving all the time. Thank heaven for that. Some of toughest scenes still ahead...we'll need each other!

Wednesday, October 22nd: Today was gutbuster we all knew was coming when Willy got inside those caves where he wasn't dependent on sunlight to shoot by. Turned out very well finally...scene of Judah coming face to face with his mother went better than had been imagined possible, but it went till nearly 8:00. Felt very rebellious around 6:30 when he decided to put a six-inch lens on a close-up of mine he had just shot, but then I realized again chance for final perfection such an approach gives me. Made me late as hell for dinner though.

Tuesday, October 28th: Finally wrapped up last of location shooting for the film by handy expedient cutting sequence with mother and sister on road back to Jerusalem, which we certainly can do without. My close-ups with Balthasar at stream got complicated; apparently something about way I drink water fails to enchant Willy. Feeling very sorry for myself because of cold anyway; treated same with brandy toddy which made me feel better whatever it did for cold. Driving home through the darkness, we heard on Vatican radio cheers and Latin sonorities announcing election of Pope John XXIII.

Wednesday, November 5th: All still stunned by sudden death of Sam Zimbalist last night, not forty minutes after he'd sauntered on set to chat affably for a bit before going home. Before shooting began this morning, Willy called everyone to the sound stage where we were rehearsing and said some very simple things about Sam which were as true as they were brief. I'd settle for that myself, I think...to have men I had worked with stop the cameras for a moment and think about me while the work waited nearby. Then we plunged back into scene, Willy exploring it with usual flexibility and insight, but through the afternoon he seemed to lose heart, as well he might, and we stopped fairly early tonight.

Sunday, November 16th: Ty Power's shockingly sudden death on set in Spain yesterday made me suddenly aware of my mortality...appropriate time to think of it since we were shooting on our day off to take advantage of continuing fine weather. Probably that's why it seemed tougher day than usual; scudding clouds kept us trotting back and forth between setups that needed sun and those that could do without it. We did last close-up after sun had gone, really; I was perhaps too tired to react quickly in struggle with Roman legionnaire while trying give Christ water. Anyway, was flung heavily against well curbing on hip still unhealed from pirate scene and then clipped over the eye with spear. Neither blow disabling, but both gave me pause, thinking of Ty. This racket sure not padded refuge for idle boozehounds Hollywood novels make it out. Have been shooting ten- and twelve-hour days, six days every damn week, not to mention a few Sundays, since May.

Monday, December 1st: Willy had disquieting night thought about final scene with Pilate, so Christopher turned his typewriter loose on it. Frank Thring all togaed and curled (and a many-splendored Thring he was) was sidelined while we switched back to cover set in kitchen just in time to stop my shaving off stubble I need for that scene. Went pretty well, I think; Sam Jaffe had a good moment in a good take or two. Tomorrow it's conceivable we may clean it up, except for exits and entrances. My energy lasts well through the day, but I run down pretty early in evening now...as Willy said, "I'm beginning to feel on Monday the way I felt on Saturday last April."

Thursday, December 4th: Willy and I bicycled back and forth between two sets today, shooting odd shots with girl in kitchen while Bob Surtees was lighting scene with Pilate on Stage 15. This all very well except that we got back to first unit after they'd had lunch, so we missed ours. Poor Frank Thring only able play full scene through flawlessly once, then began disintegrate in flurry of pickup shots, but with spontaneity of long take and polished pieces of all subsequent ones, he really played excellent scene. Like what I did also. Emotion seems more readily available to me after six more months of Willy than it once was. I think writing is as good as anything Christopher has done in script. Cast thinning out now; with Frank and Jack Hawkins both finished, that leaves only three women, back to work with me on their last scenes, of long parade of principals we've shot with.

Wednesday, December 10th: Willy back at work today, so I was able stop drowning in icy water in that galley. We finished in scullery and spent afternoon getting an entrance on terrace scene, exactly kind of scene we spent whole day on six months ago, last time we worked on this set. The feeling of time past in the scene was very real for me, though. After shooting, we had grinding session beating scene out in Willy's trailer. Christopher has brought it back closer to being love scene finally, though very difficult to rehearse same with Willy sharing couch with us, and Christopher perched precariously on desk.

Friday, December 19th: We spent day in haphazard scavenging hunt, picking up odd close-ups and retaking bits from earlier scenes. Not particularly demanding day for me, although I was in every shot. Willy's feeling now on the tag with women after crucifixion is to play it all on the stairs, rather than wait to risk waiting for a sunset in December so we can shoot it on roof exterior. Seems a little flat conception for end of picture, but maybe not.

Wednesday, December 31st: So the year is over, and the picture almost over...both, I guess, could be called crucial. *Ben-Hur* will probably be not only most important film I'll ever make, but should also either finally push me into thin, airless reaches where the supernovae drift, or demonstrate conclusively that my orbit is a different one. In other words, if you can't make it with this one, buddy, turn in your suit. Eaten though I am by the drive to break through to that farthest space, I'm not sure I'd be unhappy with either end. I make a living doing what I want to do more than anything else... and my son grows finer and my wife more serene each month. Whether the film we made turns out to be memorable or not, I know the year we spent achieving it will be...and Rome will mark us all forever.

Wednesday, January 7th, 1959: The last day finally came and was over in such a flurry of pickup shots there was hardly time to mark it. Very last shot made was Judah watching in slack awe the Descent from the Cross...an appropriate shot on which to end schedule as tough as this one. As Willy shook hands with me after the print on the last take, he cracked, "Well, thanks, Chuck...hope I can give you a better part next time." We both caught the same late plane for London for *The Big Country* opening there. Fray sent me off on the plane with his best rifle and new cowboy hat...It figures; he knows it's a Western.

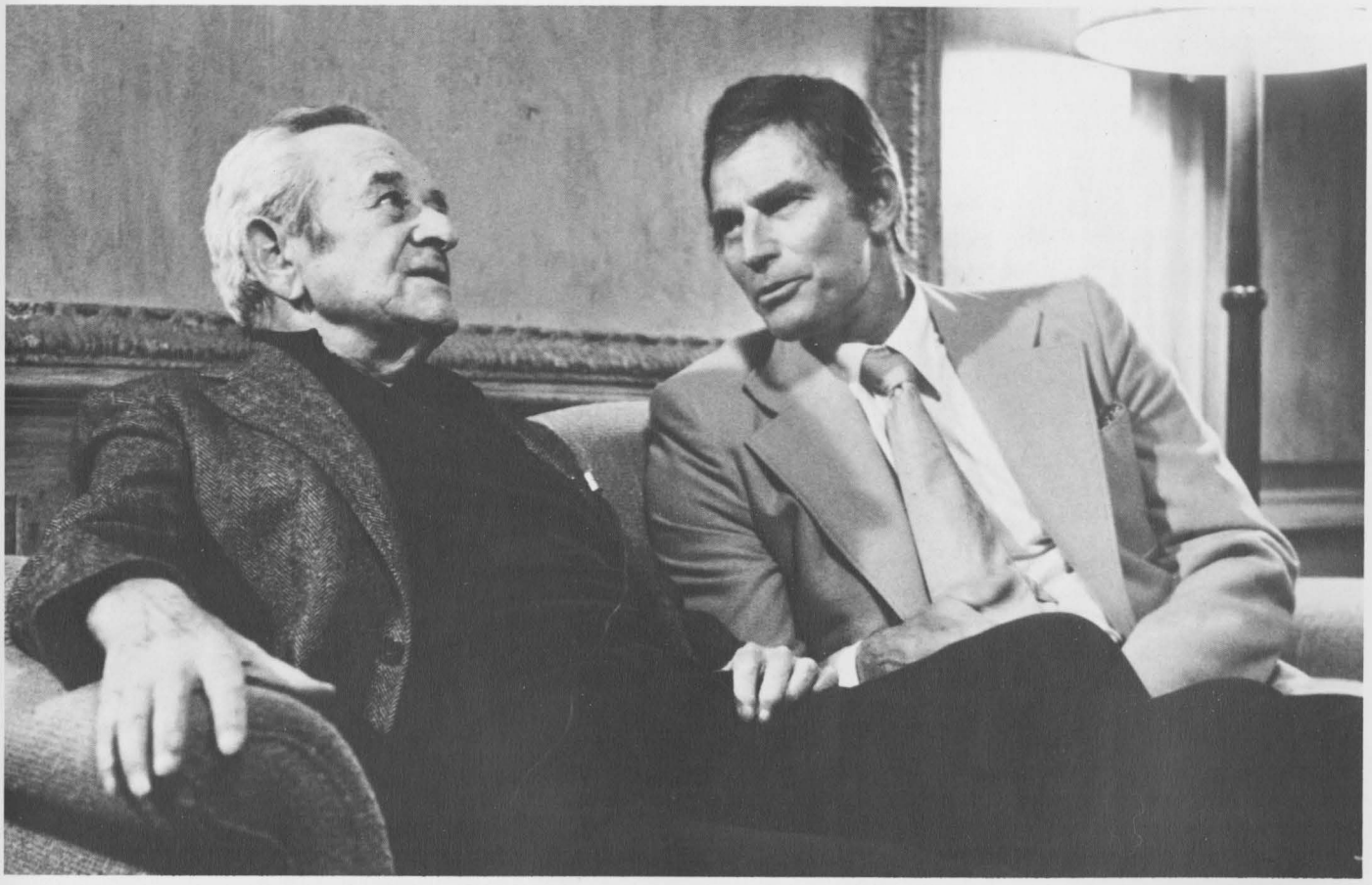
Sunday, January 11th: The day in London, the flurried return and scramble of checking out of the studio, all run together in a mountain of crates, cases, trunks, bags, and paper sacks...thirty-nine pieces of luggage in all, piled beside the fountain when the trucks came to tranship it down to Naples and on board *The Independence*. There wasn't even time for a final walk in that fantastic garden before we were in the limousine, with Rome a diminishing, glimpsed perspective in the rearview mirror as we drove south. Naples we hardly had time to taste before boarding the ship. Suddenly the whistles screamed and we steamed out into the moonrise, our friends waving from the dock, left behind with Italy.

Dialogue on Film

William Wyler

An inquiry into the arts and crafts of filmmaking through interview seminars between Fellows and prominent filmmakers held at Greystone, under the auspices of The American Film Institute's Center for Advanced Film Studies. This educational series is directed by James Powers.

William Wyler invited Charlton Heston to sit in on the seminar to help him handle the questions. Wyler's hearing was impaired in an explosion in the Second World War.



Charlton Heston: I think there's general agreement that William Wyler is among the half-dozen best film directors alive. My own opinion is somewhat higher.

William Wyler: I'll settle for the half-dozen.

Heston: But what has most impressed me in working for him—which I've had the good fortune to do twice—and in looking at his films is the enormous range of his work, from comedy through period pictures and melodrama and documentaries. I can think of no other director of world class who has that kind of range. The first time I worked for Willy was in *The Big Country*, a Western. One day I had an idea for a scene which I thought was marvelous. I was positive that if I could just communicate this idea to him he would perceive its greatness. I needed the script to get my point across, and I picked up his script from a chair. It was inserted in one of those battered leather binders, and I flipped it open and said, "Damn it, Willy, let me show you what I mean." It opened to the inside of the leather flyleaf and stamped in very discreet letters were his credits: *Dead End*, *The Heiress*, *The Little Foxes*, *Memphis Belle*, *Dodsworth*, *The Westerner*, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, *Detective Story*, *Roman Holiday*. And I said, "Willy, I agree with you."

That really is the best course an actor can follow with him. I would not, as a veteran of two of his

films, say that he is the easiest director to work with. He's not. But doing a picture for Willy is like getting the works in a Turkish bath: You damn near drown, but you come out smelling like a rose.

Question: Mr. Wyler, your career started in silent films. How did the transition to sound affect you?

Wyler: To me it was a very welcome thing. I was just starting directing and had made only a few pictures. But I always loved the theater, and I always felt the restriction of the silent screen. While many people hated the idea of sound, I welcomed it. I knew that to be able to hear what people are saying would be an added value to pictures. In the silents we tried to have as few titles as possible and to get everything over with pantomime. If we could find a way to eliminate a title by gesture or some other way, this was supposed to be very ingenious and very good. Of course, there were some subjects that fit into the silent picture era. In a way, *Memphis Belle* is a silent picture because you don't feel the dialogue, though it has the spoken word.

Heston: Did you ever do a silent picture you later remade with sound?

Wyler: No, not the whole picture. I made *The Shakedown*—a sort of prizefight picture—during the time sound was coming in. The New York office sent the picture back and said, "Put in twenty-five percent sound." This meant that they liked the picture, and were willing to spend more money on it. So I picked out a couple of scenes, and we made those scenes over with dialogue.

Heston: You made *Hell's Heroes* at the time with Charles Bickford, based on *The Three Godfathers,* which Ford made later with sound.

Wyler: Which he made first and again later. The last time I saw him he said, "It's your turn to make *Three Godfathers* again."

Heston: Was your version silent or sound?

Wyler: Mine was all sound, the first all-talking outdoor picture Universal made. We were in the Mojave Desert and in Panamint Valley, just off Death Valley, in July and August of 1930. The cameraman was in a glass booth. It was 120 degrees outside. In the glass booth it was 140. Sometimes after a shot, we would find that the cameraman had passed out. We had a crew pushing this

Humphrey Bogart and the Dead End Kids in the stylized New York setting for the Wyler film of Sidney Kingsley's Dead End *(1937).*

A tribute from
Robert Wise

Laura La Plante, Norman Trevor in The Love Trap *(1929), Wyler's last silent movie. Talking sequences were added after filming was completed.*

thing, with the microphone hidden in a cactus here and in the sand over there.

Question: In the early days, you directed with Sam Goldwyn as producer, and later you became your own producer. What difference did you find?

Wyler: Sometimes it's a burden being your own producer. I never felt I did a good job because there was too much to do as a director. The only reason I wanted to be a producer was to be able to do exactly as I wanted. Now, I didn't have much trouble with Sam Goldwyn doing what I wanted, except in a few small instances where he overruled me. He, of course, had the final word. But in most cases—not all—he seemed to have more confidence in what I thought than in what he thought himself, and he let me have my way.

Heston: By and large it was a very harmonious and fruitful relationship, wasn't it?

Wyler: Fruitful, yes. Harmonious, not always. For instance, he wanted me to do a number of pictures which I refused to do.

Heston: Did you have complete freedom on choice of films with him?

Wyler: I didn't have it in my contract, no. Buf if he wanted me to do a film I didn't like to do, I would simply leave town. I had a three-year contract run on for five years because I would be—what was it called?—suspended and extended. He'd say, "Here, make a picture called *Woman Chases Man*. Make a thing called *The Cowboy and the Lady*. Make a picture called *Marco Polo*. Make a picture called *The Bishop's Wife*." I would say, "No, I won't make them. They're terrible. I don't like the stories." And we'd have fights over that. But when he agreed with me, when he bought stories like *Dodsworth*, *Dead End*, or *Little Foxes*, or when I got him to buy the script of *Wuthering Heights*, I said, "Great," and we went ahead and worked together in relative harmony.

Question: What always stand out in your films are the intensity and the passion of the performances. Obviously they're of extreme importance to you. How do you work toward them?

Wyler: When I come on the set, I've studied the scene, and I've got a vague idea of how I want to play it. But I haven't mapped it out exactly as some directors do. Before I can make up my mind definitely, I've got to see the actors doing it. Also, I want to see what the actors have to contribute, so I don't tell them very much. If an actor asks me, I say, "You show me. You know the scene. Go ahead, you show me." And it happens very often that the actor will have a different idea or an even better idea than I have. When we've got it worked out, then comes the technical part of working out the camera movement, the camera work, and so on. Then we start shooting. That's when they say I start becoming a sadist, shooting again and again.

Sometimes I'm not very articulate with the actor. If you point out something, it may become too prominent in his thinking, and the scene will suffer. I figure that by putting an actor on his own and letting him use all the resourcefulness he has, he won't depend on me. I can't do it for him, no matter what. He's got to do it. He's got to feel it.

Heston: I would say that is an accurate description of the way Willy works with actors. I've worked for all kinds of directors who work in different ways and for whom I've done good work. I've worked for directors who like to improvise, and you can arrive at good things that way. I have worked for directors—Frank Schaffner is an offhand example—who have the scene and the camera angles all worked out. Willy comes in on a set and says, "Well, let's talk through it." He'll say to the cameraman, "Get some light on this. This doesn't look like a room; it looks like a movie set." The camera-

man will ask, "What do you want?" He'll say, "I don't know. Just put a couple of lights on so we can work." Willy will get his camera angles out of that. You don't even have a firm idea of where you're going to put your camera before you see the scene begin to shape.

Wyler: Not exactly.

Heston: There's a lot of pressure on the actor. Though Willy is not a sadist by any means, he is very tough and—what I have found to be very useful—he is very chary of compliments. I value that. Actors learn to be skeptical about a director who says, "That's marvelous, sweetheart. Just great. Now could you do just one little thing?" Willy never says that. You do the scene, and he says, "OK, let's do one more. This time when you're listening to the girl let me see that you don't really believe she's going to leave you." You do a couple of takes this way, and he'll say, "You're still too interested in what she's saying. You did something with a glass a couple takes ago for a minute. Do that a little bit more." The point is that everything Willy tells you is right. I think one of his strongest creative instincts is taste in performance. It's true that he doesn't tell an actor a lot of things to do. He simply judges what you give him.

Willy keeps adding and taking out. I must say, it takes a lot of concentration from the actor because you get the feeling that the scene is like building matches on top of a milk bottle. You've got to hold it all together. After working on it for an hour or so, he'll say, "You know, it's not very spontaneous." On the first picture I did with Willy, I remember following him around and saying, "Look, Willy, we've worked on this for two hours. Tell me what's wrong. Don't quit. I can get it." He turned to me and said, "Look, Chuck, if I don't say anything after a take, that means it's OK."

I remember a moment about two-thirds of the way through the shooting of *Ben-Hur*, an exhausting film, just a brute to work on. We were shooting in Rome, and we both left the stage one night about seven o'clock, our normal quitting time. We were both standing by the stage door waiting for our cars, and I said, "Good night, Willy," and he said, "Good night, Chuck. That was good today." I said, "What?" He said, "The scene, you were very good in it." I said, "Oh. Oh...thanks." One time, he said that. But that's good because he doesn't put any butter on it. You know that when he prints a scene it's going to be as good as you can do it. He just keeps fiddling with it until he's satisfied he can't get it any better.

Zasu Pitts, Una Merkel in Her First Mate *(1933). This comedy was made at the end of Wyler's years of apprenticeship at Universal.*

Wyler: That's what I try. But about not praising the actors: Sometimes I just forget to, because when I've got a scene the way I want it, immediately I think of the next scene. I forget. I must confess that sometimes in the cutting room a scene won't look as well as it did when I was shooting it. While something was achieved which I was looking for, something else, some spontaneity perhaps, left the scene without my noticing it. Then I'll say, "Let's print up take one or take two. Let's take a look at those other takes." Sometimes in the cutting room I'll put the early take back in the picture. The actor, of course, won't know which take it is.

Heston: I think one of the things Willy concentrates on most strongly in his films is performance. There is no director whose pictures have included more Academy nominations for actors than his, by a long margin. He presses an actor very hard and leans on him very heavily and adjusts and readjusts. It's not the kind of thing a nonprofessional could survive very well.

Question: Your work has been almost exclusively with professional actors. But in *The Best Years of Our Lives*, you did interesting work with a nonactor—the handless man who plays the war veteran. What problems did you have?

Wyler: You mean Harold Russell. Naturally there were problems of making him act; but I didn't have

to explain to him how it feels to lose your hands—he knew better than I. But there was the problem of making him feel and react in certain ways at a certain time with a lot of lights and cameras, which is not conducive to feeling, to showing emotions. This was a bit of a problem, and I had to treat him a little better than I do professional actors.

Heston: I know what he means.

Wyler: I had to put on my kid gloves, but the result was very gratifying. He finally knew what was required, and when it came time to feel something, he was able to do it. All I could do was help him.

In the original story of *The Best Years of Our Lives* the man was a spastic. It was a little book by MacKinlay Kantor called *Glory for Me*. It's very easy to act a spastic, and I guess a lot of actors would have liked the chance to do it. But I felt that it would always look acted. I wanted something real, and we came across the idea of a man who had lost both hands.

The Best Years of Our Lives is one of the most successful films I ever made, and it's also one of the easiest I've made. The reason is that I had been in the service myself. I came back from the war and had a few of the problems veterans have in getting readjusted. I understood these men very well. I had spent four years in research, so to speak. I knew these men better than Ben-Hur or Roman soldiers. I didn't have to think, "Now, what would a man do in that situation?" I knew the situation. I knew the men. It made me think that very often we do pictures where we don't know our characters well enough. We do a picture because we like the story, or because it's time to make another picture, or we need the money.

Bette Davis, Henry Fonda (below) in Wyler's Jezebel *(1938). Davis won a second Academy Award for her portrayal of a Southern vixen.*

Question: The final script of *The Best Years of Our Lives* seems to me very different from the film. How free are you with a script? Do you leave room for some improvisation?

Wyler: I don't feel I have to have a script. I have to have a story that I like and that I think will make a good picture. But I don't go out improvising scenes, though if I can think of something that's better than what was written, of course, I'd do that. But you've got to have a basis for what you're going to do if you don't get a better idea.

I think a director is bound to make small contributions to a screenplay. I'm not a writing director, but that doesn't mean I don't make changes. An example is in *The Best Years*. We had Dana

Andrews walking around the airfield seeing all these obsolete airplanes which never saw action, and all the script said was, "He walks around thinking of how the war has done him in." But it's because I did *Memphis Belle* and rode in a bombardier's compartment on a few missions that I got the idea that he would climb up into his old place and have a dream and lose himself in the dream, or rather in hallucination. It was all invented on the spot because the airfield, those obsolete planes, were conducive to the basic idea of the film, of the man feeling lost.

Heston: No matter how many times you went over the script you wouldn't come up with that.

Wyler: No. It's also because I had the personal experience of knowing the character, knowing what he had done, that led to this scene. If I made the picture today, I would end it right there. I think it's a better ending than the other one.

Heston: It's a great moment in the film. I think one of the reasons writers are suspicious and cynical about making films is that they perceive their own contributions as controlled by other people. They say, "The director and actors change what I do." But in my view this is a part of the nature of film. There are things you can't find out about a scene until you are standing on the ground in the wardrobe.

Wyler: I simply thought that it would work if Dana Andrews got in the bombardier's seat over the bomb sight. It would all come back in his mind, and he would hear in his mind's eye the motors going, even though there were no motors there. It occurred to me that it would be good to hear each motor start, as before takeoff, over shots of the empty nacelles, as part of his hallucination.

Question: Did you see the remake of *Best Years*?

Wyler: Yes. I didn't like it, and I most definitely was not involved in it. They seemed to imitate some of the things we did, and it didn't come off.

Laurence Olivier (above, left) as Heathcliff in the Hecht-MacArthur adaptation of Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights *(1939).*

Bette Davis, Herbert Marshall in The Little Foxes *(1941). Lillian Hellman wrote the script from her own stage play.*

A tribute from the
Eastman Kodak Co.

A tribute from
Merv Griffin Productions

Above: Laurence Olivier in Carrie *(1952), an adaptation of Theodore Dreiser's* Sister Carrie.

Left: Charlton Heston as Ben-Hur offers water to the Christ in Ben-Hur *(1959).*

Below: Dana Andrews, Myrna Loy, Fredric March, Hoagy Carmichael, Harold Russell, in The Best Years of Our Lives *(1946).*

They left out some of the best things in it.

Heston: I know the actor who played the Fredric March part, Dabney Coleman, who's a good actor. I was talking to him about it, and he said, "I not only have to try and reproduce one of the best performances Fredric March ever gave, but I don't have William Wyler."

Wyler: I think the film was a big disappointment to everybody. I don't know why they did it. I don't know why they simply didn't show the old picture.

Question: I found *Memphis Belle* a very strong picture, probably the most emotionally strong of all your films.

Wyler: Of course, that was the real thing. It was all very difficult. I had a little crew, only four people. One of them was William Clothier, one of the top cameramen now. We went to a place called Bovington, an RAF training center in England. We all had to go to a school of aircraft recognition and to a gunnery school. We had to learn how to take a machine gun apart and put it back together, because we all had to be able to take over the machine gun in case one of the gunners got hurt. We had to go through all that before we were allowed to fly along.

But the difficulties! We operated 16 millimeter cameras at 28,000 feet where it was 60 below zero in

the cabin. The cameras would freeze; I had another one in my electric suit to try and keep it warm. Besides the electric suit, I had on a Mae West, a parachute, oxygen equipment which was plugged in. If you wanted to move around anywhere you had to plug into what was called a walkaround bottle. And you had thick gloves on. If you wanted to change the film you had to take off your glove, but if you took it off for more than one or two minutes you would lose some fingers from frostbite. Being on oxygen, your efficiency was at a minimum. Taking three steps was like walking a mile.

If you shot out one side—the windows were open because the machine guns were sticking out—the exposure would be different than from the other side. On one side you'd be shooting into the sun and on the other side away from it. By the time you looked through the camera any fighter plane coming at you was gone. If you took time to look through, by the time you were ready to shoot you were over a target. And you forgot the danger. You didn't even think of the danger. There wasn't time. You thought only of getting it on film. Anyway, the picture was shot under very difficult conditions.

Heston: I think the most remarkable thing about *Memphis Belle* is that it works for an audience now as it did then, although I think documentaries are the most fragile of all films. This year's passionate statement of this or that position is next year's high camp. A documentary by definition illustrates a contemporary point of view, one that is out of fashion in five years' time, or especially after thirty years' time.

Question: I think what is most remarkable about the film is that—politics aside—the people came across. It was on a very human level.

Wyler: I guess you could feel it was all done under the conditions of complete reality.

Heston: But another director could have also worked under real conditions and have come out with a picture about cardboard figures.

Wyler: Well, it was an instance where you could create a situation that was dramatic in itself. You didn't have to dramatize it. You could just show a gunner or a navigator looking around, waving and grinning at the camera, and you'd say, "This is Jim Jones from such-and-such a place in Iowa. He's dead now." Wow. You don't need anything. That's as dramatic as anything you can do. That's the advantage of a documentary. I mean you are the author. You can talk and say things that enhance what you show on the screen, and that can be very dramatic and very emotional.

Question: *Memphis Belle* seems to me one of the strongest antiwar movies I've ever seen, but the narration goes completely the other way. Did you have control over the narration?

Wyler: Oh, yes. Incidentally, the editor was John Sturges, who was in the Air Force at the time. An Air Force sergeant, Lester Koenig, who worked with me on several films after the war, wrote the narration in accordance with my description of the missions. I think both he and Sturges did a first-rate job. This was one film where we had no producer bothering anybody.

Question: Why were there no films on the Vietnam War like *Memphis Belle* or *Why We Fight*?

Wyler: I don't know. There must have been some.

Heston: Sure there were. You have to remember television covered the Vietnam War. It was a somewhat different situation. There were all kinds of documentaries on television. In World War II there was nothing but film, the newsreels.

Question: In making *Memphis Belle* did you feel

A tribute from
MGM Laboratories, Inc.

Left: Memphis Belle *(1944). Here the Flying Fortress is seen during an air raid over Wilhelmshaven.*

Gary Cooper, Dorothy McGuire in Jessamyn West's Friendly Persuasion *(1956), an account of a Quaker family during the Civil War.*

Films Directed by William Wyler

From 1925-27, Wyler directed 21 of 135 two-reel Westerns in the "Mustang" series produced by Universal Pictures Corporation.

1925
Crook Buster

1926
The Gunless Bad Man
Ridin' for Love
Fire Barrier
Don't Shoot
The Pinnacle Rider
Martin of the Mounted

1927
Two Fister
Kelcy Gets His Man
Tenderfoot Courage
The Silent Partner
Galloping Justice
The Haunted Homestead
The Lone Star
The Ore Riders
The Home Trail
Phantom Outlaw
Square Shooter
The Horse Trader
Daze in the West

In 1927 Wyler directed "Blue Streak" five-reel Westerns produced by Universal Pictures Corporation.

Lazy Lightning
Stolen Ranch
Blazing Days
Hard Fists
The Border Cavalier

Additional five-reel Westerns for Universal Pictures:

Straight Shootin'—1927
Desert Dust—1927
Thunder Riders—1928

Feature Films directed by William Wyler:

Anybody Here Seen Kelly?—Universal—1928
The Shakedown—Universal—1929
The Love Trap—Universal—1929
Hell's Heroes—Universal—1930
The Storm—Universal—1930
A House Divided—Universal—1933
Tom Brown of Culver—Universal—1932
Her First Mate—Universal—1933
Counsellor At Law—Universal—1933
Glamour—Universal—1934
The Good Fairy—Universal—1935
The Gay Deception—Twentieth Century-Fox—1935
These Three—United Artists—1936
Come and Get It!—United Artists—1936 Codirector (with Howard Hawks)
Dodsworth—United Artists—1936
Dead End—United Artists—1937
*Jezebel**—Warner Bros.—1938
Wuthering Heights—United Artists—1939
The Westerner—United Artists—1940
The Letter—Warner Bros.—1940
The Little Foxes—RKO—1941
Mrs. Miniver—Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer—1942
*The Memphis Belle**—Paramount release of a War Activities Committee Production—1944
Wyler was also producer, screenwriter, and did additional photography.
The Best Years of Our Lives—RKO—1946
Thunderbolt—Monogram release with Carl Krueger Productions and USAF—1947. Wyler was also editor.
*The Heiress**—Paramount—1949
*Detective Story**—Paramount—1951
*Carrie**—Paramount—1952
*Roman Holiday**—Paramount—1953
*The Desperate Hours**—Paramount—1955
*Friendly Persuasion**—Allied Artists—1956
The Big Country—United Artists—1958
Wyler was also coproducer.
Ben-Hur—Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer—1959
*The Children's Hour**—United Artists—1962
The Collector—Columbia—1965
How To Steal a Million—Twentieth Century-Fox—1966
Funny Girl—Columbia—1968
The Liberation of L.B. Jones—Columbia—1970

*also produced

Lee Grant as the shoplifter, Bert Freed as a detective in Wyler's version of Sidney Kingsley's Detective Story *(1951).*

A tribute from
Motown Industries

The Desperate Hours *(1955). Humphrey Bogart as the leader of a trio of thugs who invade a suburban household. Martha Scott is the terrorized wife.*

you were doing more than quoting facts. Were you trying to influence the audience to a point of view about the men.

Wyler: Sure. I was expressing an anti-German point of view.

Heston: In favor of the crew of the *Memphis Belle*.

Wyler: The film was used as propaganda. When the Air Force and the president saw the picture, they said, "Get it out to everybody." It was run in 16,000 theaters all over the country. They all got it free because it was propaganda for the people who were working in the factories. The end of the film in effect said, "You see what these boys are doing, how they're sacrificing their lives. Now all you people who make airplanes, guns, and tanks, keep at it, keep working, and send them the materials."

Question: You've worked on productions of varying scale—*Ben-Hur* an example on one end. When you've done a large scene, where have you directed your attention—the scene itself, the camera work? For example, the ship-sinking scene in *Ben-Hur*?

Heston: That water was goddamned cold, I'll tell you that. I thought I was going to spend my life pulling that oar. We'd been shooting eight months by then, and I said, "Willy, I'm anxious to get home but I'm damned if I thought I'd have to row all the way."

Wyler: I didn't feel that cold water.

Heston: You mentioned the big scenes in *Ben-Hur*. The chariot race is considered, I suppose, still one of the best action sequences ever filmed. I think what makes it unique is not the remarkable chariot work, for which Yakima Canutt was largely responsible, but the fact that the race is photographed and plays on the screen as a conflict between two men. This is what Willy was able to do with it. I would think the tendency for any director would have been to dwell on the set because it was overwhelming. I can't tell you what it was like to really stand on that ground and see that set. It was incredible. It was one of the sights of Rome all that year. Everybody who came to Rome wanted to go out and see the chariots. Didn't we have 5,000 extras on it at one time?

Wyler: Yes, I think so. But I must point out that the chariot race was really the work of two men, Yakima Canutt and Andrew Marton. They were the directors of this chariot race, which was a separate unit. They worked about four months doing just nine or ten minutes of film. I couldn't spend that much time on it.

Congratulations **Tandem Productions, Inc.**
T.A.T. Communications Co.
Bud Yorkin Productions

Heston: I think Willy's being somewhat modest. My point is this: I saw some rough-cut footage of all the remarkable shots taken. But the crucial editorial choice was Willy's, of course. When he was cutting the picture he chose not to use those fantastic full shots. If you look at the race, there are, I think, two cuts lasting less than thirty seconds that show the full set. Most of the time you are in close.

Wyler: Yes, we had to stay right in there. You know, it was a really fantastic set. I don't think there's been anything like it since *Intolerance*, Griffith's picture, which I never saw. Originally, the chariots were supposed to come out and stand in line, and then the race was supposed to start. I said, "No. My God, we must take advantage of this set." It was my idea to make them go around once in formation. That part of it I shot, showing the set and showing the chariots parade around. Somebody told me, "They never used to do this in the old Roman days." I said, "To hell with that. That's the way I'm going to do it." It was a piece of showmanship, simply. It was like a musical number or an overture.

I wanted to take advantage of the production because I knew that once the race started we wanted to stay with the characters. We wanted to stay in the race. We wanted to be alongside the chariots and with the two characters. There would be no time then for long shots. To cut to a long shot at that time would drop the tension.

Heston: But the net result is still that the race is very much a conflict between the two men. I think almost any other director couldn't have resisted using many more of these incredible shots which Yak and Marton made.

Wyler: It was not only a good race. Two hours of the story work up the enmity of these two men and work toward this climax. This is the moment you wait for, so you don't want to cut away from them. After the chariot race the picture was a letdown for some people because it was no longer as exciting. But you can't have three hours of chariot races.

Heston: Would you believe I haven't had one offer to drive a chariot since then?

Question: The race is spectacular. But your camera work in *Ben-Hur* and elsewhere doesn't draw attention to itself.

Heston: I would say that Willy tries to avoid trick camera movements.

Olivia de Havilland in The Heiress *(1949), based on the Ruth and Augustus Goetz stage adaptation of Henry James's* Washington Square.

Wyler: Oh, yes. I try to do camera movements that are smooth, unnoticed if possible, and that help to make the scene more interesting. A lot of directors use the camera as a toy. They think it's something to play around with. You see a lamp or post sailing across the foreground for no damn reason. It doesn't help the scene. It means nothing. The movement of camera and the use of camera should be such as to enhance the scene and to give good composition and clarity.

Question: *Ben-Hur* took eight months to film, *The Big Country* took four. The filming schedules today run from sixty to seventy days and no more. Obviously, you are someone who won't let himself be hurried when you're shooting.

Wyler: It depends on your standing as a director. When I first made pictures, I was simply given a schedule. The first pictures I made were given three days. Two reels, three days, and $2,000 to make the whole picture. I got $60. The cameraman got $75. But later on I was given a schedule of six

weeks, eight weeks. I often went over the schedule, but within reason. But sometimes in the early days I would have to confront the head of the studio, and he'd say, "What the hell is going on? You're behind schedule." It was never serious, because it was never a great deal. They knew I wasn't loafing. They always knew I was working hard and doing the best I could. I just tried to make things better; it took a little more time. When I received more control later I made my own schedules.

For instance, for a picture like *Detective Story*, the production office at Paramount made out a schedule for eight weeks. I was the producer also, and I sent it back to them and said, "Make out a six-week schedule." The production manager came to me and said, "Please, you know, we don't like pictures to go over schedule." It would look bad for him and the production office. I said, "I'm not going to go over schedule. Make it six weeks." He said, "I'd rather have it eight weeks than have you go over schedule." I said, "No, I want six weeks, that's all." And that's what we did. We made it in exactly six weeks.

Of course, we had an advantage there. We had a week or two of rehearsals. I've always liked that. It's a great advantage for me because, as I've said, I don't rely on improvisation. To be able to see the whole thing rehearsed, now there are very few pictures you can do that with. A picture like *Detective Story* was all one set, mostly.

Heston: Like the original play.

Wyler: The original play was all one set. We had the same idea, only more elaborate. We had the police station upstairs, downstairs, on the roof, the street out front, the cafe across the street. But still one location. In transferring a play from the stage to the screen, as I did with *Detective Story*, there is the temptation and often the demand to open up the play. Nobody likes to be accused of just photographing a stage play. For instance, in *Detective Story* we thought it would be nice to see where this man lives, to see his apartment, to find his wife there. We wrote it in the script, but we threw it all

out again because we found that the play was so constructed that the action was very concentrated, very fast, very good.

Heston: There was no time to get away.

Wyler: But I said, "I don't want it to look as if I've just photographed a stage play. I want to make it cinematic, give it movement." So I gave it an illusion of movement, an illusion of opening up. In other words, I did not change the construction of the play. I simply changed the set. Instead of having two little rooms as in the play, I have five rooms, six rooms. The construction of the play, which was good and solid and successful on the stage, was not changed. But we did get a feeling that it was not a photographed stage play.

Question: Let me ask one question about *Detective Story*. In the end is Kirk Douglas, in a sense, committing suicide when he walks into the gun?

Wyler: He's lost his wife. He's had a big disappointment, and he's in a reckless mood that is conducive to suicide. It certainly contributed to the fact that he walks into this gun, though I don't think he was consciously committing suicide. Suddenly there is an element in the character of recklessness and a sharp desire for revenge on the criminal character. If this overzealous man hadn't had the disillusionments he had, he probably would have acted in a safer way and not taken a chance.

Charlton Heston, Gregory Peck in The Big Country *(1958), a late return by Wyler to the Western form.*

Question: Your films have virtually no spots that drag. *The Best Years of Our Lives* is a good example: Almost a three-hour film, but it moves rapidly. What approach do you have to rhythm?

Wyler: I have a theory: It is not to bore the audience. That's a good theory. It sometimes seems that all pictures are too long, mine included, but this is always what I try to avoid. That's why we have previews. If we see the film getting slow or somebody falling asleep or walking out, then you try to correct something to keep the interest up.

Some of the directors today don't seem to give a damn about anybody except their own feelings. There's a very fine line between self-confidence and arrogance. You make pictures, in a way, for yourself, but you also make them for an audience. I guess some filmmakers don't care about the audience. They only want to satisfy themselves, and I think this is wrong. I think you've got to consider the audience, and to bore them is wrong. To insist on length when it is not necessary, when it is not needed, is wrong.

Heston: I think that is marvelous advice to filmmakers. Every filmmaker considers himself an artist, and an artist feels that he must serve his own instinct, his own feeling of what he wants to say. But a filmmaker above all artists must reach his audience, because if he doesn't he won't get any more cameras to play with. Then it doesn't matter if he's pleased himself.

Wyler: Yes. If you make a film that has something to say, if you want to convey that thought to a large audience, then you must make it compatible to them. You must make them accept it and like it. Otherwise, if they don't come to see your picture, you only reach a handful of people, and you have not succeeded in getting your message across.

Heston: In my experience of William Wyler's films, both as an actor and a member of the audience, I think what he's said is the best advice: Don't bore them.

The American Film Institute

The proceeds from this dinner go entirely to support the programs of The American Film Institute; and just as the tradition of the Life Achievement Award grows each year of its presentation, so, too, does the Institute.

The American Film Institute was founded in June of 1967, but its official history began nearly two years earlier when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the National Arts and Humanities Act. He announced there would be "an American Film Institute, bringing together young men and women who wish to pursue this twentieth-century art form as their life's work."

Established as an independent, nonprofit organization by the National Endowment for the Arts, The American Film Institute's stated purpose is to preserve the heritage and advance the art of film and television in American.

AFI's teaching facility, the Center for Advanced Film Studies in Beverly Hills, has established itself as a recognized and active part of the Hollywood community. Many of the Center's students have already made their marks as leading creative talents in film and television.

The AFI's film preservation program has now secured more than 12,500 films for preservation and study and has placed them in the AFI Collection at the Library of Congress. Less than half of the film output during the last seventy-five years exists today. Many film classics are gone forever, destroyed by film companies that needed storage space, or ravaged by time and careless handling. Only two of Frank Capra's first dozen films exist. Of the fifty films starring movie vamp Theda Bara, only her first and last remain. Greta Garbo's 1929 film, *The Divine Lady*, was found to be decomposed beyond salvage.

AFI's film archivists comb the world in search of America's missing cinema treasures. Mary Pickford's 1914 *Cinderella* was recovered from a basement in Holland. A 1922 version of *Oliver Twist* starring Jackie Coogan and Lon Chaney was found in a film vault in Yugoslavia. A Detroit theater basement yielded *The Scar of Shame*, perhaps the earliest existing silent film with an all-Black cast.

Training new filmmakers, encouraging independents through a grant program, and preserving vintage films are only part of AFI's efforts on behalf of our great film heritage.

We are in the process of cataloging every film made in America since 1893, and are recording oral histories of pioneer moviemakers. We conduct a national film repertory theater in the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. We service a national membership dedicated to the goals of the AFI. Our latest effort is *American Film: Journal of the Film and Television Arts*. Published ten times a year, *American Film* is a handsome, literate magazine of critical articles and lively features. It has drawn wide attention and has significantly increased AFI's membership.

With stable and sufficient funding, we hope to do even more for the art of the film in America.