

## **Bette & Joan**

Bette Davis (1908-1989) and Joan Crawford (1904-1977) were two of classic Hollywood's most famous and respected leading ladies. Crawford got her start in the silents, first appearing in minor roles in lavish MGM productions, then transitioning to the gritty Warner Bros. films which earned her fame. While Crawford's performances often appeared over-the-top, she was always psychologically committed to her roles, which grew darker, more villainous and indelible as her career progressed. Davis, on the other hand, worked at Warner for nearly her entire career, establishing herself as Hollywood's top star and a model for the strong, modern woman. The two stars famously carried on a bitter feud throughout their careers, which became fodder for unending gossip and legendary Hollywood lore. But despite their deep personal animosity, the rivalry pushed each to excel, and between them they achieved some of the highest highs in some of the most memorable roles that we have had the good fortune to enjoy.

Friday, July 8, 7pm

***Grand Hotel***, US, 1932

dir. Edmund Goulding (112 mins., Drama, 35mm)

Featuring a veritable who's-who of MGM royalty during the studio's heyday, including an ascendant Greta Garbo, Barrymores John and Lionel, Wallace Beery, and a sultry, seductive Joan Crawford in an early featured role, *Grand Hotel* is a clear precursor for the kitchen-sink, domestically-focused dramas of Robert Altman and Paul Thomas Anderson, and was a mid-career triumph for wunderkind MGM producer Irving Thalberg. *Grand Hotel* follows several narrative strands that routinely intermingle, including the machinations of a rich baron (Beery) as he tries to close a deal, the last days of a despondent accountant (Lionel Barrymore), and the exploits of a jewel thief (John Barrymore). Garbo and Crawford, however, are the most tragic and affecting figures as, respectively, the fallen-from-grace Russian ballerina Grusinskaya and the aspiring actress Flaemmchen. Filled with unforgettable lines from a labyrinthine screenplay adapted from the 1929 novel by Vicki Baum, *Grand Hotel* is a melancholic yet "dazzling parade of star iconography."—Dave Kehr, *The Chicago Reader*. 35mm print courtesy of the Academy Film Archive.

Sunday, July 10, 7 pm

***Dangerous***, US, 1935

dir. Alfred E. Green (79 mins., Melodrama, 35mm)

Davis won her first Academy Award for her portrayal of Joyce Heath, a Broadway actress down on her luck and needing rehabilitation to regain her lofty position among Broadway's elite. She meets Don Bellows (Franchot Tone), an architect who was once inspired by Joyce to follow his career path, and who feels he owes her. Thus begins their relationship and her re-entry into stardom. Hanging over their seemingly idyllic pairing, however, is Don's engagement and pending wedding, and Joyce's shambles of a marriage that she's desperate to hide by any

means necessary. Joyce—self-identified as a jinx who brings trouble to everything with which she becomes involved—finds herself moving down a path of no return, grasping at the chance for salvation. “Bette Davis is such an eerie stimulant in this movie that you can see why some people loved her and others hated her, while still others were split.”—Pauline Kael.

Sunday, July 17, 4:30 pm

***Jezebel***, US, 1938

dir. William Wyler (104 mins., Drama, 35mm)

Her role in Wyler’s sensitive Antebellum drama garnered Bette Davis the second—and somewhat shockingly, final—Oscar of her burgeoning career, unforgettably playing the careening New Orleans society belle Julie Marsden. Julie is engaged to Preston “Pres” Dillard (Henry Fonda in a particularly headstrong role), a banker in the midst of the biggest deal of his career, who refuses to drop his work obligations at Julie’s beck and call. Julie lashes out and Pres, unwilling to capitulate, fights back—most prominently in an unforgettable, lavish Olympus Ball sequence. But in *Jezebel*, where lovers freely quarrel and North-South politics collide, a yellow fever outbreak looms and the couple’s fighting soon takes a back seat to more substantial concerns—namely, life and death. In the end, Davis steals the show, for *Jezebel* is “a lurid Deep South women’s picture that allows Davis first to scheme then repent: it is lit up by her little girl’s conviction—a trash heap glowing at twilight...Now at last she was in her tortured element.”—David Thomson, *A Biographical Dictionary of Film*. 35mm print courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Saturday, July 23, 7 pm

***Dark Victory***, US, 1939

dir. Edmund Goulding (104 mins., Melodrama, 35mm)

*Dark Victory* is a highly emotional, unforgiving piece of classical cinema about the choices one might make when learning of imminent death. Bette Davis stars in one of her most sensitive and magnetic roles, for which she was again nominated for an Academy Award—a regular occurrence by 1939. As Judith (a role originated on Broadway by Tallulah Bankhead), Davis plays a young Long Island socialite with a carefree attitude toward life, who suddenly begins to experience unexpected accidents that lead to a very serious diagnosis by a brain researcher Dr. Frederick Steele (George Brent). When Judith learns the truth—following her engagement to Steele—she realizes that she must try to enjoy life before it’s unceremoniously taken from her. *Dark Victory*, a gut-wrenching yet crucial film from Hollywood’s most storied year, is, “even by the standards of a typical Bette Davis melodrama...an embarrassment of riches.”—Keith Uhlich, *Slant Magazine*.

Sunday, July 24, 7 pm

***The Women***, US, 1939

dir. George Cukor (133 mins., Melodrama, 35mm)

Though its focus on modern women's lives unfortunately made *The Women* a relative outlier in the 1930s Hollywood pantheon, this delightful melodrama follows three women through the travails (and joys) of their lives: the happy-go-lucky socialite Mary Haines (Norma Shearer), her gossipy, chatterbox cousin Sylvia Fowler (Rosalind Russell), and the seductive, smoky counter girl Crystal Allen (Joan Crawford). Despite the very simple plot—Crystal gets fleetingly involved with Mary's husband, while Mary must hatch a plan to win her man back—the film is pure pleasure for the way the women interact. Anita Loos's brilliant, wise-cracking script paves the way for the three actresses to do their vicious best under Cukor's assured, sensitive direction.

Sunday, July 31, 7 pm

***The Letter***, US, 1940

dir. William Wyler (95 mins., Thriller, 35mm)

This second adaptation of W. Somerset Maugham's 1927 stage play features Bette Davis' turn as Leslie Crosbie, an adulterous yet misunderstood plantation wife in what is now Malaysia. Leslie, married to Robert (Herbert Marshall) yet unapologetically in love with another man, is caught in a bind when she kills her lover, ostensibly out of self-defense. However, the titular letter—a paradoxically threatening love note sent on the night of her crime—makes the truth murky at best, and sets up what amounts to a sham trial with racial overtones. The letter, miraculously for sale at a life-destroying price, forms the crux of further backroom machinations as shady characters spill forth from the shadows to vie for a piece of the prize. And while the duped Robert unknowingly heads toward financial ruin, Leslie tragically cannot escape her love for the other man, no matter how hard she tries. Davis is captivating, and was again nominated for Oscar in this “brilliant melodrama.”—Preston Wilder, *Theo's Century of Movies*. 35mm print courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Monday, August 1, 7 pm

***The Little Foxes***, US, 1941

dir. William Wyler (116 mins., Drama, 35mm)

*The Little Foxes* was the final collaboration of Bette Davis and William Wyler, a tumultuous creative—and sometimes romantic—partnership that brought Hollywood key works such as *Jezebel* and *The Letter*. Davis plays Regina Hubbard Giddens, a wealthy, independent Southern woman passed over for a huge inheritance, but between her scheming, already-wealthy brothers and her near-death husband, she is caught in web of arch-male control and deceit. But Regina, in unswerving Davis fashion, has plans of her own to enact and fears no one. Featuring incredible, and often disconcertingly claustrophobic, deep-focus cinematography by Gregg Toland, *The Little Foxes*—a nine-time loser at the 1942 Academy Awards, including a top actress nod for Davis—is a “slickly mounted” film with “power and superb performances.”—Dave Kehr, *The Chicago Reader*.

Saturday, August 6, 7 pm

***Now, Voyager***, US, 1942

dir. Irving Rapper (117 mins., Melodrama, 35mm)

Another film-carrying performance, another Academy Award nomination for Bette Davis—her fifth in five consecutive years—for *Now, Voyager*, one of the most openly melodramatic films in a career filled with them. Charlotte (Davis), a spinster living under the iron fist of an oppressive mother, is sent to a sanitarium following a mother-induced nervous breakdown. Once there, she blossoms under the supervision of Dr. Jaquith (Claude Rains). Sent on a long cruise at the insistence of a loyal friend, Charlotte meets the unhappily married Jeremiah (Paul Henreid), with whom she falls quickly, irrevocably in love. But that love, seemingly doomed from the start, eventually leads Charlotte into a mentor/mother role for Jeremiah's wayward daughter Tina, a relationship which gives Charlotte a new sense of purpose and devotion. A hugely popular success upon release, and inducted into the National Film Registry in 2007, *Now, Voyager* is a film that “demonstrates just how clever and accomplished Hollywood's art of popular storytelling is.”—Dana Polan, *Senses of Cinema*.

Sunday, August 7, 7 pm

***Mildred Pierce***, US, 1945

dir. Michael Curtiz (111 mins., Melodrama, 35mm)

Following her early career at MGM, Joan Crawford moved to Warner Bros. in 1944, with *Mildred Pierce* her first starring role (though she played a bit part in Warners' 1944 support-the-troops variety picture *Hollywood Canteen*.) The plucky studio had made famous the likes of James Cagney and Humphrey Bogart, and put Crawford in more sympathetic professional company than she had experienced at MGM. And what a first role: here Crawford plays the eponymous character, a wife stuck between her cheating, deadbeat husband Bert (Bruce Bennett) and her diabolical eldest daughter Veda (Ann Blyth). Mildred decides to go solo, divorcing her husband and starting her own restaurant with the help of a friend (Eve Arden). But which threat will collapse her first? Hard-swinging new beau Beragon (Zachary Scott), Veda, who takes to Beragon's fast lifestyle, or the return of the jealous Bert? A potent blend of melodrama and noir that won Crawford the only Academy Award of her career, “*Mildred Pierce* tapped directly into the postwar mood of the country—generally upbeat, but with an undercurrent of anxiety about traditional notions of sexuality and marriage.”—Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System*.

Friday, August 12, 7 pm

***Humoresque***, US, 1946

dir. Jean Negulesco (125 mins., Drama, 35mm)

Featuring a soundtrack packed to the gills with famed classical compositions, *Humoresque* gave Joan Crawford the opportunity to ascend the social ladder in her portrayal of Helen Wright, a society matron who falls for a much younger man, the concert violinist Paul Boray (a superb John Garfield). Although initially focused on Paul's early pluckings and subsequently rapid rise to fame (assisted by Helen), *Humoresque* probes the depths of cross-generational relationship psychology through Paul and Helen's equally distracted positions—Paul's career focus and Helen's loveless marriage. "A film about Joan Crawford's face, that marvel of early make-up call architecture and brutal star self-will...(in which she's) dedicated to making drunken self-loathing as glamorous as possible."—Dan Callahan, *Slant Magazine*.

Sunday, August 14, 7 pm

***Possessed***, US, 1947

dir. Curtis Bernhardt (108 mins., Film noir, 35mm)

Joan Crawford was nominated for an Academy Award—only the second of her long and distinguished career—for her role as Louise Howell, the nurse for an oil man's (Raymond Massey) ill wife, and who is unhealthily obsessed with her engineer neighbor, the fatalistic David Sutton (Van Heflin). When David falls for—and quickly marries—the oil man's daughter Carol (Geraldine Brooks), is he doing so out of love for Carol, or out of spite for Louise and her obsession? Featuring stunning set-pieces illustrating Louise's rapidly declining mental health, as well as many compositions taken from the German expressionist playbook, "this picture, directed by Curtis Bernhardt, is often very striking, and, clearly, he and the cast are doing their damndest. Insanity is used, in the usual 40s Hollywood manner, to provide an excuse for high-on-the-hog melodrama; there isn't a trace of believability—that's part of what makes it enjoyable."—Pauline Kael.

Monday, August 15, 7 pm

***Daisy Kenyon***, US, 1947

dir. Otto Preminger (99 mins., Drama, 35mm)

On loan to Fox, Joan Crawford delivers yet another tour-de-force performance (one of the greatest of her career) as the titular character, a successful Manhattan career woman caught in a love triangle with two men: the philandering Dan O'Mara (Dana Andrews) and widowed veteran Peter Lapham (Henry Fonda). *Daisy Kenyon*, much, much more than merely a Crawford vehicle, is a deep exploration of love and is refreshingly free from the usual Hollywood moralizing, instead offering a compassionate view of three wayward souls at a time when the nation was simultaneously confident in its immediate prospects yet questioning its overarching direction. "Perhaps Preminger does deserve the final kudos, because his elaborate mise-en-scène, the unprecedented screenplay (adapted by David Hertz, with a grown-up relationship with the real postwar world), and a cast at the height of its powers is made to cohere into a distinct vision that talks and walks and feels utterly unique. It's a revelation."—Michael Atkinson.

Saturday, August 20, 7:30 pm

***Beyond the Forest***, US, 1949

dir. King Vidor (97 mins., Film noir, 35mm)

After an extremely successful 18-year run at Warner Bros., Davis's work for the studio ended on a bitter note with the teetering-on-campy trash masterpiece *Beyond the Forest*. Even more than most Davis films, Vidor's creation is a one-woman show, in which she plays the tragic Rosa Moline, a small-town "forgotten woman" and doctor's (a near-invisible Joseph Cotten) wife. When a businessman comes to town, Rosa, who dreams of big-city life, is immediately infatuated and longs for escape; when she's spurned on both sides, she veers toward an ignominious fate. Critically divisive upon release but extremely fascinating in its portrayal of a woman without options, this is a film for which the term "re-appraisal" must have been coined. "For all its rampant vulgarity, *Beyond the Forest* is visually and emotionally alive."—David Melville, *Senses of Cinema*. 35mm print courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Sunday, August 21, 7 pm

***All About Eve***, US, 1950

dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz (138 mins., Drama, 35mm)

Bette Davis picked up a justified "late-career" Academy Award nomination (her eighth) for her role as Margo Channing, a famous Broadway actress just past the ripe old age of 40, who fears a career decline. Showbiz timing being what it is, Eve Harrington (Anne Baxter), an up-and-coming young actress, swoops in to remind Margo of the clock. The two develop a relationship as star and understudy, but as Eve not-so-subtly undermines Margo's career—including befriending theater critic Addison DeWitt (George Sanders in an Oscar-winning turn), shacking up with Margo's playwright friend Lloyd Richards (Hugh Marlowe), and interfering with Margo's beau Bill Sampson (Gary Merrill)—her own star begins to ascend, revealing her true motives and underlining the cutthroat world of both Broadway and Hollywood. *All About Eve*, perhaps the quintessential film not only about the crisis of age and beauty, but also about how to protect oneself from life's interlopers, is "endlessly quotable...not so much laugh-out-loud funny as it is scalding."—Farran Smith Nehme, *The Self-Styled Siren*.

Friday, August 26, 7 pm

***Sudden Fear***, US, 1952

dir. David Miller (110 mins., Film noir, DCP)

Joan Crawford stars alongside noir mainstays Gloria Grahame and Jack Palance (both excellent) in this suspenseful, doomed love triangle directed by the relatively unheralded freelancer David Miller. Myra Hudson (Crawford, nominated for a third and final Academy Award) is a flourishing yet lonely Broadway playwright conducting auditions for her new work. Lester Blaine (Palance), a self-involved actor not up to Myra's snuff, courts her on a cross-

country train ride to San Francisco. The two marry, but when a considerable financial question looms, Lester hatches a plot with his scheming ex, Irene (Grahame), to get back at Myra. "With suspense screwed way beyond the sticking point, superb camerawork, and Crawford in nerve-janglingly extravagant form, it's hugely enjoyable."—Tom Milne, *Time Out London*.

Saturday, August 27, 4:30 pm

***Johnny Guitar***, US, 1954

dir. Nicholas Ray (110 mins., Western, 35mm)

Widely cited as an allegory for the anti-Communist hearings overseen by the House Un-American Activities Committee that led to the Hollywood blacklist of 1955, *Johnny Guitar* is one of the fiercest Westerns ever made. Vienna (an unforgettable Joan Crawford), a saloon owner in a small Arizona town, walks a fine line between the conservative townsfolk, led by vicious ex-rival Emma Small (Mercedes McCambridge), and an outlaw gang led by the Dancin' Kid (Scott Brady). When the mysterious Johnny Guitar (Sterling Hayden) arrives into town, it dredges up a tumultuous past with Vienna, and drives a wedge between the warring parties. McIvers, the local sheriff (Ward Bond), gives Vienna, Guitar, and the gang 24 hours to leave town, which sets up one of the most unexpected showdowns in Hollywood history. Shot in retina-searing Tricolor by veteran lenser Harry Stradling, *Johnny Guitar* is one of the most original films of the 1950s. "Once seen, never forgotten."—Scout Tafoya, *Brooklyn Magazine*.

Sunday, August 28, 7 pm

***What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?***, US, 1962

dir. Robert Aldrich (134 mins., Melodrama, 35mm)

Robert Aldrich directs one of the most mythical productions in Hollywood history, the lone film which co-starred longtime personal and professional rivals Joan Crawford and Bette Davis, whose dynamic is brilliantly channeled into this unhinged work of the latter-day studio system. Baby Jane Hudson (Davis in an Academy Award-nominated turn, her last) is a faded vaudeville star; Blanche Hudson (Crawford), her sister, achieves much more success as an actress but in 1935 is paralyzed in a suspicious car accident. Three decades later, the sisters live together but Jane's mental health is rapidly deteriorating. Blanche, wheelchair-bound, has few options to escape Jane's growing rage, the culmination of a lifetime of playing second fiddle. Shot by legendary cinematographer Ernest Haller, who had earlier shot both Crawford (*Mildred Pierce*, *Humoresque*) and Davis (most of her early Warner output including *Jezebel* and *Dark Victory*), *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* has "one of Hollywood's best gothic grotesqueries."—Roger Ebert.