

# *The Best Years of Our Lives*

By Randy Carter

**D**irector William Wyler returned from World War II a changed man. He lost the hearing in one ear from explosions filming the Italian campaign, but it was the emotional debt he owed to his fallen comrades that weighed on his conscience. Like fellow veterans George Stevens, John Ford and Frank Capra he came home to postwar Hollywood and cautiously took up the wand of make believe after years of filming carnage, death and concentration camps.

Postwar movie attendance reached peaks that have never been duplicated, but it was the soldiers themselves who shaped the presentation of *The Best Years of Our Lives*. Across four long years GI's fought and died and...

**The Greatest Generation** watched movies...  
**returned to work** movies on sheets, movies on the decks of

battleships, movies in jungle camps, movies in bombed out churches and castles. These men facing real death and injury had no patience for phony heroics on screen. They booed lustily any actor or situation that didn't ring true. There was a new reality in post war Hollywood and Wyler and his peers got the message.

According to Goldwyn legend, Time Magazine printed a picture showing a group of homecoming Marines leaning out of windows of a railway car on which had been chalked "Home Again!" Sam picked up the phone and for \$12,500 commissioned author MacKinlay Kantor



to write a story treatment. He turned out a novel in blank verse entitled GLORY FOR ME, the story of three men coming back to face civilian life.

In the original story, Homer, the young enlisted man returned with war wounds that produced spastic paralysis. Concerned that an actor portraying that type of wound would be hopelessly unconvincing, Wyler and screenwriter Robert Sherwood visited veterans' hospitals and were introduced to amputees. Non-actor Harold Russell, a sergeant who had lost both hands when a dynamite charge exploded prematurely during training in North Carolina and had been featured in an Army Pictorial Service documentary, intrigued Wyler. Russell

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# SAMUEL GOLDWYN the producer

***Pictures are for entertainment,  
messages should be delivered  
by Western Union”  
– S. Goldwyn***

**H**e was an independent long before the break-up of major studios and their chains. He was among the first advocates of the primacy of writers, of putting classics on film, of transferring Broadway hits to Hollywood cameras. But he was also infamous for his relentless ambition, bad temper and genius for publicity – Samuel Goldwyn became Hollywood’s mentor for all future independent producers.

Born in Warsaw, Goldwyn, with the newly “Americanized name” Samuel Goldfish, became a factory worker at a glove factory in Gloversville, NY where he discovered he was an extraordinary salesman.

On a bitter cold winter day in New York, he walked into a nickelodeon on Herald Square to warm up. Watching the jerky, silent one-reelers fired his imagination.

He rushed directly from the nickelodeon on Thirty-fourth Street to his brother-in-law’s apartment, passionate about launching a career in motion pictures. Jesse Lasky asked how long Sam had been contemplating this idea. “About a half hour,” Goldfish replied, “as long as it took me to get home.”

Lasky was not enthusiastic, but Goldwyn stirred the interest of a young playwright, Cecil B. DeMille, to direct their first movie and the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company

was born. DeMille moved the operation into a barn in Cahuenga Pass and they became the first permanent feature film company actually located in the town of Hollywood – it was 1913 and the movie was *The Squaw Man*.



Goldfish remained in New York to sell the film to theatres, but soon grew tired of selling – he wanted to be a producer. The company merged in 1916 with Adolph Zucker’s Famous Players and eventually became Paramount Studios.

Goldfish sold his interest in 1917 for \$900,000. He then formed a new production company (as a producer!) with the famous theatrical Selwyn family. The new partners invented the name Goldwyn Pictures. The Goldwyn Company stars including Mabel Normand and Will Rogers. But a short time later, to the Selwyn’s dismay, Goldfish made the company name his own – he officially became Samuel Goldwyn and promptly left the partnership. That company later merged to become M-G-M. But Goldwyn preferred to produce

***I was always an independent  
producer, even when I had  
partners – S. Goldwyn***

independently. In 1923 he became an independent producer and formed Samuel Goldwyn, Inc. He said: “I found that it took a world of time trying to explain my plans to my associates; now I can save all that time and energy, and put it into making better pictures.”

In 1925, he married actress Frances Howard who became his lifelong partner – both in marriage and business.

For the next 35 years, Goldwyn was the boss and sole proprietor of his own production company, a mini-studio specializing in expensive “quality” films, distributed initially by United Artists and later by RKO. The Goldwyn lot, now called Hollywood Center Studios is located on Formosa Avenue and Santa Monica Boulevard. Touted by publicists for his “Goldwyn Touch,” he boosted the careers of many actors at various times included, Lawrence Olivier, Merle Oberon, Dana Andrews, Ronald Colman, Eddie Cantor, Gary Cooper, David Niven and Danny Kaye with movies like *Wuthering Heights*, *Dodsworth*, *Pride of the Yankees*, *The Bishop’s Wife*, and *Best Years of Our Lives*.

Ironically, Goldwyn had a falling-out with Wyler over who should get the lion’s share of credit for *Best Years*. Their friendship was soon restored – speaking for the majority of those who worked under the lash of the Goldwyn whip when Wyler said, “Even when you can’t agree with Sam, you have to respect him.”

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# Goldwynisms

From that cold day in the nickelodeon to 1959, Goldwyn producer over 100 films. His last film was *Porgy and Bess* (1959) starring Sidney Poitier and Dorothy Dandridge.

Samuel Goldwyn, who had been wheelchair-bound after a debilitating stroke in 1969, died in his sleep on January 31, 1974 at the age of 95.

Looking at Goldwyn's contribution to the American cinema, no one would deny that some of Hollywood's best years were spent with Samuel Goldwyn. ■

*We welcome once again  
Linda Harris as a contributor.*

## Samuel Goldwyn Filmography

(partial, in viewer preference)

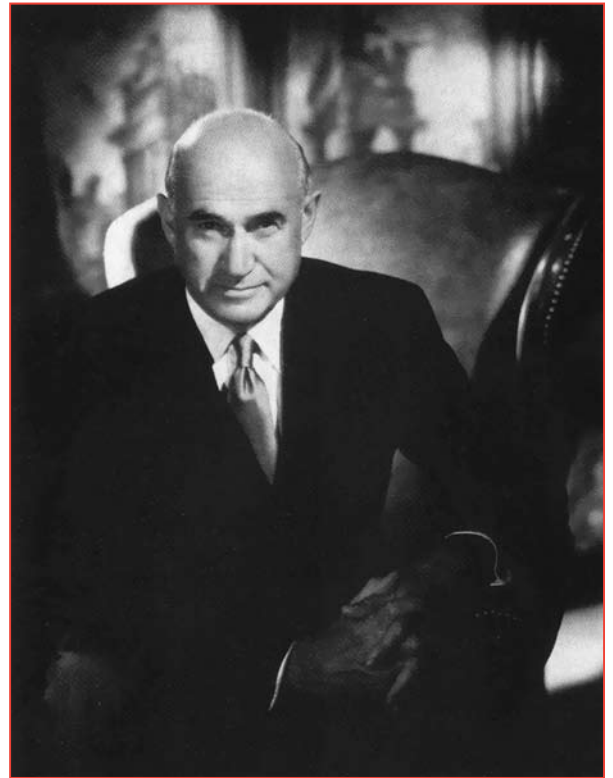
The Internet Movie Database lists 174 titles for Goldwyn including:

*Dodsworth* (1936)  
*Porgy and Bess* (1959)  
*The Little Foxes* (1941)  
*Street Scene* (1931)  
*Wuthering Heights* (1939)  
*Pride of the Yankees* (1942)  
*The Bishop's Wife* (1947)  
*Stella Dallas* (1937 and 1925)  
*Guys and Dolls* (1955)  
*The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*  
(1947)  
*Barbary Coast* (1935)  
*Hans Christian Andersen* (1952)

Goldwyn also appeared on  
*The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1952

***"In two words:  
im-possible."***

***"...We've all passed  
a lot of water since  
then."***



***"A verbal contract isn't worth the paper it's written on."***

***"The movies is a place where  
everybody can go and not blush  
over what they see on the  
screen."***

***"Anyone who goes to a  
psychiatrist should have  
his head examined."***

***"Too caustic? To hell with the costs,  
we'll make the picture anyway."***

***On Fredric March:  
"I'm overpaying him, but  
he's worth it."***

***"When you're a star,  
you have to take the bitter  
with the sour."***

William Wyler's

# *The Best Years of Our Lives*

Black and White – 1946 – 172 min  
Samuel Goldwyn Productions  
Print Courtesy of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

## Cast

Myrna Loy ..... Milly Stephenson  
Fredric March (AA)..... Al Stephenson  
Dana Andrews..... Fred Derry  
Teresa Wright..... Peggy Stephenson  
Virginia Mayo..... Marie Derry  
Cathy O'Donnell ..... Wilma Cameron  
Hoagy Carmichael ..... Butch Engle  
Harold Russell (2 AA) ..... Homer Parrish  
Gladys George..... Hortense Derry  
Roman Bohnen ..... Pat Derry  
Ray Collins ..... Mr. Milton  
Minna Gombell ..... Mrs. Parrish  
Walter Baldwin ..... Mr. Parrish  
Steve Cochran..... Cliff Scully  
Dorothy Adams..... Mrs. Cameron  
Don Beddoe ..... Mr. Cameron  
Victor Cutler..... Woody Merrill  
Marlene Aames..... Luella Parrish  
Charles Halton..... Mr. Prew (Novak Complaint)  
Ray Teal..... Mr. Mollett (Axis powers sympathizer)  
Howland Chamberlain ..... Mr. Thorpe  
Dean White ..... Mr. Novak  
Erskine Sanford ..... Mr. Bullard  
Michael Hall ..... Rob Stephenson  
Gene Krupa ..... Himself (archive footage)  
James Ames..... Jackie\*  
Carol Andrews ..... Saleswoman\*  
Mary Arden..... Miss Barbour\*  
Al Bridge..... Gus, Salvage Superintendent\*  
Harry Cheshire..... Minister at Wedding\*  
Joyce Compton..... Hat Check Girl\*  
James Conaty..... Man At Bank Dinner\*  
Heinie Conklin..... Customer\*  
Bert Conway..... ATC Sergeant\*  
Clancy Cooper..... Taxi Driver\*  
Mady Correll..... Announcer\*  
Roy Darmour ..... Parking Lot Attendant\*  
Hal K. Dawson..... Man at Airport\*  
Claire Du Brey..... Mrs. Talburt, Perfume Customer\*  
Tom Dugan..... Doorman\*  
Edward Earle ..... Steese (Bank)\*  
Blake Edwards..... Corporal at ATC Counter\*  
Billy Engle..... Customer\*  
Ben Erway ..... Lou Latham (Bank)\*  
Doris June Fesetta ..... Camera Girl\*  
Pat Flaherty ..... Salvage Foreman (Junking Bombers)\*  
Tennessee Ernie Ford ..... Nightclub/Hillbilly singer\*  
Louise Franklin..... Ladies' Room Attendant\*  
Harry Gillette ..... Card Player at Lucia's\*  
Art Gilmore ..... Trailer Narrator (voice)\*  
Dick Gordon..... Maitre d'Hotel\*  
Earle Hodgins ..... Diner Attendant (Lucia's)\*  
Stuart Holmes..... Wedding Guest\*  
Ray Hyke..... Gus The Foreman\*

Directed by ..... William Wyler (AA)  
Written by..... MacKinlay Kantor (Novel Glory for Me)  
Robert E. Sherwood (AA)  
Producer by..... Samuel Goldwyn (AA)  
Cinematographer ..... Gregg Toland  
aerial Cinematographer ..... Paul Mantz\*  
Editor ..... Daniel Mandell (AA)  
executive in charge of production ..... Leon Fromkess  
assistant director..... Joseph Boyle  
Original Music by..... Hugo Friedhofer (AA)  
musical director ..... Emil Newman  
Art Directors..... Perry Ferguson & George Jenkins  
Set Decorator..... Julia Heron  
illustrator..... Dorothea Holt\*  
Costume Designer..... Sharaff  
Hair Stylist ..... Marie Clark  
Make up by ..... Robert Stephanoff  
sound recordist..... Richard DeWeese  
supervising sound editor ..... Gordon Sawyer  
sound ..... Larry Gannon\*  
special effects director ..... John P. Fulton\*  
special effects ..... Harry Redmond Sr.\*  
key grip ..... E. Truman Joiner\*  
title designer ..... Dale Tate\*

John Ince ..... Ryan\*  
Teddy Infuhr..... Dexter, Brat in Drugstore\*  
Jackie Jackson ..... A Boy\*  
Robert Karnes ..... Technical Sergeant\*  
Kenner G. Kemp..... Man At Bank Dinner\*  
Donald Kerr..... Steve the Bartender\*  
Alyn Lockwood ..... Counter Girl\*  
Susan Mann..... Announcer\*  
Michael Mauree ..... Glamour Girl\*  
Doreen McCann..... A Girl\*  
Peggy McIntyre ..... Girl at Soda Fountain (Enter Mollett)\*  
Chef Milani ..... Giuseppe (Lucia's Restaurant proprietor)\*  
Harold Miller ..... Wealthy Man at Nightclub\*  
Ernesto Morelli ..... Card Player\*  
William Newell..... Waiter At Bank Dinner\*  
Georgie Nokes..... One of Homer's 'Kids'\*  
William H. O'Brien ..... Nightclub Waiter\*  
Joe Palma ..... Card Player\*  
Leo Penn ..... ATC Corporal\*  
Caleb Peterson..... Black Soldier At Airfield\*  
Norman Phillips Jr..... Clarence 'Sticky' Merkle\*  
Jack Rice..... Apartment Desk Clerk\*  
Suzanne Ridgeway..... Girl At Table With Cliff\*  
Mickey Roth..... Boy at Soda Fountain (Enter Mollett)\*  
Ruth Sanderson..... Mrs. Garrett\*  
Ralph Sanford ..... George H. Gibbons\*  
Noreen Sayles ..... A Girl\*  
Stephen Soldi ..... Card Player\*  
John Tyrrell ..... Angus (Gus), Butch's Waiter\*  
Amelita Ward..... Counter Girl\*  
Marek Windeheim..... Waiter at Lucia's Restaurant\*  
Catherine Wyler ..... Department store extra\*

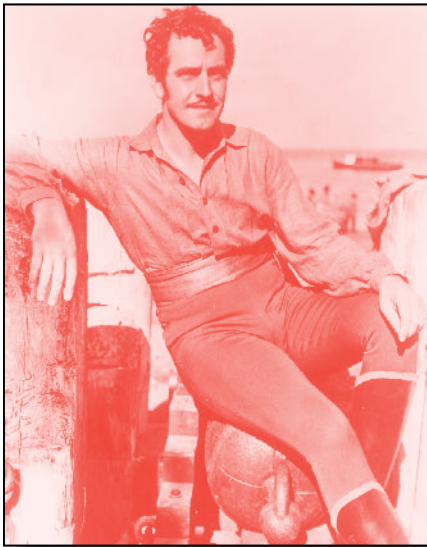
\* uncredited, AA Academy Award

# Photo Gallery



Photos (clockwise from above):





**E**rnest Frederick McIntyre Bickel began his career as a banker, but an emergency appendectomy caused him to reevaluate his life, and in 1920 he began working as an extra in movies made in New York City, using a shortened form of his mother's maiden name, Marcher. He appeared on Broadway in 1926, and by the end of the decade signed a film contract with Paramount Pictures.



With Olivia de Havilland in Warner Bros' *Anthony Adverse* (1936)

March won an Oscar® nomination in 1930 for *The Royal Family of Broadway*, in which he played a role based upon John Barrymore. He won the Oscar® for Best Actor in 1932 for *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*,

and again in 1946 for *The Best Years of Our Lives*. In 1954, March hosted the 26th Annual Academy Awards®.

March was one of the few actors to resist signing long-term contracts with the studios, and was able to freelance and pick and choose his roles, in the process also avoiding typecasting. By this time, he was working on Broadway as often as in Hollywood, and his screen career was not as prolific as it had been.

March, however, won two Best Actor Tony Awards: in 1947 for the play *Years Ago*, written by Ruth Gordon; and in 1957 for a Broadway production of Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*.

A friend of playwright Arthur Miller, he was favored by the writer to inaugurate the part of Willy Loman in the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Death of a Salesman* (1949). Director Elia Kazan cast Lee J. Cobb, however, as Willy Loman, and Arthur Kennedy as his son Biff Loman, two men that the director had worked with in the film *Boomerang!* (1947). March later played Willy Loman in Columbia Pictures's 1951 film version of the play, directed by Laslo Benedek. Perhaps March's greatest late-in-life role was in *Inherit the Wind* (1960), opposite Spencer Tracy.

When March underwent surgery for prostate cancer in 1972, it seemed his career was over, yet he managed to give one last great performance in *The Iceman Cometh*, as the complicated Irish bartender, Harry Hope. Ironically, co-star Robert Ryan was entering the final stages of lung cancer, so the film was shot on a deathwatch.

Fredric March died in Los Angeles, California, at the age of 77 from



*We Live Again* (1934) with Anna Sten, A Samuel Goldwyn production.

cancer. He was married to actress Florence Eldridge from 1927 until his death; they had 2 adopted children. ■



With Humphrey Bogart in Paramount's *The Desperate Hours* (1955).

**Academy Awards® and nominations**

- 1952 Nominated  
*Death of a Salesman*
- 1947 Won  
*The Best Years of Our Lives*
- 1938 Nominated  
*A Star Is Born*
- 1932 Won  
*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*
- 1931 Nominated  
*The Royal Family of Broadway*

would play Homer and win two Academy Awards® for the same part, an honorary Oscar™ and one for Best Supporting Actor.

Fredric March came on board when William Powell beat him out for the title role in *Life With Father* (1947). Sam Goldwyn persuaded Myrna Loy to play the wife of the banker gone to war, Fredric March. He thought she might be sensitive about playing Teresa Wright's mother but she signed with great enthusiasm. Virginia Mayo was Dana Andrew's two timing wife and Cathy O'Donnell played the young girl destined to marry the amputee.

Dana Andrews was chosen to play ex-pilot Fred Derry, featured in one of the most memorable sequences in the film. Wyler had discovered in Ontario, twenty-five miles east of Los Angeles, a graveyard for bombers and fighter planes constructed too late to be used in the war. "We've got to use this", he told Sherwood and cameraman Greg Toland (*Citizen Kane*). With a series of dolly shots and the sound of actual engines starting and taking off, they recreated the feeling of an actual bombing run with Andrew's character once again in the nose of a B-17.

*The Best Years of Our Lives* cost \$2.1 million dollars to produce and Wyler took great care to rehearse and discuss every sequence until the cast understood the context and the intent. The film opened in New York in November of 1946, replacing Laurence Olivier's *Henry V* at the Astor, with special pricing (\$2.40 on weekends for reserved seats). It became a phenomenal success with critics and public alike, earning

\$11 million in the U.S. and Canada during its first years in release and, in Great Britain, out grossing *Gone With the Wind*. On March 11, 1947 President and Mrs. Harry Truman attended the Washington premiere with Robert Sherwood. Two nights later *The Best Years of Our Lives* dominated the entire Oscar® slate. ■

*The Best Years of Our Lives*  
1946 Academy Awards®

- Best Actor in a Leading Role*  
**Fredric March**
- Best Actor in a Supporting Role*  
**Harold Russell**
- Best Director*  
**William Wyler**
- Best Film Editing*  
**Daniel Mandell**
- Best Music, Scoring of a Dramatic or Comedy Picture*  
**Hugo Friedhofer**

*Best Picture*  
**Samuel Goldwyn**

*Best Writing, Screenplay*  
**Robert E. Sherwood**

*Nominated Best Sound, Recording*  
**Gordon Sawyer**

*Honorary Award*  
**Harold Russell**  
*For bringing hope and courage to his fellow veterans through his appearance in*  
*The Best Years of Our Lives*



**Including Short Subjects**

**The Vanishing Private**

Walt Disney Donald Duck Cartoon, Technicolor – 1942 – 7:30 min.  
Print courtesy of Walt Disney Pictures



- Produced by.... Walt Disney
- Directed by ..... Jack King
- Story by ..... Harry Reeves & Carl Barks
- Animation     Paul Allen Hal King, Ed Love,  
                         Charles A. Nichols, Vladimir Tytla, Judge Whitaker
- Layouts..... Bill Herwig
- Voices..... Billy Bletcher, Don Brodie, Clarence Nash
- Song..... Leigh Harline
- Music..... Oliver Wallace

Private Donald camouflages a cannon with invisible paint then paints himself to escape the wrath of Sergeant Pete.

Research on short subjects courtesy of the Cine-Loa Archives.  
Feature credits courtesy of IMDB.com.

# Society News

## Crime Scene Investigation Benefits the Alex

*History For Hire* is a leading prop and set decoration provider for the motion picture industry. When owner and AFS Board Member Pam Elyea got a call from *C.S.I. New York* with a request for period film projectors, she knew how to add some reality to the scene. Her next call was to AFS Board member (and Alex Theatre projectionist) George Crittenden to see if he could come to the set as a consultant. George said he'd be delighted to lend a hand if any fee could be donated to the Alex Theatre to complete the soundproofing of the projection booth. This long delayed project became the happy benefactor of George's \$1,200 donation.

George spent several days at CBS Radford Studios (formerly Republic and Mack Sennett Studios) and had a wonderful time with the cast and crew. The only sour note was the story line... the projectionist gets murdered. Thanks George.

*Randy Carter, President*

### MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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Please list your two favorite films:

[www.AlexFilmSociety.org](http://www.AlexFilmSociety.org)

Tickets: 818.243.2539

**Saturday, July 7, 2007 at 2 pm & 8 pm**

On the Big Screen of the Alex Theatre!

## FORBIDDEN PLANET

At once intelligent and campy, *Forbidden Planet* is an intriguing, sci-fi classic that borrows from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and strongly anticipates "Star Trek" in its sci-fi milieu.



Set in 2200 AD, a spacecraft from Earth arrives at a distant planet to investigate the status of a missing colonizing party. What Commander John Adams (Leslie Nielsen) and his crew find is a single survivor, the secretive, uncooperative Dr. Morbius (Walter Pidgeon) – and his virginal but uninhibited daughter Altaira (Anne Francis). As Adams' crew prepares to relay their discoveries to Earth and receive further instructions, the deadly force that decimated the first crew reawakens. Key members of Adams' team are found murdered and Dr. Morbius may not be revealing all he knows... *Forbidden Planet* was nominated for an Oscar™ (special effects) and is presented in CinemaScope with Color by DeLuxe. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (1956).

**Saturday, September 15, 2007 at 8 pm ONLY**

*8th Annual! Live Music, Comedy acts, and Laurel & Hardy's THE MUSIC BOX.*

## VAUDEVILLE EXTRAVAGANZA!

Once again the grand tradition of Vaudeville returns the Alex Theatre to its roots when we present 5 live acts of live music, magic, comedy and thrills. Our evening will be capped off by two comedy classics both involving pratfalls and stairs: Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy's **THE MUSIC BOX** (1932) and Larry, Moe and Curly in **AN ACHE IN EVERY STAKE** (1941). This is an evening of family entertainment at its best, don't miss it!



### VOICE of the THEATRE

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