

Generations

The woes of a movie director

It's almost Oscar time, but I'm debating whether to watch the three-hour program since I haven't seen any of the movies nominated (patiently waiting for Netflix).

Remote channel surfing to catch red-carpet interviews and responses to the "who are you wearing" question becomes rather tedious after the first low-cut, thigh-high-slit gown sets the bar for the night.

My favorite actors have been gone so long, but every once in a while, a super movie with a good cast and a dynamic director will catch my eye. Even though films have changed dramatically with all the newest high-tech imagery and gadgets, without a good director to take charge, the film may fail miserably.

According to www.thecinmaholic.com, some of the top five film directors in today's mainstream are veterans of the old stock in trade. No. 1 was Martin Scorsese ("Taxi Driver," "The Wolf of Wall Street," "Goodfellas"), followed by David Fincher ("Gone Girl," "The Social Network"), then Quentin Tarantino ("Pulp Fiction," the "Kill Bill" movies), next Paul Thomas Anderson ("There Will Be Blood"), and finally Richard Linklater ("Boyhood").

Of course, many will disagree with the list, and I think Stephen Spielberg ("Schindler's List," "Jaws," "Saving Private Ryan") should have been No. 1, but everyone has different tastes when it comes to movies.

One thing is unanimous for all: directing big-name stars has never been an easy job.

For example, Spielberg had his hands full when he directed the amazing Daniel Day-Lewis in "Lincoln." Day-Lewis insisted that everyone on the set, including Spielberg, call him "Mr. President."

He also refused to use any words or phrases that Lincoln wouldn't have actually used in the 19th century.



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The English actor also refused to speak to anyone British for fear that it might "throw him off." It must have worked, since he took home the Oscar for "Lincoln" and Spielberg won as

best director.

But a Method actor is ... well, a Method actor, and any method he or she uses successfully has to be admired.

Director Jim Sheridan worked with Day-Lewis in "My Left Foot," the story of Christy Brown, a writer and painter who was born with cerebral palsy and was only able to control his left foot. Day-Lewis insisted on spending most of the film shoot in a wheelchair, being wheeled around set and lifted over lighting cables by other crew members.

He even visited restaurants in the wheelchair, demanding that he be wheeled everywhere to understand how it feels. An Oscar was his reward, but Sheridan lost the best-director Oscar to Oliver Stone.

Top honors for patient directors should go to Francis Ford Coppola, who directed Marlon Brando in "Apocalypse Now." Playing the mad Col. Kurtz, who was supposed to be a lean, furious warrior, marvelous Marlon turned up on set vastly overweight and unprepared, and then shaved his head just because he fancied it.

With none of his lines memorized, Brando slowed shooting significantly as he had to be fed every piece of dialogue while his co-stars waited.

Coppola won the Oscar for directing and the film won for Best Picture.

It didn't get easier for John Frankenheimer, who directed Brando in "The Island of Doctor Moreau." Brando was hot one day, so he put an ice bucket on his head, refusing to remove it for the entire shoot.

He stopped learning his lines, so they were read to him through an earpiece. Finally, Brando became obsessed with co-star Nelson de la Rosa, the world's smallest man, and had the script rewritten so la Rosa could be in all future scenes — wearing the same clothing as him.

But hey, I loved Brando and I've always told my kids that bluejeans, a white T-shirt and a motorcycle bad-boy image was begun by none other than Marlon courtesy of one of his early films, "The Wild One."

Actresses, too, make some tough demands, and Method acting often has nothing to do with it. Robert Aldrich, who directed Bette Davis and Joan Crawford in "Whatever Happened to Baby Jane," learned how to play peacemaker ... quickly.

More recently, director Adam McKay takes honors for putting up with the demands of Paris Hilton, who had a small part playing herself in "The Other Guys." Her demand list was three pages long and included having live lobsters around for when she got hungry, and a bottle of liquor of a certain brand to wash them down.

All was for naught — Hilton's scene was left on the cutting-room floor. Even without her, the movie was a huge hit for Mark Wahlberg and Will Ferrell.

Be careful what you ask for, Paris.

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