



the modern filmmakers who often imitate his style.

A suitable answer to this question would contain any number of these options, and more. Certainly French director Francois Truffaut did much to elevate the status of Hitchcock with his book-length interview in the 1960s. Yet, the logistics of his success pale in comparison to the unadulterated pleasure the viewing of his movies bring to audiences, even today.

Beyond the mystique of Hitchcock lie those films, which for the largest part of a century have entertained, thrilled, and even scared us. His films are many. So, let us try to highlight a few of the Master's outstanding masterpieces.

But for the moment, let us go back in time. Sixty years before the filming of *Psycho*, Hitchcock's 47th feature film. Back across the Atlantic, to the country of Hitchcock's birth and early career...

The young Hitchcock

At the turn of the previous century, England was about to emerge from the conservative Victorian era. Worldwide advances in technology seemed to herald a better life for everyone. A new art form, called cinema, was taking its first infant steps, and above a greengrocery at 517 High Road, Leytonstone, London, on August 13, 1899 Alfred Joseph Hitchcock, future master of the art form, was born.

Spending his formative years living above his family's store certainly had an impact on him. Noting the crates of imported produce with the stamps of foreign countries on them sparked a lifelong passion for travel and foreign destinations. As a boy, his bedroom wall was decorated with a world map. Using pins, and **Lloyd's register**, his hobby was charting the journeys of British mercantile ships across the world. By his early teens, he had even explored the city's bus system, having travelled to the end of every single line available at the time. In later movies, such as *To catch a thief* (1955), and *The man who knew too much* (1956), the use of exotic locations such as Monte Carlo and Marrakech evidenced this passion. In many other films, aeroplanes, busses, and especially trains were also often featured. On reflection trains, boats and planes are a strong recurring motive in the cinema of Hitchcock.

Aside from these early experiences, not much is known about the childhood of the young Alfred (though many have speculated!). Perhaps even his most famous

ALEXANDER VAN DER POLL

Correspondent

'If I made Cinderella, the audience would be looking for a dead body in the coach.'

Alfred Hitchcock

On a chilly December evening in 1958, Hitchcock felt very satisfied indeed. He had completed the shower scene from *Psycho*. The camera angles, lighting, lenses, the actors blocking, everything was perfect. All that remained to be done was to cast the actors, prepare the studio, and get the cameras rolling the next Spring.

To understand why words such as 'genius' and 'master' crop up so frequently when Hitchcock is discussed one needs to consider his unique work ethic. As the imagined scenario above implies, Hitchcock believed in the meticulous planning and storyboarding of each film. (Storyboard: A means of pre-planning a sequence of individual shots for a film by means of a series of drawings, somewhat like a comic strip. Some directors, notably Alfred Hitchcock, prepare an entire film, and the necessary camera set-ups, by

means of a storyboard. Others use it to work out in advance the likely problems, or the best positions for the camera, in action sequences. Storyboard artists can play a creative role in movie-making by suggesting shots or camera angles and movements that may not have occurred to the director.) This allowed Hitchcock to see the film in his mind's eye, before filming began, in the same way a musician may hear the music before composing.

Do these technical details explain the phenomenal success of Alfred Hitchcock? How did he become so well known? How did it happen that even those unfamiliar with his work, know of his reputation? How do they manage to recognise his visage in photos? Could it be because of his numerous, often amusing, cameo appearances in his films? (For a complete list of these cameos, refer to the accompanying filmography.) Perhaps his relentless pursuit of the press? Maybe it is due to his phenomenally successful television series, which he hosted and introduced for ten years? Or the 1980s spin-off series, that burnt the image of that famous silhouette into the minds of many new generation film fans? Perhaps thanks are due, in part, to



childhood recollection could merely be a fabrication.

The story goes that Hitchcock, as a young boy of about five or six, was sent to the local constabulary with a note from his father. The note instructed the official to lock the child in a prison cell for a few minutes, with the admonition, 'this is what happens to naughty little boys'.

In later years, Hitchcock would recall vividly the horror he experienced in those few minutes. He would often cite the incident as the root of his mistrust of the police, and of the justice system. Is this an authentic story, or merely a made up vignette? Whatever the answer, it does provide an interesting background to the many 'Wrong Man' films that he made during his career.

What we do know is that Hitchcock attended a Jesuit boarding school in London. A natural breeding ground for the theme of 'Catholic Guilt' that would often crop up in his later films.

Old Boys of St Ignatius have only vague memories of the quiet, retiring boy who occupied the classrooms from 1910 to 1913. Alfred Hitchcock was a diligent student, and largely stayed out of trouble.

Following a year at the London County Council School of Engineering and Navigation, he changed direction and studied fine arts at the London University. It was here that his creative impulses were first stirred. Soon he discovered graphic design, and pursued a career in this field.

At the tender age of 15, Hitchcock started work at the WT Henley Telegraph Works. At Henley's he soon became a popular member of staff. Often he would draw amusing caricatures of senior staff members, and he later contributed regularly to the company's in-house publication, writing short, humorous stories.

Yet, Hitchcock was not satisfied. Early in life, he had acquired a love of cinema, often attending shows with his older sister; until she married and left London. His greatest

desire was to enter the burgeoning world of film.

A colleague at the Henley Company steered him in the right direction when Hitchcock was employed to design captions and titles for the company's subsidiary film studio. Shortly after, in his early twenties, Hitchcock found employment at the London branch of the American studio, the Famous Players-Lasky. Here he continued his work as title designer for the silent films produced at the time.

In the early days of film, such designations as director, producer, title designer, art director, et cetera, were very much blurred. It was due to this that Hitchcock managed to try his hand at directing a fair number of silent movies. The legendary Michael Balcon produced most of these, and Hitchcock even travelled to Germany to work with the famous UFA Company. This experience in the German tradition of expressionistic filmmaking would later benefit several of the director's cinematic efforts.

During this time, Hitchcock met the future Mrs Hitchcock. Alma Reville worked as a continuity supervisor at the English film studios. Their courtship was traditional and uneventful, but the importance of Alma in Hitchcock's career can never be overstated. Their eventual marriage in 1926 would last their entire lifetime, and span over five decades. Through all this time, Alma was Hitchcock's silent partner, in almost every one of his artistic ventures. If Alma had doubts about the merit of a decision Hitchcock was taking, he would abandon it, and take a different approach. In this sense, the movies more often than not had the input of two Hitchcocks. Their close partnership with assistant Joan Harrison, was humorously dubbed 'The Three Hitchcocks'.

Earlier successes

After nearly a dozen false starts, the film that first brought Alfred Hitchcock significantly to the public attention, was the 1926

silent film **The lodger**. Based on the play by Mrs Belloc-Lowndes, and loosely based on the homicidal spree of Jack the Ripper in Victorian London. The film met with great success and marked the first time that Hitchcock dabbled in what would become his trademark genre - suspense.

A few more minor features followed that success, which culminated in the release of England's first 'talking' picture - **Blackmail** (1929). Originally conceived and filmed as a silent feature, producer Michael Balcon, insisted that Hitchcock add sound in the post-production. Its German speaking star, Anny Ondra, had a thick accent, deemed inappropriate for her role, and she had to be dubbed by Joan Barry. Notwithstanding the problems of converting a silent feature into a talking picture, **Blackmail** was another major success, and Hitchcock seemed well on his way to becoming the legend that we know today.

A minor success was achieved with Hitchcock's next thriller, called **Murder**. Made in 1930, it continued the famous Hitchcock theme of a person convicted for a crime they did not commit. Four years later he wowed audiences with the spy thriller, **The man who knew too much**, which he would remake twenty-two years later with Doris Day and James Stewart. **The 39 steps** (1935), marked Hitchcock's second significant contribution to the spy-thriller genre. Today this remarkable film, based upon a book by John Buchan (though little of the original story remained in the script), is still regarded as one of the best chase movies ever filmed.

In making **Sabotage** (1936), Hitchcock learnt an extremely valuable lesson in suspense. In an early scene, a young boy is sent with a parcel through the streets of London. The package needs to be delivered within a certain time. Though the boy is unaware of it, the audience knows that the parcel contains a time bomb. The boy is unexpectedly detained en route. Tension



in the audience mounts. Regular cuts to a clock-face emphasise the time factor. One can almost hear the audience shouting out to the boy to hurry up. Alas, things go awry. The bomb explodes, killing the child.

Audiences reacted with horror. After all the mounting tension, they expected Hitchcock to allow the boy to survive. The public outrage caused Hitchcock to realise that when building suspense in such a way, one needs to bring relief at the end of that scene. The bomb exploding is almost anticlimactic. Hitchcock would never make this same mistake again! He once said, 'There's no terror in a bang, only in the anticipation of it.'

The Selznick partnership

A further successful entry in the spy genre came with **The lady vanishes** (1938). By this time, with the aid of his signature cameo appearances, Hitchcock was the only British director that the viewing public recognised. From now on, audiences would deliberately seek out the latest offering from 'the name above the title'.

By the mid 1930s, Hitchcock had even managed to alert Hollywood to his potential. In 1937, David O Selznick, famed future producer of **Gone with the wind**, approached Hitchcock to enter into a four-picture deal with Selznick International Pictures.

Hitchcock jumped at the chance. Living and working in America had been a long-time dream of his. After hurriedly finishing the shooting of Daphne du Maurier's **Jamaica inn**, Alfred, his wife Alma, and their young daughter Patricia, set sail for the New World in mid 1939.

By the time the family had settled down in their new environment, Hitchcock had already been in conference with Selznick for many months prior; regarding their first collaboration. It was to be yet another filming of a Daphne Du Maurier novel; this time - **Rebecca**.

For his first American picture, Hitchcock could not have wished for a greater success than **Rebecca**. Its stars, Laurence Olivier and Joan Fontaine, were the flavour of the time, and the haunting story gripped audiences in the way it could only happen in a producer's dream.

But, the honeymoon was short lived! Selznick was well known in film history as being an overbearing, controlling producer. Selznick did not feel content in merely fulfilling his role as producer. Instead, he wanted artistic input and complete veto rights in even minor decisions. For a director with Hitchcock's sense of creativity and planning, this was a match made in Hell. Not only did he find 'The Selznick Touch' restrictive, his contract prevented him from working independently for any other producer in Hollywood. This unquestionably retarded Hitchcock's progress in America. It would be seven years before Hitchcock was again allowed artistic freedom to explore the depths of his inherent creativity. A fascinating account of the turbulent relationship between these two giants can be read in Leonard J Leff's 1988 **Hitchcock and Selznick: The rich and strange collaboration of Alfred Hitchcock and David O Selznick in Hollywood**.

Moving on

Apart from **Rebecca**, this volatile working relationship produced another of Hitchcock's most famous movies: **Spellbound** (1945). The film starred Ingrid Bergman and Gregory Peck. Furthermore it featured the unforgettable **Spellbound concerto** by Miklos Roza, and dream imagery created by the famous Salvador Dali.

Hitchcock had random brief hiatuses from his Selznick contract, working for other studios (with Selznick's approval). These efforts would more often than not benefit Selznick financially, with Hitchcock often working for no salary at all. However, in lieu of money, other less oppressive producers afforded Hitchcock artistic freedom. Under these circumstances he was able to create some truly wonderful films, such as **Suspicion** (1941) for RKO studios, **Shadow of a doubt** (1943) for Universal (incidentally, this was Hitchcock's personal favourite), and the unforgettable Cary Grant/Ingrid Bergman film, **Notorious** (1946), also made for RKO.

Other films worth noting are **Lifeboat** (1944) and **Rope** (1948). These films are significant, in that they were experiments in technique for Hitchcock. In **Lifeboat** the entire story takes place on the eponymous lifeboat, with the seven-strong cast spending the film in this close, confined space. Even Hitchcock's cameo was particularly noteworthy! In one scene, Gus is reading a newspaper, on the back of which is an advertisement for a weight loss system, known as 'Reduco'. Hitchcock appears (in print) as the model for this system, in amusing before and after pictures.



Quotes...

In **Rope** Hitchcock attempted perhaps his most daring experiment in cinema. The film, loosely based on the Leopold and Loeb murders of the 1920s, was shot in a seemingly continuous take, with no noticeable breaks in action. Again, the action is confined solely to the small apartment shared by the murdering duo.

These films were minor successes, but were pivotal to Hitchcock improving his craft, outside the suffocating Selznick dynamic.

The Selznick/Hitchcock partnership ended on a sour note with the disappointing Bergman/Peck courtroom drama **The Paradine case** (1947), but finally Hitchcock was able to start his Hollywood career afresh, with what is undoubtedly his richest time in cinema - the 1950s.

In part two we take an in-depth look at some of the many highlights in Hitchcock's career during the fifties and sixties.

Recurring themes and motives will be identified, and we look at the legacy of The Master of Suspense. A list of his cameo appearances will also be featured.

Bibliography

Auiler, Dan. **Hitchcock's secret notebooks**.- Bloomsbury, 1999.

Auiler, Dan. **Vertigo: the making of a Hitchcock classic**.- Titan Bks., 1999.

Bogdanovich, Peter. **Who the devil made it: conversations with Robert Aldrich, George Cukor, Allan Dwan, Howard Hawks, Alfred Hitchcock...**- Ballantine, 1998.

Hitchcock often told the story of how he caused consternation in a crowded elevator by muttering, quite audibly to a friend: 'I didn't think the old man would bleed so much.'

'The cinema is not a slice of life, it's a piece of cake.'

Upon defending his claimed statement that 'actors are cattle' he stated, 'What I said was, actors should be treated like cattle.'

'Drama is life with the dull bits left out.'

'Always make the audience suffer as much as possible.'

'Terror is a matter of surprise; suspense, of forewarning.'

Hitchcock hated long dialogue sequences, and once said, 'A filmmaker isn't supposed to say things. He's supposed to show them.'

Cary Grant said, 'He couldn't have been a nicer fellow. I whistled coming to work on his films.'

'Even my failures make money and become classics a year after I make them.'

'The length of a film should be directly related to the endurance of the human bladder.'

Condon, Paul & Sangster, Jim. **The complete Hitchcock**.- Virgin, 1999.

*Duncan, Paul. **Alfred Hitchcock: architect of anxiety 1899-1980**.- Taschen, 2003.

Freeman, David E. **The last days of Alfred Hitchcock**.- Pavilion Bks., 1985.

Gow, Gordon. **Hollywood in the fifties**.- Zwemmer, 1971.

Kashner, Sam & MacNair, Jennifer. **The bad & the beautiful: Hollywood in the fifties**.- Time Warner, 2003.

Leff, Leonard J. **Hitchcock and Selznick**.- Weidenfeld, 1988.

McGilligan, Patrick. **Alfred Hitchcock: a life in darkness and light**.- ReganBooks, c2003.

Perry, George. **The films of Alfred Hitchcock**.- Studio Vista, 1965.

Spoto, Donald. **The life of Alfred Hitchcock: the dark side of genius**.- Collins, 1983.

Maltin, Leonard (Ed.). **Leonard Maltin's movie and video guide 1996 edition**.- Signet, 1995.

Thomas, Robert Joseph. **Selznick**.- Doubleday, 1970.

Halliwell's who's who in the movies (3rd edition by John Walker).- HarperCollins, 2003.

Note: *Books not in Provincial Library Service stock.

