

Adrian Wootton Talks Hollywood legends



Presented by [MIFF 37°South Market & Accelerator](#), Adrian Wootton returns exclusively to Melbourne for another series of his acclaimed *Illustrated Film Talks*, this year focusing on Hollywood's Golden Age and four of its legendary creative personalities, who made and appeared in some of the greatest films in Tinseltown history. All four of these Hollywood legends started their careers pre-Second World War, shone in the Golden Age of the 1940s and 1950s Hollywood and endured to sustain their careers into the 1970s and 1980s.

Before he arrives, we asked him a few questions:

How do you explain that Hollywood's Golden Age has become a myth in our popular culture, and that all its legendary actors are still so much talked about?

I think for a brief period of time a small group of really talented entrepreneurial people created a perfect entertainment system, literally a dream machine that created stories in every conceivable genre for the whole western world to watch, populated by impossibly glamorous attractive people who still managed to relate to the audience. Society has changed and that time has gone but a larger proportion of those movies and the people who made them and starred in them still stand up magnificently today, influencing contemporary films, filmmakers and performers.

How did you choose these four specific Hollywood legends?

All of the people in these talks are creative talents whom I massively admire and whose work I love.

John Huston because he was a larger than life character, he was part of a Hollywood Dynasty and one of the greatest filmmakers who ever lived. He made some of my favourite films – such as *The Maltese Falcon*, *Treasure of The Sierra Madre*, *The Man Who Would be King* and *The Dead*, all of them risk taking, original and highly influential.

Bette Davis for her remarkable acting, in so many movies, which displayed her intelligence, sharp wit and incredible diversity over a really long career. Frankly, if you

don't love her in *Now Voyager*, *Dark Victory*, *All About Eve* and even *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane* you don't love movies!

Fred Astaire is to me the greatest onscreen dancer in history of cinema (and, yes, that includes Gene Kelly!). His skill artistry, grace and innovation in films such as *Top Hat*, *Easter Parade* and *The Band Wagon* shaped movie musicals for three decades – and he was a pretty good straight actor too.

And David Niven because he represents the kind of English Gentleman, on and off screen, that I always wished I could be, whilst being a really fine actor and a rare Brit who became part of that small, exalted community of stars in the Golden Age. He was also the star of one of my favourite movies of all time, the classic *A Matter of Life and Death*. He also wrote brilliantly about his experiences in a series of wonderful books.

In Hollywood's Golden Age, studios had immense influence. Was it possible for the actors to have a creative and independent voice outside the path imposed by their studios?

It was really tough to have any kind of control of your career in Hollywood, as the movie moguls controlled every aspect of what you did and the films you made. All of stars I'm talking about this year fought the studios to gain increased independence, better pay and more freedom to choose when and what kind of films to be involved in.

Bette Davies fought for her independence during her career. How tough was it to be a woman in the Hollywood of the 1950s/1960s?

It was really hard to be in the movie industry and to be a successful woman star in the Hollywood Golden age (from the 1930-50s), as not only did the studios determine what you made and who you worked with, they also determined every aspect of your personal appearance. Bette Davis recounts in many interviews her fights (and law suits) with Warner Brothers over what sort of movies she should appear in, and also about having natural hair colour, her eyebrows, her make-up, even what kind of underwear she wore! She was such a formidable person that by and large she fought and won but that wasn't always the case and many women's careers ended up on the scrap heap for refusing to do what Hollywood "wanted".

You have an incredible knowledge of cinema: in your opinion, which films from the Golden Age are the most remarkable and you would advise a novice to watch?

Well, of the the four subjects I am covering, the movies I have referenced above wouldn't be a bad place to start. Also, *Easter Parade*, *The Maltese Falcon*, *All About Eve* and *A Matter Of Life and Death* (lthough it's British rather than US!) will undoubtedly be immensely pleasurable. But frankly there are so many more riches – not just in the canon of Astaire, Huston, Niven and Davis – and so many other great talents it's difficult to know where to stop and start. But some of my favourites include westerns like *Rio Bravo* or *The Searchers*, all the Laurel and Hardy movies, musicals like *Singing In the Rain*, crime thrillers such as *In a Lonely Place*, (and many other Humphrey Bogart movies too), lots of Hitchcock movies like *Notorious* and *Vertigo*, not to mention Orson Welles and *Citizen Kane*!

There are so many ways to access these movies: online, on TV and DVD as well as in the cinema. The key is to start with a group of classics like those I have mentioned and then, depending on what you like, explore other films by same performers or directors or by genre.