

I Believe...  
My Favorite Top 10 Movies from the 1930's Are...  
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I Believe...these ten films from the 1930's represent some of the finest film making not just of that decade, but of any decade. Consider this: Pictures with sound were first used in 1929 and were strictly in Black and White (B&W). These 10 films show amazing development with the use of sound and, later in the decade, color as represented by "Gone With the Wind" and "Wizard of Oz" both made in 1939. (As any film buff knows 1939 was the miraculous year for great films and several of them are on this list.) All the films below have one thing in common: Great stories written, directed, acted and photographed by people who loved what they did. The energy and exuberance in each of these films is palpable. If you haven't seen some or any of these try to find them at your favorite movie store.

- **"City Lights"** 1931, B&W. Charlie Chaplin, Virginia Cherrill. Directed by Charlie Chaplin, this masterpiece tells the story of the little Tramp and his love for a blind flower girl. Incredibly touching, sad and incredibly hilarious, all at once. Although silent films were finished, as a popular medium, Chaplin still continued doggedly to make them since he still had wonderful things to say without dialogue. Genius at work.
- **"If I Had A Million"** 1932, B&W. W.C. Fields, Charles Laughton, Gary Cooper, Mary Boland, Charlie Ruggles. Directed by James Cruze, the film rotates around a dying multi-millionaire who gives one million dollars (in 1932!) to strangers and how they deal with it. The various vignettes vary in length but the results are all great, especially Fields as a crusader against bad drivers in Los Angeles, naturally. And the final story is a delight in comeuppance.
- **"She Done Him Wrong"** 1933, B&W. Mae West, Cary Grant. Directed by Lowell Sherman, West wrote and produced this play on Broadway in a much raunchier version, which was toned down for this movie. However, it's still racy and hilarious especially when she sings the songs "Frankie and Johnny" and "Easy Rider". West asked specifically for Grant even though he wasn't well-known, then, and made him a star with this movie. There will never be another Mae West for certain: She was unique.
- **"The Black Cat"** 1934, B&W. Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi. Directed by Edgar Ulmer, this horror film about a devil-worshipping architect and a doctor out for revenge has amazing sets and one of most horrific endings in movies, without being grossly graphic. Ironically, Karloff plays the bad guy but in real life he was a wonderfully kind, generous and gentle man. Black & White suits this film amazingly well.
- **"My Man Godfrey"** 1936, B&W. Carole Lombard, William Powell, Eugene Pallette, Gail Patrick, Mischa Auer. Directed by Gregory La Cava, this wonderful screwball comedy involves a rich, crazy New York household who takes in a "forgotten man" (a hobo) and makes him their butler with wonderful, life- changing results for the family. Carole Lombard was never more beautiful or hilarious as the not-really-so-ditzzy blond who sets her sights on Godfrey. A gem.
- **"Stage Door"** 1937, B&W. Katherine Hepburn, Ginger Rogers, Lucille Ball, Eve Arden, Ann Miller. Directed by Gregory La Cava, Hepburn portrays a rich girl who wants to be a stage actress and insists on living with other struggling actresses in a theatrical boarding house. Based on the Kaufman-Ferber play, several stars-in-the-

making (Ball, Arden, Miller) shine in small, hilarious roles. This is an incredible film with great performances and rapid-fire dialogue.

- **“The Women”** 1939, B&W/Color. Norma Shearer, Joan Crawford, Rosalind Russell, Joan Fontaine, Paulette Goddard, Marjorie Main. Directed by George Cukor, and adapted from the Claire Boothe play, this hilarious and star-studded “cat-fight” boasts a cast of nothing but women who talk about nothing but men. There’s not one photo or statue of any men in this picture. The plot centers on friendship, divorce, the “mistress”, and revenge. Although in perfect black and white there is a hand-tinted fashion-show in the middle of the film, which is a hoot. This film made Joan Crawford a star, but it was one of the last films for superstar Norma Shearer before she retired in the 40’s.

- **“The Adventures of Robin Hood”** 1939, Color. Errol Flynn, Olivia De Havilland, Basil Rathbone, Claude Rains. Directed by Michael Curtiz, this great, swashbuckling film of the famous Sherwood Forest bandit and his Maid Marian has everything going for it including one of the most beautiful and rousing musical scores by Erich Korngold. Flynn tried to seduce Olivia de Havilland who wanted nothing to do with him, physically, although she liked him personally. Years later she said she had kicked herself many times for not having “succumbed” to his charms.

- **“The Wizard of Oz”** 1939, B&W/Color. Judy Garland, Margaret Hamilton, Ray Bolger, Bert Lahr, Jack Haley. Directed by Victor Fleming, everyone knows this film so I won’t go into detail. This was directed by the same man who directed “Gone With the Wind”, and in the same year. There’s a great book called “The Making of The Wizard of Oz” by Aljean Harmetz that is a well-written and fascinating look behind the scenes.

- **“Gone With the Wind”** 1939, Color. Clark Gable, Vivien Leigh, Olivia de Havilland, Leslie Howard, Hattie McDaniel. Directed by Victor Fleming, this was arguably the most eagerly anticipated picture ever made and it didn’t disappoint. Basically, a Civil War soap opera of massive proportions with Vivien Leigh (unknown in the States, and a minor actress in England) stealing the picture as the willful yet resourceful Scarlett O’Hara, and Clark Gable the definitive Rhett Butler. A couple of people I know don’t want to see it because the depiction of Blacks in the film is stereotypical, but Hattie McDaniel (who was the first Black person to win an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress) brings great dignity and resonance to her part. The memorable score is by the legendary Max Steiner. The Director, Victor Fleming, wasn’t quite finished working on this film when he had a feigned “nervous breakdown”. The Director, Sam Wood, was brought in to continue filming but after two weeks Fleming miraculously recovered. In today’s comparable money exchange, GWTW has made more money than any other film in history.

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