

## TIMELINE OF INDEPENDENT CINEMA and the AMERICAN NEW WAVE

### *PRECURSORS TO AMERICAN NEW WAVE*

- 1954 Roger Coran directs *The Monster From the Ocean Floor* for independent producers James Nicholson and Samuel Arkoff, for \$10,000. Starts a production relationship of low budget, quickly made films and independent distribution that continues until 1970
- 1956 American International Pictures formed in 1956 from American Releasing Corporation by James H. Nicholson and Samuel Z. Arkoff, dedicated to releasing independently produced, low-budget films, primarily of interest to the teenagers of the 1950s. Nicholson and Arkoff served as executive producers while Roger Corman and Alex Gordon were the principal film producers and, sometimes, directors.
- 1957 John Cassavetes shoots *Shadows*.
- 1957 Louis B. Mayer, legendary head of MGM and founder of Studio Star system dies. Marking in part the end of the old Hollywood moguls
- 1961 Method actor and maverick *auteur* film-maker John Cassavetes' low-budget, black and white, non-Hollywood studio film *Shadows*, was his first directorial effort - deliberately created as a contrast to Hollywood's studio system. The self-financed, self-distributed *cinema verite* film (initially shot in 1957) with a jazzy score was a story about an inter-racial couple. It was first publically screened in 1958, but then withdrawn and reshoots in 1959, and then re-released - first to European audiences and then to US audiences in 1961. Shot on 16-mm film and using a non-professional cast and crew, the improvisational film symbolized the emergence of the New American Cinema movement, and inspired the growth of underground films and other independent ("indie") and personal works.
- 1962 Government regulations forced studios out of the talent agency business.
- 1963 The most expensive film ever made (in terms of real costs adjusted for inflation) -- and one of the biggest flops in film history -- opened, *Cleopatra*, starring Elizabeth Taylor, Rex Harrison, and Richard Burton. Marks the END of the old studio structure.

- 1966 Bob Rafelson and Schneider "created" the musical group The Monkees, and win an Emmy for "The Monkees" comedy TV series. This success leads to the Psychedelic Monkee's movie *Head* and the forming of the independent production company BBS in 1968.
- 1966 Roger Corman directs *The Wild Angels*, a prototype for Easy Rider, that would come 2 years later. Staring Henry Fonda, about a chapter of the Hells's Angels and released by American International Pictures
- 1966 Sweeping revisions were made in the Hays Code regarding the standards of decency for films, suggesting restraint in questionable themes, rather than forbidding them completely. In the new code of the Motion Picture Association of America, virtue and the condemnation of sin were still encouraged. However, it eliminated previous prohibitions of "lustful kissing" and "passion that stimulates the base emotions," and permitted certain films to be labeled "recommended for mature audiences." The ground-breaking UK Swinging 60s comedy film *Georgy Girl* became the first film to carry the label "suggested for mature audiences."
- 1966 MGM distributed Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow Up*, the director's first non-Italian feature, in defiance of demands that it make cuts. Jane Birkin and Gillian Hills, acting as groupies in the film, displayed glimpses of full-frontal nudity.
- 1966 Paramount's purchase by Gulf & Western marked the beginning of a trend toward studio ownership by diversified, multi-national conglomerates.
- 1967 Director Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde* was promoted with the slogan for its anti-heroes: "They're young. They're in love. They kill people." The anti-establishment, violent film, originally criticized at the time of its release, was aimed at youth audiences by its American auteur and producer/star Warren Beatty.
- 1967 Mike Nichols became the first director to earn \$1,000,000 for a single picture — for *The Graduate* (1967).
- 1967 Jack Warner, co-creator of Warner Bros., sold his remaining interest in the company to a Canadian corporation called Seven Arts Ltd. for \$84 million. The company became known as Warner-Seven Arts.
- 1968 BBS formed by Bert Schneider, Bob Rafelson and Steve Blauner

- 1968 Rafelson made his feature debut directing *The Monkees in Head* (1968), a wild, surreal hodgepodge of music and parody which is a fun time capsule of late sixties fads.
- 1968 A new voluntary ratings system was developed and went into effect in late November by the MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) - it was announced by its President Jack Valenti. The new system classified films according to their suitability for viewing by young people, in four categories: "G" for general audiences; "M" for mature audiences; "R," no one under 16 admitted without an adult guardian (later raised to under 17 years of age); and "X," no one under 17 admitted. The four criteria used in the ratings included theme, language, violence, and nudity and/or sexual content. Many parents thought films rated M contained more adult content than those that were rated R; this confusion led to its replacement in 1969 by the rating of GP (or General Public, or **G**eneral Audiences, **P**arental Guidance Suggested). In 1970, the GP (or earlier M) rating was changed to PG: Parental Guidance Suggested, and the age limit was increased to 17. [The PG ratings category would again be revised in 1984.]
- 1968 The flesh-eating zombie sub-genre of films was given a boost with George A. Romero's cheap, stark black and white horror flick, *Night of the Living Dead*.
- 1968 Peter Bogdanovich was the first critic and film scholar to become a Hollywood writer-director, with his directorial debut for *Targets*, made for American International Pictures. He deliberately revered past American directors in his own work which extended into the 70s.

### ***Turning Point – AMERICAN NEW WAVE BEGINS***

- 1969 Warner Studio bought by Kinney (from Seven Arts); MGM bought by Kerkorian; Universal International close to liquidation; Fox records losses of \$65m; UA, MGM and WB come under new leadership; first major X-rated release (*Midnight Cowboy*) gets Academy Award for Best Picture; Francis Coppola founds American Zoetrope; American Film Institute (AFI) opens Advanced Study Centre in Los Angeles; Paul Newman becomes top box-office draw; about 70% of features are 'runaway' productions made outside Hollywood;
- 1969 *Midnight Cowboy*, starring Dustin Hoffman and Jon Voight, became the only X-rated picture to ever win an Oscar for Best Picture (the rating was later changed to an R). More and more mainstream films

contained sexual content that was unacceptable only a few years earlier.

- 1969 A new wave of independent film-making in Hollywood was signaled by Dennis Hopper's anti-Establishment release of the low-budget *Easy Rider*. Its phenomenal success shook up the major Hollywood studios. This movement was termed Hollywood's New Wave (fashioned after the earlier French New Wave), and would last through the next decade. Hopper's next experimental film *The Last Movie* (1971) was less successful, both commercially and critically, and sounded a death-knell for his own ambitious film-making efforts.
- 1969 Sam Peckinpah's ultra-violent western *The Wild Bunch* was exceptional for its non-glorification of bloodshed, and its slow-motion, heavily-edited, stylized views of multiple deaths -- it was influential for other filmmakers ranging from Martin Scorsese to John Woo to Quentin Tarantino in years to come. Due to its violence, the film was originally threatened with an X-rating by the newly-created MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America), but an R-rating was its final decision. A so-called 'director's cut' version of the film, threatened with an NC-17 rating when submitted to the MPAA ratings board in 1993 prior to a re-release in 1994, held up the film's re-release for many months
- 1969 African-American film-maker and cinematographer Gordon Parks directed his own autobiographical *The Learning Tree*, and became the first black director of a major feature film for a major US studio. This laid the groundwork for Parks' next film -- the landmark *blaxploitation* action film *Shaft* (1971) with Richard Roundtree - a very successful cross-over film.
- 1970 Roger Corman stopped directing to form his own company, New World, and produced a long string of successful drive-in fare, written and/or directed by such neophytes as Jonathan Demme, Jonathan Kaplan, Joe Dante, Allan Arkush, James Cameron, Paul Bartel, John Sayles, and Ron Howard. At New World Pictures he also, incongruously, distributed to American audiences such distinguished fare as Ingmar Bergman's *Cries and Whispers* (1972) and Federico Fellini's *Amarcord* (1974).
- 1970: Fox records deficit of \$77.4 m; MCA and Paramount form Cinema International Corporation (CIC) to distribute theatrical films; Roger Corman founds New World Pictures; Sidney Poitier, Paul Newman and Barbara Streisand form First Artists Production Company; International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees & Motion

Picture Machine Operators (IATSE) offers producers wage concessions to stimulate sub-\$1m production; Hollywood Film Council (HFC) stages action rally to focus concern about 'runaway' productions; IMAX debuted at Osaka Exposition; [*Airport*].

- 1970 Rafelson's next film *Five Easy Pieces* (1970) was astonishing: a lyrical, adult study of identity and confusion, with Jack Nicholson as an oil-rig worker alienated from his girlfriend, his job, and his elitist family. Critics were dazzled by the film's intelligent, elliptical, European-influenced tone, and Rafelson received Oscar nominations for Best Picture and Screenplay, written with Adrian Joyce
- 1970 Nevada millionaire Kirk Kerkorian bought MGM in 1970, and then promptly downsized the company. He sold off acres of the studio's real estate of backlots, and its valuable film memorabilia (such as Dorothy's *The Wizard of Oz* ruby slippers) for a fraction of its real value. The sell-off financed an expansion of Kerkorian's hotel-casino investments, and began a decline for the studio.
- 1971(May) Darryl F. Zanuck, brought back to head Twentieth Century fox after *Cleopatra* in disaster (1962) is finally forced out of studio.
- 1971 The blaxploitation film genre, with anti-Hollywood films aimed at a primarily African-American audience, was born with Melvin Van Peebles' groundbreaking *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song!* -- the first commercially-successful black-themed film. The landmark crime/action blaxploitation film *Shaft*, starring Richard Roundtree as a defiantly-proud black hero, was directed by Gordon Parks and would become a major cross-over hit. From then on through the end of the decade (but mostly in the first half of the decade), over 200 films would be released by major and independent studios which featured major black characters (and some black athletes such as Jim Brown and Rosie Grier), to profit from the black movie-going audiences. Clint Eastwood and Charles Bronson would play similar hard-edged roles for whites. Blaxploitation cinema experienced a revival in the late 1990s, with Larry Cohen's *Original Gangstas* (1996), reuniting stars from the earlier era. The director of *Pulp Fiction* (1994), Quentin Tarantino, paid homage to the blaxploitation genre twenty-five years later with *Jackie Brown* (1998), starring Pam Grier.
- Early 70s The success of blaxploitation films led to an onslaught of other black exploitation genres, with numerous remakes or lesser imitations ranging from westerns to martial arts kung fu films to

horror and gangster films. Sample films included *Hit Man* (1972), *Blacula* (1972) and *Blackenstein* (1973), and Larry Cohen's *Black Caesar* (1973). However, the vast majority of these films were still distributed, produced, and controlled by non-blacks. All of the blaxploitation films set the stage for Hip Hop music and subculture, future directors such as Spike Lee and John Singleton, and movies like *Harlem Nights* (1989), *Posse* (1993), the *Beverly Hills Cop* series, and *Pulp Fiction* (1994).

- 1971      Zanucks quit Fox, new managers sell lot; Columbia loses \$29 million; Robert Altman establishes Lion's Gate Films; Disney World opens in Florida; *A Clockwork Orange* is first film with Dolby sound; John Wayne is top box office draw; many major newspaper syndicates refuse to advertise X-rated movies; about 400 non-rated movies screened in USA;
- 1971      USC film school graduate George Lucas released his first full-length feature film, *THX 1138*.
- 1973      Hirschfield & Begelman take over Columbia; MGM stages massive sale of studio properties and lets UA take over its distribution; 73% of ticket sales are to 12-19 age group; blaxploitation cycle peaks with *Blacula*, *Blackenstein* and *Black Caesar*; HFC report finds 60% unemployment amongst union membership; Burke-Hartke Bill on 'runaway' production introduced to Congress for second time;
- 1974      boom year with box-office grosses increasing by \$150m (on 1973) and 150 new cinema screens opened; US weekly attendances are 18 million; talent agencies International Creative Management (ICM) and Creative Artists Associates (CAA) established; Robert Redford becomes top box-office draw; Cassavetes forced to self-distribute *A Woman Under The Influence*;
- 1975      *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* was the first film to take all the major awards (Best Picture, Best Director, Best Screenplay, Best Actor, and Best Actress) since Frank Capra's *It Happened One Night* (1934).

### **BEGINNING OF THE END of AMERICAN NEW WAVE**

- 1975      Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* was the first modern 'blockbuster' film to top the \$100 million record in box-office business in North America (cruising past previous pace-setters *Gone With the Wind* (1939) and *The Sound of Music* (1965)). It earned its 27 year-old director

(and Universal Studios) a place in Hollywood. Part of its financial success was due to the fact that Hollywood advertised its release on television with a massive TV marketing campaign costing \$700,000. It was also booked into almost 500 theatres for its opening weekend - a record! The film's tremendous success spurred Hollywood studios to aggressively look for further blockbusting, 'big-event' films fueled by increasingly more expensive ad campaigns.

- 1975 Robert Altman's low-budget, Oscar-nominated ensemble film *Nashville* followed the interlocking lives of a huge eclectic cast of twenty-four main characters. It was shot in under 45 days, and was the first major release that had actors perform live in front of the camera during their song performances.
- 1975 Jim Sharman's *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, a film version of the original international stage hit, was a commercial failure when originally released, but has since achieved major cult film status, and has been considered the longest-running 'midnight movie' of all time.
- 1975 Director George Lucas, John Dykstra and producer Gary Kurtz created a facility called Industrial Light and Magic (ILM) in Lucas' own studio (Lucasfilm) in Marin County (Bay Area of Northern California) to help in the creation of special effects and miniature models for his first film in a trilogy -- *Star Wars* (1977). One of its customized inventions was a motion-controlled camera (the "Dykstraflex") to film the spectacular space-ship dogfight in the finale. Since then, the award-winning ILM (under the umbrella of Lucas Digital, Ltd.) has become the industry standard. It has been a major player in the development of advanced and computer-generated visual effects for scores of films, and the top effects house for Hollywood.
- 1976 The Steadicam, developed by Garrett Brown, was used for the first time *Bound For Glory*, then Extensively in *Rocky*, and then fully exploited in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980).
- 1977 George Lucas' space opera *Star Wars*, made for \$11 million, was released in theaters in mid-summer and grossed nearly \$200 million on its first release, topping *Jaws* (1975) as the highest earning film to date and generating an astoundingly lucrative merchandising campaign. It truly revolutionized movie merchandising. After adjusting for inflation, its US gross profit was

second only to *Gone with the Wind* (1939). It ultimately helped to resurrect the financial viability of the science-fiction genre, a category of films that was considered frivolous and unprofitable, and its exhilarating, action-paced computer-generated effects thrilled audiences. Until *Jaws* (1975) and then *Star Wars*, the summer was typically Hollywood's slow season -- not true afterwards.

- 1977 Woody Allen's semi-autobiographical romantic comedy *Annie Hall*, a marked departure from Allen's earlier slapstick-filled pictures, won the Best Picture honors over the special-effects blockbuster *Star Wars*, and gave the director/star/writer two Oscars (Best Screenplay and Best Director). The costuming of the title character (Best Actress winner Diane Keaton) -- dubbed the 'Annie Hall' look -- created a fashion craze. Woody Allen became the *first* director to win an Academy Award for a film he starred in.
- 1978 At first, John Carpenter's low-budget teen slasher film *Halloween* was dismissed as schlock by most critics, until championed by the *Village Voice* and the 'Ebert & Siskel' review show as a work of art. For many years, it was the highest grossing independent film of all time, and ushered in a glut of other similarly gory films (such as *Friday the 13th* (1980)). Unfortunately, it spawned numerous, often routine and mediocre sequels.
- 1978 (Sept) Jack Warner dies. At the time of his death, he was the last surviving Warner brother. Aged 86 by the time of his death, he was also the longest lived of all Warner brothers.
- 1979 Miramax Films was originally created as a small production company to distribute low-budget, quirky independent and arthouse films. It started when brothers Bob and Harvey Weinstein purchased and renovated a run-down movie theater in Buffalo, N.Y., and turned it into a profitable college art house. They started as distributors by acquiring the rights to the concert film *The Secret Policeman's Other Ball*, which cost them \$180,000 and grossed \$6 million. [In the following two and a half decades, until Disney split with its partner in 2005, the Weinsteins-run Miramax would garner \$4.5 billion in grosses from its films, almost 250 Oscar nominations, and a reputation for creating controversy.]
- 1980 UA premiered *Heaven's Gate* (1981) in late 1980, and then withdrew it for re-editing, and re-released it in 1981. The disastrous film marked the start of the death-knell of the American Auteur



period that had blossomed in the 1970s, with original works by directors and producers, including Martin Scorsese (*Mean Streets* (1973), *Taxi Driver* (1976)), Peter Bogdanovich (*The Last Picture Show* (1971)), Woody Allen (*Annie Hall* (1976)), and Michael Cimino (*The Deer Hunter* (1978)).

### **THE PARTY IS OVER**

1981           MGM made a comeback when it was split into a hotel empire and a movie company in 1980, and then acquired United Artists. UA was on the verge of bankruptcy due to the disastrous *Heaven's Gate* (1981). The regular release of James Bond films provided most of the studio's hits for the remainder of the decade.