



Birth name

Robert E. Wise

Robert Wise was born as the youngest of three brothers. Through an odd job at RKO at the age of 19, the avid moviegoer came into film business. A head sound effects editor at the studio recognized Wise's talent, and made Wise his protege.

Around 1941 Orson Welles was in need of an editor for "Citizen Kane", and Wise did a splendid job. Welles really liked his work and ideas. Wise started as a director with some B-Movies and his career went on quickly, and he made MANY classic movies. His last film, "Rooftops", proves that Wise is still a film maker in full command of his craft. The carefully composed images, tight editing and unflagging pace make one wish that Wise had not stayed away from the camera for so long

Dependable Hollywood veteran whose transparent cinematic style has yielded wide-ranging success. His film career began when his brother, who worked in the accounting department at RKO, got young Robert a job as an assistant editor. He eventually worked his way up to full editor, notably cutting [The Hunchback of Notre Dame](#) (1939), [My Favorite Wife](#), [Dance, Girl, Dance](#) (both 1940), [The Devil and Daniel Webster](#) (1941, aka [All That Money Can](#)

[Buy](#) and Orson Welles' landmark [Citizen Kane](#) (also 1941, for which he was Oscar-nominated as Best Editor) and [The Magnificent Ambersons](#) (1942). Wise was given his first chance behind the camera as codirector of [The Curse of the Cat People](#) (1944), one of the stylish horror films produced by Val Lewton; the producer also assigned Wise to direct [The Body Snatcher](#) (1945). He toiled in RKO's B-picture unit until 1948, doing consistently solid work. His first boost came when he was assigned the moody Western [Blood on the Moon](#) (1948) and turned in a first-rate job. [The Set-Up](#) (1949), a prizefight drama that took place in "real time," won Wise even more attention and was to be the turning point in his career.

In the 1950s he proved to be a master Hollywood craftsman who brought intelligence and skill to the widest possible range of material, from the landmark science-fiction tale [The Day the Earth Stood Still](#) (1951) to the soap opera saga [So Big](#) (1953) to the all-star [Executive Suite](#) (1954). [Somebody Up There Likes Me](#) (1956) proved an important acting showcase for young Paul Newman, and [I Want to Live!](#) (1958) gave Susan Hayward an Oscar-winning opportunity; Wise was also nominated as Best Director. He wisely recruited choreographer Jerome Robbins to help bring [West Side Story](#) (1961) to the screen, and as producer-director, he won both Best Director (shared with Robbins) and Best Picture Oscars for that inventive musical. He again won dual Oscars-Best Director, Best Picture-for the beloved Rodgers and Hammerstein musical [The Sound of Music](#) (1965). Now typecast as a "big" moviemaker, he had difficulty finding worthy material, especially in the 1970s (although, having made the masterful modern ghost story [The Haunting](#) in 1963 he was a perfect choice to tackle 1977's [Audrey Rose](#) In 1973 he deliberately chose an intimate story to sink his teeth into, [Two People](#) In 1986 Wise was asked to executive produce Emilio Estevez's maiden voyage as director, [Wisdom](#) and three years later Wise returned to the director's chair himself, for the ill-advised urban musical [Rooftops](#) (1989), a film that begged unfortunate comparisons with [West Side Story](#)

A past president of both the Directors Guild of America and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Wise has settled comfortably into the role of Hollywood elder statesman.

OTHER FILMS INCLUDE: 1944: [Mademoiselle Fifi](#) 1946: [A Game of Death](#), [Criminal Court](#) 1947: [Born to Kill](#) 1948: [Mystery in Mexico](#) 1950: [Three Secrets](#), [Two Flags West](#) 1951: [The House on Telegraph Hill](#) 1952: [The Captive City](#), [Something for the Birds](#) 1953: [The Desert Rats](#), [Destination Gobi](#) 1955: [Helen of Troy](#) 1957: [This Could Be the Night](#), [Until They Sail](#) 1958: [Run Silent](#), [Run Deep](#) 1959: [Odds Against Tomorrow](#) 1966: [The Sand Pebbles](#) 1968: *Star!* 1971: [The Andromeda Strain](#) 1975: [The Hindenburg](#) 1979: [Star Trek-The Motion Picture](#)

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Trivia

Is an avid fan of commercial Indian cinema.

President of the Directors Guild of America (DGA). [1971-1975]

Biography in: John Wakeman, editor. "World Film Directors, Volume One, 1890-1945". Pages 1210-1219. New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1987.

President of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, 1985 - 1988.

Directed 9 different actors in Oscar-nominated performances: [Nina Foch](#), [Susan Hayward](#), [Rita Moreno](#), [George Chakiris](#), [Julie Andrews](#), [Peggy Wood](#), [Steve McQueen](#), [Mako](#) and [Daniel Massey](#). Hayward, Moreno and Chakiris won Oscars for a role in one of Wise's movies.

In 1987, he accepted the Oscar for "Best Actor in a Leading Role" on behalf of [Paul Newman](#), who wasn't present at the awards ceremony.

Society of Operating Cameramen, (SOC) Honorary Member (1982)

As of 2005, he is the only living crew member of [Citizen Kane](#) (1941).

Received the Irving Thalberg Award.

One of the most successful directors of the 1960s, when he became an efficient maker of epic-length pictures, **Robert Wise** is one of Hollywood's few popularly recognized filmmakers. He joined **RKO** in the 1930s as a cutter and eventually became one of the studio's top editors, working in this capacity on classics such as [The Devil and Daniel Webster](#) (1941),

[Citizen Kane](#) (1941), and [The Magnificent Ambersons](#) (1942). He became a director with help from producer [Val Lewton](#), who assigned Wise to finish [Curse of the Cat People](#) (1944), a B-movie that had fallen behind schedule, and the resulting picture proved extremely haunting and enduring. Wise later directed [The Body Snatcher](#) (1945) for Lewton, but after the producer left **RKO**, he found himself locked into B-movies. His 1948 psychological [Western Blood on The Moon](#), starring [Robert Mitchum](#), and the acclaimed boxing drama [The Set-Up](#) (1949) were the only two important pictures that Wise got to do during his last four years at the studio. **Wise** left **RKO** at the end of the 1940s and went to **20th Century Fox**, where his most important film, among a string of popular releases, was the visionary pacifist **science fiction/drama** [The Day the Earth Stood Still](#). He also formed a short-lived production company with his former RKO colleague, [Mark Robson](#), producing the acclaimed fact-based crime-drama [Captive City](#) (1952). During the mid-'50s, **Wise's** films rapidly rose in importance and visibility, including [Executive Suite](#) (1954), [I Want To Live](#) (1958), and [Odds Against Tomorrow](#) (1959), all of which embraced important topical and sociological subjects amid their compelling performances. However, Wise's breakthrough as a "money director" came with [West Side Story](#) (1961), a screen adaptation of the stage hit (co-directed with [Jerome Robbins](#)) that earned multiple Oscars and a huge return at the box office. After a return to occult subjects with [The Haunting](#) (1963), which he also produced, Wise found himself in a position to establish himself as a major producer. Director [William Wyler](#) had been chosen by 20th Century Fox to direct the screen version of the [Richard Rodgers](#) and [Oscar Hammerstein](#) musical **The Sound of Music**, but had balked at the last moment and went to England to film [The Collector](#). Wise was suggested as a replacement, and agreed to make the movie, but only if the studio agreed to finance **Wise's** production of [The Sand Pebbles](#) (1966), which he had been trying to raise money to make for several years. Fox agreed, and **The Sound of Music** (1965) went on to become one of the biggest box-office hits of the decade, acquiring a shelf of Academy Awards in the process. [The Sand Pebbles](#), starring [Steve McQueen](#), was too serious a movie for the public to accept in 1966, with its overtones of the Vietnam War and its downbeat ending, although it eventually made money on re-release. Much less successful was [Star](#) (1968), Wise's epic **musical** based on the life of [Gertrude Lawrence](#), which was heavily cut after a disastrous first run (but later restored to full length), and which never recovered its huge costs. After forming a new production company with [Mark Robson](#), Wise returned to the profitable column with the **science fiction/drama** [The Andromeda Strain](#) (1971), based on [Michael Crichton's](#) best-seller. His serious, adult romance **Two People** (1973) ran into problems with the censors and was heavily cut.

And **The Hindenburg** came out too late in the '70s disaster film cycle to attract huge audiences, despite its more-serious-than-usual theme for such a genre film. **Wise's** fortunes declined following **Audrey Rose** (1977), a sensitively made and effective occult drama; **Star Trek: The Motion Picture** (1980) was marred by major production problems; and **Rooftops**, an '80s urban musical, was ignored by the public and derided by the critics. However, as a spokesman for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, **Robert Wise** has remained a very visible and well-known director and figure in Hollywood since the 1970s. ~ Bruce Eder, All Movie Guide