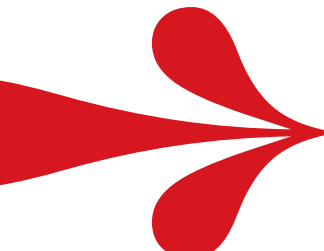


Against All Odds

By Steve Chagollan



AS ANYONE WHO has a heart can testify, love can be both ecstatic and plagued with uncertainty. At its very core, true love is irrational, even obsessive, and can just as often end in tragedy as in the happily ever after. In the following films, star-crossed lovers battle the odds in vain, whether it's class differences, divergent temperaments, terminal illness, self-destructive jealousy or a corrupt establishment. But in terms of heart-stirring dramas that reflect the human condition, these are timeless works that stand up to repeated viewing.

GEORGE STEVENS

A Place in the Sun 1951

► A distilled version of Theodor Dreiser's classic novel *An American Tragedy*, this 1951 drama paints a more sympathetic portrait of its protagonist George Eastman (Clyde Griffiths in the book), the poor nephew of a rich industrialist played by Montgomery Clift who is less social climber and more a victim of circumstance. Eastman's budding romance with a dazzling socialite, played by a young Elizabeth Taylor, is doomed from the start, given his previous affair with a factory worker who becomes pregnant with his child and threatens to make their relationship public. The tragedy has as much to do with the gulf between classes as it does with star-crossed romance. Taylor credited Stevens for giving her the opportunity to play a complex adult role as opposed to a glorified image of herself. The late Mike Nichols called the film, enhanced by William Mellor's shimmering B&W photography, his "bible" and "a lesson in moviemaking." Stevens would go on to win both a DGA Award and an Oscar for his direction.





FRANCO ZEFFIRELLI

Romeo and Juliet 1968

► Zeffirelli had just come off of directing screen veterans Liz Taylor and Richard Burton in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. But with *Romeo and Juliet*, he worked with relative newcomers Leonard Whiting and Olivia Hussey, 17 and 15 years old respectively, the appropriate ages for the Bard's star-crossed lovers. Their pristine beauty was a given, but Zeffirelli made sure they were prepared to handle Shakespeare's iambic pentameter, and mandated six months of training for Whiting to shake off his Cockney accent, and for the Argentinian-born Hussey to remove all traces of her Spanish-language lilt. Zeffirelli, who earned DGA and Oscar nominations for his effort, could be a stern taskmaster, but the results were luminous. "Franco is one of a kind," Hussey said at the time of the film's 50th anniversary. "He's an absolute genius. Sometimes he'd be hell to work with, but when you've finished working with him, there's nobody else that you could ever work with that makes you feel alive like that."



MELINA MATSOUKAS

Queen & Slim 2019

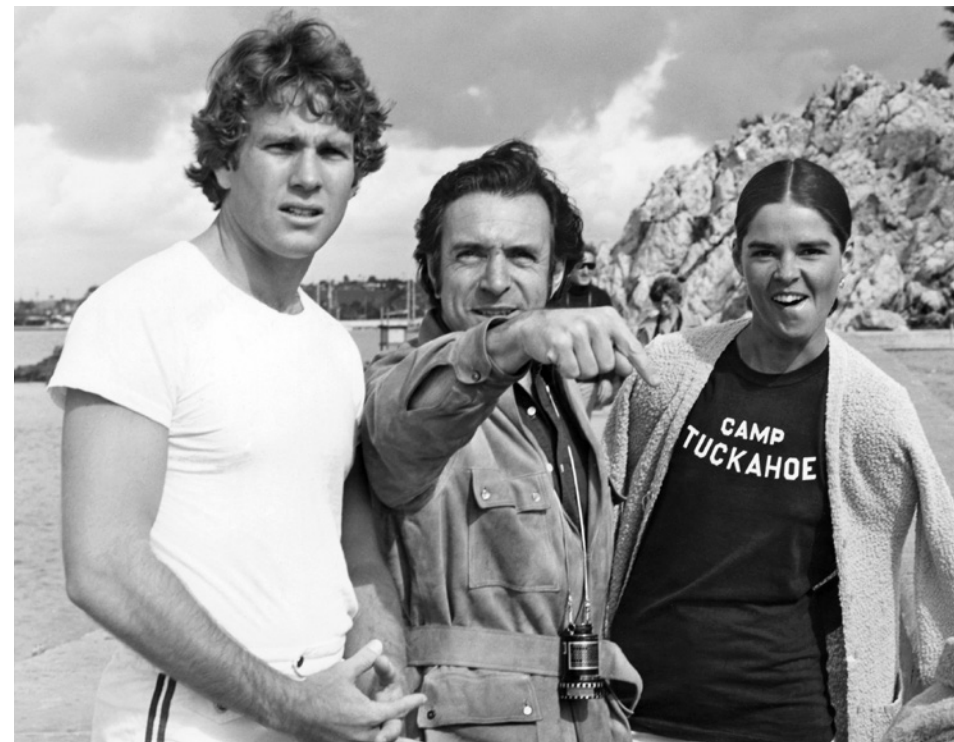
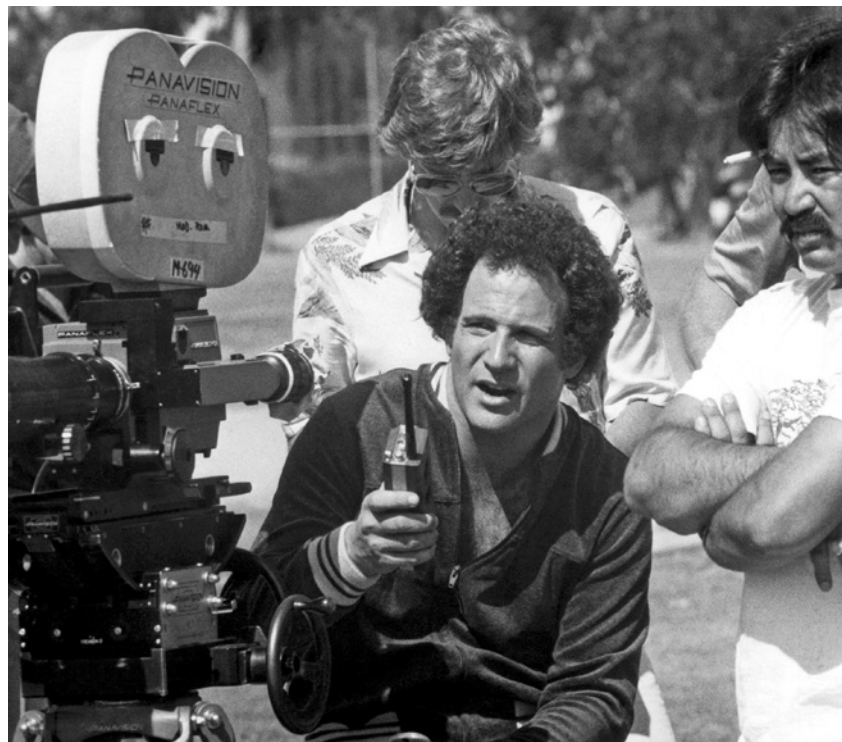
► This doomed lovers-on-the-run drama has been likened to 1967's *Bonnie and Clyde*. But unlike Arthur Penn's Depression-era outlaws, the protagonists of this galvanizing contemporary drama are the innocent victims of racial profiling. Like Penn's characters, they become antiheroes in the public eye, refusing to succumb to a justice system in which the cards are stacked against them. Matsoukas, in her feature debut, exhibits a sure stylistic hand and guides magnetic newcomer Jodie Turner-Smith and *Get Out* star Daniel Kaluuya to nuanced, multi-layered performances. Matsoukas, who earned a First-Time Feature Film Award nomination from the DGA, saw the story as both celebration and lamentation of a country divided. "I always looked at it as a reverse slave-escape narrative," said Matsoukas. "They start in the north and travel south. And I wanted you to see that changing landscape and how beautiful it can be through a black lens, and to see the world how we experience it."



ALBERT BROOKS

Modern Romance 1981

► Brooks' work as a comic director—with its mix of scathing satire, acute anxiety and unflinching narcissism—is so unique that it almost deserves its own category. (Judd Apatow considers his films "like the Torah to me.") And this subversive anti-romcom is considered his masterpiece. It begins with a breakup, with the protagonist, a film editor played by Brooks himself, spending the rest of the movie trying to win his girlfriend (Kathryn Harrold) back. His character's neurosis—driven by jealousy, self-loathing and uncertainty—makes Woody Allen's kvetchy characters models of stability in comparison. These are all traits with which audiences can identify, but in Brooks' hands, it's like witnessing a car crash—difficult to watch but you can't take your eyes away. No less than Stanley Kubrick loved the film, and told Brooks, whom he would cold-call in the middle of the night, that this was the movie he always wanted to make about jealousy.



ARTHUR HILLER

Love Story 1970

► This latter-day *Carnegie* tragedy, involving a Harvard Law School student played by Ryan O'Neal and a Radcliffe College music student (Ali MacGraw) of whom his parents disapprove, helped lift Paramount Pictures out of its economic doldrums. Hiller brought the film in \$25,000 under its \$2 million budget, and managed to finagle \$15,000 out of the reluctant studio to shoot additional scenes in New York to fortify the couple's growing romance. But one of the worst snow storms to hit the East Coast in decades caused the director to think on his feet. Hiller managed to gain access to Harvard's football stadium and coaxed O'Neal and MacGraw to improvise in the snow, with the couple frolicking on the field, "with (camera operator) Lou Barlia with a handheld camera beside me listening to me and watching," said Hiller, a former DGA president. "All that was just ad-libbed out of necessity, and the film wouldn't be the same without it." The movie was an instant smash and earned Hiller directing nominations from the DGA and the Academy.



WILLIAM WYLER

Roman Holiday 1953

► An impossible romance between a high-born princess (Audrey Hepburn, in her feature debut) and a working stiff (Gregory Peck plays an expatriate reporter), *Roman Holiday*, at the insistence of Wyler, was filmed entirely in Rome and nearby Cinecittà Studios, much to the consternation of Paramount, which wanted the director to shoot on its own backlot. Wyler would cut costs by filming in black and white. The movie not only introduced American audiences to Hepburn and Vespa scooters, but to the Eternal City, which would become “Hollywood on the Tiber” as a result. *Variety* called the film a “Cinderella theme in reverse.” There are also echoes of Frank Capra’s *It Happened One Night*, but without the fairytale ending. Wyler guided Hepburn to winning her first Oscar, and won one himself for direction.



ANG LEE

Brokeback Mountain 2005

► Based on an Annie Proulx short story, this love story between two men—considered both a huge risk and a major leap for the LGBT community at the time—was told against the backdrop of immense physical beauty and unyielding intolerance. The characters, taciturn Ennis Del Mar (Heath Ledger) and effusive Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal), must keep their mutual attraction secret, at a time and place—early '60s Wyoming—when a same-sex relationship was almost unspeakable. Repression hangs heavy over this tragic drama, with Ennis and Jack living a lie that tears at their very souls. “Even though *Brokeback* was very much a movie of its moment in history, Ang made sure that it would stand the test of time,” said Gyllenhaal 10 years later at a Britannia Awards tribute to Lee. “He kept it simple and quiet, with respect for the characters, and their corner of the world. He knew that to tell a big story, you had to keep it small.” The film, shot mostly in the Canadian Rockies with a modest \$14 million budget, would earn Lee the DGA Award and an Oscar.



ELIA KAZAN

Splendor in the Grass 1961

► William Inge, the playwright with whom Kazan had worked on Broadway on *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*, produced a novelette that Kazan helped fashion into a screenplay for this hothouse romance between a high school BMOG, played by Warren Beatty in his feature debut, and Natalie Wood’s virtuous teen. Kazan, the director every actor wanted to work with, was known for using every means at his disposal to get the performances he wanted. “Sexual notoriety is one of the most attractive colors a movie star can wear,” wrote Kazan in his autobiography, *A Life*. “It was clear to Natalie, as it was to me, that Warren was bound for the top; this perception was an aphrodisiac.” The relationship between Beatty’s Bud and Wood’s Wilma does not turn out harmoniously, and Kazan has admitted that there are soap opera elements to Inge’s story, “until suddenly it appears there is a little more depth and humanity there, as well as a balanced view of life.”