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| **Orson Welles (1915-1985)** |
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| Orson Welles was born on May 6, 1915 in Kenosha, Wisconsin to Richard Head Welles (a prosperous wagon manufacturer and inventor) and Beatrice Ives Welles (a gifted concert pianist). Noted for a deep resonant voice, imposing personality, and overflowing talent, he was an actor, director, writer, and producer in theatre, radio, and film. Welles was influential in all of these fields, but left his mark most noticeably on cinema with a series of stylistically original films. *Citizen Kane* (1941) recounted the life of newspaper mogul Charles Foster Kane (who was fashioned after media magnate William Randolph Hearst) from five different points of view. Produced by RKO in 1941, it has frequently been placed at the top of numerous ‘Best Films’ lists by critics ever since. Following *Citizen Kane* was *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), a story of declining family fortunes and the rise and subsequent societal impact of the automobile. The film, in many ways, echoed Welles’ biography. Welles’s films were praised for their ingenious techniques, including long takes and compositions in depth of field that reinforced realism and gave spectators the freedom to scan the scene in ways that classical editing did not allow, while also producing a stylised, unnatural cinema.  Welles began directing and acting in his teenage years at the Todd School for Boys, where he developed a special interest in Shakespeare. After the divorce and death of his parents, Welles was sent to Ireland to study painting, but instead obtained his first professional role at the Dublin Gate Theatre. Back in the United States he acted in plays until 1937, when he and John Houseman established the Mercury Theatre — one of the Federal Theatre companies in New York — where he staged a revolutionary and immensely popular version of *Julius Caesar*. By that time he was also known for his work in radio on programs such as *The March of Time*, *The Shadow*, his *First Person Singular* (Welles’ own show), and *The Mercury Theatre on the Air*, whose extraordinarily realistic version of *The War of the Worlds* threw Americans into a panic. Pursuing an early interest in cinema, Welles took his Mercury Theatre actors to Hollywood to create *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons*, followed by three films that failed at the box office: *The Lady from Shanghai* (1946), *The Stranger* (1946), and *Macbeth* (1948). To the eyes of Hollywood, this trilogy about power and its consequences revealed him as an eccentric but unreliable director, and he did not make another Hollywood film for a decade.  Alienated from the movie world and American society in general, he moved to Europe (where production costs were lower) and continued his career as an actor to finance stylistically bizarre films such as *Othello* (1952), *Mr. Arkadin* (1955*), The Trial* (1962), and the Shakespeare-based *Chimes at Midnight* (1966). During this period, Welles returned to Hollywood to make the expressionistic *Touch of Evil* (1958), but then worked mainly as an actor until his death at age 70. His ashes were taken to Spain and buried in the country house of bullfighter Antonio Ordóñez.  **List of works (films directed by Welles)**  *The Hearts of Age* (1934)  *Citizen Kane* (1941)  *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942)  *The Stranger* (1946)  *The Lady from Shanghai* (1946)  *Macbeth* (1948)  *Othello* (1952)  *Mr. Arkadin* (1955)  *Touch of Evil* (1958)  *The Trial* (1962)  *Chimes at Midnight* (1966)  *The Immortal Story* (1968)  *F for Fake* (1973) |
| Further reading:  (The Evolution of the Language of Cinema)  (Bazin)  (Berg and Erskine)  (Callow)  (Higham)  (Kane)  (Mulvey)  (Naremore)  (Rosenbaum)  (Welles and Bogdanovich) |