

# The Main Feature



Season 34 -  
Issue 6  
(screening  
28.11.13)

USA 1950  
138 Minutes

Director: Joseph L Mankiew  
Producer: Darryl F Zunuck  
Screenplay:  
Joseph L Mankiewicz  
Cinematography: Milton Krasner  
Editor: Barbara McLean  
Music: Alfred Newman  
Art Direction: Lyle Wheeler and George Davis



## Cast

Margo Channing	Bette Davis	Lloyd Richards	Hugh Marlowe
Addison de Witt	George Sanders	Gregory Ratoff	Max Fabian
Eve	Anne Baxter	Miss Casswell	Marilyn Monroe
Karen Richards	Celeste Holm	Phoebe	Barbara Bates
Birdie	Thelma Ritter	Bill Sampson	Gary Merrill
Master of Ceremonies at dinner	Walter Hampden		



All About Eve is an outstanding American drama film of 1950, written and directed by Joseph L Mankiewicz and produced by Darryl F Zanuck. It was based on a short story "The Wisdom of Eve" by Mary Orr.

All About Eve, in a year which included competition from *Sunset Boulevard*, *Born Yesterday*, *Panic in the Streets* and *Harvey*, was nominated for 14 Academy Awards, a feat unmatched until *Titanic* in 1997, and won six: Best Picture, Best Director and Best Writing Screenplay (both awarded to Mankiewicz), Best Supporting Actor for George Sanders, Best Costume Design for a black and white film, and Best Sound Recording. The film received also a Golden Globe Award, New York Film Critics Circle Awards, a Directors Guild of America Award, Cannes Film Festival Awards and a British Academy of Film and Television Arts Award for the best film from any source.

Subsequently, in 1990, *All About Eve* was selected for preservation in the United States National Film Registry by the Library of Congress as being "culturally, historically or aesthetically significant". So much then for the film's credentials. I hope you are not disappointed with the result although you may agree with Bette Davis' comment, included in the American Film Institute's 100 best movie quotes "Fasten your seatbelts. It's going to be a bumpy ride".



The film opens with an awards dinner at which Eve Harrington (Anne Baxter) – the newest and brightest star on Broadway – is being presented with an award for her outstanding performance in a play. Theatre critic Addison de Witt (George Sanders) observes the proceedings and, in a sardonic voiceover, recalls how Eve's star had risen so far, so quickly. The film flashes back a year as the intimates who figured in Eve's breathless success story project their own vignettes on how this was achieved.

Margo Channing (Bette Davis) was one of the biggest stars on Broadway, but despite her success having just turned forty she was increasingly concerned about her future career. Anne Baxter, a starry eyed would be actress, through the kind offices of Celeste Holm, finally contrives a meeting with Bette Davis, her histrionic idol. Eve is taken into Margo's household and trading on the vanity and insecurity of Margo, Eve becomes her indispensable confidante as she attempted to launch her own bid for Broadway immortality. The ingratiating and scheming Eve is ruthless in her pitch for the lover and husband of the two women who have most befriended her as she clambers to the top over her supposed idol Margo.

All About Eve in its rancorous commentary on Broadway is nevertheless a rousing and endlessly amusing melodrama whose merciless exposure of the bitchiness and tawdry trappings of fame has a certain relevance in these days of transient celebrity. It is witty and intelligent and full of bon mots for you to identify and perhaps appreciate: Addison to Eve "You're an improbable person, Eve, but so am I. We have that in common. Also a contempt for humanity, an inability to love or be loved, insatiable ambition and talent. We deserve each other". And Addison again "That's all television is dear – just auditions" and again "I am a critic and a commentator. I am essential to the theatre – as ants to a picnic, as the boll weevil to a cotton field".



There were some fine acting performances in the film. In addition to George Sanders' Oscar, the four female leads all received nominations, Bette Davis and Anne Baxter as best Actress and Celeste Holm and Thelma Ritter as best Supporting Actress. And Marilyn Monroe, relatively unknown at the time, and cast as Miss Casswell, had a stairway entrance and was introduced by the cynical critic Sanders as a "graduate of the Copacabana School of Dramatic Art".

All About Eve received overwhelmingly positive reviews from critics upon its release and Sunset Boulevard, released in the same year, drew similar praise, and the two were often favourably compared. All About Eve was described as "the wittiest, the most devastating, the most adult and literate motion picture ever made that has anything to do with the New York stage". But some critics had reservations and a number thought, at 138minutes, it was overly long. I know what I think. I hope you enjoy it.

Neville Ledsome

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**Repropoint**

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# Bette Davis Biography:

Bette Davis always talked about how her solid New England and Yankee heritage had made her tough and able to survive all that was required to be a star in Hollywood. The daughter of a Massachusetts lawyer, Bette Davis was born in the middle of an electrical storm in Lowell, MA on April 5, 1908. She was named Ruth Elizabeth Davis and when her parents divorced she lived with her mother and sister, Barbara in New York City.

During the 1930's she was in many splendid films such as *Three on a Match*, *Cabin in the Cotton*, and *20,000 Years in Sing Sing* with Spencer Tracey. However, she was unhappy with the roles she was receiving and defied the studio by going to England to make pictures. She lost the battle, but she won the war since now the studio gave her better films. She won her first Oscar nomination for *Of Human Bondage* with Leslie Howard, and then won it for *Dangerous* in 1936 with Franchot Tone and finally for *Jezebel* in 1939. *Jezebel* has often been thought to have been a consolation prize for not getting the role of Scarlet O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*. She also married her first husband, Harmon Nelson, during this period and divorced him in 1939.

The 1940's was when she truly became her own personality. During WWII she spent many hours with the Hollywood Canteen. Inspired by New York's Stage Door Canteen, Bette transformed a once-abandoned nightclub into an inspiring entertainment facility. "There are few accomplishments in my life that I am sincerely proud of. The Hollywood Canteen is one of them," Bette later commented. In 1980, she was awarded the Distinguished Civilian Service Medal, the Defense Department's highest civilian award, for running the Hollywood Canteen.

Even though she spent much of the war years with the Hollywood Canteen, she made many of her most famous films during this decade such as *Dark Victory*, *The Letter*, *The Little Foxes*, *Now Voyager*, and *Mr. Skeffington*, to name a few (all of which she was Oscar nominated). In *Now Voyager*, she has the famous scene with Paul Henreid where they exchange cigarettes. Davis smoked all her life. During this time she married her second husband, Arthur Farnsworth who died in 1943 and then she was married again in 1945 to William Grant Sherry whom she divorced in 1950.

In 1949, she did, what is generally considered to be her "worst film", *Beyond the Forest*. During the production she asked to be released from her Warner Brothers contract after 18 years. Lucky for her, Darryl F. Zanuck offered her the role of Margo Channing in *All About Eve*. Claudette Colbert had been forced to leave the production due to a back injury and although Bette was the third choice (Ingrid Bergman had been his second choice) she won the part. Its hard to think of anyone else in the role of Margo Channing since this part seems so tailored to Bette in every respect. Its probably the best screenplay ever written and the ensemble cast is superb. She met her fourth and last husband, Gary Merrill during the filming and the film was enhanced since they were truly falling in love themselves.

In the 1950's Bette began her period of character roles. She revived her portrayal of Queen Elizabeth I in *The Virgin Queen* (she had played her in *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* in 1939 with Errol Flynn), played Debbie Reynold's mother in *The Catered Affair* and played Apple Annie in Frank Capra's redo of "Pocketful of Miracles".

However, in the 1960's she became known for horror films which began with her portrayal of Jane Hudson in *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* with her old nemesis, Joan Crawford. Then again, in *Hush*, *Hush Sweet Charlotte* with Olivia DeHavilland. During the remainder of her life she was in many TV productions and films, but always as a matriarch. In 1977, she was the first female recipient of the American Film Institute's Life Achievement Award.

She died on 6 October 1989 of breast cancer.

## Reactions to **Ivan's Childhood** – 14.11.13

<b>Score</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
	~	~	~	8	7	5	6	6	3	1	~

Total received – 36

Average Score – 5.22

### Your Comments

Explain it to me! Well made but.....and the storyline was?  
 Not sure it was worth salvaging What an awful film!  
 Slow, disjointed, incomprehensible at times Certainly ahead of its time  
 Interesting choice of film – thank you Beautiful photography  
 Too slow – good photography and acting by young lad  
 Amazing cinematography and one of the best juvenile performances  
 Fine acting and beautifully photographed but rather confusing  
 Doubtless a worthy film in some aspects but very slow.....  
 Good to see a black and white film – some great effects (especially in the silver birches)  
 A very moving film – photography superlative. I am unsure that it is in my top 100 but extremely memorable.  
 Interesting and strange film – don't know whether I knew exactly what was happening  
 Club is great – impressive in its organisation.

Position	Film	Average Score
1 <sup>st</sup>	Argo	8.07
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Even the Rain	7.38
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Amour	6.46
4 <sup>th</sup>	Ivan's Childhood	5.22
5 <sup>th</sup>	Sightseers	4.56

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