

everybody's talkin'

The Top Films of 1965–1969

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APPLAUSE
THEATRE & CINEMA BOOKS

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those magnificent films on those cinema screens,
or how i flew from new york to london to write
about the sixties in 4 years, 10 months, 25 hours,
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those magnificent films on those
cinema screens, or how i flew
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Everyone should have a favorite decade at the movies; mine is the '60s. This was the decade I first experienced going the movies, after all, which might have biased my enjoyment of the era; but looking back I see that this is not just a case of idealizing the past. I was privileged to witness a period that produced an incredibly diverse range of films in which a terrific selection of actors and filmmakers gave us some of their finest work.

For those who lament the passing of the old-fashioned, studio-bound era of filmmaking, it was still very much in evidence at this time, especially during the early part of the '60s. For those who were glad to see Hollywood throw off the shackles of mainstream storytelling and censorship restraints, this era was the beginning of all that independence and freedom. I think the films of that time represented the best of both worlds, something often taken for granted by both those who were unwilling to see things change and those who were so anxious to turn their backs on tradition that they failed to appreciate the value of anything that stuck to basics.

There were wonderfully probing dramas exploring important themes; westerns—traditional, epic, and radical; gloriously entertaining musicals; comedies of both a sophisticated and a bawdy nature; daring explorations of formerly taboo subjects; influential horror films that still retained some degree of restraint before this genre got so out of hand; ambitious science-fiction films that brought a wider degree of attention to this field; and war movies, both flag waving and critical. Seldom had so many followers of so many kinds of movies had such a great choice of what to see. As sex and violence were becoming more prevalent,

attention was still being paid to what was relevant to the story line and what crossed the boundary into mere exploitation. Screenplays were given priority over high concepts; if a movie boasted a large budget, the costs were usually evident in the finished print. Films were allowed to roll out slowly rather than open in saturation bookings, giving moviegoers many chances to see them in theaters, where they belonged. There was a genuine sense of pride in much of the product being released; audiences took chances in what they chose to see; there was a feeling that all kinds of entertainment from different countries were being sampled. Novels and plays were looked to on a regular basis for source material; it was not common to depend on old television shows or flip through the pages of comic books for inspiration. Although there were occasional sequels, there were no numbers slapped on the ends of the titles (a horrid tradition that began in the '70s and continues to this day) and it was not a given to immediately put a spin-off or further chapter into development simply because a movie had done well at the box office. You could look down the list of Oscar nominees and pretty regularly find the very same titles showing up on that year's Top 25 Box Office list. Again, many people took this era for granted (and many still do), only realizing just how good things were in retrospect; but this holds true for pretty much any era of motion pictures.

Of course there were bad films, just as there are in any decade, but you did not get the impression that poor or mediocre pictures were the norm, with occasional gems slipping through. There was a sense of purpose and ambition to so much of what was being done—it made the industry seem admirable and something you wanted to be a part of, even when a film's reach exceeded its grasp. There was no falling back on cable television or home video; if you missed a picture in its theatrical run, you ended up seeing it cut and commercially interrupted on your television screen, a prospect that made it much more exciting to go out to the cinema and catch things before they were mutilated from their intended state. There were no video or digital devices to allow you to copy, download, or buy the same movie months if not weeks after its theatrical debut, so you didn't get the sense so prevalent today that a picture's run in cinemas was nothing more than a prelude to its appearance on a video monitor. For those brought up on the joys and conveniences of video and DVD consumption, this might seem like a negative aspect of the '60s, but it was not. During that time even people who settled for watching films on television knew they were missing out and that it was an inferior experience. This belief has become far less widely held, and as a result, the movies have lost much of their special luster.

There has been much written about how the late '60s and early '70s were some sort of second golden era of moviemaking—about how certain pictures from this period “saved” the movie industry from stagnation. Although I have great admiration for many of the pictures referred to as “breakthroughs,” I believe that this is a whopping generalization. To insist that a handful of “independent-minded” films were trendsetting and therefore superior to those before them is an insult to a long list of fine motion pictures that appeared in cinemas throughout the '60s. To act as if movies had no value until *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Graduate* came along is to denigrate such late '60s works as varied as *Alfie*, *The Sound of Music*, *The Fortune Cookie*, *Fantastic Voyage*, *The Pawnbroker*, *Georgy Girl*, *Shenandoah*, *A Thousand Clowns*, *A Man for All Seasons*, and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, to name but a few. The truth is that the decade was overloaded with fine films that need not apologize because they did not turn moviemaking on its head or fit into some sort of thesis about the countercultural revolution.

Setting out to write a book about half a decade of films is a daunting task, one that required some boundaries and rather strict criteria for exactly which titles would be selected. My idea from the start was to do a reference book highlighting a certain number of titles from each year that would represent what the decade really looked like had you actually been there, seeing them not so much in retrospect from a modern perspective, but according to what the dominant titles of the day were. It is very easy to choose favorite movies from the time and then act as if they were as important in their day as we might view them now, but this does not give a complete picture.

I also knew that I did not wish to simply include movies that I felt were good, because this would seem a bit repetitious in tone, praising one film after another. I finally struck upon the idea of giving a fairly thorough overview by focusing on two key areas: the Academy Awards and each year's top box-office moneymakers. The former would include the work considered worthy of accolades (those given by the movie industry itself, which has always been far more diplomatic, open-minded, and interesting in their choices than critics' awards, which often deliberately try to look away from commercial entertainment, as if to condemn a work for trying to appeal to the general public), while the latter would cover the chief pictures that the public paid to see. I was delighted to see how frequently both of these lists overlapped, not to mention how they included so many important and significant titles from the decade. I knew then that these lists would provide me with a pretty comprehensive overview of some of the best (and most varied) product the late '60s had to offer. It would also shed some attention on lesser-known pictures that had their brief moment in the '60s sun, either by having been listed somewhere on the Oscar-nomination roster or by having appealed to their paying customers because they reflected some fad or interest belonging strictly to the era. In any event, there are bound to be favorites missing (favorites of mine are missing, to be sure), but I think this does indeed give a pretty comprehensive look at the latter half of the decade.

I decided to include every movie that had won an Academy Award in all but the following categories: Short Subject—Live Action, Short Subject—Animated, Documentary—Feature, and Documentary—Short. The omission of the short films speaks for itself; this is a book about feature films, after all. As for the documentaries, not only are many of these films difficult to track down, but several were not even made publicly available to viewers at the time (a practice continued throughout Academy history) and don't really represent the sort of picture I was aiming to cover anyway. I also included all films to receive Oscar nominations in the following categories: Best Picture, the four acting slots, and Best Director.

For the box-office list I decided to cut it off at the top ten, those pictures with the highest attendance figures in their day. (I ranked the films according to the year they were released, not according to when they were making their money. In other words, if a movie arrived in theaters in December and made most of its money the following calendar year, I judged it according to how it performed alongside the titles from its own year, not any other year.) This is not a perfect system, and many might be inclined to feel that certain movies unjustly missed making the cut. I think those that remain are still very much worth a look.

My original intent was to look at a wide, wide range of movies from the entire decade. But because my ambitions exceeded my budget and my space, a compromise was made in which the decade was split in half and the criteria for making the cut made more restrictive, causing me to drop several titles I had been hoping to include. (Five titles I was obliged to drop according to my newly stated boundaries were

thereafter reinstated, one from each year, when space became available.)

Not content to simply write about the 109 movies that made the list, I was adamant that I also wanted to track down the source material for any motion picture that had come from a novel, a short story, a play, a television play, or a magazine article. This was a challenge that entailed scouring out-of-print bookshops in Manhattan, Los Angeles, and throughout New Jersey, and it took me to all sorts of places and towns I had never been to before—itsself a worthwhile offshoot of my project. Because used bookstores are yet another form of business that is losing its lure because of the Internet, I often found myself crossing out the names of shops on my preliminary list that had only recently closed or dropping in at others whose days may very well have been numbered. It was always a thrill to come across some of the titles in my search, even more so when I found the edition of the novel with the movie tie-in cover. Once or twice these places lived up to the traditional image of the cozy and cluttered old bookstore by including a cat sitting among the paperbacks. (I can only assume they were keeping guard over the novels *The Ballad of Cat Ballou* and *Undercover Cat*, both of which I needed for my project).

My project did not stop at books, however, which meant I went looking for magazines, sheet music, press books, LPs, and so forth, in all sorts of locations, from Long Beach to London, in order to represent most of the selected entries with an interesting bit of ephemera or memorabilia. I figured rather than always fall back on a still photo from the film, it would make the book more visually arresting to show something off the beaten track that represented other ways of merchandising or selling the films.

I have attempted to give some background on each of the titles because, frankly, even the worst movies have backstories worth telling; and just how they were made, where, and why, is quite interesting. In order to locate such information, there were a number of books (listed in the bibliography) that were quite helpful, as well as Rebecca Cline at the Disney Archives, whose kindness and quick responses were an inspiration; the clipping files at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center; the Library of the British Film Institute in London (where I discovered the fascinating *Kinematograph* weekly); and the Margaret Herrick Library in Los Angeles; my thanks to these establishments and those staff members who offered assistance. I would also like to thank the UCLA Archives (for the Twentieth Century-Fox titles) and the Warner Bros. Archives. In addition to the fulfillment of tracking down information that initially seemed out of my reach, it was great to return to each of these places just for the fun I had outside of doing research. (Alas, there was a smattering of folks along the way who were less than helpful or supportive, but they shall remain nameless.)

Since this is an overview of half a decade, I thought it only made sense to do the book chronologically, with each entry listed according to when it first opened in the United States. Being an East Coast boy, I have also listed when the movie first debuted in New York City, if the very first showing did not take place here. (Such films as *Inside Daisy Clover* and *You're a Big Boy Now* have often been chronicled in the New York area according to their openings here, 1966 and 1967, respectively, although their official debuts were in December of the preceding years). Each entry includes a quote from the film, which I hope captures its theme or tone; song lyrics are used for all official movie musicals from this period. The main credits and cast principals (and the roles they played) are followed by a brief plot summary, my observations on the movie, comparisons to source material, the background on how or why it was made, and whatever other information I was able to find. The more significant movies get the larger entries, of course.

1965

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

Academy Award Winner: Best Picture; Best Director; Best Sound; Best Scoring of Music—Adaptation or Treatment; Best Film Editing

Academy Award Nominee: Actress (Julie Andrews); Supporting Actress (Peggy Wood); Cinematography—Color; Art Direction—Set Decoration—Color; Costume Design—Color

Top 10 Box Office Film

Opening date: March 2, 1965.

Twentieth Century-Fox. A Robert Wise Production, Produced by Argyle Enterprises, Inc.

Director-Producer: Robert Wise. Screenplay: Ernest Lehman. Based on the 1959 musical play by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, with book by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse. Suggested by Maria Trapp's story. Songs by Richard Rodgers (music) and Oscar Hammerstein II (lyrics): "The Sound of Music," "Dixit Dominus/Morning Hymn/Alleluia," "Maria," "Sixteen Going On Seventeen," "My Favorite Things," "Do-Re-Mi," "The Lonely Goatherd," "Edelweiss," "So Long, Farewell," "Climb Ev'ry Mountain." Song by Richard Rodgers (music and lyrics): "I Have Confidence." Song by Richard Rodgers (with uncredited contributions by Ernest Lehman and Saul Chaplin): "Something Good." Music Supervisor, Arranger, and Conductor: Irwin Kostal. Choreographers: Marc Breaux, Dee Dee Wood. Photography: Ted McCord. Production Designer: Boris Leven. Set Decorators: Walter M. Scott, Ruby Levitt. Costumes: Dorothy Jeakins. Associate Producer: Saul Chaplin. Editor: William Reynolds. Sound: Murray Spivack, Bernard Freericks. Puppets: Bil and Cora Baird Marionettes. Deluxe color. Todd-AO. 175 minutes (including entr'acte).

CAST: Julie Andrews (Maria), Christopher Plummer (Captain Georg von Trapp), Eleanor Parker (Baroness Elsa Schraeder), Richard Haydn (Max Detweiler), Peggy Wood (Mother Abbess), Charmian Carr (Liesl von Trapp), Heather Menzies (Louisa von Trapp), Nicholas Hammond (Friedrich von Trapp), Duane Chase (Kurt von Trapp), Angela Cartwright (Brigitta von Trapp), Debbie Turner (Marta von Trapp), Kym Karath (Gretl von Trapp), Anna Lee (Sister Margaretta), Portia Nelson (Sister Berthe), Ben Wright (Herr Zeller), Daniel Truhitte (Rolfe), Norma Varden (Frau Schmidt), Gil Stuart (Franz), Marni Nixon (Sister Sophia), Evadne Baker (Sister Bernice), Doris Lloyd (Baroness Ebberfeld).

PLOT: Told she does not have the strict dedication to become a nun, Maria is sent from her abbey to serve as governess to widower Captain von Trapp's seven children, teaching them the joy of music and bringing them closer to their stern and distant father.

Most of the world seemed to love the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein and had proven so time and again on Broadway during the 1940s and 1950s, where the two names had become household words by the time Oscar Hammerstein II died in 1960. The team's final collaboration, *The Sound of Music*, had earned praise for its score and less favorable comment for its book, most critics decrying it as saccharine and routine. This fazed the public not at all, for they lapped it up in a big way, the show running an impressive 1,443 performances, and making a movie sale inevitable. Twentieth Century-Fox, which had first dibs on buying anything the duo produced for the stage, snapped up the rights for \$1.25 million in June 1960, a month before Hammerstein's untimely passing. Now came the difficult task of taking a potentially treacherous property and making it soar onscreen.

It had all started with Maria Augusta Kutschera (1905–1987), an Austrian postulant who took a job tending to the seven children of a widowed retired navy captain, Georg von Trapp, and ended up marrying him in 1927. After discovering their musical abilities, the family became a singing group. This led to professional engagements in Austria and other parts of Europe until the Nazi regime forced them to escape to America. In 1948, a year after the Captain's death, Maria published an account of her life, *The Story of the Trapp Family Singers*, the rights to which were bought by German producer Wolfgang Reinhardt, who wanted to dramatize their tale as a motion picture. *Die Trapp Familie* (1956) proved so popular in Germany and Austria that a follow-up was ordered, *Die Trapp Familie in America* (1958), both of them directed by Wolfgang Liebeneiner and starring Ruth Leuwerik as Maria and Hans Holt as the Cap-

“I go to the hills when my heart is lonely. I know I will hear what I’ve heard before. My heart will be blessed with the sound of music, and I’ll sing once more.”
—Maria

tain. Broadway director Vincent J. Donehue thought the movies could be adapted for the stage to accommodate the talents of Mary Martin. Originally he envisioned a dramatic play utilizing authentic Austrian folk songs, but this idea was wisely discarded in favor of an all-new score by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. With a book by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse and a cast consisting of Martin, Theodore Bikel (as the Captain), Kurt Kaszner (Max Detweiler), Marion Marlowe (Elsa), Patricia Neway (the Mother Abbess), Lauri Peters

(Liesl), and Brian Davies (Rolf), *The Sound of Music* opened at New York's Lunt-Fontanne Theater on November 16, 1959. It earned Tony Awards in five categories—Best Musical, Best Actress (Martin), Best Featured Actress (Neway), Best Music Direction, and Best Scenic Design—and finally ended its run at the Mark Hellinger Theatre (where it had transferred in November 1962) on June 15, 1963.

There was much skepticism in Hollywood that *The Sound of Music*, with its mixture of religion, children, and unapologetic wholesomeness, could make the transition to the big screen without appearing square and overly cutesy. To make matters worse, Fox had purchased the two German Trapp films, stitched them together into one movie titled *The Trapp Family*, dubbed it in English, and opened it in the United States in March 1961 to complete public apathy, suggesting interest in the story was lower than anticipated. Writer Ernest Lehman, who had helped adapt *West Side Story* (United Artists, 1961) into an Oscar-laden motion picture, was one of the few who saw the possibility of something special in transferring the stage version to film and set about trying to restructure the show's problematic book. The two songs sung by the secondary characters of Max, the family's manager, and the captain's fiancée, Elsa—“How Can Love Survive?” and “No Way to Stop It”—were dropped, as was a love duet between Maria and Captain von Trapp, “An Ordinary Couple,” which Rodgers claimed to have disliked anyway. “My Favorite Things,” the song Maria sang to build up her confidence prior to going to the Trapp villa, was moved from the abbey to a scene in Maria's bedroom at her new place of employment, performed to comfort the children during a thunderstorm. In the play this scene had been where “The Lonely Goatherd” was sung, which now became part of a puppet show done by Maria and the children for the benefit of the Captain and Elsa. Rodgers was asked to write a new song for Maria to sing on her way to the Trapp residence, which resulted in the upbeat “I Have Confidence” (Rodgers supplying the lyrics

as well, rather than finding a new partner to do this task). To replace “An Ordinary Couple,” he wrote “Something Good,” but nobody was particularly happy with the end result, so Lehman and the movie’s musical supervisor and associate producer, Saul Chaplin, ended up providing additional lyrics and music, though they were uncredited.

There were further revisions in the characterization of the Captain, who had been perceived by pretty much everyone as a stiff onstage; and certain elements could now be enacted in a more fluid and cinematic fashion, notably the staging of “Do-Re-Mi,” which allowed Maria and the children to traipse through the streets of Salzburg; the escape from the Nazis, which was relocated to a graveyard at the abbey; and, best of all, the opening. Now, rather than the whole thing being ushered in by the nuns’ “Prelude,” which had opened the play, the title song would be sung on those very hills described in the lyrics.

Because Lehman had done such an ace job in smoothing out the bumps in the script, he nearly got William Wyler committed to the project as director. However, after going so far as to scout locations, Wyler decided he simply didn’t believe in the piece enough and opted to direct *The Collector* for Columbia instead. Another nonbeliever, Robert Wise, was also won over by the revisions but was hoping to get *The Sand Pebbles* into production at the time and had to pass. When Fox put *Pebbles* on hold, though, Wise was able to say yes, thereby reuniting Lehman with one of his *West Side Story* directors. With the production finally falling into place and getting closer to becoming a reality, Wise and Lehman managed to land the one actress



A nonmusical moment as governess Julie Andrews tends to the von Trapp children, as played by Debbie Turner, Angela Cartwright, Duane Chase, Kym Karath, Heather Menzies, Nicholas Hammond, and Charmian Carr.

they were most enthusiastic about playing Maria, Julie Andrews. Andrews had had great luck with her previous Rodgers and Hammerstein project, *Cinderella*, which had become one of television’s best-loved and most highly acclaimed specials after its sensational first airing in March of 1957. At the time she was signed for *Music*, neither of her first two pictures, *Mary Poppins* (Disney, 1964) and *The Americanization of Emily* (MGM, 1964), had yet opened, but preview footage from the former convinced everyone that she had the makings of a great film star.

Far less willing to come aboard was Christopher Plummer, who was Wise’s choice to play the Captain; the director believed the actor’s edgy qualities would help make the character more interesting, sexier, more compelling. Once he was finally talked into it, Plummer comforted himself with the belief that he’d at least be able to sing onscreen, a dream that was not to come true. When he was told his vocals would be dubbed, he nearly walked off the picture, until Wise placated him by telling him he’d be allowed to record his tracks as a test to see if he was suitable. If he honestly believed he was up to the demands,

they would go ahead with the Plummer pipes. Fortunately, Plummer realized he sounded hopelessly inadequate next to Andrews's gorgeous instrument and had to give in. He was ultimately "ghosted" by Bill Lee.

After considering two actresses who had not appeared before the cameras for years, Jeanette MacDonald and Irene Dunne, for the Mother Abbess, Wise went with Peggy Wood, who was best known for having reprised one of Dunne's roles on *Mama*, a television version of *I Remember Mama* (RKO, 1948) that ran on CBS from 1949 to 1957. Although she had once sung in such Broadway shows as *The Madcap Duchess* and *Maytime*, her vocal abilities were no longer what they had been, and she ended up being dubbed by Margery MacKay. Beating out such contenders as Mia Farrow and Lesley Ann Warren for the role of the oldest Trapp daughter, Liesl, was someone completely new to the business, Charmian Farnon, whose name was changed to Charmian Carr for her hoped-for new career in films. Popping up as one of the nuns was Marni Nixon, perhaps the most famous "ghost" singer in movie history, having filled in for Deborah Kerr in *The King and I* (Twentieth Century-Fox), Natalie Wood in *West Side Story*, and Audrey Hepburn in *My Fair Lady* (Warner Bros., 1964). As with Carr, this would be Nixon's only appearance in front of the cameras in a theatrically released picture.

Because Liesl was the only one of the von Trapp children to have a substantial role, the other six youngsters were cast principally for appearance, functioning more as a collective group than as individuals. (The stage version had come up with all new names for the children, who in the real life were called Rupert, Agathe, Maria, Werner, Hedwig, Johanna, and Martina.) All of their singing voices except Carr's were dubbed in the film.

Shooting began at the Twentieth Century-Fox studios on March 26, 1964, and continued there until the production traveled to Austria on April 23, where it would remain for over two months, returning to the Los Angeles soundstages on July 6. The interiors filmed in Los Angeles consisted of all the rooms in the Trapp villa, most of the abbey interiors (including the graveyard), and the pavilion on the grounds of the Trapp estate (used for both "Sixteen Going On Seventeen" and "Something Good"). The only indoor set that was built in Europe—at Dürer Studios in Parsch, when rainy weather kept the unit from filming outside—was the Mother Abbess's quarters, where she performed "Climb Ev'ry Mountain." All of the exteriors were shot in and near Salzburg, a decision that enhanced the movie in every way: the breathtaking backgrounds were just one reason the play suffered in comparison to the movie, especially in the eyes of later generations who had grown up on the film. The principal locales were comprised of the grounds and lake at the Bertelsmann estate, subbing for part of the Trapp property; Schloss Frohnburg, which served as the facade of the Trapp house (thereby necessitating cutting between the two locations, sometimes within the same scene); the exterior of the Nonnberg Abbey, where the real Maria had been cloistered; the imposing rock wall at the Rocky Riding School, which made for a stunning backdrop as the Trapp Family performed at the music festival; the St. Margarethen Chapel, where the nuns held service; Mondsee Cathedral, where the wedding of Maria and the Captain took place; Obersalzberg Mountain, which provided the inspiring final image of the family making their escape into Switzerland; and a montage of places around Salzburg, including Winkler's Terrace and the Mirabelle Gardens for the memorable "Do-Re-Mi," the latter locale providing the staircase for Andrews's sustained high note at the end of the song.

One location, however, surpassed all of these, simply because it was used for the moment that provided the movie with its defining image. Having created such a knockout opening for *West Side Story* by silently drifting over the streets of Manhattan from high above, Wise figured he could get away with something similar yet again and allowed his camera to descend from the snow-peaked Alps into the greenery of the Austrian countryside. But what capped the sequence was the helicopter shot that swept down toward Andrews as she spun about on a mountaintop before letting forth with the lyrics “The hills are alive with the sound of music.” This was the sort of incredible and indelible filmic moment that was greeted with awe for the manner in which it plunged its audience so thoroughly and emotionally into the story. Filmed at a mountain called Mellweg near the Bavarian village of Schellenberg during the final week on location (June 28–July 2, 1964), the sequence would be cheered, parodied, talked about, and praised until it could rightly take its place as a part of cultural folklore.

Right about the time principal photography ended, something wonderful happened that caused Fox to breathe a sigh of relief about the future of its \$8.5 million investment: Walt Disney’s *Mary Poppins* had opened to rapturous notices, with critics proclaiming Julie Andrews the best thing to happen to the musical genre, or, indeed, movies in general, in years. The crowds lined up in record numbers, making this *the* event movie of 1964, and Andrews was one of the key reasons for its success. By the end of the year, *The Americanization of Emily* had earned her another avalanche of praise, and it seemed as if Andrews had become just about the best-known celebrity in town. Fox scheduled the road show engagement of *The Sound of Music* to open in early March 1965, which meant that *Poppins* would overlap with it in theaters, meanwhile continuing to rake in a small fortune for Disney. For a moment all of this build-up seemed for naught when the first reviews of *Music* came rolling in, pretty much blasting the picture for being everything that Wise and company had set out to avoid, accusing it of being saccharine and slight. And the mediocre-to-poor reviews kept arriving like black clouds, with only a sprinkling of favorable comment coming from select publications. Fortunately, in one of those miracles that all filmmakers pray for, nobody seemed to give a damn about the negative press, and audiences flocked to the film’s exclusive engagements right from the start. Better yet, the audience kept growing and growing till the numbers were so staggering that even the naysayers started to wonder if they had missed something. As *Music* spread to more theaters during the summer and fall of 1965, the cash kept pouring into the Fox bank account until the movie had become the sort of phenomenon that comes along all too rarely. In time, *The Sound of Music* would zoom over the \$100 million mark, passing the all-time record holder, *Gone with the Wind* (MGM, 1939), a feat that seemed unlikely at the time. Andrews had gone from superstar to household word and the whole world seemed to have an opinion of her and the movie, whether they’d seen it or not. Needless to say, the record attendance figures only caused certain reviews and champions of the cinema’s more realistic, New Wave movement to denounce the picture more loudly and with greater venom. Because it was now the most popular motion picture of all time, the opposition pointed to it as the epitome of Hollywood sentimentality, the most caustic comments coming from those who weren’t likely to enjoy musicals in the first place.

The millions who embraced the film obviously responded to its message of hope. *The Sound of Music* was a truly inspiring story about one triumph over the Nazi nightmare, whereas too many other true-life incidents had ended in unspeakable tragedy. Wise and Lehman had done a masterful job of storytelling,

keeping the sugar to a minimum (despite what many declared) and creating people audiences genuinely cared about. Much of this success was due to Andrews's performance; the actress exuded a sense of comfort and love without ever once telegraphing her intentions in a manner that might be construed as self-conscious or false. It was, in many ways, the finest performance of her career, so it was only fitting that it be the one more audiences would see than any other. The beautiful Rodgers and Hammerstein score was another reason the film worked so well. As the airwaves and record sales figures were just on the cusp of being taken over by rock and roll, the soundtrack became the last of its sort to reach the number 1 spot on the *Billboard* charts, a position it held for two weeks in the fall of 1965. Nearly every song in the film became a standard, giving the impression that the traditional musical was *not* on its way out, as so many had predicted for years. As a direct result, every Hollywood studio in town found its share of Broadway musicals to adapt for the big screen, spending a lot of money, sometimes for the good, sometimes not. Big-budget musicals became the norm right into the early 1970s, when it suddenly became unfashionable to make this kind of entertainment in the midst of the cinema's crusade to establish a harder edged, uncensored, grittier style of filmmaking. Overnight, musicals seemed to bother everyone a great deal and were looked upon by certain factions as the squarest of the square, with *The Sound of Music* singled out as the worst offender.

Lehman, who had believed in the picture from the start, had been vindicated by its record-shattering success, which helped Twentieth Century-Fox find its legs after the crippling financial losses of *Cleopatra* (1963). *The Sound of Music* was an outstanding example of a movie attaining the status of a classic not because the reviewers were aware of its merits, but because the general public responded so passionately and treasured it in a way that few films ever were. It wound up with ten Oscar nominations, pitting it against the other big 1965 movie that had irked the critics and thrilled the public, *Doctor Zhivago* (MGM). It was *Music* that snatched up the Best Picture award to make its incredible triumph complete and thorough. The film was successfully reissued in 1973 and premiered to huge audiences on television in 1975, where it remained a staple of prime-time viewing for decades to come. Salzburg became a favorite vacation destination, and a "*Sound of Music* Tour" became a key attraction in which visitors were taken to the various locations used in the film, much to the chagrin of the locals. Austria was one of the few countries where the picture flopped. The film remains one of the great dividing lines of taste to this day, championed as an all-time favorite by millions who have kept it a constant seller on various home viewing formats, from VHS to DVD, while never failing to evoke a smirk of disdain from others. Even one of its stars, Christopher Plummer, took delight for years in making derisive comments about the role and film for which he remains best known. Andrews, on the other hand, was quick to point out all the joy it brought to so many people and was appreciative of the cinematic immortality it gave her.

THE PAWNBROKER

Academy Award Nominee: Actor (Rod Steiger)

Opening date: April 20, 1965.

Landau Releasing Organization–Allied Artists. An Ely Landau and Herbert R. Steinman Presentation.

Director: Sidney Lumet. Producers: Roger Lewis, Philip Langner. Executive Producer: Ely Landau. Screenplay: Morton S. Fine, David Friedkin. Based on the 1961 novel by Edward Lewis Wallant. Photography: Boris Kaufman. Art Director: Richard Sylbert. Set Decorator: Jack Flaherty. Costumes: Anna Hill Johnstone. Music: Quincy Jones. Editor: Ralph Rosenblum. Black and white. 116 minutes.

CAST: Rod Steiger (Sol Nazerman), Geraldine Fitzgerald (Marilyn Birchfield), Brock Peters (Rodriguez), Jaime Sánchez (Jesus Ortiz), Thelma Oliver (Ortiz's Girl), Marketa Kimbrell (Tessie), Baruch Lumet (Mendel), Juano Hernandez (Mr. Smith), Linda Geiser (Ruth Nazerman), Nancy R. Pollock (Bertha), Raymond St. Jacques (Tangee), John McCurry (Buck), Ed Morehouse (Oratory Award Owner), Eusebia Cosme (Mrs. Ortiz), Warren Finnerty (Savarese), Jack Ader (Morton), E. M. Margolese (Papa), Marianne Kanter (Joan), Marc Alexander (Rubin), Reni Santoni (Junkie with Radio), Charles Dierkop (Robinson).

PLOT: Sol Nazerman, an elderly Jewish pawnbroker plying his trade in Harlem, tries to run his business with as little human interaction as possible, having turned his back on mankind after witnessing the extermination of his wife and children in the Nazi death camps.

How to deal with something as unspeakable as the Holocaust? This event had scarred the world for all time and was ripe for reflection, criticism, and dramatization, but Hollywood wasn't too keen to venture into so explosive and potentially unnerving territory when it came to providing audiences with "entertainment." *Judgment at Nuremberg* (United Artists, 1961) had been one of the few movies to risk bringing up the subject, even going so far as to show actual footage shot within the concentration camps, but it had not dared to stage scenes of actors within the camps themselves. *The Pawnbroker* took that risk and moved motion pictures that much further ahead in confronting the monstrous nature of mankind and the numbed human beings left behind to forever confront the atrocities committed against them.

The source material was an excellent novel by Edward Lewis Wallant, who had been declared one of the most interesting and probing young writers of his generation but died in 1962 at the age of thirty-six. By that point Roger Lewis, a former vice president at United Artists, had bought the rights to the book, wanting to branch into independent film production with what he believed would be an unusual and adventurous property. MGM showed some interest, and Daniel Petrie was mentioned as a possible director. Lewis had wanted Rod Steiger to play the lead, Sol Nazerman, but MGM got cold feet about the commercial viability of this difficult piece, and Steiger's participation did not placate the studio where box-office business was concerned. The deal eventually fell apart, so Lewis brought in another producing partner, Philip Langner, who had received an associate producer credit on *Judgment at Nuremberg*. One studio after another turned them down. Finally, Ely A. Landau, whose only previous movie credit

had been the blatantly noncommercial three-hour film version of Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, offered to serve as backer and distributor on the picture, with Sidney Lumet (who had helmed *Long Day's Journey*) selected as director.

Two writers who worked mainly for television, David Friedkin and Morton S. Fine, were responsible for taking Wallant's book, which emphasized a lot of internalized feelings, and making it into something

**“Survive? A coward's survival! And at what a price—no love, no passion, no . . . no pity. Dead! Sol Nazerman, the walking dead!”
—Mendel**

more cinematic. Although they were present in one of the earliest scenes in the film, Sol's sister and her family were given far less importance, which meant eliminating the relationship between Sol and his troubled, antisocial nephew Morton, who in the book was asked to help his uncle in the shop following the murder of Sol's apprentice, Jesus. Two other characters—a corrupt police officer who makes himself a nuisance at Sol's shop and a half-crazed Holocaust survivor who demands money for the Jewish Appeal from Sol's sex partner, Tessie—were dropped altogether. The ominous hood who rules over the pawnbroker's life from afar was changed from an Italian American named Murrillo to an African American called Rodriguez, with suggestions of a gay relationship between him and his blond housekeeper thrown in for good measure. Many of Sol's memories of his hellish internment were changed from nightmares to conscious memories triggered by present-day experiences. They included one pivotal sequence that wound up bringing the film the sort of attention and outcry that worked in its favor.

It was decided to take Sol's most unbearable memory—being forced to watch his wife submit sexually to a Gestapo officer—and intercut it with a desperate whore's efforts to trade her body to the pawnbroker for needed cash. Boldly, Lumet decided that in order to make this sequence truly ugly and gut-wrenching in its impact, he would photograph both the actress playing the hooker and the actress playing Sol's wife bare-breasted from the front, an unprecedented move for an American motion picture at the time. The nudity would thereby come off as unpleasant rather than titillating, and the full nature of his wife's degradation—and the crippling effect it had left upon Sol—would be made clear.

After nearly two years of trying to get the project off the ground, filming began on October 7, 1963, and continued over a schedule of fifty-six days. Lumet, who prided himself on having never filmed in Hollywood up to that point, kept to this credo by shooting entirely in the New York metropolitan area. The site for Nazerman's pawnshop was found near the southeast corner of Park Avenue and 116th Street, which meant that the elevated train loomed nearby for added atmosphere. Other locations, in addition to those near and around Harlem, included a glimpse of the newly erected Lincoln Center and an apartment housing project behind the complex; Connecticut, which would stand in for Germany; and a typical suburban home at 185 North Marginal Road in Jericho, Long Island, facing the Jericho Turnpike. Richard Sylbert's appropriately cluttered pawnshop set was constructed at the Fox Movie-tone Studios on West Fifty-fourth Street. The total budget was \$1 million plus.

Whereas the previous Lumet and Landau collaboration, *Long Day's Journey*, had been able to get a distribution deal with Embassy Pictures, *The Pawnbroker* was simply too iffy a project to get even an established independent company to handle it. They took the movie to the Berlin Film Festival in June

1964, where it was hailed as the most stunning of all the new entries and brought Steiger a Best Actor award. Despite this acclaim and the buzz on just how stark, uncompromising, and ultimately shattering this film was, the nudity was still a problem. Submitted for the customary seal of approval by the Production Code authority, Lumet and Landau were told that their movie violated the code because of “indecent and undue exposure.” The authority’s head, Geoffrey M. Shurlock, did, however, realize the maturity and dramatic validity behind the offending scenes and saw fit to have the appeals board discuss the issue in depth in hopes of coming out in favor of Lumet’s vision. Miraculously, it did just that and, in March 1965, granted *The Pawnbroker* an exemption from its standard regulations, voting to let the film be passed and released exactly as it was. The board did, however, make clear to other filmmakers hoping to use this ruling to their benefit that this exemption was being made solely for this particular movie. Lumet and Landau managed to retain the film they wanted, to be distributed directly by Landau’s company under the banner of the Landau Releasing Organization. Thanks to this landmark ruling, their investment was a safer bet than they had even hoped, because the controversy only piqued the public’s interest in seeing the finished product.

No film had ever depicted so effectively and so relentlessly as *The Pawnbroker* the tawdry and hopeless side of urban living. Sol’s motley customers were portrayed as dispirited, desperate, deluded, and sad. The movie was refreshingly honest in showing both the nonchalant day-to-day integration of the races as well as the unavoidable barriers erected between Caucasians, blacks, and Hispanics as the cultural overlap provoked tension, misunderstanding, and violence.

Always worth watching but never predictable when it came to how far he might extend his reach, Rod Steiger proved to be in every respect the perfect choice for the role of Sol Nazerman. The part called for a bulky actor who exuded the presence of someone older than his years, and Steiger certainly fit the bill physically, being able to convincingly play the character in his younger, happier years as well as in his latter, prematurely aged state. Knowing full well that a role this demanding and this good didn’t come along every day, Steiger plunged so deeply into the self-induced lifelessness of this character that he was simply frightening to behold at times, painting the cinema’s ultimate portrait of internalized despair, a being so emotionally destroyed by inhumanity that he has passed from bitterness into a resigned state of simply existing, unable to respond or wake up to the equally despondent beings around him until it



The Mercury Records recording of Quincy Jones’s *The Pawnbroker* score includes a theme song by Jones and Jack Lawrence with vocals by Marc Allen that does not appear in the film itself.

is too late. It was by general consensus the pinnacle of his career, and whatever undisciplined trips into overemoting he would take later in life, *The Pawnbroker* was always around to remind people of the levels of greatness he could reach.

With some of the truly outstanding reviews of the year, *The Pawnbroker* became one of the top art-house attractions of 1965. But all that controversy spilled over into the mainstream venues as well, which meant that this important film was able to extend its reach outside the more exclusive bookings. There were plans, however, to get the film play even wider. In 1966 American International Pictures took over distribution rights, but the studio compromised its most talked-about scene by taking the negative and blowing up the image so that both actresses were now seen from the shoulders up. Suddenly, because of this distortion, the once dreaded but increasingly ineffectual Catholic Legion of Decency could find satisfaction with the picture and lowered its “condemnation” classification to a less stringent A3, which meant Morally Objectionable. Apparently other religious organizations had looked beyond this puritanical carping: the National Catholic Office of Motion Pictures voted *The Pawnbroker* one of the best American films of 1965, securing a place for it on a list that didn’t see fit to include George Stevens’s expensive epic on the life of Christ, *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (United Artists).