

Film News: Iconic Filmmaker Peter Bogdanovich Dies at 82

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CHICAGO – The work of filmmaker Peter Bogdanovich – who passed away on January 6th, 2022, at age 82 – was inspired by the cinematic language of American movies, which he interpreted through his many classic films. His most fertile and imaginative period were three movies from 1971 through 1973, which began with his masterpiece, “The Last Picture Show.”

Bogdanovich’s personal life was also the stuff of legend, and contributed to to a less inspired creative period after 1973, but he made a major comeback with “Mask” (1985) and didn’t stop there ... he directed six more narrative feature films thereafter, two documentaries and seven TV movies.



In 2016: Peter Bogdanovich at the 52nd Chicago International Film Festival

Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

Peter Bogdanovich was born in Kingston, New York, the son of Serbian immigrants. An early adapter of film scholarship, Bogdanovich kept a meticulous record of every film he ever saw from the age of 13 to his early 30s. He began his career as a film writer, seeking out the titans of the early studio era in their old age, and revived scholarship on John Ford, Howard Hawks and Orson Welles. A chance encounter with producer Roger Corman led to his first directing job, “Targets” (1968), and his association with Ford and Welles influenced the creation of “The Last Picture Show” (1971).

His follow ups were the hilarious “What’s Up, Doc?” (1972) and the rambunctious “Paper Moon” (1973). It was during this period that he divorced his first wife and collaborator Polly Platt, and had a long time relationship with actress Cybil Shepard, who appeared in “Last Picture Show,” and subsequently “Daisy Miller” (1974) and “At Long Last Love” (1975), which weren’t as well received as his previous films. His next three films, “Nickelodeon,” “Saint Jack” and “They All Laughed” (1981, with then-lover Dorothy Stratton) finished his 1970s era in a critical and box office downturn. Stratton was then tragically murdered by her ex-husband, a further spiral in Bogdanovich’s life.

After Mask, he revisited his “Last Picture Show” roots with “Texasville” (1990), a critical and box office flop, but had good notices for “The Cat’s Meow” in 2001. “She’s Funny That Way” was his last narrative feature film, and his last film of any kind was the documentary “The Great Buster: A Celebration” (2018) about silent film era actor Buster Keaton. He also acted in film and television, including a recurring role on “The Sopranos.” Peter Bogdanovich died of natural causes in Los Angeles. He is survived by his two children through his marriage to Polly Platt, Antonia and Alexandra, and three grandchildren.

Patrick McDonald of HollywoodChicago.com talked with Peter Bogdanovich when he attended the 52nd Chicago International Film Festival in 2016, where he received a Career Achievement Award. The interview begins on PAGE TWO.

HollywoodChicago.com: The documentary about the making of ‘They All Laughed’ opened a Pandora’s Box of spirits that were released. What hope was left once that all was examined?

Peter Bogdanovich: It is about still making pictures. That was my hope.

HollywoodChicago.com: When you saw the final cut of the documentary, what insight do you think the filmmakers got about you, your career or ‘They All Laughed’ that you never expected when the project began?

Bogdanovich: What was gratifying were the comments that the other directors made in the film, like Wes Anderson and Noah Baumbach. That was very nice, and the insight they had about the film was interesting, and touching, and was moved by it.

HollywoodChicago.com: I was fascinated with your card catalog of films seen from 1952 through 1970. What became your go-to theater for a majority of those films, and where in New York City were they?

Bogdanovich: I started that card file when I was living in New York City, and there was a theater nearby called The Alden. When the Lincoln Center was built, they tore down the RKO Colonial Theatre, and I used to go there a lot. The Museum of Modern Art film program was also a destination, my parents would take me there often when I was a kid. When I got older, there was the New Yorker Theatre, on 89th and Broadway, and I loved to go there.



Peter Bogdanovich On Set with Barbra Streisand in 'What's Up, Doc?'

Photo credit: Warner Bros.

HollywoodChicago.com: Of course, one of the famous trivia answers is that the film 'Red River' was the last picture show in your film 'The Last Picture Show.' Was that inspired by a 'last picture show' that you encountered in your movie-going life?

Bogdanovich: The reason I chose 'Red River' for that film is that we were shooting in Texas, and I wanted to show a film that had a sense of Western adventure. I was deciding between 'Wagon Masters' by John Ford, and 'Red River' by Howard Hawks. I chose the latter because it has the great sequence of the cattle drive that was exciting, and it was in contrast to the sad town in the story.

HollywoodChicago.com: I think about 'What's Up, Doc?' when asking this next question. How important is it for you to get the right character actors to establish a comic rhythm, and could you give me an example from that classic comedy?

Bogdanovich: All the actors in that film were good at comedy. It was Madeline Kahn's first film, and I had met her in New York City. Kenneth Mars I'd seen in Mel Brook's 'The Producers' and thought he was hilarious, that's why I used him. Barbara [Streisand] of course had done stage comedy, and we sort of taught Ryan [O'Neal] how to do it.

HollywoodChicago.com: Orson Welles once told you, 'I started at the top, and have been working my way down ever since.' In the context of being a filmmaker, does that generally ring true?

Bogdanovich: With Orson, it wasn't true, he was just being modest. He had a particularly hard time, because he was too fucking smart, too much for the people in the industry. Every career is different, you can't really go by one and say it pertains to another.

HollywoodChicago.com: What is your mindset on the work of Bob Fosse, especially in the context of how he interpreted the events of the period described in the documentary, in his film 'Star 80'? Does that alter your view of his overall achievements?

Bogdanovich: Well, it didn't help. I thought 'Star 80' was a piece of shit. It was badly made, and had nothing to do with the real people involved. Bob had never met Dorothy, and had no clue as to what she was actually like – he made her a generic blonde. The whole thing was in bad taste, it never should have been made.

HollywoodChicago.com: In what circumstance did you actually watch the film?

Bogdanovich: I had to see it because Dorothy's family was thinking about a lawsuit against Warner Brothers. So I watched it, and I told Louise [Stratten, Dorothy's sister] and Dorothy's mother Nellie what I didn't like, specifically a couple lines of dialogue. We got them to cut those lines, and they paid the family a settlement.

HollywoodChicago.com: Did you know Bob Fosse before that all went down?

Bogdanovich: Yes. When he made the film 'Lenny' in 1974, he asked me for some advice for shooting in black and white, and I helped him with it. I actually called him when they announced they were making the film, since it was in such bad taste. I asked him why he was making the film, and he told me it was a good story. I told him I don't even know the whole story, how the hell did he know it? Then I concluded the conversation with, 'Bob, if this had happened to you I wouldn't make a movie about it, that's all I have to say.'

HollywoodChicago.com: In the period where you rediscovered and brought to light many of the studio era filmmaking titans, which one shocked you in the sense of how the world was neglecting them at that point and why?

Bogdanovich: I remember at the time saying, 'why am I working and John Ford is not?' I couldn't quite figure that out. He certainly could have made a film during his later years. Hollywood is a ageist town, and the hot new thing is the thing. However, it was worst back then than it is now. Clint Eastwood is still working. All of those titans you refer to, they all should have worked to the end.

HollywoodChicago.com: Has falling in love been redefined for you as your life has evolved, with all the high profile and tragic circumstances you've had in association with falling in love?

Bogdanovich: I think I discovered what falling in love was for the first time with Cybill [Shepard], and in a much stronger form with Dorothy. When I made 'They All Laughed' I was defining what real love meant to me, and Dorothy was the inspiration.

HollywoodChicago.com: If there was somebody who has passed away that you could call on a celestial phone, who would it be and what would tell or ask them?

Bogdanovich: Probably Orson.

HollywoodChicago.com: What would you ask Mr. Welles?

Bogdanovich: Help! [laughs] He was a complicated guy, in contrast to Howard Hawks, who I found to be much more centered. Of all the directors from that era I knew, Orson was complicated, Jack Ford was a bit reckless and Howard was centered.

HollywoodChicago.com: If you could take a time machine back to the point right before 'The Last Picture Show' was released, what advice would you have given your younger self and would that younger guy taken that advice, since it is you?

Bogdanovich: That's a complicated question. [laughs] I would tell that younger guy to 'stay calm.'

Source material for this article was from wikipedia.com. Peter Bogdanovich, 1939-2022



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