

Keystone Born Hollywood Bred

There is magic in the movies. They draw viewers away—even if but for a few hours—from mere ordinary, everyday life to see their own experience and the experience of others in a detached but powerful way. Some induce laughter, others bring tears. But audiences seem grateful for the opportunity to know the richness, the complexity, and the irony of events without their having to cope firsthand. Good movies afford viewers the rare opportunity to discover what is truly meaningful in their own lives.

"Movie Buff"
David Mallery
Reviews
the Acting
Careers of
James Stewart
and
Grace Kelly

by William C. Kashatus

Through the years Pennsylvanians have enjoyed, admired, and even loved several classic films made by two of their very own, James Stewart and Grace Kelly. During his forty-three-year career, Stewart matured from leading man to national idol. His classic performances in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *The Philadelphia Story* (1940) and, of course, *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) are, in essence, visions of the American experience. Known to millions everywhere as Jimmy Stewart, he became the ideal American male with an awkward but endearing way of muttering asides, memorable double takes, and affably wry retorts. Despite the adulation, however, his code of honor always allowed him to see his way clear to doing, in the words of contemporary filmmaker Spike Lee, "the right thing."

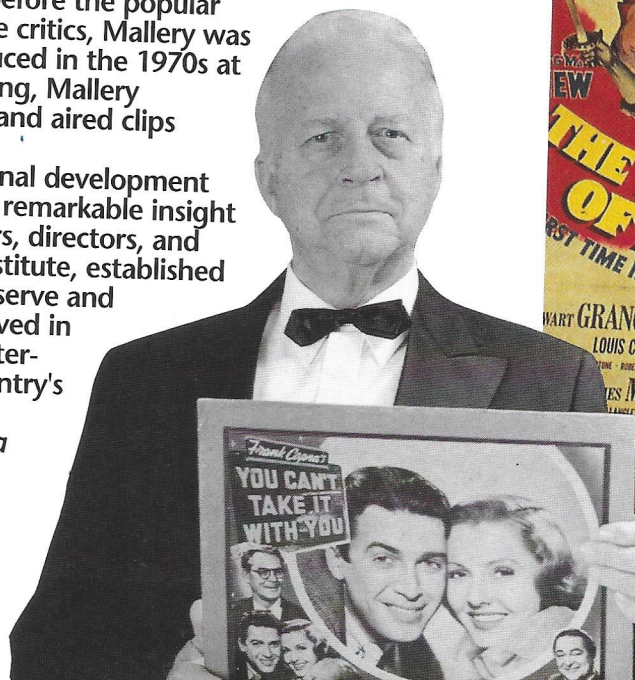
Grace Kelly was a different sort of icon. Despite her aloof and aristocratic bearing, she exuded a deep sensuality to which so many American women aspired. Her brief, six-year film career was highlighted by her seductive yet graceful charming of Hollywood's leading men Gary Cooper in *High Noon* (1952), Clark Gable in *Mogambo* (1953), Cary Grant in *To Catch A Thief* (1955) and, of course, Jimmy Stewart in *Rear Window* (1954).

Philadelphian David Mallery, who knew both Stewart and Kelly, is among their greatest admirers. Long before the popular team of Siskel and Ebert had launched their careers as movie critics, Mallery was host of "The Movie Buff," a weekly television program produced in the 1970s at KYW-TV in Philadelphia. For two hours every Sunday morning, Mallery reviewed the careers of some of Hollywood's greatest stars, and aired clips from classic American films.

An educator by profession, Mallery is director of professional development for the National Association of Independent Schools. It's his remarkable insight for film that has earned the respect and admiration of writers, directors, and actors alike. As a founding member of the American Film Institute, established by the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson to preserve and advance the nation's filmmaking arts, Mallery has been involved in the creation of a national film school and archives, and in determining the recipient of the Life Achievement Award, the country's highest honor for a filmmaker.

In this exclusive interview granted recently for *Pennsylvania Heritage*, David Mallery reviews the movie careers of James Stewart and Grace Kelly. His remarks are preceded by brief sketches of these screen legends and their Keystone State roots, early lives, and celebrated careers.

Lights! Camera! Action!



James Stewart

James Stewart was born on May 20, 1908, to Alexander and Elizabeth Jackson Stewart, descendants of Irish immigrants who had settled in Indiana, Indiana County, at the close of the eighteenth century. Stewart's ancestors were fervent patriots who served their country in every war, beginning with his great-great-grandfather who fought in the American Revolution. Because of that distinction, probably, the young Stewart developed a fascination for all things military.

While his father was serving in World War I, he persuaded his mother to buy him a little soldier suit which he wore constantly. He might even have been giving thought to his own military career as a fighter pilot as early as age four when he tied a box kite to his go-cart and attempted to fly it from the roof of his parents' two-story house at 104 North Seventh Street. His acting career began in the basement of that house where he staged amateur dramatic productions with such patriotic titles as *To Hell with the Kaiser*.



Indiana County native Jimmy Stewart being directed in his portrayal of aviator Charles A. Lindbergh.

Stories of Stewart's folksy, small-town background often belie the fact that he came from an affluent, well-educated, and strict Presbyterian family. By the time Stewart had been born, the quaint ramshackle hardware store established by his grandfather had blossomed into a profitable family business. The store provided enough money to send Jimmy to Mercersburg Academy, a private boarding school in Mercersburg, Franklin County, steeped in Presbyterian tradition. At Mercersburg he excelled academically and competed on the football and track teams. Surprisingly, Stewart's only acting stint during his prep school days was a token appearance in the class play, *The Wolves*. His collegiate years would prove to be a different story, however.

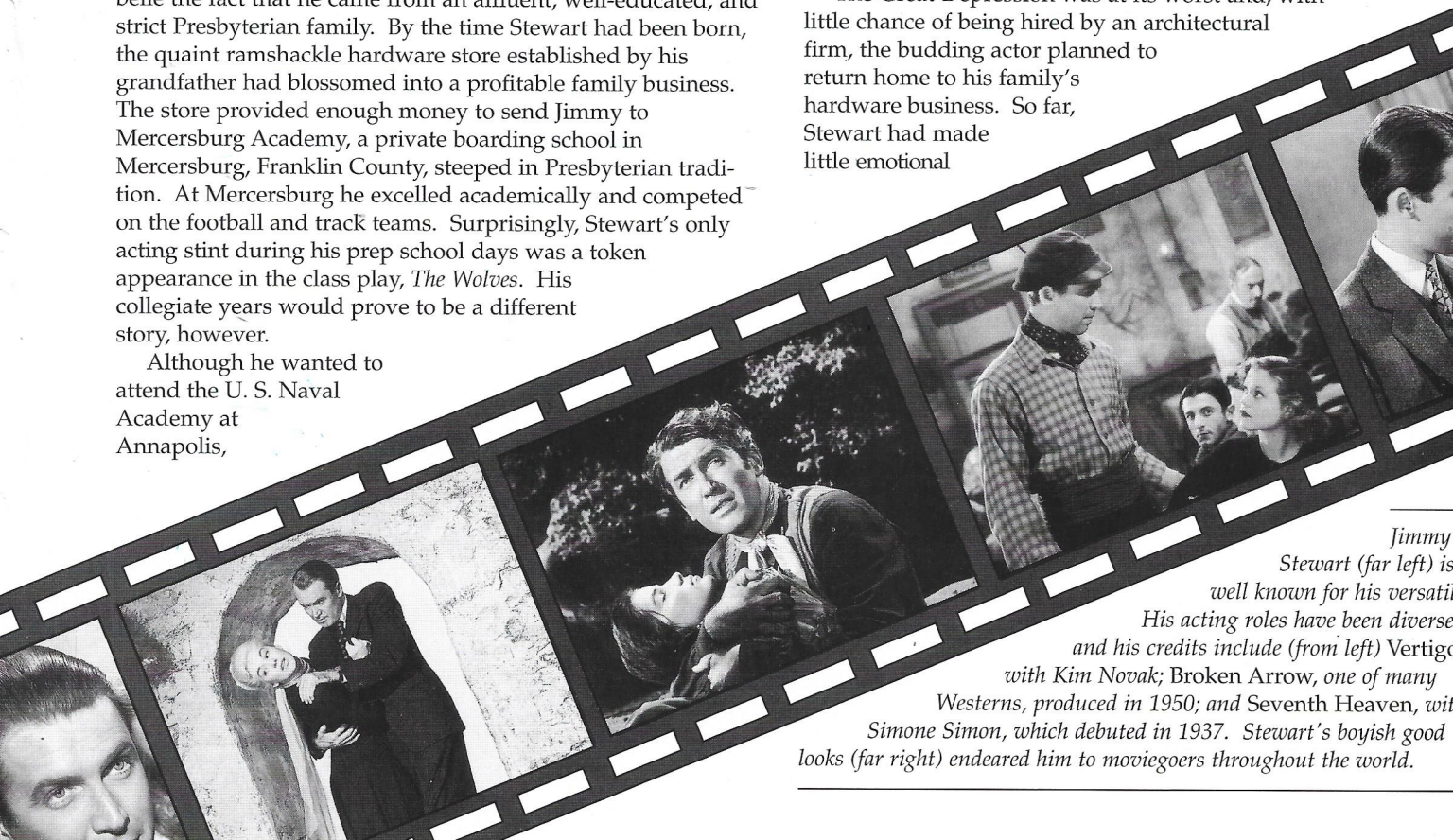
Although he wanted to attend the U. S. Naval Academy at Annapolis,

Stewart deferred to his father and enrolled in Princeton University, Alexander Stewart's alma mater. The decision was fortuitous. While his academic interests ranged from engineering to political science—he ultimately graduated with an honors degree in architecture—Stewart's extracurricular activities unwittingly led him to his true vocation, acting. He auditioned and was accepted by Princeton's famous theater group, the Triangle Club, which specialized in lighthearted productions emphasizing music and undergraduate humor. The troupe would open productions on campus and then tour the country, often attracting the attention of Hollywood and Broadway talent scouts.

It was during the 1928 Triangle Club's production of *The Golden Dog* that Stewart was spotted by Josh Logan who had established a theater group, the University Players. Based in a small movie theater on Cape Cod, the University Players was a collaborative venture between the dramatic societies of Harvard, Princeton, and Yale Universities, and Radcliffe, Smith, and Vassar Colleges. During its brief, five year existence, the University Players established an enviable reputation as a training ground for Hollywood careers. Its successful alumni included Henry Fonda, Myron McCormick, and Margaret Sullavan.

When Henry Fonda left the Players in 1932, Logan nabbed Stewart, who had recently graduated from Princeton, as his new leading man. After two modest successes, Stewart made his Broadway debut in a biographical melodrama about the temperance crusader Carry Nation. Unfortunately for Stewart, who had only four bit parts, and for the rest of the troupe, the play was panned by reviewers and closed after only thirty-one performances. The University Players broke up not long afterward. The timing was terrible.

The Great Depression was at its worst and, with little chance of being hired by an architectural firm, the budding actor planned to return home to his family's hardware business. So far, Stewart had made little emotional



*Jimmy Stewart (far left) is well known for his versatility. His acting roles have been diverse and his credits include (from left) *Vertigo* with Kim Novak; *Broken Arrow*, one of many Westerns, produced in 1950; and *Seventh Heaven*, with Simone Simon, which debuted in 1937. Stewart's boyish good looks (far right) endeared him to moviegoers throughout the world.*

The earnest young Stewart in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), which was directed for Columbia Pictures by Frank Capra.



investment in acting. Instead, he referred to this “stage monkey business” as “a lot of fun” and assumed something of a “take-it-or-leave-it” attitude toward the profession, believing that his future lay in architecture. Although probably embarrassed to admit it, deep down he loved acting.

Jimmy Stewart’s big break occurred in autumn 1932 when New York producer Arthur J. Beckhard found a part for him in *Goodbye Again*. The comedy opened on Broadway in December and proved to be a long-running hit.

Although Stewart’s role was only a three-minute cameo appearance, it routinely brought down the house, indefinitely postponing his return home to Indiana. It would be only a matter of time before the motion picture studios claimed him for their very own.

During his illustrious career, James Stewart appeared in eighty-one feature films, eleven television movies or series, and fifteen documentaries. He made his final film in 1990, providing one of the cartoon voices for *An American Tail: Fievel Goes West*. He then retired with characteristic humility. “I think I’ve done enough,” he said.

What has been the key to James Stewart’s success as an actor?

What made James Stewart such an exceptional actor was his versatility. Everyone knows and loves him for the boyish enthusiasm and idealistic strain we see in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) but he can also be very funny as he was in *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), a role in which he plays a delightful, witty newspaper reporter, and for which he won an Oscar. Then again he could leave that charming humor and get into these strange, dark, subtle, rather somber roles like the ones he played in Alfred Hitchcock’s movies, especially *Rear Window* (1954). The westerns present an even more different Stewart; he shows us his extraordinary ability to take on these savage and strange characters who are crazed for revenge in movies like *Bend of the River* (1952), *Naked Spur* (1953), and *Man from Laramie* (1955). Then there was his astounding performance in *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959) where we see yet another Stewart. This time he poses as a very clever, manipulative, country boy lawyer. The film

has a star-studded cast with George C. Scott and Lee Remick, but for me, Stewart’s performance is the show.

So there are many James Stewarts. He’s not just the kind of “Aw Shucks” fellow many of us have come to enjoy over the years. I think because of that, moviegoers get this tension whenever he deviates from the Jimmy Stewart we know and love for his genuine sincerity. Yet the dark, sinister roles he has played make him a richer actor than if anyone else tried to do it. So while his versatility is terrific, the underlying core of Stewart’s success is the fervent, sincere personality that we know is there and which we keep recognizing and relating to. That’s why people stop him in the street. They don’t stop him because of his acting technique, which is brilliant but almost invisible.

Most people think of Stewart as “Jimmy,” not “James.” He seems to represent the quintessential small-town, All-American boy, almost as if he stepped out of a Norman Rockwell painting. What gives him that endearing quality?

There is something endearing—and timeless—about Jimmy Stewart, and it comes from his style, his personality, and his manner of speaking. For more than three decades, night club comedians have impersonated him because he’s so easy to do, just like James Cagney and Edward G. Robinson. Yet he is much more than the mannerisms and the shtick.

There is a unique, deep sincerity that comes forth from him and it’s different from the quality of any other actor. For example, in the *Mortal Storm* (1940) he plays a pacifist, anti-Nazi veteran who comes from a small town in Germany. The story begins in the early 1930s when Adolf Hitler becomes chancellor. It seems to me that the essence of Stewart surfaces in a café scene where everyone else in the room is standing, saluting Hitler and singing a militant Nazi anthem. And there’s Stewart very conspicuously sitting with his back to all



A film legend and a Hollywood classic: Stewart made It's a Wonderful Life, with Donna Reed, in 1946, which many critics believe is his best movie. It's a Wonderful Life is also the actor's favorite movie and a perennial holiday favorite.

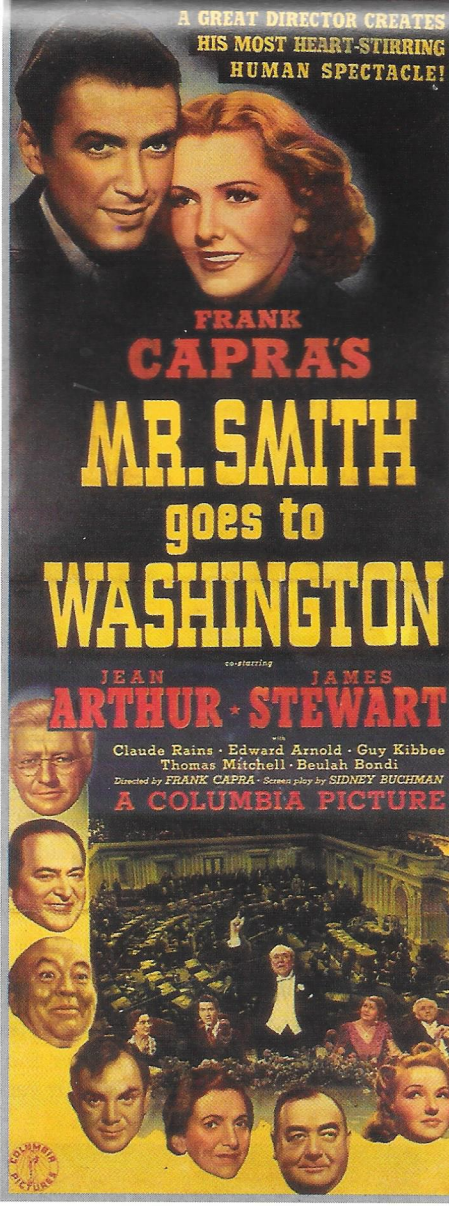
looking detached from all this—not just disgusted, that would be too easy—but a kind of detachment which says, “My values are far away from here and being here is going to cost me.” It’s one of the great moments in movie history.

Another fine example of Stewart’s unique sincerity is the filibuster scene in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939). He plays Jefferson Smith, the bumbling Boy Scout leader who comes to the U. S. Senate full of pride at the thought that he’s the chosen representative of his people, only to discover that he is simply a political front man. Smith goes his own way, challenging corrupt pressure groups over a piece of land he wants to use for a boys’ camp. Matters come to a head on the Senate floor where Smith tries to filibuster the attempt to have that land turned into a profit-making venture. You see the quintessential Jimmy Stewart: the little man standing up against an army of hostile interests. He’s exhausted, frazzled, and raspy-voiced in that final desperate plea which lasts nearly twenty minutes. Finally, he simply drops and the movie ends quickly. Incidentally, he used bichloride of mercury to make his voice go hoarse for that scene and almost did some serious damage to himself.

People stop Jimmy Stewart in the street because of his sincerity which we all truly love. It’s almost as if he is a family member but it’s more than that. I think millions of people love Jimmy Stewart more than they love some of their own family members. And that kind of affection for a movie actor is rare.

How real is that sincerity? Does it cut to the core of Stewart’s real life personality or has it been made for Hollywood?

I believe he is a sincere human being. What has always impressed me about Jimmy Stewart is his genuine sense of humility. He was never too busy to stop and chat with his admirers. I remember one occasion in particular when a fan came up to introduce himself, apologizing for interrupting our conversation. The poor fellow was very nervous—or maybe starstruck—but managed to express how much Stewart’s films meant to him and to his family. Stewart was very touched by his kind words, thanked him, and replied, “Please don’t ever feel that you’ve intruded. You’ve reminded me that you have carried with you a little piece of time from my films and that makes me very happy.” It was a funny phrase—“a little piece of time”—because Jimmy Stewart gave us all hundreds of those “little pieces.” His films are timeless expressions of Americans as we want to be seen, not necessarily the way we really are. That’s an extremely powerful testimony to the man’s greatness and yet he was so humble that he thanked the fan for



Stewart starred with Jean Arthur in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*; other popular cast members included Claude Rains and Edward Arnold.

giving him back a kind of gift—which he was.

Stewart really doesn’t have any pretense. He can mix with anyone—stars, directors, writers, even movie buffs like me—and enjoy their company. In 1977, for instance, President Jimmy Carter held a reception at the White House celebrating the history of the American film. As a board member of the American Film Institute I was invited. Let me tell you, it was a movie buff’s paradise! Every movie actor who you’d ever imagine in your best fantasies was there. But the first two voices that caught my attention were those of Jimmy Stewart and Claudette Colbert. As I turned to follow the voices, I could see the dome of the United States Capitol through the window behind them. It was an extremely moving experience for me and I reacted like an excited little boy. The first thing that came out of my mouth was, “I can’t believe I am standing here talking to James Stewart, and I’m looking at the Capitol Building and thinking of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*! Yet here we both are in the White House!” He got a kick out of that. He really enjoys people and seems to be genuinely touched by the pleasure his films bring to them.

Of the eighty-one films Stewart made, which one do you consider his best?

I’d have to say *It’s a Wonderful Life* (1946) in which he plays George Bailey, a small-town family man who is down on his luck and doesn’t realize how much he means to his neighbors. As he sinks into suicidal despair, he is rescued by Clarence, a crinkle-faced guardian angel who shows him how meaningless the lives of others would be had he never been born.

When the film was released it received mixed responses, some raves, some snarls. Some critics were savage, calling it an “orgy of sweetness” and “an embarrassment to both flesh and spirit.” Over the last twenty years, however, it has become an American classic, part of the Christmas ritual through frequent television screenings. I do think, however, that the beauty of *It’s A Wonderful Life* is that it reminds everyone of their own hometown and the resilience of the American spirit. It is about life, how our lives matter, wherever we live them.

Of course the film is Stewart’s personal favorite, as he has often said, because it expresses his fervor and feeling about life. The noisy, life-loving Bailey family we see in the early scenes of the movie probably reminded him of his own childhood in Pennsylvania. In that sense, George Bailey’s Bedford Falls was probably not that much different from Jimmy Stewart’s hometown of Indiana. He seems to have come from a household that was energetic, boisterous, and informal. Maybe he even saw the character of George Bailey as his own father,

whom he has spoken of as being pugnacious and gay, full of a thirst for adventure."

There are, of course, similarities to Stewart's own experience: Bailey's desire to become an architect, his sentimental devotion to the family business, and his trademark humility in putting the feelings and needs of others before his own. Of course, all that is guesswork. But I've often felt that the theme of the movie—that one man's life touches so many others in ways he can't even imagine—made quite an appropriate statement about Stewart's own contribution to American culture.

Frank Capra, who directed *It's A Wonderful Life*, as well as Stewart classics *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and *You Can't Take it With You*, was widely recognized as a "Director's Director." How did he influence the actor?

was during the filming of *It's a Wonderful Life*. Stewart was in his mid-thirties at the time and quite disillusioned with acting. After all, he had been out of movies for five or six years, having just returned from World War II as a colonel and a tremendously respected pilot who had flown bombing mission after bombing mission. When Frank Capra asked him to do the film, Stewart agreed only because he loved Capra so much, but he was very uncertain about acting. As he started the film he apparently felt awkward, silly, trivial. There he was with make-up on his face, waiting for the lights to come up, more of a "play actor" than anything else. The war seemed much more real than making films. He went to Capra and said he wasn't sure if he could continue in acting. He told the director that he had been agonizing over the question of whether acting was not only worthwhile, but even decent, and thought he might do better to return home to Pennsylvania and work in his father's hardware store.



During the filming of *It's a Wonderful Life*, a disillusioned Stewart was considering retiring from acting—until Lionel Barrymore made him understand that his work helped people see their own lives more clearly. When Barrymore finished his spiel, Stewart had been begun to cry—and decided to continue acting.

Frank Capra's influence on Stewart was great. He was a personal, as well as professional, mentor to him. Let me give you an example. Not many people know that Stewart was contemplating retiring from acting as early as 1946. In fact, it

Capra was appalled. Not only did he understand and appreciate the marvelous actor Stewart was, but he also knew what kind of fabulous career he had ahead of him. Capra was even more genuinely concerned about him because of Stewart's

real inability to make the adjustment from the intensity of World War II and the devastating bombing experiences he had had to make films again. He also realized that his own experience as a director was quite different from an actor's and that whatever encouragement he might have for the young Stewart might not carry enough weight. So Capra went to Lionel Barrymore who was playing villainous, old Judge Potter in the film and told him about Stewart's dilemma. Barrymore was, of course, crippled with arthritis and near the end of a sensational sixty-five year career. But he was also clearly among the most respected actors of the time. He told Capra what he wanted to hear: "Leave Stewart to me."

Barrymore found Stewart and after listening to his troubles said, "I've been in acting all my life. And I've often felt that I have given people some experiences that moved them, made them laugh, cry, and helped them to see their own lives better. However, if you think that it is a more meaningful life to drop bombs on people than to bring rays of sunshine into their lives with your acting talent, then you should probably get out of the movie business." By the time Barrymore finished, Stewart had been reduced to tears. He realized the tremendously powerful contribution he could make as an actor and convinced Capra that he would have no more trouble with him. It was that kind of mentoring that allowed Stewart to become a great star. I've often thought how sad it is that we simply don't see that kind of interest or even long-term commitments between today's directors and actors.

In 1980, Jimmy Stewart was given the Life Achievement Award by the American Film Institute for his contribution to filmmaking. The award is the highest honor that can be bestowed on a filmmaker. Recipients include actors Fred Astaire, Henry Fonda, and Gene Kelly; actresses Bette Davis and Lillian Gish; and directors Frank Capra, John Ford, and Alfred Hitchcock. How did Stewart receive the honor, especially in light of his strong sense of humility?

It was a wonderful evening because Jimmy Stewart is so loved by his colleagues. And each one of them seemed to have some kind of humorous or touching anecdote about him. Grace Kelly, for example, made a rare stage appearance and playfully saluted him for his great dedication to the craft of acting by recalling a difficult love scene they had to do on the set of *Rear Window*. "Despite Hitchcock's insistence that we repeat the love scene again and again," she said, "Jimmy never complained, saying only that we should do it until it was perfect!"

Of course there were also lots of notable clips from Stewart's films, beginning with his very first one, *The Murder Man*, shot in 1935. I'll never forget the way he was introduced. After a series of clips, the camera froze on a close-up from *It's A Wonderful Life*. Henry Travers' voice—who played George Bailey's guardian angel "Clarence"

in the movie—could be heard urging the audience to "remember that face!" Suddenly the spotlight came up on Stewart and everyone in the room was on their feet applauding. It was a great moment for him and for us.

After he had accepted the Life Achievement Award, Stewart with that wonderful, self-deprecating sense of humor joked, "I guess you could say that up until tonight, the American Film Institute has honored brilliance in filmmaking. That brings us down to where we are now!" He closed his comments by saying what a "remarkably lucky fellow" he was to have worked at a "wonderful career" and with "so many people I love." One could say that James Stewart had finally come to terms with his genuine love of acting.

Grace Kelly

Grace Kelly was born in Philadelphia on November 12, 1929. She was the third of four children of a handsome, wealthy family dominated by her father, Jack. An ambitious bricklayer from a working-class, Irish Catholic family, Jack Kelly established his own contracting firm, Kelly for Brickwork. Through hard work, personal charm, and the right connections, he managed to build the business into the largest construction firm on the East Coast. With his success as an oarsman winning the Olympic gold medal in the single sculls in 1920 and his dashing good looks, Kelly's business fortunes made him the toast of Philadelphia. He won election as a city councilman and became chairman of Philadelphia's Democratic Party.

By 1935, Kelly was a millionaire who was running as the Democratic Party's candidate for mayor of Philadelphia, a bid that eventually proved to be unsuccessful. He had married the striking Margaret Majer, a graduate of Temple University with a degree in physical education, who taught physical education at the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania (for many years the only female medical college in the United States). Jack Kelly had moved from the poor, immigrant quarter of East Falls, just outside the city limits, to a grand brick home he had built for himself and his family on a hill overlooking the more genteel neighborhoods of the former mill town. Three stories high, with mullioned windows and broad chimney towers, the Kelly mansion at 3901 Henry Avenue came to be known as the home of Philadelphia's "first family."

The four Kelly children—Peggy, Jack Jr., Grace, and Lizanne—were attractive, good natured, and athletic.



Philadelphian Grace Kelly (1929-1982) epitomized the glamour of Hollywood and only ended her career when she met a prince. She traveled to North Carolina for the shooting on location of The Swan

Both parents, avid athletes themselves, cultivated a keen sense of competition in them. A typical weekend for the Kelly family was spent working out together in the gymnasium or swimming pool of the Penn Athletic Club on Rittenhouse Square. No doubt, the emphasis placed on sport motivated Jack Jr. to emulate his father as an oarsman and Peggy and Lizanne to become outstanding competitive swimmers. The exception, Grace, was to find her special niche in acting.

In addition to athletics, the love of theater ran deep in the Kelly family. Jack Kelly's brother Walter had been a top-billed vaudeville comedian, and his sister, for whom Grace was named, was a comic actress and mimic. The most outstanding theatrical success, however, was another brother, George, an actor-turned-playwright, who was better known outside of Philadelphia. In 1926, he had won the Pulitzer Prize for his play *Craig's Wife*. Four of his works were made into movies that featured such stars as Will Rogers, Spencer Tracy, and Joan Crawford. By the 1930s, though, George Kelly's star had fallen on Broadway and he was living in an exquisitely bohemian set of rooms in Philadelphia's Alden Park Apartments, just around the corner from his brother's handsome residence.

Grace Kelly spent many afternoons with her Uncle George listening to long narrative passages from the nineteenth century poets he admired, or being educated in the finer points of acting. He taught her how to walk with a stately posture, helped correct the nasal twang of her Philadelphia accent for a more articulate expression, and attempt a variety of roles that were far removed from her own experience. By the time she had reached the age of seventeen, she was convinced Uncle George was the "most intelligent and wonderful man I have ever known." Whatever he discusses, he "makes you understand all its beauty and hidden meaning." Clearly, George Kelly had nurtured a love for acting in his niece that would lead to her promising film career.

She was educated at the Academy of the Assumption, a private Catholic school housed in a grand Victorian residence known as Ravenhill. Her nine years at the school cultivated in her an unflagging adherence to Catholicism that remained with her to the end of her life. When she was fourteen, Grace transferred to the Stevens School, a private girls' academy in Germantown, where she completed her high school education. It was not at either school, however, that Grace developed her acting ability. That occurred at the Old Academy Players, a small East Falls amateur dramatic group that had converted an old schoolhouse to a theater.

The Old Academy Players was one of several amateur

theater groups which flourished in Philadelphia during the 1930s and 1940s. A twelve-year-old Grace Kelly made her acting debut with the troupe in 1942 in a play called *Don't Feed the Animals*. By the time she had reached her teens she was something of an amateur dramatic star, having performed in numerous Old Academy Players productions. Her acting ability was refined at New York's American Academy of the



Kelly appeared with Louis Jordan in Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's 1956 motion picture, *The Swan*, in which she played a sweet, old-fashioned princess. Kelly retired that year to become a real-life princess of Monaco.

Dramatic Arts, in which she enrolled in 1947.

One of the nation's leading drama schools, the American Academy of the Dramatic Arts boasted a roster of famous graduates that included Spencer Tracy, Katharine Hepburn, Kirk Douglas, and Lauren Bacall. It was run by Charles Jehlinger, a founder of the modern American theater who saw as one of his responsibilities the imparting of professional acting techniques and a professional code of behavior to his students, both onstage and off. Under his tutelage, Grace Kelly acquired several components of her dramatic persona. The most important of these was an upperclass, bell-like accent delivered with the precise enunciation of a grand English actress. It would become her trademark as a professional actress. It was also during her early years in New York that Kelly experienced instant success as a model. She seemed to advertise everything from dairy products to cigarettes and appeared as a glamorous version of the girl-next-door on numerous magazine covers, including *Cosmopolitan*, *Redbook*, and *True Romance*.

Grace Kelly made her Broadway debut on November 16, 1949, as a bewildered, brokenhearted daughter in Raymond Massey's tragedy *The Father*. While she garnered rave reviews for her performance, the production as a whole was not well received and closed after only sixty-nine performances.

Legitimate live theater, fortunately, was not her only option.

Kelly learned the fundamentals of the acting profession on television. From 1950 to 1953 she appeared in more than sixty television shows produced by Lux Video Theatre, Kraft Television Theatre, Hallmark Hall of Fame, Philco TV Playhouse, and Goodyear TV Playhouse. Although many productions were no better than melodrama, some were quality tearjerkers that paved the way for the contemporary soap opera. At the same time, she continued her stage career, accepting work in summer stock companies that her agent, Edie Van Cleve, could book for her.

Since early television drama was lifted straight from the live stage, Grace Kelly's work in the two media complemented each other and prepared her for her first major motion picture, *High Noon* (1952). She would go on to make eleven feature films, retiring in 1956 shortly before her marriage to Prince Rainier Grimaldi of Monaco. Her Serene Highness Princess Grace of Monaco died on September 14, 1982, from injuries she had sustained in an automobile accident. She was fifty-two years old.

There is a mystique about the actress that followed her from her privileged upbringing in Philadelphia to her rapid success in Hollywood to her fairy-tale-come-true life as the Princess of Monaco. How much of that mystique reflected the real Grace Kelly?

Something very powerful was always going on in Grace Kelly's life. She was, in appearance, beauty and gracefulness, an elegant figure. But she also worked hard to develop those gifts, much like she would work on a piece of art. You also get a lot of myth about her revolving around the Philadelphia Kelly family and its sensational athletes. Yet, at the same time, Grace was the forgotten creature in that family, the child that nobody thought was going to amount to anything. Nevertheless, she should not be mistaken as the "rich girl who was trying to find a project" or an "also ran" in a highly visible and extraordinary family. Grace was quite serious—as well as ambitious—about her acting career. She was a quality actress in her own right, determined to be more than a glamour girl.

Although she made only eleven films, Grace Kelly did give Hollywood a classiness that the other actresses in her generation—except for Audrey Hepburn—didn't have. She held a special status because of her unique beauty and elegance



In The Country Girl, a film by Paramount Studios based on a play by Clifford Odets, Kelly played an uncharacteristic unglamorous role of a long-suffering wife of an alcoholic. It was a role for which she won an Oscar for best actress.

and, at the same time, she kept getting better and better as an actress. How much of that mystique reflected her own personality is hard to say. She was a very private person.

In which of her eleven feature films did she give her best performance?

That's a difficult question to answer. The first film that attracted immediate notice was *High Noon* (1952), in which she portrayed the Quaker wife of a sheriff, played by Gary Cooper, who is left unsupported by the townspeople when the bad guys come to seek their revenge. Grace is appalled by the violence as well as by the life she and her husband seem to have signed on for and she tries to get him out of it. What

was puzzling to me is that she thought she had done terribly in it and figured her career was over, probably because she is a little stiff, but that suits the part she had to play.

The next year she got in a remake of a Clark Gable movie which had been called *Red Dust*, originally made with Jean Harlow. John Ford, the director, wanted to remake the film with Ava Gardner as the leading lady but was convinced that Grace Kelly would do well as the second female lead. He was right. In the remake, called *Mogambo* (1953), Grace had a couple of very subtle, passionate scenes with Gable that were sensational. Suddenly the critics woke up to the fact that here was somebody very special, a classic movie star.

When you look at her next few movies made in 1954 with [Director] Alfred Hitchcock, you see the subtle emergence of a very fine actress who can play the dark side roles. *Dial M for Murder*, with Ray Milland was a classic, but her performance in *Rear Window* was sensational. She is the smart, savvy girlfriend of a photographer with a broken leg, played by James Stewart. Stewart takes up the fine art of spying on his Greenwich Village neighbors during a summer heat wave. Things really heat up for them when Stewart suspects his neighbor, played by Raymond Burr, of murdering his invalid wife and burying the body in a flower garden.

Grace had, for the first time, visible, sensational wit as well as a genuine playfulness in *Rear Window*. The love scenes had this humor, as well as seductiveness. In one particular shot she twinkles at the incapacitated Stewart as she draws a negligee out of her handbag. That scene embodied all the innocence-with-sexual-promise which surprised and delighted the critics. The movie was an overwhelming hit and distinguished her as

an up-and-coming star. But I still don't think there was as much emphasis placed on just how well she acted. That probably came with *The Country Girl*, about an alcoholic actor and his loyal, long-suffering, deeply discouraged wife.

Isn't it ironic that Grace Kelly, for all her beauty and elegance, should win her only Oscar for playing the role of a drab, long-suffering wife, the part she played in *The Country Girl*. Was it her ability to avoid typecasting that won her the award?

Clearly, it was Grace Kelly's ability to step away from her more glamorous image that caught everyone's attention. Change your appearance or style or look and suddenly people say, "That's acting!" She was always good. Look at that smooth, controlled, witty performance in *To Catch a Thief* (1955) or her exquisite performance in *The Swan* (1956). Yet the Oscar came for the atypical *The Country Girl*. There is, however, an interesting story about how she came to get that part.

Jennifer Jones, a superb actress who had been riding high for twelve years, was cast in the lead role opposite Bing Crosby, but she became pregnant. Amazingly enough, the director, George Seaton, had the idea of asking Grace to do the role. It sounded like a crazy idea. It made no sense at all to put a luminously glamorous new movie star in the role of a withdrawn, bitter woman who was the victim of an abusive drunk of a husband.

In some ways Grace wasn't ready for that role at all. But she played the part so well, perhaps because it was so brilliantly written and because Seaton knew what he was doing by making her only "slightly unglamorous" with drab hair, drab

clothes, flat-heeled shoes, and low lighting. After all, it would have been impossible to make Grace Kelly look ugly. The role was such an impressive part for her and she pulled it off. I do think, though, that there is no way in the world she should have received an Oscar for it, because it was the same year Judy Garland did *A Star is Born*. But Grace, by that time, had the two Hitchcock successes and *Mogambo*. She was the talk of the town and that clinched the Oscar for her.

Do you think she had any reservations about accepting the Oscar for Best Actress in light of Judy Garland's film?

I don't think it bothered her. Winning that Oscar was a tremendous achievement in her life and, of course, for the Kelly family itself. Grace did not hold the same esteem in her father's eyes as his other children, who were more successful athletes, and by capturing the Oscar she had a fantastic worldwide triumph. So, I don't think she had any reservations about accepting it. Yet, even after the awarding of the Oscar, her father made some quizzical comment, which he evidently thought to be humorous, that he never imagined Grace would be the child that would do the family proud.

Did any of her subsequent films ever match the success of *The Country Girl*?

I don't know if the general public saw it that way, but I certainly think she made several successful films after *The Country Girl*. There was, for example, *To Catch A Thief* with Cary Grant where she was simply enchanting, very smooth, and witty. She met Prince Rainier on the set as it was shot in



In her last film, *High Society* (1956), based on *The Philadelphia Story* starring Katharine Hepburn, Grace Kelly played opposite Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby. The story was based on the fairy tale-like life of Hope Montgomery Scott, a Main Line socialite.

Monaco. *The Swan*, in which she plays an old-fashioned princess, is another exquisite performance; to me, her warmest, sweetest, and most appealing. Then she repeated Katharine Hepburn's part in *The Philadelphia Story* for her last film *High Society* (1956). Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby surrounded her, singing great Cole Porter songs. The performances of those three great stars along with all the wonderful Porter songs make it something of a legend. But at the time, the critics complained that it wasn't *The Philadelphia Story* and it wasn't Katharine Hepburn, Cary Grant, and James Stewart. Unfortunately, her career was over after that.

It is awfully tempting to think about what a longer career would have yielded. Grace Kelly wasn't quite thirty at the time of her retirement. She could have had any part she wanted. She might have had a lifetime of success as a film star. On the other hand, she had had everything by that time in her career—superb parts, an international reputation as the ultimate glamour girl, and an Oscar to legitimize her acting abilities.

Why did she end such a promising film career?

I think there's no question that marriage to the Prince of Monaco promised so much fairy-tale glamour in her mind and in her family's mind and in the public's mind that she didn't need the movies. It was the ultimate fantasy and, perhaps, a kind of resolution to her own real life. She may also have grown tired of everyone in the world wanting to romance her. I don't know. Once married, Rainier became very adamant that she never return to the movies again, despite Alfred Hitchcock's repeated attempts to lure her out of retirement, as well as many other appeals for her return to the screen, including one for the role of the Russian empress in *Nicholas and Alexandra*.

Will we ever see the quality of another James Stewart or Grace Kelly again? Are there any current actors or actresses who can compare?

There is some sadness in that Jimmy Stewart is no longer making films and Grace Kelly has died. There really is nobody, in my opinion, who is carrying on their respective traditions. While there are other splendid actors, there are no more Stewarts or Kellys. That's why they are so terrific—they're simply irreplaceable. However, if you look at the current generation of movie actors and actresses, I think Sharon Stone, another Pennsylvanian, could hold up the tradition of the great



A film historian as well as film critic, David Mallery of Philadelphia knew both Jimmy Stewart and Grace Kelly. In the 1970s, he was the host of a popular weekly television program, "The Movie Buff."

classic movie stars of the 1930s and 1940s.

Of course, Sharon Stone has her own personality and her own style, but I think she has something magical. All she needs are decent parts. She appears to be trapped in roles where she portrays a wild, sexy babe and that's supposed to be all she delivers. She's much more interesting than that, magically beautiful, and, for me, a compelling actress who needs to be taken much more seriously. With some luck, some interesting parts, and some courage on her part, Sharon Stone could be the distinguished, luminous, beautiful female star of the 1990s with many echoes of Grace Kelly. Michelle Pfeiffer has a first-class career with a range of quality performances and freedom from being a glamorous queen, which doesn't seem to interest her especially, beautiful as she is. She is an inheritor of Grace Kelly and then some.

Of the men, I suppose Kevin Costner could be seen as an inheritor of Jimmy Stewart, though Costner is his own splendid self. But the quiet sincerity, openness, banked-down fervor of his performances in *Field of Dreams* (1989) and *Bull Durham* (1986) suggest the Stewart inheritance. But Costner is more guarded. So are our times. We are less expressive now of the qualities that Stewart allowed himself to shoot forth onto the screen. Or we are more careful, more wary of being accused of being sentimental or overdoing. It's rather interesting that no one ever accused Stewart of overdoing. What he seemed, felt so right. We believed him. The only current actor that exudes that kind of sincerity is Tom Hanks, especially for his performance in *Sleepless in Seattle*.

Hanks is an inheritor of James Stewart, connected mainly because he is so widely loved as well as admired for his remarkable acting talent. Tom Hanks' talent for playful, ironic, sometimes uproarious comedy has always been interwoven with subtle responses, often very movingly portrayed. This has been true from the start, in the television series "Bosom Buddies," which had a lot more in his performance and in the scripts than Charley's Aunt-type men-dressed-up-as-women-for-high-comedy-goings-on. Then in *Splash* and *Big* came the real presence that people related to, like the way they liked a really cherished, well-known young neighbor in a small town. Those performances had a lot more than likeability. Then *Philadelphia* and *Forest Gump* moved him into a whole other dimension as serious actor but did not lose the likeability. These movies actually deepened it.

It's interesting that James Stewart's extraordinary impact had a lot to do with likeability. Perhaps unlike Tom Hanks, Stewart's likeability was so extraordinary that it took audience longer to value and honor Stewart as gifted, resourceful

the Stewart of Hitchcock's *Rope* or of Mann's *Man from Laramie*, or of Preminger's *Anatomy of a Murder* seemed some kind of mistake. Where was the Jimmy of *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*? Nevertheless, he brought us along, and we could respond to these strange, ambiguous, complex men and still keep "Jimmy Stewart" to cherish. Now that was some kind of feat on both Stewart's part and the audiences' part.

Major presences in our 1990s lives, like Tom Hanks and Kevin Costner and Michelle Pfeiffer and the still under-used and under-discovered—after twelve years, at least—Sharon Stone have their own distinctiveness. They bring the great stars with them as a kind of personal-professional history, theirs and ours. They carry echoes with them. It's not that they are echoes. They carry them, for us.

Stewart carried no echoes, that I can see. He inherited from no one. Partly this was because in 1937 sound films were still building their own history—ten years, then. That tall, thin, awkward, gangly fellow climbing out of the rumble seat in *Murder Man* was something new and unique. We hadn't seen anything like that before. With Grace Kelly we had plenty of echoes—the glamorous movie stars and the society page aristocracy of the 1930s and 1940s fantasy. Yet those stars that were riding that wave came and went, and actually that image was going out of style even as early as 1953, the year of *Mogambo* and Grace Kelly's startling breakthrough. So she gave us, perhaps for the last time, the princess-before-she-was-a-princess, the Hollywood glamour queen, the elegant lady, and the increasingly artful, fiercely ambitious and developing actress, in one, luminous presence.

I think there are fine actors and actresses now working in films who carry something of what Stewart and Kelly gave them and gave us. But good ones, like Kevin Costner and Michelle Pfeiffer, and the very promising ones, like Sharon Stone and Tom Hanks, are on their own road, and should be. Grace Kelly and Jimmy Stewart, on the other hand, will remain their own extraordinary, luminous, wonderful selves, instantly available to us in memory, on the video screen, and in our dreams. ❖

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