

Telluride Film Festival

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A Tribute to Christian Bale

Can it really be 30 years since we first encountered 13-year-old Christian Bale in Steven Spielberg's *EMPIRE OF THE SUN* (1987)? The screen newcomer made a vivid impression on audiences and critics alike in an emotionally challenging role. Roger Ebert said the part of the boy who is separated from his parents in 1930s Shanghai was "played by Christian Bale with a kind of grim poetry that suggests a young Tom Courtenay."

Bale enjoyed working with Spielberg but hated the attention and media coverage that went along with the job. Even so, he knew that acting was what he wanted to do. He considered attending one of Britain's leading drama schools but ultimately decided to continue working instead. Given the breadth of what he has achieved in the years since then, he may be the world's most impressive spokesman for on-the-job training.

There is nothing Bale won't try. As an adolescent he learned to sing and dance for *NEWSIES* (1992) and *SWING KIDS* (1993). He tackled Shakespeare for Kenneth Branagh in *HENRY V* (1989) and *A MIDSUMMER'S NIGHT DREAM* (1999) with Michael Hoffman. He fearlessly faced his darker side in *AMERICAN PSYCHO* (2000) and in *THE MACHINIST* (2004), for which he famously lost 60 pounds. He will do whatever is necessary to make a character credible.

"I trust that people are smart enough to know that this is not me," Bale has said. "I'm an actor and what I enjoy doing is pretending to be other people." His American accent was so convincing when he met with director John Singleton to discuss playing the title role in a remake of *SHAFT* that the filmmaker didn't realize Bale was Welsh! He maintained his accent on set for the duration but not, he points out, on his days off.

Bale makes no bones about his motivation. As he once told me, "I'm always more comfortable when the character is as dissimilar to me as possible." When that happens, he said, "I find I can really sit back and watch the movie properly and enjoy it, as though as I was watching another actor."

No one could have anticipated that this intense (and intensely private) actor would seek out the role of Bruce Wayne in *BATMAN BEGINS* (2005), but the part, and the chance to work with Christopher Nolan, intrigued him. His reinvention of the character and his famous alter ego in that film, followed by *THE DARK KNIGHT* (2008) and by *THE DARK KNIGHT RISES* (2012), won him critical accolades and an enormous new following. He then took on another iconic movie character, John Connor, in *TERMINATOR SALVATION* (2009).

Buoyed by this success, he sought out projects that would bring him personal satisfaction. He worked with Terrence Malick on *THE NEW WORLD* (2005), Werner Herzog on *RESCUE DAWN* (2006), Michael Mann on *PUBLIC ENEMIES* (2009) and David O. Russell in *THE FIGHTER* (2010) and *AMERICAN HUSTLE* (2013). He accepted the challenge of playing Moses for Ridley Scott in *EXODUS: GODS AND KINGS* (2014). Bale earned his first Academy Award for *THE FIGHTER*, thanks to his transformational performance as drug-addled New Englander Dicky Eklund, and

received nominations for AMERICAN HUSTLE and in Adam McKay's THE BIG SHORT (2015). He is currently preparing to play a more contemporary public figure, Dick Cheney, again working with McKay.

Through all of this, Bale has carefully maintained a distance from the public, giving as few interviews as possible in the hope that moviegoers will have an easier time believing his performances if they don't have to shed their familiarity with Christian Bale. This aloofness may frustrate magazine editors and television interviewers but it has served the actor well. He is able to shed his skin for each new project — be it a Western like 3:10 TO YUMA (2007) or the modern-day rust-belt drama OUT OF THE FURNACE (2013).

He and writer-director Scott Cooper clearly got along well on OUT OF THE FURNACE, as they have now collaborated on a second film, HOSTILES. The filmmaker wrote the part with Bale in mind and says, "Christian has the ability to inhabit a part that most actors don't. I think he's the finest actor of my generation. When you see Christian on screen, you never question him. He is able to make the audience forget that they're actually seeing an actor."

Bale's role as a disgruntled U.S. Army captain in 1892 may require a less physical and more internal performance than some others on his resume, but that is also its strength: the ability to reveal so much about his character through Cooper's repeated close-ups of his face. It's a face we haven't tired of over 30 years' time, and that isn't likely to change in the foreseeable future.

—Leonard Maltin

PROGRAM

1. Selection of clips (30 minutes)

EMPIRE OF THE SUN (d. Steven Spielberg, 1987)	3 minutes
AMERICAN PSYCHO (d. Mary Harron, 2000)	3 minutes
THE MACHINIST (d. Brad Anderson, 2004)	6 minutes
BATMAN BEGINS (d. Christopher Nolan, 2005)	2 minutes
3:10 TO YUMA (d. James Mangold, 2007)	2 minutes
I'M NOT THERE (d. Todd Haynes, 2007)	2 clips/3 minutes
THE FIGHTER (d. David O. Russell, 2010)	4 minutes
AMERICAN HUSTLE (d. David O. Russell, 2013)	3 minutes
THE BIG SHORT (d. Adam McKay, 2015)	3 minutes
RESCUE DAWN (d. Werner Herzog, 2006)	2 minutes

2. Presentation of the Silver Medallion (Saturday screening only)

3. Onstage interview: by Werner Herzog (Saturday) and Leonard Maltin (Sunday)

4. Feature film: HOSTILES (d. Scott Cooper, 2017, 127m)