

“Lights, Camera, Action” May 23

On May 23 in Silver Spring, Maryland, the U.S. Postal Service will honor four great filmmakers who captured the many varieties of the American experience. Frank Capra, John Ford, John Huston, and Billy Wilder created some of the most iconic scenes in American cinema and gave audiences an unforgettable vision of life.

These four filmmakers received multiple Academy Award nominations, 15 Oscars, and numerous other honors during their lifetimes.

The stamp art combines a portrait of each director with a scene from one of his most iconic works. The background art for the John Ford stamp recalls a scene from *The Searchers*, an influential Western starring John Wayne in which Ford made characteristic use of the American landscape. Though he is often associated with stories of the Old West, Ford’s work shows an impressive range. He received five Academy Award nominations for directing, winning four times—for *The Informer* (1935), *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), *How Green Was My Valley* (1941), and *The Quiet Man* (1952). His fifth nomination was for *Stagecoach* (1939).

The background art for the stamp honoring Frank Capra shows a scene from *It Happened One Night*, a comedy in which a runaway heiress (played by Claudette Colbert) and a reporter (Clark Gable) compare their hitchhiking skills. Capra’s movies celebrate democracy and freedom and express his love for America. His most characteristic theme, developed in classic works such as *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, is the triumph of the idealist over cynical sophisticates.

The Maltese Falcon (1941) inspired the background



art for the John Huston stamp. In this classic mystery, gumshoe Sam Spade (Humphrey Bogart) goes up against various unscrupulous characters (among them Mary Astor, Peter Lorre, and Sydney Greenstreet). Using a pared-down visual style that focused on character and story, Huston also showed us the dark side of the quest for riches in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948). But among his infamous and evil characters, misfits and outcasts, there also is the delightfully antisocial captain of *The African Queen* (1951).

And for Billy Wilder, the background artwork was inspired by *Some Like It Hot* (1959), a farce about two male musicians (Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis) who seek refuge from gangsters by posing as members of an all-girl band featuring luscious singer Sugar Kane (Marilyn Monroe).

Known for taking risks and breaking accepted filmmaking conventions, Wilder emphasized story, character, and language over visual effects to show us a glimpse of our “wilder” side. His films also included the dark evil depicted in *Double Indemnity* (1944) to the bitter cynicism of *Sunset Boulevard* (1950).

Art director Derry Noyes designed these stamps using art by award-winning illustrator Gary Kelley, who created the images using pastels on paper. The Great Film Directors stamps are being issued as Forever® stamps, which are always equal in value to the then-current First-Class Mail one-ounce rate.

The address for FDCs is Postmaster, Great Film Directors Stamp, 8616 Second Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20910-9998, and the deadline for submissions is July 23, 2012.