



Milos Forman

February 18, 1932 - April 13, 2018

Czech-born director Milos Forman, who won best directing Oscars for “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest” and “Amadeus,” has died. He was 86.

Forman died Friday in the U.S. after a brief illness, his wife, Martina, told the Czech news agency CTK. She said that “his departure was calm, and he was surrounded the whole time by his family and his closest friends.”

Forman was also known for directing “Hair,” “Ragtime” and “The People vs. Larry Flynt.” Directors’ Guild president Thomas Schlamme said, “Miloš was truly one of ours. A filmmaker, artist, and champion of artists’ rights. His contribution to the craft of directing has been an undeniable source of inspiration for generations of filmmakers. His directorial vision deftly brought together provocative subject matter, stellar performances and haunting images to tell the stories of the universal struggle for free expression and self-determination that informed so much of his work and his life.

“A member of the DGA’s National Board and a recipient of the DGA’s highest honor, the Lifetime Achievement Award, Miloš actively championed artist’s rights throughout his career, speaking multiple times before Congress and world audiences about the importance of creative rights and artists’ protections against the violation of those rights. He stood up on behalf of his beloved fellow filmmakers time and again, and he believed with all his heart that creativity and artistic freedom could make a difference in the world. Now it’s up to us to prove him right. We will miss him.”

Having made just one American film at the time, the ironic comedy “Taking Off” (1971), which won critical acclaim but failed to connect with audiences, Forman seemed an unlikely choice to direct the adaptation of Ken Kesey’s countercultural novel “Cuckoo’s Nest.” But he brought a balance and objectivity to the film, which could easily have descended into histrionics. The critically lauded and immensely popular film starring the fast-rising Jack Nicholson struck a nerve in 1975, and on Academy Awards night it became the first film since 1934’s “It Happened One Night” to sweep the top five Oscar prizes: best picture, director, actress, actor and screenplay (adapted).

To shoot “Amadeus,” Forman returned to his native Czechoslovakia in 1983 and used little-known theater actors to play Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (Thomas Hulce) and his rival Antonio Salieri (F. Murray Abraham), Forman created a compelling and cogent adaptation

of Peter Shaffer's award-winning stage play — helped in great measure by the magnificent Mozartian score. Again, Forman ruled the Oscars, taking another director trophy as the film also drew awards for picture, actor (Abraham), and screenplay, winning eight awards in all. The film was also his most financially successful after "Cuckoo's Nest." With a style that film historian David Thomson said stressed the everyday over the melodramatic and a flair for improvisation, Forman had flourished as a young director in Czechoslovakia with such satirical films as 1966's "Loves of a Blonde" and 1968's "The Firemen's Ball," the latter of which was refused a showing in his native country because of its satire of bureaucratic thinking.

Forman was in Paris in August 1968 when Russian tanks rolled into Czechoslovakia, ending the Warsaw Pact country's brief artistic renaissance. Soon thereafter he moved to New York, joining another celebrated Czech director, Ivan Passer, who had penned "Loves of a Blonde" with Forman and others. Forman's first U.S. film, "Taking Off," was similar in approach and style to his earlier work, and while it was praised by critics, it did little to establish him as an American director. He also took on "The Decathlon" episode of "Visions of Eight," a compilation documentary of the Olympics by an octet of different helmers.

Over the years Forman directed few films, and his American track record was mixed. Though "Cuckoo's Nest" transformed him into an A-list director, he waited four years before his next film, tackling another challenging piece of material, "Hair," based on the '60s smash hit musical. But 10 years later, the episodic piece seemed passe onscreen, and Forman's simple approach was ill-suited for the musical material. He did better with 1981's "Ragtime," a mostly successful adaptation of E.L. Doctorow's bestseller centered on intersecting lives in the early 20th century. The film did not score at the box office, however.

He attained commercial and critical success once more with "Amadeus" but never quite scaled those heights again.

Forman appeared next in 1989 with "Valmont," an adaptation he co-penned of the French period novel "Les Liaisons dangereuses" starring Colin Firth and Annette Bening. While graceful and witty, the film suffered from comparison to the more melodramatic "Dangerous Liaisons," released the previous year and starring John Malkovich and Glenn Close.

He didn't direct again until he issued two other satirical pieces in the late '90s, the first of which was "The People vs. Larry Flynt," a well-reviewed comedy about the First Amendment controversy stirred up by Hustler publisher Larry Flynt, embodied in the film by Woody Harrelson. While reviews were strong, the film did only moderately well at the box office. But it brought Forman another director nomination in 1996.

The reception to his 1999 film "Man on the Moon," about the offbeat comic Andy Kaufman, was mixed, though lead Jim Carrey pulled in great notices.

After an absence of seven years, Forman returned in 2006 with "Goya's Ghosts," in which he sought to wed the Inquisition, the life of the painter Goya and the Napoleonic Wars, starring Natalie Portman, Javier Bardem, Stellan Skarsgard and Randy Quaid.

In 2009 Forman directed, with his son Petr, the Czech-language "A Walk Worthwhile," a remake of his earlier 1966 work for Czech television.

Forman collaborated with Vaclav Havel on the adaptation of a novel about the Munich Agreement, through which Hitler annexed Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland in 1938, but the project did not come to fruition. He also had in development as a directing project the story of Charles Ponzi, the early 20th century fraudster who lends his name to the Ponzi scheme.

In addition to his directing chores, Forman was co-director of the film program at Columbia U. and appeared as an actor in such films as "Keeping the Faith," "Heartburn" and "New Year's Day."

Born in the town of Caslav (also spelled Kaslov), near Prague, Jan Tomas Forman was raised by an uncle and in foster homes following the death of his parents in WWII concentration camps. After graduating from the Prague Film Faculty of the Academy of Dramatic Arts in 1957, he wrote sketches for the mixed media *Laterna Magika*, which was celebrated at the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels. After departing the group in 1961, he was hired by the Czech state film studio, where he came to attention with two medium-length films, 1961's "The Talent Competition" and "If There Were No Music." His feature debut in 1963, "Black Peter," won the top prize at the Locarno Film Festival and led to such internationally acclaimed efforts as "Loves of a Blonde" and "The Fireman's Ball." Forman was jury president at the Cannes Film Festival in 1985 and the Venice Film Festival in 2000.

In Czechoslovakia Forman was married twice, first to actress Jana Brejchova (sister of his lead actress in "Loves of a Blonde") and then to Vera Kresadlova, who was the mother of his twin sons Peter and Matej. In 1998 he had another set of twins, Andrew and James, by his third wife, Martina Zborilova.

Obituary Credit: <http://variety.com/2018/film/news/milos-forman-dead-dies-director-one-flew-over-the-cuckoos-nest-1202753397/>

A note from Martin Oaks Cemetery & Crematory:

Filmmaker Milos Forman died last week at the age of 86. It's almost as if two directors passed at the same time.

Forman established himself with independent satires, *Loves of a Blonde* and *Fireman's Ball*, before coming to Hollywood to make big-box-office, Oscar winning films that had a counterculture sensitivity -- *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Amadeus*.

Ragtime, a later effort, fit somewhere in between the two periods.

Although some found his earlier work to be precious, critic John Simon said that he would "stretch slenderness beyond the breaking point," we remember those movies very fondly.

Fireman's Ball was dry wit, served with a political edge.

RIP Milos.