

The Astrology of Hollywood's Golden Year - 1939

by Ray Grasse



Various years have been singled out by film critics as the “greatest” for film production, with some of the candidates proposed including 1962, 1972, 1994, 1999, or 2007.

But the general consensus among most cinephiles have focused on 1939 as Hollywood's most distinguished “Golden Year.” Consider a few of the entries from that time: *Gone with the Wind*, *Stagecoach*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Of Mice and Men*, *Rules of the Game*, and *Grapes of*

Wrath, among others.

Several theories have been proposed to explain that impressive run, such as the fact there was an improved economy taking shape after the Great Depression which gave people more disposable income for attending movies, while allowing for more investment to be poured into film productions. Another factor was the flood of creative refugees coming from Europe that energized the movie industry as fascism took hold overseas.

But I've long wondered what might account for that cinematic crop of films from a more astrological perspective. For a long time I assumed it was probably due to the fact that transiting Uranus was forming a trine to Neptune throughout that period, roughly from 1938 up to 1944—and which reached one of several peaks when that trine not only became exact but was energized by a conjunction from Jupiter to the Uranus end of that trine, in late April and early May of 1941, which was precisely when *Citizen Kane* premiered.

But while that Uranus/Neptune trine was surely a factor, I always felt like there must be something more at work, something particularly strong in 1939.

And as it turns out, there was.

As I discovered recently while looking through an ephemeris from that period, I realized that throughout the late 1930s and very early 1940s, the United States was in the midst of its *first Neptune return*—this being the planet of imagination, film, illusions, and mysticism. In the 1776 U.S. horoscope, Neptune was positioned at 22 degrees of Virgo, and throughout 1938, 1939, and 1940 it was hovering around that zodiacal degree once again.

In other words, America was waking up to the imaginal potentials of its own Neptune throughout that period (and note that, with the exception of Jean Renoir's *Rules of the Game*, all the “best pictures” I listed above were U.S.-based productions). It was as if a channel had opened up to our collective national unconscious which prompted a rich flood of ideas to come pouring out, many of which have continued to hold a place in the heart of movie-goers around the world.

But there's another interesting cultural synchronicity I came across as well, which may not be entirely cinematic but is nevertheless worth pointing out. The first U.S. Neptune return, as calculated by tropical standards, fired exactly on Oct. 28th of 1938, and triggered exactly one more time on August 29th, 1939—the *very same week* as the premiere of *The Wizard of Oz*.

It's pretty easy to see how *The Wizard of Oz* was an expression of America's Neptune being activated that second time, with a timing nothing short of uncanny. But did anything of Neptunian importance happen close to the date of that *first* exact return?

As it turned out, it was just about 48 hours after the return of Oct. 28th 1938 that a young Orson Welles performed his infamous “War of the Worlds” radio broadcast, in which millions of U.S. citizens were fooled into thinking we were being attacked by aliens from the planet Mars. One would be hard-pressed



to imagine a more fitting example of Neptune's deceptive side than masses of people being fooled into believing something that was actually a complete illusion—an illusion about the planet Mars, no less (which Neptune closely squares in the natal U.S. horoscope, fittingly).²

One final note: The U.S. is currently undergoing its Neptune *half*-return, as it transits across the zodiacal point 180 degrees away from its natal position in July of 1776. (By tropical standards, this one is in effect throughout 2021, but according to sidereal calculations will be exact throughout 2023.) Will this period likewise be looked back to by future film historians as a similarly rich one for this medium? And if so, which films or TV shows and series will find their place on that esteemed list?