

## MOVIE DIRECTORS

# Famous Italian American Directors

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The fingerprints of **Italian-Americans** can be seen all over Hollywood's greatest modern masterpieces. They are actors, producers, screenwriters and, quite notably, directors. Names like **Scorsese**, **Coppola** and **Tarantino** come easily to mind when speaking about the greatest directors of their generations and all are of Italian heritage. Following in the footsteps of greats like **Frank Capra** (*It's A Wonderful Life*) these directors have brought their unique visions and life experiences to the silver screen and enhanced the profiles of Italian-Americans at the same time.



Italian-American Film Directors: Martin Scorsese

## Martin Scorsese – The Historian

Oscar winner **Martin Scorsese** is thought by many to be one of the most talented directors currently working. What is impressive about Scorsese is not just the volume of work he produces, but the quality and individuality of each of his movies. Having brought classics like *Raging Bull*, *Taxi Driver* and *Goodfellas* to life (all of which starred Italian-American

Robert DeNiro), Scorsese has more recently been at the helm of *Gangs of New York*, *The Departed*, *Shutter Island*, *Hugo* and *The Wolf of Wall Street* . His last effort, *Silence*, was released in December 2016.

Just the names of the movies Scorsese has directed in his long and critically acclaimed career will tell any movie lover all they need to know. This man is good.

Scorsese has also acted as a screenwriter, actor and producer and is well known as a dedicated film historian and preserver. He founded the World Cinema Foundation and has been the proud recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award from AFI for his huge contribution to cinema. Martin Scorsese has also received BAFTA, Golden Globe, and Directors Guild of America awards and is the president of the Film Foundation, a not for profit organization committed to preserving films and preventing the decay of motion picture film stock.

## Quentin Tarantino – The Wild Card

After storming into the national consciousness with his brash and deliciously unique *Pulp Fiction* (a film he both wrote and directed), Quentin Tarantino became somewhat of an overnight legend.



## Quentin Tarantino, Melanie Laurent and Brad Pitt at the German Premiere of *Inglorious Basterds*

Tarantino quickly became known for his eclectic manner of direction and his penchant for pushing the very boundaries of cinema. The rise of Quentin heralded a new type of filmmaking, which has since been copied by various other directors, although few if any can pull off such an unusual style with élan. A man of many talents, besides writing and directing Tarantino has also acted, like his turn as George Clooney's brother in *From Dusk 'Till Dawn*, a movie directed by Tarantino pal Robert Rodriguez.

You will know a Quentin Tarantino movie because it will be visually interesting and unique, fast paced, a little strange, and likely strewn with blood and violence. Tarantino's films include the classic *Reservoir Dogs*, the *Kill Bill* series (which reunited him with *Pulp*'s leading lady Uma Thurman), *Jackie Brown*, Oscar-winning *Inglorious Basterds*, which starred Brad Pitt and Diane Kruger and the recent *The Hateful Eight*, starring Samuel L. Jackson and Kurt Russell.

A fascination with movies that began when Tarantino was young blossomed during his years working in a video store, and has now made him a legend among directors, yet another Italian-American to leave his mark on the movie world.

## Francis Ford Coppola – The Godfather

In the 1960s and 70s a brash, young group of movie directors and friends were making their mark in Hollywood. Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, Martin Scorsese and **Francis Ford Coppola** will always be associated with this golden era in cinema history. Coppola will probably be best remembered for his masterpiece *Godfather* trilogy—which starred Marlon Brando, Robert DeNiro and Al Pacino, among other luminaries—but he has made many other incredible and influential movies. From the gritty *Apocalypse Now* to *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, Coppola's films have spanned all genres and subject matter.



Francis Ford Coppola, one of the best known Italian American directors (Wikimedia)

When the accomplished Coppola was 8 he was stricken with polio, a time he would later credit for helping his imagination to blossom and grow. After having studied theater at Hofstra University and graduating with an MFA in filmmaking from UCLA Film School, Coppola set out for Hollywood. One of the most admirable things about the director is how he involves his family in his business. Coppola's father Carmine, a composer, produced most of the music for the first two *Godfathers* and *Apocalypse Now* while his sister, Talia Shire, played Mafia Princess Connie Corleone in the *Godfather* movies (she was also Adrian in the *Rocky* series) and his daughter, Sofia, played her niece Mary. Talk about keeping it in the family—and what a talented lot they are! Nicolas Cage is one of Coppola's nephews as is the actor Jason Schwartzman and the musician Robert Schwartzman.

Coppola, who has won five Academy Awards, has now branched out into many other industries from wine making to magazine publishing. He is also a producer and hotelier.

## **Sofia Coppola – The Torch Bearer**



Italian-American Film Directors: Sofia Coppola

Like her father and brother **Sofia Coppola** has worn many hats—actress, clothing designer, screenwriter, producer and director. Closely involved with her productions from start to finish Coppola brings her keen eye and quirky style to each of her projects. From *Lost in Translation* to *The Virgin Suicides* and *Marie Antoinette* the Oscar winner is clearly ushering in a new generation of talented Coppolas, the first Italian-American family of cinema. Her later productions are 2010 *Somewhere* and 2013 *The Bling Ring*. Her latest effort, *The Beguiled*, is in post production and supposed to come out later in the year.

## Other Italian-American Directors

**Brian DePalma** has mastered the art of producing high-grossing and entertaining thrillers and gangster films. The director's movies include the classics *Scarface* and *Carrie*, *Dressed to Kill*, the *Mission Impossible* films, *The Untouchables* and *Carlito's Way*.

**Michael Cimino**'s definitive project was the seminal 1970s movie *The Deer Hunter*. The Vietnam story starred Robert DeNiro, Christopher Walken and Meryl Streep and elevated Cimino to the heights of Hollywood. Unfortunately, Cimino's later movie *Heaven's Gate*, effectively ended his career. After running over budget the movie was a flop and bankrupted a studio, marring Cimino's reputation despite the classic movie he had previously produced. Cimino died in 2016.

**Godfrey Reggio** is an Italian-American who specializes in documentaries and experimental subjects. Actively involved in various political causes Reggio works closely with the American Civil Liberties Union and even co-organized a public media interest campaign regarding the privacy invasion and the use of technology to curb certain behavior.

**David O. Russell**, the director of movies like *Three Kings*, *I Heart Huckabees* and *Flirting with Disaster*, is the son of Italian Catholic mother. Russell's movies have been critically acclaimed, although there have been rumors that he is difficult to work for. His last effort, *Joy*, dates back to 2015.

There are also several Italian-American actors, like **Stanley Tucci** and **Steve Buschemi**, who dabble in directing. Though these men are best known for their work in front of the screen they have also proven their talent behind it.



Italian-American Film Directors: Abel Ferrara

**Abel Ferrara** is of Italian and Irish descent and makes movies that tend to fit into the gangster or slasher genres. Ferrara's movies include *King of New York*, *The Driller Killer*, *Ms. 45* and *China Girl*. The gritty subject matter and slick style of the director's movies has made him a favorite of the critics. In 2014 he proposed his own cinematic version of the events surrounding the death of Italian artist **Pierpaolo Pasolini**.

**Italian-Americans** have made their mark in all facets of **Hollywood**, including in the role of **director**. Responsible for creating classic movies like *The Godfather*, *Scarface*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Goodfellas*, and *Lost in Translation*, these directors have won Academy Awards and box office battles. In each of their projects they have also shown the creativity and ingenuity of the Italian-American community.