

Orson Welles

Timeline

- 1915 Born in Kenosha, Wisconsin.
- 1919 The family move to Chicago and his parents separate.
- 1924 Death of Welles' mother.
- 1930 Death of Welles' father. Maurice Bernstein becomes his guardian.
- 1931 Graduates from Todd School and uses a small inheritance to travel to Europe.
- 1931 Makes stage debut at the Gate Theatre in Dublin.
- 1934 Marries Virginia Nicholson, an actress.
Makes his Broadway (New York) debut as Tybalt in *Romeo and Juliet*.
- 1936 Meets John Houseman and directs an acclaimed all-black production of *Macbeth* in Harlem for the Federal Theatre Project. The production, which becomes known as the 'Voodoo Macbeth' because of its setting, Haiti, is a huge success.
- 1937 Welles directs a political opera 'The Cradle will Rock' for the Federal Theatre Project. When funding is withdrawn, the production is cancelled but Welles instigates an impromptu performance of it at another theatre that runs for two weeks.
Welles and Houseman leave the Federal Theatre Project and set up the Mercury Theatre. Their first production is a version of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* set in a fascist state.
- 1938 The Mercury Theatre on the Air is launched with Welles directing and acting in radio versions of classic literature. Their version of H G Wells' *The War of the Worlds* which imagines an invasion of Earth by Martians achieves huge notoriety after it causes widespread panic and listeners, believing it to be true, attempt to flee the oncoming invasion.
- 1939 Welles stars in his two-part play *Five Kings* which adapts the contents of five plays by Shakespeare to tell the story of Sir John Falstaff. The production of the first part is unsuccessful and the second part is never produced.
Welles signs a contract with RKO Studios in Hollywood that allows him unprecedented freedom, extraordinarily for a director yet to prove himself on film.
- 1940 Welles writes, directs and stars in *Citizen Kane* which uses elements of the life of press tycoon and multi-millionaire William Randolph Hearst in its portrait of the life of Kane. The film is a critical success and has gone on to be voted the greatest film ever made in successive polls of industry and academic bodies. Hearst attempts to buy up all prints of the film and the negative.
- 1941 *Citizen Kane* is nominated for 8 Oscars and wins for Best Screenplay.

- 1942 Welles directs his second film for RKO, *The Magnificent Ambersons* based on the novel by Booth Tarkington. Welles has lost his right to edit the final 'cut' of his films for RKO and while he is in Brazil filming a propaganda documentary *It's All True* over an hour of the film is cut and the ending changed. The missing footage has never been recovered. Welles association with RKO comes to an end.
- 1943 Welles plays Rochester in a film adaptation of *Jane Eyre*. He marries film star Rita Hayworth.
- 1946 Directs *The Stranger*. Begins new radio series The Mercury Summer Theatre.
- 1947 Welles directs his wife Rita Hayworth and also stars in *Lady from Shanghai*.
- 1948 Welles directs a low-budget film version of *Macbeth* which suffers from huge financial problems and is considered a flop. Welles leaves the United States to work in Europe.
- 1949 Welles appears in Carol Reed's masterpiece, *The Third Man* as Harry Lime. It is his most famous film role.
- 1951 Welles works as a film actor in Europe and the UK to finance his film project *Othello* in which he plays the title role. Filming is suspended frequently when money runs out but the film is eventually finished and wins the coveted Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival.
- 1955 Welles directs *Mr Arkadin* filmed on a very small budget in Europe.
- 1958 Welles directs and co-stars with Charlton Heston in *A Touch of Evil* for Columbia Studios. He is beginning to develop the serious weight problem that will dog him for the rest of his life.
- 1962 Welles directs his own adaptation of Franz Kafka's *The Trial*.
- 1965 Welles directs and stars in *Chimes at Midnight*, based on his play *Five Kings*. He is so morbidly obese that he has to diet to play this legendarily fat character.
- 1973 Welles directs and stars in *F for Fake*.
- 1985 Welles dies of a heart attack in Hollywood.