William Wyler & Wuthering Heights: Facts

1. The director William Wyler won Academy Awards for *Ben-Hur*, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, and *Mrs. Miniver*; only John Ford has won more Academy Awards (four). Wyler was nominated for twelve Academy Awards, more than any other director.

2. The Directors Guild of American awarded him a Lifetime Achievement Award in 1966, an Outstanding Directorial Achievement for *Ben Hur* (1960), and five more nominations for that award.

3. Fourteen actors received Academy Award nominations in Wyler films, which remains a Hollywood record.

4. Laurence Olivier found himself becoming increasingly annoyed with William Wyler's exhausting style of film-making. After yet another take, he is said to have exclaimed, "For God's sake, I did it sitting down. I did it with a smile. I did it with a smirk. I did it scratching my ear. I did it with my back to the camera. How do you want me to do it?" Wyler retorted, "I want it better."

5. Olivier: "If any film actor is having trouble with his career, can't master the medium and, anyway, wonders whether it's worth it, let him pray to meet a man like William Wyler. Wyler was a marvelous sneerer, debunker; and he brought me down. I knew nothing of film acting or that I had to learn its technique; it took a long time and several unhandsome degrees of the torture of his sarcasm before I realized it."

6. Wyler's daughter Cathy, born in 1939, was named after Cathy in *Wuthering Heights*.

7. *Wuthering Heights* won eight Academy Award nominations: Best Picture, Best Actor (Laurence Olivier), Best Supporting Actress (Geraldine Fitzgerald), Best Director, Best Cinematography, Best Screenplay, Best Interior Decoration, and Best Original Score (Alfred Newman).

8. Cinematographer Gregg Toland won an Oscar for Black & White Cinematography. Gregg Toland was the cinematographer for Orson Welles's masterpiece *Citizen Kane*, John Ford's *The Grapes of Wrath*, and William Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives*.

9. In the final sequence, the spirits of Heathcliff and Cathy walk along Penistone Crag. This was added after filming was complete, and because Laurence Olivier and Merle Oberon had already moved on to other projects, doubles were used. Wyler hated the scene, which Samuel Goldwyn added to the film. Goldwyn subsequently claimed, "I made *Wuthering Heights*, Wyler only directed it."

10. The Mitchell Camera Corporation selected Gregg Toland and this picture to be the first to use their new Mitchell BNC camera. This camera model would become the studio standard.

11. Vivien Leigh wanted to play the lead role, alongside her then lover and future husband Laurence Olivier, but studio executives decided the role should go to Merle Oberon. They later offered Leigh the part of Isabelle Linton, but she declined and Geraldine Fitzgerald was cast.

12. Ronald Colman, Douglas Fairbanks Jr. and Robert Newton were all considered for the part of Heathcliff.

13. In April 5, 1939, Samuel Goldwyn withdrew "Wuthering Heights" from the entire province of Quebec. Quebec censors demanded deletions because certain sequences dealt with divorce and infidelity, situations long frowned upon by the Quebec board. Goldwyn refused to make the cuts.
14. Real heather was imported from England and re-planted in California to help simulate the look of the moors.

15. The film was not a big financial success when first released. It had to be re-released years later to earn a profit.

16. The film only depicts sixteen of the novel's thirty-four chapters and is set in 19th century instead of 1771-1801.

17. Producer Samuel Goldwyn felt that script was too dark for a romance movie, so he asked several writers to do a rewrite on the script, including a young John Huston, who said that the script was perfect as it was.

18. Merle Oberon and Laurence Olivier apparently detested each other. Legend has it that when William Wyler yelled "Cut!" after a particularly romantic scene, Oberon shouted back to her director about her co-star, "Tell him to stop spitting at me!"

19. Both of the leading players began work on the film miserable at having to leave their loved ones back in England. Olivier was missing his fiancée Vivien Leigh and Oberon had only recently fallen in love with film producer Alexander Korda.

20. David Niven dreaded the film not only because he was playing a thankless, secondary role, but because he dreaded working with William Wyler again. Merle Oberon was uncomfortable working with Niven after their year long love affair ended in 1936.

21. During the storm sequence Oberon twisted her foot and Olivier was suffering from a severe case of athlete's foot, so that both stars hobbled for a time.

22. The scenes set on the Yorkshire moors were actually shot in Thousand Oaks, southern California.


24. Called the greatest year in Hollywood history by many, 1939 produced the following films: Wuthering Heights, Gone with the Wind, Goodbye Mr. Chips, The Wizard of Oz, Dark Victory, Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, Stagecoach, Ninotchka, Of Mice and Men, and Love Affair.