



Alfred Hitchcock's Legendary Leading Ladies: The Lives of Grace Kelly, Ingrid Bergman, Joan Fontaine, and Kim Novak

Charles River Editors

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Considering that her film career lasted just six years, it would seem as though the reputation of Grace Kelly far outweighs her actual output. Indeed, from the time of her arrival in Hollywood in 1951 through her final film, *High Society*, in 1956, Kelly acted in just 11 films, leaving viewers to wonder whether Kelly was still in the beginning of her career or whether *High Society* was a proper culmination to an extraordinarily brief stay in the film industry? Ultimately, it is might be most accurate to state that Kelly was still in the prime of her career, but it's unclear what direction her career would have taken, as well as who inherited the void she left. Despite the short resume, Kelly is one of America's most famous actresses, and she left an indelible impact on Hollywood. Kelly brought a well-heelled, almost regal quality that deviated from the film noir roles and musical showgirls who had populated the screen during the 1930s and 1940s, and it is this new identity Kelly brought to the motion picture industry that remains her overriding trademark. Ingrid Bergman's fame cannot be doubted, but the international quality of her career has prevented most people from gaining a complete understanding of her filmography. Moreover, the immense success of her most famous films obscured her other achievements; one of Bergman's persistent lamentations late in her career was that even though she appeared in other films she deemed more significant, the only film of hers that people wanted to discuss was *Casablanca*. As a result, her early films in Sweden, the Italian Neorealist films she made with famous director and future husband Roberto Rossellini, and her French film with Jean Renoir have all been relegated to the margins. Bergman is thus recognized as a Hollywood star rather than an actress who should be identified with an array of different film industries, reducing the enormous scope of her career to a relatively small proportion of her filmography. In 1939, Olivia de Havilland had her most memorable role as Melanie Hamilton in *Gone With the Wind* (1939), perhaps the most famous movie in American history, but Hollywood legend has it that she only got the role because her own younger sister, Joan Fontaine, was asked to audition for the part and recommended Olivia instead so that she could audition for Scarlett O'Hara. Although Fontaine and de Havilland would make history by becoming the only sisters to both win an Academy Award for Best Actress, that anecdote was just one of the various stories about the siblings that has shed light on their notoriously contentious and complicated relationship. As Fontaine once put it, "I married first, won the Oscar before Olivia did, and if I die first, she'll undoubtedly be livid because I beat her to it!" De Havilland herself once said, "Joan is very bright and sharp and can be cutting." An art student in her early 20s, Novak found herself in Los Angeles by chance and appeared as an extra in a 1954 film to earn money, only to be almost immediately discovered by Columbia and turned into a star when she appeared in *Picnic* (1955). *Picnic* began a 10 year run that witnessed Novak become one of the biggest names in Hollywood, starring in major hits like *Pal Joey* (1957), *Middle of the Night* (1959), *The Notorious Landlady* (1962), and *Of Human Bondage* (1964). However, Novak's most famous role was as one of Alfred Hitchcock's legendary "icy blondes" in *Vertigo* (1958), beguiling Jimmy Stewart's character to the point of madness in what is widely considered one of the greatest films ever made. In addition to being one of the country's most recognizable and alluring sex icons, the girl who originally wanted to be an artist had reached the upper echelon of Hollywood itself, all before she turned 30.

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