

This Reviewer Is

KENNETH TURAN OF THE *L.A. TIMES* EARNS THE PRESS CLUB'S LUMINARY AWARD FOR LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT | BY JANE ENGLE



On the Fox lot, Los Angeles.



Critically Acclaimed

Passionate, insightful and fearless: Throughout his career, *Los Angeles Times* senior film critic Kenneth Turan has shown all these qualities.

Once dubbed “Hollywood’s most powerful film critic” by the *Chicago Tribune*, Turan wields his influence without fear or favor at the *Times*, where he has worked since 1991, and on National Public Radio’s “Morning Edition” and the “Arts Alive” program on KUSC FM 91.5.

Turan’s honors are legion. He received a Special Citation Award from the National Society of Film Critics in 2006 and the Alumni Award from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism in 2008.

Now, he is the recipient of the Los Angeles Press Club’s Luminary Award for Career Achievement, which he will accept at the sixth annual National Entertainment Journalism Awards.

Whether he is exulting over a masterpiece or excoriating a cinematic dud, Turan is driven by his fervor for film.

“If you care enough about films to be a critic, there’s really kind of a proselytizing aspect to it,” he said in a 2010 interview with the *USC Trojan Family Magazine*. “You want to share the good news. There are so many good ones out there, it frustrates me that people are not seeing them.”

Turan’s love affair with film was nurtured in the neighborhood movie houses of Brooklyn. At Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, he was exposed to more esoteric fare when he got involved with the film selection committee for the weekly campus movie.

After receiving a master’s degree from Columbia University, Turan began a journalism career that included nine years at *The Washington Post*, where he was a sports and features writer. He came to the *Los Angeles Times* in 1990 as its interim book editor before becoming a film critic.

In addition to reviewing movies, Turan directs the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prizes and teaches



Kenneth Turan speaks at film panel at the Green Mountain Film Festival in Montpelier, Vermont.

DAVID ANSEN

Although he is in his fifth year as the artistic director of the Los Angeles Film Festival, David Ansen is probably best known as *Newsweek*’s movie critic during a 31-year-run (1977-2008). In fact, he continued to write for the magazine until its final print issue last year.

The prolific Ansen has written several documentaries for television of film legends Greta Garbo (on TNT), Groucho Marx (on HBO), and Elizabeth Taylor (on PBS). He also wrote the Bette Davis doc, “All About Bette” which appeared on TNT. That documentary won the cable Ace award for Best Entertainment/Cultural Documentary.

Ansen served for eight years on the selection committee of the New York Film Festival, and has served on numerous festival juries from Sundance to Istanbul.

A three-time winner of the Page One Award from the Newspaper Guild of New York, he has also written pieces for *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times* Review of Books, *Film Comment*, *Elle*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Cineaste*, *Men’s Journal*, *The Advocate*, *Interview* and *Self*.





In Cannes 2004 with fellow critics Richard Schickel, Roger Ebert and Richard Corliss.

film reviewing and writing at the USC Annenberg School for Communications and Journalism, where he is an adjunct professor. He serves on the board of directors of the National Yiddish Book Center, a nonprofit organization that rescues, translates and disseminates Yiddish books and presents educational programs.

Turan has authored or co-authored numerous books, including *Free for All: Joe Papp, The Public, and the Greatest Theater Story Ever Told*, about the Brooklyn-born impresario who changed the face of American theater. In a 2009 review, *The New York Times*' Charles Isherwood called it "important, colorful, capacious" with "insightful commentary."

Turan has made a career of being bold and willing to go against the grain. Reviewing *The Soloist*, the 2009 movie based on the relationship between Turan's *Times*' colleague Steve Lopez and homeless musician Nathaniel Ayers, Turan found major flaws, writing, "As much as I wanted this film to succeed, these kinds of missteps and excesses were a price I was unwilling to pay."

Turan's withering review of the 1997 blockbuster *Titanic*, which he wrote "reeks of phoniness and lacks even minimal originality," touched off a celebrated public spat with the director, James Cameron, who dismissed Turan's writings as "vitriolic ravings" and suggested that the critic be "impeached."

Twelve years later, Turan filed a glowing review of Cameron's 3D movie *Avatar*. He praised it as "an extraordinary act of visual imagination" and "the most expensive and accomplished Saturday matinee movie ever made."

Turan is capable of rapturous reviews when he feels they are warranted. Of a recent thriller, he

wrote, "*Gravity* is out of this world. Words can do little to convey the visual astonishment this space opera creates."

Turan especially champions lesser-known, accomplished movies that can get lost amid Hollywood's blockbuster mania. In his 2004 book *Never Coming to a Theater Near You*, he offered a guide to high-quality, unsung films that didn't make it to the megaplex.

As co-author of Patty Duke's 1987 autobiography *Call Me Anna*, which became a bestseller and was later made into a movie, Turan dramatically recounted the rise to stardom of the Academy Award-winning actress and her lifelong battle against manic depression. His other books include 2002's *Sundance to Sarajevo: Film Festivals and the World They Made* and *Now in Theaters Everywhere* (2006).

At USC, Turan teaches the class "Writing the Film Review," which, according to the class description, many students have called the best class they have taken at Annenberg.

Asked in the 2010 USC interview why he teaches, Turan responded, "I certainly don't do it for the money. I really find it very satisfying to help students."

Among Turan's favorite movies are two classics from France: *Children of Paradise*, from 1945, and *The Earrings of Madame de...*, released eight years later. They are mainly about—what else?—amour. Belying the stereotype of the cynical critic, Turan admits, "I tend to like romantic films."



Kenneth Turan interviews Croatian film director, the late Krsto Papic in Dubrovnik, Croatia.