



A TRUE Hollywood HOST

TURNER CLASSIC MOVIES' BEN MANKIEWICZ GETS THE LA PRESS CLUB'S LUMINARY AWARD FOR CAREER ACHIEVEMENT

BY CLAUDIA OBERST

Ben Mankiewicz has 120 seconds to seduce his audience. That's all the time the prime-time host for Turner Classic Movies gets for his introductions.

"After you get to about 2:15, people are saying, 'Go ahead and start the movie now,'" Mankiewicz told *Variety* in April.

His intros need to be entertaining, informative and strike a delicate balance between humor and reverence. His goal: tell a story in that time that could be a movie itself.

"We are programming for people who want to be told good stories," he said. "Our job is to tell an engaging story and not merely a recitation of who was in it and where it was shot."

Mankiewicz has been a host at the classic movie channel since 2003. Before that, he worked as a reporter in South Carolina and Florida. In the span of his career, Mankiewicz has introduced thousands of movies and conducted long-form interviews with more than 200 of the industry's top talents, including Martin Scorsese, Sophia Loren, Quentin Tarantino and Ava DuVernay. This summer he also became a contributor to "CBS News Sunday Morning," and last year he began hosting the American Society of Cinematographers Awards. Additionally, he is a regular co-host of the online political show "The Young Turks," which he co-founded with Cenk Uygur in 2002.

Tonight, the Los Angeles Press Club is honoring Mankiewicz with the Luminary Award for Career Achievement.

Mankiewicz hails from Hollywood royalty—entertainment literally runs in his blood. His grandfather was Oscar-winning *Citizen Kane* screenwriter Herman Mankiewicz, his great-uncle was Oscar-winning writer-director Joseph Mankiewicz (*All About Eve*) and his cousin was writer-direc-



Right, top to bottom: Mankiewicz has a chat with Bruce Springsteen.; Billy Crystal and Rob Reiner attend the Hand and Footprint Ceremony, at the 2019 10th Annual TCM Classic Film Festival in Hollywood.; Mickey Rooney discusses *Girl Crazy* (1943) at the TCM Classic Film Festival in 2011.

tor Tom Mankiewicz (*Live and Let Die*). Another cousin, John Mankiewicz, is an executive producer on "House of Cards" and "Bosch." His brother Josh works as a reporter for NBC's "Dateline."

Despite his family tree, it took Mankiewicz a few years to find his way to the entertainment industry. He grew up in Washington, D.C., where his father Frank was press secretary to Senator Robert F. Kennedy, presidential campaign manager for Senator George S. McGovern and chief of National Public Radio. Hollywood and movies were not on the agenda in the Mankiewicz household.

"We didn't talk about show business around the dinner table," said Mankiewicz in an interview with the *New York Post* in 2015. "If you wanted attention, you'd have to complain about how disappointing President Carter was."

Mankiewicz idolized his father, once telling a reporter, "My dad shaped everything that I do or am."

Like his father, he went into journalism. He's a graduate of Tufts University and the Columbia

Clockwise from top left: Mankiewicz channeling Humphrey Bogart?; enjoying the outdoors with wife, Lee; Father, Frank, gives his son a lift; Ben tries to make a point with brother Josh, who is a patient older brother.



From left: 105-year-old actor Norman Lloyd gets a visit from Mankiewicz; Angie Dickinson at the screening of *The Killers* at the 2019 TCM 10th Annual Classic Film Festival; former TCM host Robert Osborne greets Mankiewicz; and having a chat with comedian Jerry Lewis at The Roosevelt Hotel Stage in 2014.



University Graduate School of Journalism, and worked as a producer, reporter and anchor for television stations in Charleston, S.C. and Miami. He was twice named Best Anchor in South Florida, but eventually realized that journalism wasn't for him.

"I hated it," he once told the *New York Times*. "The third time you knock on a mother's door and ask how she feels that her teenage daughter was killed, you think, 'How am I making anything better?'"

He didn't like journalism, but he liked being on TV, so he auditioned for the hosting job at TCM. His love for classic movies dates back to when, as a history major, he took a film class at Tufts.

"That was the beginning of an appreciation that there was a historical context to put these movies in, to think about them not just as old pieces of art but old pieces of art that were representative of a special time. That made it click with me," he told the *Los Angeles Times*.

Since his debut on TCM on Sept. 6, 2003, Mankiewicz has made more than 20,000 on-air appearances. He was the second host ever to appear on the network, following in the footsteps of beloved former actor and film historian Robert Osborne, who had been the primary host of TCM since its inception in 1994.

"Once I got the job, I had to do an enormous

amount of catch-up work, watching and watching and watching films to try to get smart about them," Mankiewicz explained to fashion designer/movie director Tom Ford over lunch a couple years ago.

Not only did he have to have to read up on old Hollywood, he also needed to woo the audience.

"TCM fans were resistant for a long time—years," Mankiewicz said. "They revered Robert and they thought, 'Who's this young punk with a goatee?'"

Eventually, he managed to charm his way into their hearts. Nowadays, he has a solid social media following, speaks on TCM cruises, and hosts

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screenings and does interviews at the TCM Classic Film Festival, which takes place in Hollywood in the spring.

"He is a beloved member of the family," said Charles Tabesh, TCM's senior vice president of programming, adding, "People grew to accept him."

With Osborne's passing in 2017, Mankiewicz has become the longest serving host on the vintage movie channel that celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. He is aware of the importance the channel has for its viewers.

"TCM is my bread and butter, and that's the job I care about most and the one I want to be associated with most," he told the *San Luis Obispo Tribune*. "This is a TV channel that matters to people. It matters emotionally. It matters viscerally."

In the age of superhero franchises and multi-million dollar blockbusters, Mankiewicz is using his enthusiasm and snarky charm to promote classic movies.

"They mean something," he said. "They represent a particularly American art form that ought to be appreciated and understood (in the same) way we read Mark Twain, John Steinbeck and J.D. Salinger."



Family time with daughter Josie, wife Lee, and dog Bob Mankiewicz.



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