## Orson Welles Biography



**The son of a concert pianist mother and wealthy inventor father, his parents initially channelled their energies into Orson’s older brother, Dickie.**

Dickie failed to live up to their demands, but Orson showed great early promise in many arts - piano, magic, painting, and, especially, acting.  
  
Upon his mother's death in 1924, he travelled the world with his father, only to lose him in 1928. Turning down the chance of college in 1931, he went on a sketching trip to Ireland.  
  
Unsuccessful in his attempts to break onto the London and Broadway stages, he travelled further in Morocco and Spain, where he fought in the bull-ring.  
  
A big year for him, 1934 marked his first New York appearance, his marriage, the shooting of his first short film and his radio debut. He married actress and socialite Virginia Nicholson. They had one daughter, Christopher, who became known as Chris Welles Feder, an author of educational materials for children. The couple divorced in 1939.  
  
After forming the Mercury Theatre with John Houseman, he produced 'The Mercury Theatre on Air'. The show became famous for the notorious events surrounding their version of 'The War of the Worlds' as a Halloween prank in 1938, in which they changed the action to the US, being so realistic as to provoke mass panic.  
  
'Citizen Kane', his first public release, which he both starred in and directed, was released in 1941. It proved a commercial failure, losing RKO $150,000. Welles' consolation is that the film is regarded by many as one of the greatest ever made.  
  
In 1943 Welles married Rita Hayworth. They had one child, Rebecca Welles, but divorced five years later in 1948.  
  
His following films, such as 'The Magnificent Ambersons' and 'Chimes at Midnight', won many plaudits, but were also commercial failures. In retaliation for the amount of studio interference, Welles exiled himself to Europe in 1948.  
  
In 1955, he married Italian actress Paola Mori and they had a daughter called Beatrice, born the same year, who later became Welles' sole heir. They were estranged for decades but never divorced.  
  
Welles' long-term companion both personally and professionally from 1966 was Croatian-born actress Ojo Kodar. They lived together for the last 24 years of his life.  
  
1956 saw Welles direct 'A Touch of Evil', which failed in the US, but won a prize at the Brussels World's Fair in 1958.  
  
He received a lifetime achievement Oscar in 1971, the American Film Institute's Lifetime Achievement Award in 1975, and, despite his lack of commercial success, the Directors Guild of America awarded him their highest accolade, the D.W. Griffith award.  
  
In 1972, he narrated the film documentary version of 'Future Shock' and then starred as Long John Silver in John Hough's 'Treasure Island' the same year.  
  
This was followed by 'F For Fake', which was completed in 1973. It was a personal essay film about art forger Elmyr de Hory and the biographer Clifford Irving.  
  
Between 1973 and 1974, he took part in 'Orson Welles' Great Mysteries', which he hosted and narrated but this only lasted one season. In 1974, he lent his voice to the Agatha Christie remake 'Ten Little Indians'.  
  
In 1979, Welles completed his documentary 'Filming Othello' and filmed a pilot for his series 'The Orson Welles Show' which was never turned into a full series. He also appeared in the biopic 'The Secret of Nikolai Tesla' and made a cameo in 'The Muppet Movie'.  
  
Spiralling into obesity, Welles suffered a heart attack in Hollywood, on 10 October 1985 and died.  
  
Welles' prolific work rate and mastery of many skills have placed him as one of the greatest artists of the 20th century, with his film, theatre and acting work still having heavy influence on today's dramatists.  
  
His use of nonlinear narratives and chiaroscuro lighting techniques in his early film noirs has been borrowed by many directors since, with innovative camera angles, deep focus shots and long takes.  
  
His background in radio also allowed him to excel at sound production on his films, raising the art to a new level.  
  
Welles' insistence that he had complete creative control over his films has also inspired auteur theory in cinematic criticism, with the director often being seen as the ultimate creative visionary when it comes to films.  
  
Due to his perfection, many of Welles' film projects were left abandoned, included a feature length version of Don Quixote, a TV adaptation of The Merchant of Venice and the self-penned script for a film titled ‘The Other Side of the Wind’.