

When leading men direct

As Ben Affleck's latest directorial effort, *Argo*, lands in Dubai, **Rob Garratt** finds other stars who have sat in the director's chair

It seems obvious that being good at one thing doesn't necessarily make you good at another. But chuck in all the ego (and financial clout) that goes with being a Hollywood star, and it's unsurprising that many successful actors have tried to boost their credibility by turning director.

Some of them have gone on to be named among the most celebrated directors of all time (Clint Eastwood), while others have embarrassed themselves beyond repair (Arnold Schwarzenegger; see below). And some of them perhaps should have stuck to the day job, but emerged with their credibility intact for their efforts (Al Pacino). The latest action hero to learn this lesson was Sylvester Stallone who, after assembling a mighty cast for his eighth directorship, *The Expendables* (2010), chose to quietly hand over directorial duties to Simon West (*Con Air*) for the sequel.

Hollywood actor Ben Affleck has already taken the reins in *Gone Baby Gone* (2007) and *The Town* (2010), and now makes his third directional outing with *Argo*, a CIA thriller set in the midst of an Iranian revolution. To set the scene ahead of the movie's release this week, we've rounded up a few actor/director case studies including the good, the bad, and the ugly. *Argo* is in UAE cinemas from Thursday October 11. Read our review on the opposite page.

Al Pacino

Case study: *Looking for Richard* (1996)

Pacino's longing for respect manifested itself in a disjointed documentary about the actor's bid to stage a star-studded theatre production of Shakespeare's *Richard III*. A mix of filmed scenes from the play and a broader, indulgent examination of The Bard's significance today, Pacino himself took the tragic hero's role, with a cast list also including Alec Baldwin, Kevin Spacey and Winona Ryder fleshing out its appeal.

Did he direct again?

Just twice – 2000's indie play adaptation *Chinese Coffee*, and



Ben Affleck: *Argo*



Sly Stallone: *The Expendables*



Clint Eastwood: *Play Misty For Me*

another indulgent play-docu-drama in last year's *Wilde Salomé*, based on a production of Oscar Wilde's tragic play, *Salomé*.

Arnold Schwarzenegger

Case study: *Christmas in Connecticut* (1992)

Props to Arnie for totally wrongfooting us with his only stab at directing a feature film to date. Who would have predicted that a man whose typecast is a near-mute, leather-clad Teutonic killing machine would have opted for a treacle-smothered Christmas movie (a remake of a 1945 Barbara Stanwyck vehicle) about a cookery writer (Dyan Cannon) and her shenanigans with a swarthy forest ranger? Unfortunately, Arnie directs with all the panache of a lobotomised wrestler, and the critics were quick to pan it.

Did he direct again?

Due to its utter drabness, some harsher critics would argue that he didn't strictly 'direct' this.

Clint Eastwood

Case study: *Play Misty for Me* (1971)

In perhaps the most notorious role reversal in acting history, Eastwood went from being a '60s Western hero, as The Man with No Name in Sergio Leone's famous trilogy and as Rowdy Yates in US show *Rancho*, to become one of the country's most celebrated directors. His inconsistent directorial career verges from the incredible *Flags for our Fathers/Letters to Iwo Jima* double header of 2006 to forgettable romp *Bronco Billy* (1980), but it all began in 1971 with psychological thriller *Play Misty for Me*.

Did he direct again?

Yes, more than 30 times – and he's still going strong. Now 82, last year's biopic, *J. Edgar*, wasn't half bad.

George Clooney

Case study: *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* (2002)

Retiring gent Clooney stunned us all in 2002 with this directional debut,

the biopic of washed-up game show host Chuck Barris who claims in his memoirs he was once an assassin for the CIA (something the agency vehemently denies, understandably). Clooney supposedly got the movie made after convincing leading ladies Drew Barrymore and Julia Roberts to lower their fees to meet the film's budget.

Did he direct again?

Clooney has gone on to surprise the critics by writing two decent political dramas, *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2009) and *The Ides of March* (2011).

John Wayne

Case study: *The Alamo* (1960)

Wayne's directorial debut was a colourful, tedious and historically dicey retelling of the Battle of the Alamo that co-starred everyone from Laurence Harvey and Richard Widmark to Chill Wills and Denver Pyle. The 15-year-long gestation period of The Duke's passion project would seem to have sucked most of the resultant life out of the finished film, and Wayne looks mightily incongruous under Davy Crockett's cap, but it was at least better than John Lee Hancock's botched 2004 version of the same events.

Did he direct again?

His only subsequent credit was for questionable gruntsploitation folly *The Green Berets* (1968).

Mel Gibson

Case study: *The Man Without a Face* (1993)

Imagine if someone made a disease-of-the-week movie about *Batman* supervillain Harvey 'Two Face' Dent, and that gives you some idea of the path Mad Mel chose to wander with this understated (in a bad way) directing debut. Based on Isabelle Holland's 1972 novel of the same name, Mel himself stars as 'Hamburger Head' McLeod, a misanthropic, deformed hermit who slowly begins to accept his place in society when he decides to help an apple-cheeked young 'un pass an entrance exam for military school.

Did he ever direct again?

Yes – he went on to bastardise history for high coin with *Braveheart*, then began his cycle of '70s-style exploitation gore pictures (*The Passion of the Christ* and *Apocalypto*).

► **NEXT WEEK:** As *The September Issue* finally lands in Dubai, we quiz director RJ Cutler about life at *Vogue*