

Obituary: Robert Mulligan

Robert Mulligan, director of 'Mockingbird,' dies

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HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) – Robert Mulligan, who directed the classic film *To Kill a Mockingbird*, with its sensitive look at a child's world shaken by the racism of a Southern town, has died at 83.

Mulligan died early Saturday at his home in Lyme, Conn., after a battle with heart disease, his wife, Sandy, said Monday.

Mulligan was nominated for an Oscar for *Mockingbird*, the adaptation of Harper Lee's best-selling, Pulitzer Prize-winning novel.

The 1962 film starred Gregory Peck, who won the best-actor Oscar for his portrayal of Atticus Finch, the small town lawyer who defends a black man falsely accused of rape.

The story unfolds largely from the point of view of Atticus' young daughter, Scout, memorably played by Mary Badham. Phillip Alford played his son, Jem.

The *New York Times* wrote that in the film's opening segment "achieves a bewitching indication of the excitement and thrill of being a child."

Mulligan was also known as the director of Reese Witherspoon's first film, *The Man in the Moon*, which came out in 1991. It was his last film, and the family drama brought Witherspoon notice as the younger of two teenage daughters grappling with her first love.

Among his other credits were *Fear Strikes Out*, the 1957 drama starring Anthony Perkins as troubled ballplayer Jim Piersall; *Summer of '42*, the 1971 wartime coming-of-age story starring

Gary Grimes and Jennifer O'Neill; and the 1972 horror hit *The Other*.

He also carved out a solid career as a TV director before moving over to film, working on such drama series as *The Philco Television Playhouse* and *The Alcoa Hour*.

But *Mockingbird* would remain his most famous work. In 2003, an American Film Institute listing of the top heroes in film history ranked Peck's Atticus Finch as No. 1.

"The big danger in making a movie of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is in thinking of this as a chance to jump on the segregation-integration soapbox," Mulligan told *The New York Times* in 1961, while the planning for the film was in its early stages. "The book does not make speeches. It is not melodramatic."

Funeral arrangements were pending, his wife said.

"Mockingbird" director Robert Mulligan dead at 83

By Duane Byrge Duane Byrge – Mon Dec 22, 8:43 am ET

LOS ANGELES (Hollywood Reporter) – Robert Mulligan, who received an Oscar nomination for directing "*To Kill a Mockingbird*," died Friday of heart disease at his Connecticut home. He was 83. Known for his diffident nature and sensitivity toward players, Mulligan directed five different actors in Oscar-nominated performances: Gregory Peck and Mary Badham in "*Mockingbird*," Natalie Wood ("*Love with the Proper Stranger*"), Ruth Gordon ("*Inside Daisy Clover*") and Ellen Burstyn ("*Same Time, Next Year*"). Peck won the Oscar for his lead role as attorney Atticus Finch in "*Mockingbird*."

He also elicited consistently fine performances from a range of his players, including Anthony Perkins in "*Fear Strikes Out*," Jennifer O'Neill in "*Summer of '42*," Robert Redford in "*Inside Daisy Clover*" and Richard Gere in "*Bloodbrothers*."

The older brother of late actor Richard Mulligan, he earned

his stripes in live TV in New York in the early 1950s on such productions as "Studio One" and "Playhouse 90" before becoming a movie director in 1957 with "Fear Strikes Out," the story of baseball pitcher Jimmy Piersall.

Self-effacing with a nonflamboyant filmic style, Mulligan didn't receive the acclaim of such ex-TV contemporaries as Sidney Lumet, Arthur Penn and John Frankenheimer. His films were more popular with audiences than with critics.

While some debated whether he had a discernible personal vision in his films, Mulligan was known for his casting and direction of children, including "Up the Down Staircase," where he personally interviewed more than 500 New York high school students.

Sensing a kindred spirit, Francois Truffaut was a vocal champion, particularly cognizant of what he perceived as undue criticism of Mulligan's work for lacking a particular "style."

Mulligan himself was dismissive of critics/cineaste talk: "I don't know anything about 'the Mulligan style,'" he told the Village Voice in 1978. "If you can find it, well, that's your job."

Mulligan was known for working side-by-side with screenwriters in shaping a cinematic story. "The attention which has been paid to directors is flattering but overrated," he noted in the same Voice interview. Mulligan had an eight-year collaboration with Alan J. Pakula, who served as a producer on all of Mulligan's early films, beginning with "Fear Strikes Out" through "The Stalking Moon" in 1969.

Mulligan was born August 23, 1925, in New York. He worked for six months at the New York Times on the copy desk before entering Fordham University, where he majored in journalism and literature. He became one of the first students to enroll in the school's radio department.

After college, he started his show business career as a messenger boy at CBS. He soon moved up to production assistant and then won an opportunity to direct on the "Suspense" series. He excelled in the fast-paced milieu of live TV, helming such projects as "The Moon and Sixpence," "Billy Budd" and "The Bridge of San Luis Rey."

He directed stage plays as well, including "Comes a Day" on Broadway.

Reuters/Hollywood Reporter