



**SPECIAL FILMS & EVENTS**

# GoodFellas

Before landing his signature role in *GoodFellas* (1990), Ray Liotta broke through with two truly opposite supporting turns. In Jonathan Demme's comedy *Something Wild* (1986), Liotta's volatile ex-con Ray exhibited a steely-eyed charisma so intense it was frightening. Three years later, Phil Alden Robinson's magical realist sports drama *Field of Dreams* cast Liotta as the ghost of baseball ace Shoeless Joe Jackson, and showcased the actor's soul. *GoodFellas* would announce Liotta as a star, but these contrasting early displays set a template for his career, of performances that could swing between the dangerously magnetic and the disarmingly sensitive.

Placed in an orphanage shortly after his birth on 18 December 1954, Liotta would be raised in Newark, New Jersey by adoptive parents Mary and Alfred. With his father's surname, Liotta would go on to play many Italian-Americans in his career, only discovering later in life that he was of mostly Scottish heritage. (On meeting his biological mother as an adult, Liotta would say 'thank God I was adopted'.)

As a youngster, Liotta made the occasional school stage appearance, but preferred sports to acting. It was assumed he'd one day go into construction or take charge of Alfred's chain of auto parts stores. It wasn't until he enrolled at the University of Miami in the 1970s that an acting teacher saw the raw potential in Liotta, who allegedly signed up for drama because he thought it sounded easier than the other classes.

Liotta's take-it-or-leave-it attitude to cultivating an acting career would be reflected later in some unhelpful professional behaviour ('I can be a dick on set', Liotta admitted in a 2013 interview) and what would prove to be a career-long aversion to mainstream, blockbuster cinema. *Something Wild* happened following years of commercials and TV soaps; after that film earned him a Golden Globe nomination, Liotta was asked to meet the then red-hot Tim Burton to play the Caped Crusader in his 1989 *Batman* movie, but the actor rejected that 'stupid idea'.

Instead, Liotta opted to star in an R-rated gangster flick by a director emerging from a decade short on hits. Though initially only a modest success, Martin Scorsese's *GoodFellas*, about a quarter-century in the life of a smalltime New York mafioso, would prove hugely influential. It quickly cemented Liotta's reputation as a go-to actor for playing menacing tough guys. But his Henry Hill is far more layered than that, showing off Liotta's full arsenal of ability, as he evolves from a shy, boyish romantic, to fearsome man of violence and seductive womaniser, on to crazed, desperate junkie and finally pathetic ordinary Joe. Liotta would play many more roles superficially like Hill, but none would be as rivetingly multifaceted.

After *GoodFellas*, Liotta made several critically and commercially unsuccessful attempts to branch out – the romantic drama *Corrina, Corrina* (1994), action sci-fi *No Escape* (1994), Disney's *Operation Dumbo Drop* (1995) among them – but crime movies quickly became his familiar domain. Mobster roles would be Liotta's stock-in-trade, from low-level guys in the likes of *Killing Them Softly* (2012) to kingpins in *The Iceman* (2012) and *No Sudden Move* (2021).

Liotta never again worked with Scorsese after *GoodFellas*, a fact he lamented, instead making do with projects of a Scorsese flavour, including – as recently as 2021 – big-screen *Sopranos* spin-off *The Many Saints of Newark*. Liotta also voiced the Henry Hill-inspired lead character in 2002 video game *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, a blockbuster title so commercially successful it's arguably the biggest hit of Liotta's career.

He played characters on the opposite side of the law, too, though his policemen were often as shady as his criminals. *Cop Land* (1997), *Narc* (2002) and *The Place Beyond the Pines* (2012) found Liotta discovering corruption in the hearts of a series of compromised lawkeepers. As Liotta found sympathy for a litany of on-screen rogues, so he enjoyed playing up the flaws in society's ostensible good guys.

With more than 120 screen credits across a four-decade-long career, his filmography also took in grand guignol horror (*Hannibal*, 2001), an erotic thriller (*Forever Mine*, 1999) and, though he found the superhero genre generally 'horrendous', even a comic book movie (*Sin City: A Dame to Kill For*, 2014). He also winningly poked fun at his tough guy persona on numerous occasions, making cameos in countless TV comedies and appearing in two Muppets movies. (Of Miss Piggy, Liotta quipped 'she's the only actress I slept with'.)

Not all of Liotta's work was a home run. In a 2000s slump that saw his output swell to include direct-to-video movies and other lower-rent material, his more ill-advised efforts included Guy Ritchie's misfiring *Revolver* (2005) and Uwe Boll joint *In the Name of the King* (2007). In his later years, though, Liotta had become truly prolific, and for any flops, there would soon be a new project to serve as a reminder of just how impactful he could still be. Following a three-year period spent exclusively in television, Liotta returned to the big screen in Noah Baumbach's broken-family drama *Marriage Story* (2019), his brief but brilliant turn as a pugnacious divorce lawyer representing some of his best work in years.

When Liotta died in his sleep on 26 May, at the age of 67, he was not at home in LA but in the Dominican Republic, shooting one of what will be several posthumous film releases. He is survived by fiancée Jacy Nittolo and daughter Karsen Liotta.

Ray Liotta, 18 December 1954 to 26 May 2022

**Brogan Morris, bfi.org.uk, 30 May 2022**

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## GOODFELLAS

*Directed by:* Martin Scorsese  
©: Warner Bros Inc.  
*An* Irwin Winkler *production*  
*Presented by:* Warner Bros.  
*Executive Producer:* Barbara De Fina  
*Produced by:* Irwin Winkler  
*Associate Producer:* Bruce Pustin  
*Production Associates:* Michele Giordano, Janet Crosby  
*Unit Production Manager:* Bruce Pustin  
*Production Accountant:* Todd Arnow  
*Location Managers:* Steve Rose, Amy Herman, Neri Tannenbaum, Daniel Coss  
*2nd Unit Director:* Joseph Reidy  
*1st Assistant Director:* Joseph Reidy  
*Script Supervisor:* Sheila Paige  
*Casting by:* Ellen Lewis, Laura Rosenthal  
*Screenplay by:* Nicholas Pileggi, Martin Scorsese  
*Based on the book* Wiseguy *by:* Nicholas Pileggi  
*Directors of Photography:* Michael Ballhaus, Barry Sonnenfeld  
*Camera Operator:* David Dunlap  
*1st Assistant Camera:* Florian Ballhaus  
*Still Photographer:* Barry Wetcher  
*Special Effects:* Conrad Brink Sr  
*Film Editor:* Thelma Schoonmaker  
*Editor:* James Kwei  
*Production Designer:* Kristi Zea  
*Art Director:* Maher Ahmad  
*Set Decorator:* Les Bloom  
*Set Dressers:* Bruce Swanson, Susan Pileggi  
*Costume Designer:* Richard Bruno  
*Make-up Artists:* Allen Weisinger, Carl Fullerton, Ilona Herman  
*Hairstylists:* Bill Farley, Alan D'Angerio  
*Titles by:* Saul Bass, Elaine Bass  
*Opticals:* R/Greenberg Associates, Arriflex Cameras, Technicolor  
*Music Editor:* Christopher Brooks  
*Production Sound Mixers:* James Sabat, Frank Graziadei  
*Boom Operator:* Louis Sabat  
*Re-recording Mixer:* Tom Fleischman  
*Supervising Sound Editor:* Skip Lievsay  
*Supervising Dialogue Editors:* Philip Stockton, Marissa Littlefield, Fred Rosenberg, Jeff Stern, Bruce Kitzmeyer  
*ADR Editor:* Gail Showalter  
*Supervising Foley Editor:* Ron Bochar  
*Foley Editors:* Bruce Pross, Frank Kern  
*Stunt Co-ordinator:* Michael Russo

## Cast

Robert De Niro (*James Conway*)  
Ray Liotta (*Henry Hill*)  
Joe Pesci (*Tommy DeVito*)  
Lorraine Bracco (*Karen Hill*)  
Paul Sorvino (*Paul Cicero*)  
Frank Sivero (*Frank Carbone*)  
Tony Darrow (*Sonny Bunz*)  
Mike Starr (*Frenchy*)  
Frank Vincent (*Billy Batts*)  
Chuck Low (*Morris Kessler*)  
Frank Dileo (*Tuddy Cicero*)  
Henny Youngman (*himself*)  
Gina Mastrogiacomo (*Janice Rossi*)  
Catherine Scorsese (*Tommy's mother*)  
Charles Scorsese (*Vinnie*)  
Suzanne Shepherd (*Karen's mother*)  
Debi Mazar (*Sandy*)  
Margo Winkler (*Belle Kessler*)  
Welker White (*Lois Byrd*)  
Jerry Vale (*himself*)  
Julie Garfield (*Mickey Conway*)  
Christopher Serrone (*young Henry*)  
Elaine Kagan (*Henry's mother*)  
Beau Starr (*Henry's father*)  
Kevin Corrigan (*Michael Hill*)  
Michael Imperioli (*Spider*)  
Robbie Vinton (*Bobby Vinton*)  
John Williams (*Johnny Roastbeef*)  
Daniel P. Conte (*Dr Dan, Cicero's '50s crew*)  
Tony Conforti (*Tony, Cicero's '50s crew*)  
Frank Pellegrino (*Johnny Dio, Cicero's '50s crew*)  
Ronald Maccone (*Ronnie, Cicero's '50s crew*)  
Tony Sirico (*Tony Stacks, Cicero's '50s crew*)

USA 1990  
146 mins

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## IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

### Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI

Mon 13 Jun 18:30

### Restoration Preview:

#### Dr. Who and the Daleks + Q&A

Sun 19 Jun 11:30

### Restoration Preview:

#### Daleks' Invasion Earth 2150 A.D.

Sun 19 Jun 14:30

### Experimenta Presents: Premiere: Wayfinder + Q&A with director

#### Larry Achiampong

Tue 21 Jun 18:15

### Burning an Illusion + intro by actor Cassie McFarlane

Mon 27 Jun 18:00

### Preview: The Afterlight + Q&A with director Charlie Shackleton

Wed 29 Jun 18:20

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## NEW & RE-RELEASES

### Vampyr

Continues from Fri 20 May

### Get Carter

Continues from Fri 27 May

### Benediction

From Fri 3 Jun

### Pickpocket

From Fri 3 Jun

### All My Friends Hate Me

From Fri 10 Jun

### Bergman Island

From Fri 10 Jun

### Swan Song

From Fri 10 Jun

### Wings of Desire (Der Himmel über Berlin)

From Fri 24 Jun (Q&A with Wim Wenders on Sat 25 Jun 15:00)

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Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

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