

Batman, A to Z

A look at the actors who have donned the Batsuit.

Batman may be an enduring comic-book hero (he turns 70 next year), but as a movie character he poses all sorts of problems. Costume issues aside, any actor who plays Batman will inevitably be overshadowed by the villains, gadgetry, special effects, merchandise or all of the above. But some actors have fared better as the Caped Crusader than others. With *The Dark Knight* opening this month, we thought we'd take a look at the five movie Batmen, in alphabetical order.

Christian Bale

Batman Begins (2005), *The Dark Knight* (2008)

The only movie Batman who wanted to be Robin, Bale auditioned for the role that eventually went to Chris O'Donnell in *Batman Forever*. The throaty voice is a bit much, but he restored credibility to the character after the debacles that were *Batman Forever* and *Batman & Robin*. (For more on Bale, see our Movie interview on page 62.)

George Clooney

Batman & Robin (1997)

Despite being the only movie Batman who has since won an Oscar, Clooney has yet to live this one down (as evidenced by Tilda Swinton's crack at this year's Oscars re: the infamous nipples Batsuit he wore in *Batman & Robin*). In fairness, Clooney wasn't the first Batman with nipples (see Val Kilmer). Besides, he can play heroes with a dark side (see *Michael Clayton*). If he had a script along the lines of *Batman Begins*, or the 1989 *Batman*, it would have been a different story.

Michael Keaton

Batman (1989), *Batman Returns* (1992)

The only actor other than Bale to play Batman twice, Keaton had to overcome (1) tremendous skepticism



among comic-book traditionalists (director Tim Burton promised that the 1989 *Batman* would be dark and edgy, yet Keaton's best-known roles were in comedies like *Mr. Mom* and *Beetlejuice*), and (2) the likelihood he would be upstaged by Jack Nicholson as the Joker. Yet he also had one thing going for him: Burton, who had worked with Keaton in *Beetlejuice*, knew the actor could bring out the tormented aspect of Batman he wanted (which was much in line with the *Dark Knight* graphic novels by Frank Miller). Keaton not only held his own against Nicholson, but set a standard for Batman that only Bale has matched.

Val Kilmer

Batman Forever (1994)

After making *Batman Returns* with Burton, Keaton was originally set to star in this second sequel, but bowed out over "creative differences" (presumably, over director Joel Schumacher's decision to abandon Burton's dark interpretation so as to appeal to a younger audience). Kilmer scored well at the box office, but not so much with critics. Must've been the nipples.

Adam West

Batman (1966)

TV's Batman makes the list because he starred in a 1966 big-screen version of the series – and with all due respect to our movie man, Fred Topel, he wasn't that bad. Besides, as anyone who's seen the YouTube tribute video "Adam West" can attest, "He's got cool and savoir faire/In his cape and cowl and his gray underwear."