

the making of citizen kane

the making of citizen kane stands as a landmark moment in cinematic history, representing not only a breakthrough in storytelling but also in film production techniques. This article explores the intricate process behind the creation of this iconic film, directed by Orson Welles and released in 1941. The making of Citizen Kane involved innovative cinematography, groundbreaking narrative structure, and a bold approach to character development that challenged traditional Hollywood norms. From the screenplay adaptation to the pioneering use of deep focus photography, every aspect contributed to its lasting influence on the art of filmmaking. This detailed examination will cover the film's conception, casting, technical innovations, and the challenges faced during production, providing a comprehensive understanding of the film's enduring legacy. The exploration will also highlight the collaborative efforts of the cast and crew that brought this cinematic masterpiece to life.

- Development and Scriptwriting
- Casting and Performances
- Innovative Cinematography and Visual Style
- Production Challenges and Techniques
- Post-Production and Editing
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Development and Scriptwriting

The making of Citizen Kane began with an ambitious vision by Orson Welles, who co-wrote the screenplay alongside Herman J. Mankiewicz. The script was inspired by the life of media magnate William Randolph Hearst, though it incorporated a fictionalized narrative to explore themes of power, memory, and identity. Welles and Mankiewicz worked collaboratively to craft a complex, nonlinear storyline that broke away from conventional Hollywood storytelling. This innovative script structure used flashbacks and multiple perspectives to reveal the enigmatic character of Charles Foster Kane.

Origins of the Story

The story of Citizen Kane was born from Welles's desire to create a film that was both artistically daring and socially relevant. Drawing on his background

in theater and radio, Welles approached the screenplay with a focus on character psychology and narrative depth. The script's layered approach allowed for a multifaceted exploration of Kane's character, avoiding a straightforward biographical depiction.

Screenplay Collaboration

Collaboration between Orson Welles and Herman J. Mankiewicz was pivotal in the making of *Citizen Kane*. Mankiewicz's experience as a screenwriter and insider knowledge of the newspaper industry enriched the script's authenticity. Despite disputes over credit, their combined efforts resulted in a screenplay that challenged the norms of the day and laid the groundwork for the film's innovative storytelling style.

Casting and Performances

The casting process for *Citizen Kane* was instrumental in bringing depth and nuance to the film's characters. Orson Welles himself played the lead role of Charles Foster Kane, showcasing his versatility as both director and actor. The supporting cast included a mix of established actors and newcomers, each contributing to the film's rich character tapestry.

Orson Welles as Charles Foster Kane

Welles's performance as Kane was notable for its complexity, capturing the character's transformation from an idealistic youth to a powerful yet isolated tycoon. His ability to embody multiple stages of Kane's life added emotional weight to the narrative.

Supporting Cast

The supporting cast featured actors such as Joseph Cotten, Dorothy Comingore, and Agnes Moorehead, whose performances complemented Welles's lead role. Their portrayals helped to build the intricate relationships that drive the film's plot.

Casting Challenges

Several casting challenges arose during production, including securing actors willing to work on an unproven project and managing the demands of Welles's dual role as director and actor. Nonetheless, the chosen cast contributed significantly to the film's critical success.

Innovative Cinematography and Visual Style

The making of *Citizen Kane* is renowned for its groundbreaking cinematography, primarily executed by Gregg Toland, one of Hollywood's most celebrated cinematographers. The film introduced visual techniques that were revolutionary at the time and continue to influence filmmakers today.

Deep Focus Photography

One of the most significant innovations was the use of deep focus photography, which allowed foreground, middle ground, and background elements to remain in sharp focus simultaneously. This technique enhanced the storytelling by providing visual complexity and encouraging viewers to engage with multiple layers within a single frame.

Low-Angle Shots and Lighting

The cinematography also featured extensive use of low-angle shots, creating dramatic perspectives that emphasized the imposing nature of Kane's character and environments. Lighting techniques, including chiaroscuro and silhouette effects, were used to evoke mood and highlight thematic contrasts.

Set Design and Camera Movement

Innovative set designs facilitated dynamic camera movements, enabling long takes and fluid tracking shots. These elements contributed to the immersive atmosphere of the film and underscored its narrative innovation.

Production Challenges and Techniques

The production phase of *Citizen Kane* was marked by both creative experimentation and logistical challenges. As Welles's first feature-length film, the project demanded careful coordination and problem-solving to realize its ambitious vision.

Budget and Studio Relations

Initially budgeted modestly, the production faced constraints that required efficient use of resources. Welles's independence was both a strength and a source of tension with RKO Studios, which financed the film but maintained oversight over the production process.

Technical Innovations

The making of Citizen Kane saw the use of several technical innovations, including the pioneering of special effects techniques such as matte paintings and optical printing. These methods were employed to create seamless transitions and expansive settings within limited studio space.

Filming Schedule and Locations

The shooting schedule was tightly managed, with principal photography taking place primarily on RKO sound stages in Hollywood. Despite the controlled environment, Welles and his crew recreated diverse locations through meticulous set design and art direction.

Key Production Techniques

- Use of long takes to maintain continuity and build tension
- Employment of unconventional editing plans to support narrative complexity
- Innovative sound design, including overlapping dialogue and ambient noise
- Integration of theatrical lighting methods to enhance mood

Post-Production and Editing

Post-production played a critical role in shaping the final version of Citizen Kane. Editing was utilized not only to assemble the story but also to reinforce the film's unique temporal and spatial narrative structure.

Editing Techniques

The editing process embraced a non-linear approach, using flashbacks and cross-cutting to reveal Kane's life from multiple viewpoints. Editor Robert Wise collaborated closely with Welles to ensure coherence amid the complex storyline.

Sound and Score

Sound design in Citizen Kane was innovative, featuring layered dialogue and

strategic use of silence to heighten dramatic effect. Composer Bernard Herrmann's musical score complemented the visual storytelling with motifs that underscored Kane's emotional journey.

Final Cut and Studio Influence

Despite some interference from RKO executives, Welles retained significant control over the final cut, preserving the film's artistic integrity. The post-production process ultimately resulted in a film that challenged and expanded the possibilities of cinematic narrative.

Impact and Legacy of Citizen Kane

The making of Citizen Kane culminated in a film that has been widely regarded as one of the greatest achievements in cinema. Its innovative techniques and storytelling have left an indelible mark on the film industry and continue to be studied and admired.

Critical Reception

Upon release, Citizen Kane received critical acclaim for its originality and technical prowess, though it faced controversy due to its perceived parallels to real-life figures. Over time, the film's reputation has only grown, securing its status as a classic.

Influence on Filmmaking

The film's influence extends to various aspects of filmmaking, including narrative form, cinematography, and production design. It inspired generations of directors and remains a benchmark for cinematic innovation.

Preservation and Recognition

Citizen Kane has undergone extensive preservation efforts to maintain its quality for future audiences. It frequently appears on lists of the greatest films ever made and is studied in film schools worldwide for its contributions to the art and craft of cinema.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who directed the film 'Citizen Kane' and what was notable about his role in its making?

Orson Welles directed 'Citizen Kane' and was notable for also co-writing, producing, and starring in the film, marking his feature film debut at the age of 25.

What innovative techniques were used during the making of 'Citizen Kane' that influenced future filmmaking?

The making of 'Citizen Kane' featured groundbreaking techniques such as deep focus cinematography, innovative lighting, non-linear storytelling, low-angle shots, and creative use of sound, all of which had a lasting impact on cinema.

How did the screenplay development process contribute to the uniqueness of 'Citizen Kane'?

The screenplay of 'Citizen Kane' was co-written by Orson Welles and Herman J. Mankiewicz, blending Welles' vision with Mankiewicz's sharp dialogue and storytelling, resulting in a complex narrative structure that was revolutionary for its time.

What challenges did Orson Welles face during the production of 'Citizen Kane'?

Orson Welles faced significant challenges including studio interference, limited budget, and pressure from media moguls who felt the film was a critique of their power, all of which made the production process difficult yet pushed Welles to be more creative.

How did the casting choices impact the making and reception of 'Citizen Kane'?

The casting of Orson Welles as Charles Foster Kane and the use of a diverse supporting cast, many of whom were stage actors, helped deliver powerful performances that contributed to the film's critical acclaim and enduring legacy.

What role did cinematographer Gregg Toland play in the making of 'Citizen Kane'?

Gregg Toland, the cinematographer for 'Citizen Kane,' played a crucial role by pioneering deep focus photography and innovative lighting techniques that enhanced the film's visual storytelling and mood.

Additional Resources

1. *Making Citizen Kane: The Magic Behind Orson Welles*

This book delves into the groundbreaking techniques and innovative storytelling methods used by Orson Welles in creating *Citizen Kane*. It explores the collaboration between Welles and cinematographer Gregg Toland, highlighting their pioneering use of deep focus and non-linear narrative. The book also offers insights into the film's production challenges and its lasting impact on cinema.

2. *RKO Radio Pictures and the Birth of Citizen Kane*

Focusing on the studio behind the film, this book examines RKO Radio Pictures' role in producing *Citizen Kane*. It provides an inside look at the studio politics, budget constraints, and marketing strategies that shaped the film's creation. Readers gain an understanding of how RKO's resources and decisions influenced the final masterpiece.

3. *Orson Welles: The Rebel Genius of Citizen Kane*

A comprehensive biography of Orson Welles with a special focus on the period when he made *Citizen Kane*. This book traces Welles' early career, his theatrical roots, and the creative vision that led to the film's revolutionary style. It also covers the controversies and critical reception that followed the film's release.

4. *The Art and Craft of Citizen Kane*

This detailed analysis breaks down the artistic elements of *Citizen Kane*, including set design, lighting, and cinematography. The book highlights the innovations in visual storytelling and how they contributed to the film's narrative depth. It features interviews with film historians and production crew members.

5. *Citizen Kane: Screenplay and Production Notes*

Containing the original screenplay alongside production notes and memos, this book offers a rare glimpse into the film's development process. Readers can see how the script evolved and how various production decisions were made. It's an invaluable resource for understanding the filmmaking process behind *Citizen Kane*.

6. *The Legacy of Citizen Kane: Influence and Innovation*

Exploring the cultural and cinematic legacy of *Citizen Kane*, this book discusses how the film influenced generations of filmmakers. It examines the pioneering techniques introduced and their adoption in later films. The book also addresses the controversy over the film's portrayal of William Randolph Hearst.

7. *Behind the Lens: Gregg Toland and the Cinematography of Citizen Kane*

Dedicated to the film's legendary cinematographer, this book explores Gregg Toland's revolutionary use of deep focus, lighting, and camera angles. It provides technical explanations alongside visual examples, illuminating how Toland's work elevated the film's storytelling. Interviews with cinematographers influenced by Toland are also included.

8. *Citizen Kane and the Power of Narrative Structure*

This scholarly work analyzes the film's innovative narrative techniques, such as the use of flashbacks and multiple perspectives. It discusses how the fragmented storytelling contributed to the film's mystery and emotional impact. The book includes comparisons to other films and literary works employing similar structures.

9. *From Radio to Screen: Orson Welles' Journey to Citizen Kane*

Tracing Orson Welles' transition from radio to filmmaking, this book covers his early career and how it informed his approach to *Citizen Kane*. It highlights Welles' mastery of sound and dialogue, which played a critical role in the film's immersive experience. The book also details the challenges Welles faced adapting his vision to the screen.

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