

Document Citation

Title	Citizen Kane
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Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	2001 Oct 08
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	61
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Citizen Kane, Welles, Orson, 1941



DANDY KANE: Orson Welles and Ruth Warrick appear in "Citizen Kane," just released on DVD by Warner Home Video.

DVD

CITIZEN KANE

A Warner Home Video release of the 1941 RKO Radio Pictures film directed by Orson Welles. Screenplay, Herman J. Mankiewicz, Welles.

With: Orson Welles, Joseph Cotten, Dorothy Comingore, Ray Collins, George Coulouris, Agnes Moorehead, Everett Sloane, Ruth Warrick, Paul Stewart, William Alland.

Release: Sept. 25, 2001.

By TODD McCARTHY

The official "greatest film of all time," at least according to the first American Film Institute poll, five decades of rankings by *Sight & Sound* magazine and more than a few critics and scholars, looks pretty damn great in this 60th anniversary DVD. Digitally remastered from the best materials located after a three-year search, a nitrate theatrical release print and a nitrate dupe (the original negative was destroyed in a fire), Orson Welles' incomparable film debut is more vivid and impeccable visually in this presentation than in any other format this critic has ever seen, including 35mm theatrical prints.

It's a commonplace claim that "Citizen Kane" rewards endless repeated viewings, that one notices new details every time. Well, what it took this DVD to reveal — so brilliant and crisp are the images — are the reflections of raindrops discreetly visible next to the magnifying glass on the desk while Everett Sloane's Bernstein delivers his famous speech about the beautiful girl he briefly glimpsed upon the ferry so many years before. The deep focus of Gregg Toland's extraordinary cinematography has never looked so deep, and never has the position he shares with Welles (at the latter's insistence) on the final credits card seemed so deserved.

Nearly everyone involved with "Kane" who survived into the 1970s and beyond was interviewed about their work on this landmark picture, which was vastly influential on the look and technique of pictures made thereafter and arguably inspired more directorial careers than any other, at least up to the Spielberg/Scorsese era. Warners could have used existing tapes of everyone from Welles on down to create a massive DVD with as many

analyses as there are personal views of Charles Foster Kane within the pic itself, just as an informational booklet might have been included with this two-disc set.

But there are fine extras as it is. Separate commentaries by director Peter Bogdanovich, who knew Welles well and conducted an invaluable book-length career interview with him, and critic Roger Ebert, who has taught "Kane" for years, each are edifying.

Bogdanovich, speaking in measured, hushed tones that make it sound as though he's doing play-by-play at a golf tournament, is very good on production anecdotes, conveying the moments Welles himself liked and didn't care for so much, explaining why the director's staging and transitions were so innovative and arguing that it was the tension created by the "youthful panache with which the story is told" and the sadness and pessimism of the story itself that made the picture so exciting.

There is considerable overlap in Ebert's observations, but the vet critic has so much to say that his energetic observations cover virtually all the dialogue in the film. Perhaps his most original insight is that "Kane," for all its sense of seamless visual unity and dramatic performances, is "really a special effects picture," with perhaps as high a percentage of shots that incorporate visual effects as any "Star Wars" installment.

These are duly noted and explained, as are many of Welles' visual strategies, such as always placing the inquiring reporter or "witness" to Kane's life in the bottom right corner of the frame and creating highly charged triangular compositions by the way in which he blocked the actors. Ebert's countless viewings pay off in his many insights that will be particularly instructive to younger audiences with little or no knowledge of the whys and wherefores of the film's stature.

Nicely packaged set includes the witty original theatrical trailer introducing the Mercury Players that Welles narrated but in which he didn't appear, brief footage of the N.Y. world premiere, storyboards, production photos and call sheets. Second disc is devoted to "The Battle Over Citizen Kane," the energetic 1995 documentary that conveys a good deal of information but also propagates some highly questionable historical and critical views.