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America on Parade

Citizen Kane
RKO Radio - Mercury
Directed by Orson Welles
1941; 119 minutes

Cast

Charles Foster Kane	Orson Welles
Jedediah Leland	Joseph Cotten
Susan Alexander Kane	Dorothy Comingore
Mr. Bernstein	Everett Sloane
Emily Norton Kane	Ruth Warrick
James W. Gettys	Ray Collins
Walter Parks Thatcher	George Coulouris
Kane's Mother	Agnes Moorehead
Raymond, the Butler	Paul Stewart
Thompson, the Reporter	William Alland
Signor Matisti	Fortunio Bonanova
Kane's Father	Harry Shannon

Credits

Producer	Orson Welles
Director	Orson Welles
Screenplay*	Herman J. Mankiewicz
	Orson Welles
Photography	Gregg Toland
Editing	Robert Wise
	Mark Robson
Music	Bernard Herrmann
Art Direction	Van Nest Polglase
	Perry Ferguson
Decors	Darrell Silvera
Special Effects	Vernon L. Walker

*Academy Award

Notes

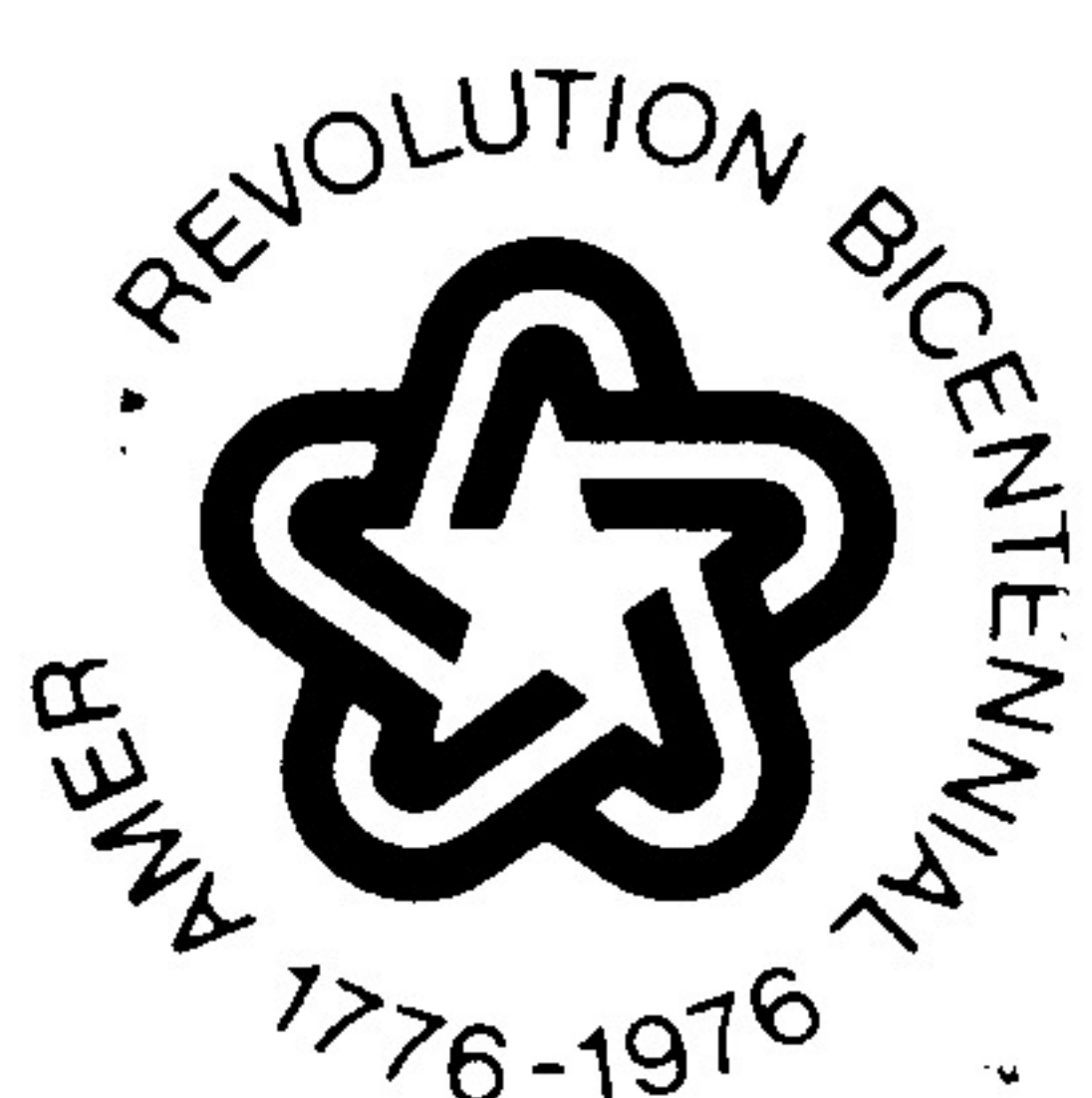
How's that again, Wadsworth Atheneum? You need five paragraphs on the film that has inspired books, doctoral theses, and the careers of more young directors than any other movie? O.K. - for openers, how's this? Citizen Kane is the greatest motion picture ever made. It has become part of American folklore, and the stories of its inception, production, and subsequent controversy have become like the tales of the patriarchs of old. To continue the Biblical analogy, Citizen Kane is, if not filmdom's Genesis, then certainly its Exodus, for it led the technique of film making out of the Egypt of narrow confines and studio control, and into the promised land of innovation and cinematic genius.

Orchestrating this work of brilliance was the genius himself, Orson Welles. Recent efforts to qualify his great accomplishment by noting the skillful collaboration of others, particularly that erratic genius Herman Mankiewicz as the "true author" of Citizen Kane (declared with the solemnity of discovering another writer of Shakespeare's plays) do not reduce Welles' claim to immortality. It is his film, he was responsible for it, and the picture is so associated with him that the names of Kane and Welles have become almost interchangeable.

Citizen Kane is the watershed in the history of the cinema, coming about halfway between D. W. Griffith and the present. Arriving at the end of the cycle of reverent biographical films of the late '30's and early '40's, it was the first picture to tread heavily on the life of a public figure. But Kane is more than a cheap shot at Patty Hearst's grandfather. It is a savage exposition of American society and a devastating critique of the American dream. Its message is perfectly clear: everything that American society considers worth striving for -- success, riches, power -- is shown to be empty, sterile and meaningless.

Not so clear is the package in which this message is presented. The portrait of Charles Foster Kane remains, like his wife Susan's gigantic puzzles, insoluble. We are offering fascinating glimpses into Kane's life, but the center is always murky. The more we find out, the less we understand. Like the photographer in Antonioni's Blowup, the closer one looks the less one sees. And "Rosebud" is not the answer to the enigma. It is only, as the reporter Thompson unknowingly but correctly points out, "a minor fragment." (This is not to ridicule the final composition shot of Rosebud, which is perhaps the most powerful in all of cinema. The burning of the crates of art turned to junk shows dramatically how utter a failure Kane was in life.)

Finally, Citizen Kane is a veritable encyclopedia of film. Consider the startling use of the following techniques: flashback - like a circus, many acts seem to be taking place at once; montage - the brilliant March of Time newsreel that provides the structure of Kane's



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life; deep focus - the use of ceilings to heighten reality; sound track - dialogue begun at one time concluded months later, especially in essaying Kane's political career; sets - the Opera House stage as seen by the performer Susan; camera movements - the classic sequence of the camera passing through the skylight of the El Rancho caberet; cuts - the memorable passage of time and dissolving of a marriage at the breakfast table. These are but brief examples of Welles' lessons to Hollywood of what can be done in a film. How the industry hated and envied him for his accomplishment. The later testimonials to his contributions came too late; he has become the living symbol of the artist destroyed by the Philistines. And therein, perhaps, lies the final amazing tale of Citizen Kane - the parallels of Welles to his creation: the ruins they left behind, their grandiose schemes that were never fulfilled, the fall they both took from glorious heights. But we still have, after all, this masterpiece, this monument of Welles' career. Though we may view it countless times, we still continue to mine its riches. .

Notes by Christopher J. Warren