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Buzz: The Life And Art Of Busby Berkeley (Screen Classics)



Synopsis

Characterized by grandiose song-and-dance numbers featuring ornate geometric patterns and mimicked in many modern films, Busby Berkeley's unique artistry is as recognizable and striking as ever. From his years on Broadway to the director's chair, Berkeley is notorious for his inventiveness and signature style. Through sensational films like *42nd Street* (1933), *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933), *Footlight Parade* (1933), and *Dames* (1934), Berkeley sought to distract audiences from the troubles of the Great Depression. Although his bold technique is familiar to millions of moviegoers, Berkeley's life remains a mystery. *Buzz: The Life and Art of Busby Berkeley* is a telling portrait of the filmmaker who revolutionized the musical and changed the world of choreography. Berkeley pioneered many conventions still in use today, including the famous "parade of faces" technique, which lends an identity to each anonymous performer in a close-up. Carefully arranging dancers in complex and beautiful formations, Berkeley captured perspectives never seen before. Jeffrey Spivak's meticulous research magnifies the career and personal life of this beloved filmmaker. Employing personal letters, interviews, studio memoranda, and Berkeley's private memoirs, Spivak unveils the colorful life of one of cinema's greatest artists.

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Customer Reviews

This is a newly published book on the life and art of Busby Berkeley. Berkeley was a pioneer in the early days of American cinema and although as a director he lacked the all round character of a

man like Orson Welles he easily made up for this with his ability to entertain people. The book starts out by examining Berkeley's family ancestry and takes you through his early days as a struggling stage director in New York followed by his first film roles, his car accident and subsequent trial and finishes with his demise in 1976. Some of the information contained in this book was previously examined in a TV documentary shown in 1998 called "Busby Berkeley going through the roof", but where this book expands is by gaining access to his unpublished autobiography which fills in lots of spaces and adds a lot more detail, invaluable information you would never have known had the book not been published. This isn't a glossy film book loaded with images it's a flat out biography and if you're a fan of his work then you should find it interesting. In the early days of cinema when most of his contemporaries were busy ripping off early German and Russian filmmaking techniques Berkeley pioneered whole new styles and never got the credit he deserved.

Prior to the publication of Mr. Spivak's book, Busby Berkeley's genius was primarily saluted in books with glorious visuals ("The Busby Berkeley Book" by Tony Thomas and Jim Terry) or provocative analysis ("Showstoppers: Busby Berkeley and the Tradition of Spectacle" by Martin Rubin.) Author Spivak dives into the "why" and "how" of Berkeley's visions with a detailed examination of their creation and impact. Along the way, he tries his very best to find the man in the middle. The details he has researched and shared are exemplary and, without moral judgement, presents them for the reader to process. Some of the theories which have been examined by previous writers, film historians and "talking heads" in the excellent 1997 TCM Documentary "Busby Berkeley - Going Through the Roof" and the many "extras" on the two Warners Home Video "Busby Berkeley" DVD collections get a new twist, such as: When did a Kaleidoscope influence his vision? Who came first - Leni Riefenstahl and her Nazi Germany visions or Busby Berkeley and his patriotic American military drills? Were his sexually provocative formations meant to "push the bounds" of censorship? Unlike Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly, Buzz was not interested or knowledgeable in dance. His angles and editing were the prototype and inspiration of how movement would be filmed in music videos and today's dance films. The film itself "dances." Mr. Spivak lets us simply admire - and be dumbfounded by - Busby Berkeley's one-of-a-kind vision which still astounds us today.

Dedicated to the life and art of Busby Berkeley (aka Buzz) this book is a rare hybrid which almost approaches the scholarly in respect to the visionary film making/choreography of Buzz while never being boring. It also delves into Berkeley's private life which was plagued with personal demons and featured many marriages, love affairs, public breakdowns, and headline making scandal. The darling

of the 1930's era Hollywood musical, Buzz revolutionized the genre during his tenure at Warner Brothers Studio with advanced camera angles and precision choreography that even today defies simplified explanations. He continued his career into the 1940's and beyond at MGM in (at times) an increasingly less significant role as his problems made him less employable. Author Jeffrey Spivak demonstrates his understanding of Berkeley's methodology and takes his reader on a tour of some of the most memorably visual scenes in films of the era. While clearly enamored with Buzz' talent and ingenuity, Spivak also demonstrates his ability to view his subject in critical terms regarding his failures and shortcomings and makes no attempts to whitewash this story. This bio/film study results in some very interesting reading that is not short on personal information and thorough analysis and presents a detailed picture of a tortured genius who was often out of control and invariably destructive to the point of being his own worst enemy. Aside from being immediately engaging and a pleasure to read, this book was really a long overdue look at the life and career of Berkeley. On a personal level, it expanded my rudimentary knowledge of Berkeley and explained the basis for various stories I had read about him. It also enhanced my admiration and appreciation of his work which might be overlooked in a time of massive special effects.

This was a well done book on film legend, director Busby Berkeley. We see Berkeley's early life and his parent's work on stage and his strong attachment to his mother. His work on Broadway is discussed and then we get into his memorable films - Dames, Gold Diggers of 1935, Hollywood Hotel, For Me and My Gal, Babes on Broadway, and so many others. He was fanatical in his work and I believe the author details this from the quotes by the various people who worked with Berkeley. However, I thought there was too much description of the scenes from the film rather than the how they were done. Most reading this book would be familiar with Berkeley's kaleidoscope shots and I would have liked to have learned more of how they were designed, shot, and other technical tidbits behind them. Berkeley was a self-destructive man - most likely an alcoholic who was responsible for a car accident in which killed several people. The book covers the trials as well as some of the Warner Brothers' stars who testified. Berkeley's later life is also covered as well as his final, happy marriage and move to the Palm Desert area. A good book for anyone interested in films.

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