



Know the
basics in
90 minutes

Quicklook at **Movies**





About Quicklook at Movies

THIS is an astonishingly comprehensive short guide to the fascinating world of film.

The film, or movie, industry has shaped our lives for over 100 years. This new art form sprang from the inventiveness and creativity of remarkable people, working on several continents and using a bewildering range of equipment and techniques. Few businesses can claim so many colourful characters: artistic, unscrupulous, businesslike, creative, brilliant or dependent on a lucky break- sometimes several of these at once.

This book takes us on a wonderful journey from the exotic, pioneering days, through to the emergence of the star system, the growth of the big studios, the coming of sound and the golden era of the great cinema palaces. Films continued to be produced through terrible world wars. The business has faced repeated challenges as times have changed. Fortunes have been made and lost.

The pace is brisk as we cover all of the main developments- the films, the stars, the directors and the business, through its many ups and downs. Movies come to terms with the television age, develop and experiment and constantly reinvent themselves. They seem sure to be entertaining us and firing our imagination well into the future.

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The 1900s: Novelty and Innovation

FOR the first 30 years movies were silent, but that did not mean they were without sound. Live musicians, sound effects and even narrators often accompanied the projection of the silent images: failing that, the audience themselves often provided a riotous accompaniment to the images on screen.

Movies developed from simple, short frivolities (often created by single individuals) to narratives taking up several film reels (each 10-12 minutes long). Since these were made by growing teams of people, the businesses of production, distribution and exhibition developed.

Exhibition

The exhibition of films to large audiences rapidly developed as a viable business in the early years of the 20th century. The venues used changed too, with screenings taking place in permanent locations. The first theatre to make a success of showing nothing but films was Pittsburgh's "The Nickleodeon", which opened for business in 1905. A half-hour programme made up of a variety of short subjects was refreshed on a weekly basis, with the arrival of new films bringing back a regular and growing audience.

In the early days, film producers sold their films directly to exhibitors. As the business side of cinema developed, film producers set up their own exhibition venues so they could control the process from creation to public screening. Independent filmmakers without access to their own exhibition venues rented their films to the new exhibitor chains, in return for a share of the box office takings.

The earliest films were crude efforts, often consisting of a single scene or a simple event. Cameras were fixed in position, with people entering and

The 1920's: the coming of sound



The Studio System

THE rise of the American studio system: consolidated much that made up the “classical Hollywood style” of filmmaking. Behind the studios that endured until the 1960s were a group of men, largely Jewish immigrants, known collectively as “the Hollywood moguls”.

Under their guidance, the main studios developed a factory-like production system. Each movie was under the control of a producer and a director, but had access to service departments (costume, scenery, make-up, lighting, the back-lot) that made up the studio. This process streamlined movie-making into an industrial, very efficient, production line system. The studios produced enough new “product” to fill their own cinemas every week, thus keeping audiences coming back.

Between 1922 and 1928, attendance at American movie theatres doubled from 40 million to 80 million, while investment in the film business expanded from \$78 million in 1921 to a colossal \$850 million by 1930. Film companies owned their own chains of cinemas, which made them hugely profitable and the heads of the big studios very rich.

A handful of dominant studios emerged from a complex series of mergers and acquisitions from the late-1910s through to the late-1920s. At the end of the process, there were five main studios that between them produced almost every film released in America.

Paramount Pictures founder Adolph Zuckor was born in Germany, his family having come to America in 1889 when he was just 16. Like many immigrants, he worked in the textile industry, before starting his own fur business in the mid-1890s. Well off, thanks to his business success, Zuckor became an investor in nickelodeon theatres before establishing Famous

(1960). Produced to an unchanging formula, these Irwin Allen pictures saw a group of characters trapped (on a capsized liner, in a burning skyscraper, on a crashing airplane) in a situation with little chance of escape. That made them an easy target for comedic spoofs, with later films featuring ever ludicrous threats (bees in *The Swarm*, 1978, and a giant space rock in *Meteor*, 1979), leading to 1980's *Airplane* and its sequels becoming box office hits (and also giving straight actor Leslie Nielsen a second, long-running comedy career).

The 'New Hollywood'

The 1970s saw a new group of filmmakers come to prominence. They both reacted against and drew from the classical Hollywood style of the 1930s to the 1950s and drew inspiration from world cinema. Initially working within the studios that had opened their doors to young talent, these directors included Francis Ford Coppola, Brian De Palma, Martin Scorsese, George Lucas and Paul Schrader. Often film-school educated (Lucas), or having gained a film-making "education" working for exploitation filmmakers like Roger Corman (Coppola, Scorsese), these writer-directors came to cinema with Orson Welles dictum ("the biggest train set a boy ever had") in their minds. Together they changed the face of cinema and the technology of filmmaking, sowing the seeds of the digital revolution that would reshape cinema in the 21st century.

The output of the new Hollywood directors encompassed serious dramas, exploitation pictures and huge box office blockbusters alike (sometimes from the same director). George Romero (*Night of the Living Dead*, 1968) and Brian De Palma (*Carrie*, 1976) turned out horror-thrillers, while John Carpenter (*Dark Star*, 1974; *Assault on Precinct 13*, 1976) and John Milius (*Dillinger*, 1973) made action-thrillers. Bob Rafelson (*Five Easy Pieces*, 1970; *King of Marvin Gardens*, 1972) and Peter Bogdanovich (*The Last Picture Show*, 1971; *What's Up Doc*, 1972) focused on personal character dramas.

The big names of the period were Scorsese, Coppola and especially Steven Spielberg and George Lucas. With *The Godfather* movies (1972, 1974), conspiracy thriller *The Conversation* (1974) and the Vietnam war epic *Apocalypse Now* (1979), Coppola recreated classical Hollywood style in a 1970s context. Scorsese drew upon his own life for coming-of-age drama *Mean*

Blockbusters dominate



The 1980s: High Concept

THE blockbuster came to dominate American filmmaking in the 1980s, but did not prevent the diversification of the independent sector that gained widespread mainstream acceptance.

The *Star Wars* sequels and the films of Steven Spielberg (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*, 1981; *E.T.* 1982 and two Indiana Jones sequels, among others) consolidated the domination of the “high concept” blockbuster. These fast-paced, crowd-pleasing, easy-to-follow movies proved immediate, huge hits with cinema audiences and many have stood the test of time.

Alongside these films the other top-grossing films of the 1980s were all high concept blockbusters such as *Batman* (1989), *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984) and *Back to the Future* (1985). Many of these had associated merchandise: a new revenue stream that brought additional income into the Hollywood studios (and to George Lucas, who was heavily involved in blockbusters). By the end of the decade, movie-related spin-off merchandise had generated around \$90 billion additional income.

The studios re-organised through the 1980s. New entrants came into what could be a lucrative, if risky, business. Companies like Cannon and Orion joined the mid-size studios in producing movies, but the long-lasting big seven studios still dominated the business, producing one third of all the films released in the US, but claiming 90 per cent of all the revenue through their continuing involvement in distribution.

As the talent agencies, like MCA (who had owned Universal since 1962), CAA and ICM, grew in power they began “packaging” movies: putting together writers and their scripts with directors and stars, all signed to the same agency, before presenting the “package” to a studio. The packaging business was supposedly started by Michael Ovitz, an agent at CAA (Crea-