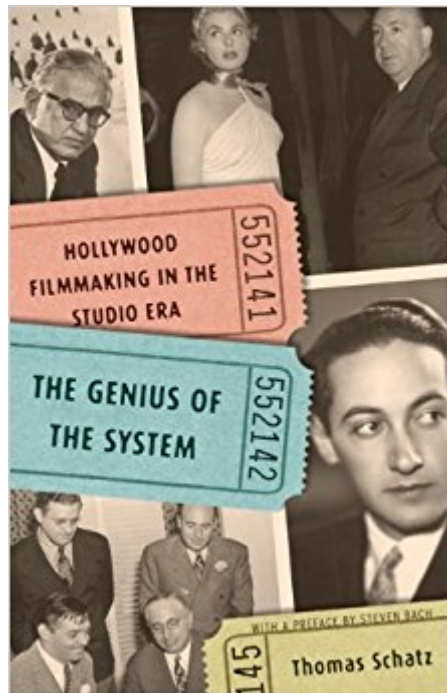# The Genius Of The System: Hollywood Filmmaking In The Studio Era

Synopsis

In The Genius of the System, Thomas Schatz recalls Hollywoodâ ™s Golden Age from the 1920s until the dawn of television in the late 1940s, when quality films were produced swiftly and cost efficiently thanks to the intricate design of the system. Schatz takes us through the rise and fall of individual careers and the makingâ ”and unmakingâ ”of movies such as Frankenstein, Casablanca, and Hitchcockâ ™s Notorious. Through detailed analysis of major Hollywood moviemakers including Universal, Warner Bros., and MGM, he reminds us of a time when studios had distinct personalities and the relationship between contracts and creativity was not mutually exclusive.

Book Information

Paperback: 528 pages

Publisher: Univ Of Minnesota Press; 2.1.2010 edition (March 3, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0816670102

ISBN-13: 978-0816670109

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1.5 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (18 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #452,249 in Books (See Top 100 in Books)   #183 inÂ Books > Humor & Entertainment > Movies > Industry   #479 inÂ Books > Arts & Photography > Other Media > Film & Video   #545 inÂ Books > Textbooks > Communication & Journalism > Media Studies

Customer Reviews

Prof. Schatz does not suffer from the scholar's disease of academic-speak and writes a book that clearly demonstrates his expertise on the studio structure. Most books I have read extended the view of the outsider looking in at the star system and not the economics of the studios. "Genius of the System" chronicles the history of the studio's business, that is to say the economics and the people behind the economics.If you want to read about the business structure of Hollywood during its beginnings, this is the book for you. I cannot recommend it enough.

An easy to read writer, Thomas Schatz details how the studio system worked from the silent era to its final collapse in the 1960s.He illuminates both the art and the business of films, with keen analysis of how producers, directors and screenwriters created such fine art (and rich profits) -- especially the producers, who are more the authors of Hollywood films than any other group.He

convincingly portrays MGM's Irving Thalberg as a genius of art and commerce and MGM's Louis B. Mayer as a clod (except when dealing with difficult stars).Schatz offers telling portraits of many others who did their best work under the constraints of the Hollywood system. He details the major studios' styles and how they evolved over the years. It's clear he has read file cabinets of documents, from endless -- but revealing -- memos to how much the stars made(!).He also puts the film industry in social and cultural context; he even says the anti-communist witch hunts of the 1940s and 1950s were a disguised form of anti-semitism.In the end, Schatz offers a convincing alternative to the auteur theory.

Schatz's book is well-rounded and nicely structured. It was a good decision on his part to take a round-robin focus on each studio instead of trying to mix them together, as some authors have. All of the studios had different ideas about what they wanted to achieve in their work, so this approach makes sense. Twentieth-Century Fox and Paramount were left out completely, but Schatz was clearly trying to choose one studio of each type of size and characteristic so as to keep control of the scope of the book. I did find a glaring error--the finale to "Babes in Arms" was not the minstral number, but the song, "God's Country." In a book of this size, or of any size for that matter, errors will creep in, so it isn't the kiss of death. However, if the reader is familiar with MGM musicals, it may be a small turn-off. Also, I wasn't satisfied with the epilogue. Instead of citing examples of the comeback of the studio system (LucasFilm, for instance), Schatz simply outlines the creative decline of Alfred Hitchcock. Huh. Slight shortcomings aside, this book is very entertaining. I wish my film studies textbooks had been this interesting.

Thomas Schatz argues in this brilliantly detailed book that even more remarkable then the motion pictures Hollywood produced from the early 20's through about the end of the 40's, was the detailed process of how Hollywood was able to churn out these quality films on a routine basis.Schatz does a remarkable job of diagraming the rise of the studio system in Hollywood. The book is remarkably easy to follow (compared to any of Andrew Sarris's works) and includes numerous photographs. He focuses most on the trials and tribulations of Universal Studios, Warner Bros. and MGM and their distinct, integrated studio styles (RKO is mentioned to a lesser extent as well).Producers Irving Thalberg, David O. Selznick, Daryl Zanuck and director Alfred Hitchcock are featured prominently and rightfully so. Also, includes many of the behind the scene battles between studios and directors/producers.There are some minor criticisms though. He almost completely ignores Paramount and Colombia Pictures. Paramount was as much a factory set-up as MGM and

deserves more attention. And the decline of the studio system is sparse compared to the rise of. But aside from that, this book is an enjoyable read and recommend it to anyone who is fascinated with early Hollywood.

Schatz's examination of Hollywood's inner workings during its Golden Age (from just before the rise of talkies to about 1960) is enlightening, informative and entertaining. It's authoritative in its presentation of how studios worked--backing up Schatz's viewpoint that the studio system was as much responsible for the overall quality of that era's films as any other factor (including the stars and directors)--yet it doesn't forget to entertain with intriguing and (dare I say it?) gosspy tidbits about many landmark films and legendary filmmakers. A solid read and, as Steven Bach says in the foreword, an important book.

Books that deal with any aspect of Hollywood's golden age comprise most of my non-fiction, and now that I've finished "The Genius of the System" I'm wondering why it took me so long to get around to reading it. This is one of the best books about old Hollywood I've ever read. Schatz has clearly not just invested a ton of time in researching his topic, but has found away to weave a number of strands together so that the reader is able to grasp a wide-ranging and ever-dynamic topic without getting lost. This is a must-read for any fan of this era.

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