



By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

So how does one follow a broadcast that becomes famous for recasting H.G. Wells' "War of the Worlds" as a live radio news report?

If you're Orson Welles, you produce what has come to be regarded as one of the greatest movies ever made.

"Citizen Kane" — Welles' thinly-veiled critical portrayal of some of the nation's most powerful media moguls — premiered in Broadway's Palace Theater on May 1, 1941 — 85 years ago.

**THE MAKING OF CITIZEN KANE**

Orson Welles' radio drama of "The War of the Worlds" on Oct. 30, 1938, got an awful lot of attention. RKO pictures quickly signed the Mercury Theater troupe co-founder to a two-picture movie contract.

"I wished to make a motion picture which was not a narrative of action so much as an examination of character," Welles later explained. "There have been many motion pictures and novels rigorously obeying the formula of the 'success story.' I wished to do something quite different. I wished to make a picture which might be called a 'failure story.'"

Welles called his movie "The American" and hired screenwriter Joseph Mankiewicz to help him create a story about the evils of the ultra-rich moguls who owned the nation's newspapers. Welles says he wished to include elements of the lives of William Randolph Hearst, Joseph Pulitzer and International Harvester chairman Harold McCormick.

But Mankiewicz actually knew Hearst and his girlfriend, Marion Davies and had been thrown out of a party at Hearst's mountaintop San Simeon "castle" mansion once for excessive drinking. Welles would later express

regret at what he considered "unfair" treatment in the way his film portrayed the mogul's girlfriend.

Welles' contract with RKO specified no interference or direction from studio executives. But they became nervous as Welles ran over his budget and as word got back to them about how the fictional Hearst character — Charles Foster Kane, played by Welles himself, at age 25 — was portrayed.

After a rough cut of the film was previewed, word spread quickly about "Citizen Kane." Infuriated, Hearst offered to buy the negative of

the film so he could destroy it. When that offer was declined, he ordered his newspapers to run ads or stories about the movie or any other RKO production.

Welles later told the story of the night "Citizen Kane" opened in San Francisco. Welles found himself at the Fairmont Hotel, alone in an elevator with Hearst himself. He introduced himself and extended an offer for Hearst to attend the premiere.

Unamused by Welles or his offer, Hearst declined. As Hearst exited, Welles said to him: "Charles Foster Kane would have accepted!"

**'ROSEBUD IS JUST A PIECE IN A JIGSAW PUZZLE ... A MISSING PIECE'**

Throughout the film, the camera tends to look up at Welles' character of Charles Foster Kane and down at other characters. This was a technique Welles and his cinematographer borrowed from director John Ford, in his 1939 film "Stagecoach," starring John Wayne. Welles watched that movie more than 40 times, trying to learn the art of moviemaking.



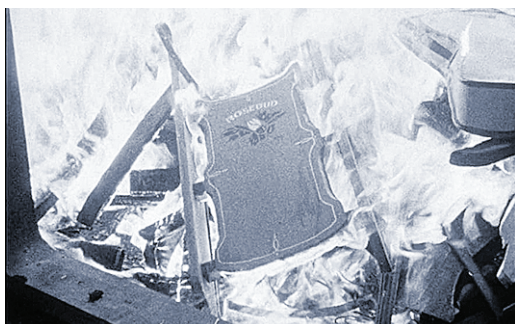
Welles often arrived at the studio at 2:30 a.m. to have makeup applied that would transform him into the older Kane. Latex appliances were applied to his face, shoulders, chest and stomach. Welles bought full-page ads in Variety and the Hollywood Reporter to pay tribute to his makeup man, Maurice Seiderman.

Wells became ill during filming from drinking 30 to 40 cups of coffee every day. Even his skin color reportedly changed. About halfway through production, he chipped his ankle while filming a confrontation on a stairwell and had to direct the film from a wheelchair. He also cut his hand in a scene in which his character wrecks his girlfriend's bedroom.



Cinematographer Gregg Toland approached Welles early on and volunteered to shoot the film. Welles admitted he didn't know anything about movies. Toland told him, "That's why I want to do it. I think if you're left alone as much as possible, we're going to have a movie that looks different. I'm tired of working with people who know too much about it."

Welles hired Bernard Herrmann to compose the score of his film. For the scene in which "Rosebud" sled was burned, Welles had Herrmann's musicians play live on the set. Herrmann would be nominated for an Oscar for "Citizen Kane" but would lose — to himself, for "The Devil and Daniel Webster." He'd go on to score "The Twilight Zone," "North by Northwest" and "Psycho."



"Citizen Kane" was nominated for nine Academy Awards but won only one: for Best Original Screenplay. The film was booed by the audience every time it was mentioned at the podium. The Hollywood newspaper, Variety, reported that film employees and members of the Academy disliked Welles and had voted as a bloc against the film winning.

The girlfriend character of Susan Alexander was based on Hearst's domestic partner, Marion Davies. Even the scene in which Susan works on a huge jigsaw puzzle paralleled Davies' fondness for puzzles. Welles later said he felt it was "something of a dirty trick," the way the film portrayed Susan's lack of singing talent and her alcoholism.



Welles produced and directed "The Magnificent Ambersons" but RKO pictures revised the movie over Welles' objections. He spent the rest of his life attempting to equal or surpass his achievement with "Citizen Kane." Welles died in 1985 at age 70. It has topped the list of best films ever made by the American Film Institute and the British Film Institute.

Sources: "Citizen Kane: The Fiftieth Anniversary Album" by Harlan Lebo, "Academy Award Winner" by Ronald Bergan, Graham Fuller and David Malcolm, "Orson Welles' Citizen Kane" by Turner Entertainment and Warner Bros. Entertainment, Internet Movie Database, American Film Institute, Mental Floss, Smithsonian magazine, BBC, Yardbarker, History.com

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