



FILM REVIEW: Citizen Kane (Welles, 1941): USA

Description

Viewed by [Larry Gleeson](#) as part of the American Film Institute's (AFI) AFI FEST 2016 presented by Audi. [Citizen Kane](#), directed by Orson Welles, was first on AFI's first 100 Greatest American Movies Movies of All Time in 1998. Ten years later, a 10th Anniversary Edition of AFI's 100 Greatest American Movies found *Citizen Kane* still perched in the top spot.

Loosely based on newspaper tycoon, William Randolph Hearst, *Citizen Kane* was the first feature film by Welles. Hearst forbade any mention of the film in his newspapers upon the film's release.

After signing his contract, Welles had been green-lighted for his film with a directorial final cut by RKO Pictures after his string of successes on Broadway with his Mercury Theater, including the thrilling radio broadcast of "The War Of The Worlds." Welles also brought several of his Mercury Theater actors on board for the project, several of whom would go on to have substantial Hollywood film careers including Joseph Cotton, Agnes Moorehead, Everett Sloane and Ruth Warrick.

Welles shared writing credits for *Citizen Kane* with Herman Mankiewicz and the two won the Academy Award for Best Screenplay in 1942. The film received a total of nine Oscar nominations in 1942 including Best Picture, Best Director (Welles), Best Actor in a Leading Role (Welles), Best Cinematography (Gregg Toland), Best Sound, Recording (John Aalberg), Best Music, Scoring of a Dramatic Picture (Bernard Herrmann), Best Film Editing (Robert Wise), and Best Art Direction-Interior Decoration, Black-and-White (Perry Ferguson, Van Ness Polglase, A. Roland Fields, Darrell Silvera).

The film opens in what appears to be a surreal reflection with a Bengal Tiger and ominous non-diegetic music with snow falling inside a crystal with an utterance of "Rosebud." A strong, deep-toned, narrative voice-over begins informing the viewer with wartime newsreel clips from "News on The March," mentioning among others Khubla Khan. After a series of quick edits, a low-angle shot of a large, stone-built castle the narrator refers to as "Xanadu, a pleasure dome," is held for a moment.

Without missing much of a beat the narration continues with quick frames of paintings, pictures and statues that have been "looted" from the finest European museums. Not stopping, the narration intensifies as the narrator projects powerfully about animals of the land, foul of the air "two of each

â?? in creation of the worldâ??s largest private zoo since Noah and the largest monument a man has built to himself since the pyramids using 100,000 tons of concrete and 200,00 tons of marble in its construction culminating in a crescendo as the narrator introduces by name only the filmâ??s protagonist, Charles Foster Kane, the great yellow journalist and heir of the Colorado Lode. News stories and the biography of the his life and death are flashed on screen as the story begins with a smoke-filled room of newsmen trying to determine the significance of the last word the newspaper tycoon uttered, â??rosebud.â??

Told primarily through flashbacks as the mystery of rosebud is explored, *Citizen Kane* contains a highly structured narrative coupled with revolutionary deep focus cinematography, mostly unseen before in mainstream cinema. Cinematographer Gregg Toland provided the deep focus effect with his specially treated lenses and light-sensitive film stock. The deep focus cinematography allowed the entire scene being shot to have primary focus and thus allowing the subjects to have equal importance visually. In addition, Welles and Toland removed floorboards in another groundbreaking scene to create ultra low-angle shots of the newspaper men following Kaneâ??s unsuccessful pursuit of the American Presidency. The effect visually is stunning as rather ordinary, though influential, men are now seen as overly large, powerful titans squaring off.

In its essence, *Citizen Kane*, is the tragic tale of a man who has high ideals to be the peopleâ??s voice, the voice of the common everyday man. Slowly, however, the benevolence of the man becomes consumed with a passionate pursuit for power.

Tellingly, *Citizen Kane*â??s message is still pertinent today. After Kane is defeated at the ballot box by the â??sleaze factorâ?? (a decidedly distasteful tactic that can skewer even the most accurate polling data) he uses his newspapers to declare â??Fraud at the Pollsâ?• in large-type newsprint headlines. Historians often cite Wellesâ?? depiction of Susan Alexander Kane (a character purportedly representative of Hurstâ??s long-time, close intimate, Marion Davies) as the basis for Hurst strong negative reaction to *Citizen Kane*. More recently, several news outlets cite President Obamaâ??s infamous roasting of President-elect Donald Trump at a 2011 White House Correspondentsâ?? Dinner as the catalyst for Trumpâ??s headlong dive into the 2016 race for the White House. Interestingly, even before Election Day, Trump declared fraud on the election. Interesting indeed. *Citizen Kane* is a must-see film for any serious cinephile and is highly recommended for all filmgoers.

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