



Behind the Screen: How Gays and Lesbians Shaped Hollywood, 1910-1969

By William J. Mann

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William Mann's *Behind the Screen* is a thoughtful and eye-opening look at the totality of the gay experience in studio-era Hollywood. Much has been written about how gays have been portrayed in the movies but no book—until now—has looked at their influence behind the screen. Whether out of or in the closet, gays and lesbians have from the very beginning played a significant role in shaping Hollywood. Gay actors were among the earliest matinee idols and gay directors have long been among the most popular and commercially successful filmmakers. In fact, gay set and costume designers created the very look of Hollywood.

With this landmark book, Mann fills a void in the Hollywood history archives. Written in the tradition of Neal Gabler's *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* and based on hundreds of hours of interviews with survivors of this golden age, *Behind the Screen* is destined to become a classic of film literature.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

If your last piece of golden-era Hollywood gossip is that Greta Garbo and Cecil Beaton kissed at a rooftop party, you need to steep yourself in William J. Mann's social history of gay Hollywood, a treasure trove of fresh anecdotes and observations of a period and place in which homosexuals enjoyed tremendous freedom and influence--within certain obvious limits. In choosing subjects for his study, Mann cast his net widely, hauling in a great number of uncelebrated but essential workers in the "queer" areas of the film industry--mainly costume design and props, but also writing, directing and acting. This is not principally a look at famous figures, in other words, but at a subculture as a whole, in which Dorothy Arzner, George Cukor, and Charles Laughton are just part of larger circles of gay life and work. Certain to become essential to gay film studies, *Behind the Scenes* provides a rich, accessible history of pre-Stonewall Hollywood. --Regina Marler

From Publishers Weekly

"Come next week if possible. Kathleen giving supper Sunday the 27th. Will ask her to include you and Gary. Want both to occupy one guest room? Answer soon as possible." An insignificant query? Not when you know that it was sent in 1929 to openly gay actor Anderson Lawler, and that "Gary" was none other than beautiful Hollywood newcomer Gary Cooper, Lawler's constant companion. While he doesn't skimp on the details of who was sleeping with whom (Mary Martin and Janet Gaynor; Claudette Colbert and Marlene Dietrich; Cary Grant and costume designer Orry-Kelly), historian and cultural critic Mann (Wisecracker) also delivers an astute and groundbreaking study of the impact of gay and lesbian actors, set designers, writers, costume designers, editors and producers on studio-era Hollywood. Without directly correlating sexual identity and artistic production, Mann applies sharp, original research and interviews to re-create the intricate lives and work of "gay Hollywood," offering a new lens for examining the complicated, sometimes contradictory relationship between sexual activity, identity and work. Treating his subjects with great integrity, he argues that it is inaccurate to label stars like Colbert, Cooper and Grant "gay," because they had a far more fluid sexuality. Yet he makes a cohesive and persuasive argument for how their varied sexualities transformed Hollywood and the movies. Mann also covers a wide range of ancillary topics e.g., the history and aesthetics of set design; the rise of Los Angeles's "pansy clubs"; and the special role of Jews (who were more likely than gentiles to be open about their sexuality). This intelligent and accessible study marks a major step for gay, gender and film studies. Agent, Malaga Baldi. (On-sale Oct. 15)

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From Library Journal

Author of Wisecracker (LJ 1/98), the critically acclaimed biography of early gay Hollywood star William Haines, Mann gives us the book we've all been awaiting: a readable, slightly gossipy, yet scholarly history of gays and lesbians in Hollywood. Decade by decade, Mann examines how the movie capital of the world was transformed by a host of writers, directors, designers, actors, and producers often at odds with the official codes and mores of the times. Based partly on the historical record but more on interviews with and the correspondence of those who lived through these years, Mann's book is important reading for anyone interested in the history of American film. Essential for all film and gay studies collections to supplement David Ehrenstein's Open Secret: Gay Hollywood, 1928-2000 (LJ 10/15/98), for coverage of the current state of affairs, and Neal Gabler's An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood (LJ 11/1/88), for the history of another group of outsiders. Anthony J. Adam, Prairie View A&M Univ., TX

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Percy Cole:

Hey guys, do you wishes to finds a new book you just read? May be the book with the title Behind the Screen: How Gays and Lesbians Shaped Hollywood, 1910-1969 suitable to you? The actual book was written by renowned writer in this era. The actual book untitled Behind the Screen: How Gays and Lesbians Shaped Hollywood, 1910-1969 is a single of several books that will everyone read now. This specific book was inspired a lot of people in the world. When you read this publication you will enter the new age that you ever know ahead of. The author explained their strategy in the simple way, and so all of people can easily to comprehend the core of this e-book. This book will give you a wide range of information about this world now. In order to see the represented of the world in this particular book.

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People live in this new day of lifestyle always aim to and must have the extra time or they will get large amount of stress from both daily life and work. So , if we ask do people have extra time, we will say absolutely of course. People is human not a robot. Then we question again, what kind of activity are there when the spare time coming to a person of course your answer may unlimited right. Then ever try this one, reading publications. It can be your alternative within spending your spare time, the particular book you have read will be Behind the Screen: How Gays and Lesbians Shaped Hollywood, 1910-1969.

Mary Burnette:

Is it a person who having spare time then spend it whole day simply by watching television programs or just resting on the bed? Do you need something totally new? This Behind the Screen: How Gays and Lesbians Shaped Hollywood, 1910-1969 can be the reply, oh how comes? It's a book you know. You are and so out of date, spending your spare time by reading in this brand-new era is common not a geek activity. So what these guides have than the others?

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