

Hollywood: A State of Mind

When comedian Ken Murray first came to Los Angeles, it was the late 1920s and he was a member of a vaudeville troupe. Luckily, he brought with him a movie camera because he was a star-struck fan, and wished to share his experiences with the folks back in New York.

In the beginning, he would film any actor or actress he came across. As his own career developed and his circle of acquaintances widened over the next 40 years, he eventually captured anyone who was anyone in what he came to refer to as his hometown.

Because his circle came to include the likes of Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Laurel and Hardy, Clark Gable, Walt Disney, Rita Hayworth, Charlie Chaplin, Cary Grant and William Randolph Hearst, all happily mugging for his hand-held camera, his little home movies eventually became a series of TV specials.

When you see his films of life in the movie capital, it all looks so normal and light-hearted, it's easy to forget about the gangsters and communists who fought for control of the Hollywood unions in the 30s. You could forget that the studio bosses caved in to German demands that Hitler not be portrayed in an honest light or that in spite of their pious statements about democracy, they first allowed left-wingers to deny employment to conservatives before allowing right-wingers to do the same to left-wingers. These days, they are back to denying employment to conservatives, while at the same time preventing aging writers and directors, whatever their political leaning, from working.

For me, it came as a shock to read in Ben Shapiro's "Primetime Propaganda" that producers I had worked with and in a few cases been friends with, now insist that they would never work with conservatives, not merely because they regarded them as

racists, fascists and that old standby, homophobes, but because conservatives are untalented.

Although there is no group of people more opposed to the Second Amendment than the folks in Hollywood, if you removed weaponry from their movies and TV shows, the town would have to shut down. If the industry had its make-believe handguns, rifles and bazookas, confiscated, the studios would be turned into trailer parks and the biggest stars would have to go back to busing tables, parking cars and hooking.

It's hard to decide whether the most prevalent of Hollywood's multitude of sins is fear or hypocrisy. At the same time that they establish their political bona fides by openly expressing their contempt for conservatives, they shy away from depicting Islamic jihadists as the bad guys in their movies. The villain is most likely to be the head of the CIA, a rogue two star general, a corrupt police chief or a businessman. It would have been like making movies during the 40s, but instead of waging war on Nazis and the Japanese, John Wayne, Randolph Scott, John Garfield, Alan Ladd and Humphrey Bogart, had spent all their screen time in deadly hand-to-hand combat with pickpockets and muggers.

Speaking of screen time, something I have never understood is why, back when Hollywood was still producing musicals, original product, including such classics as "Gigi," "An American in Paris," "Meet Me in St. Louis," "Cover Girl," "7 Brides for 7 Brothers," "Blue Skies," "Holiday Inn" and "Singin' in the Rain," all ran a zippy 100-113 minutes. However, when it came to adapting stage musicals, movies such as "Carousel," "South Pacific," "Guys and Dolls," "Oliver!" "West Side Story," "The Music Man," "Fiddler on the Roof," "Annie," "Finian's Rainbow," "Paint Your Wagon," "Camelot," "Oklahoma," "My Fair Lady," "Man of La Mancha," "Evita," "Les Miz" and "The Sound of Music," all lumbered in between 128 and 181 minutes, while averaging a snoozy two hours and 33 minutes.

The mystery is that on screen, they were all longer and slower than they were when they ran on Broadway or the West End. In fact, you couldn't in all honesty use the verb "ran" when referring to the screen versions. In the main, what they did was lurch, limp and crawl, to an untimely end.

By contrast, the scintillating musicals that Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers churned out for RKO, such as "Top Hat," "Swing Time" and "The Gay Divorcee," averaged a spritely hour-forty. Their movies made you want to get up and dance.

Today, between the movies based on comic books, the slacker comedies and the ones dedicated to the notion that America is the single greatest menace to peace, freedom and Mother Nature, they only make you want to get up and leave.

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