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Orson Welles

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In Hollywood and American culture, Orson Welles was one of many talented filmmakers whose contributions to the cinematography were under-stated. Our generation hardly knows who he was, or how he had influenced the movies on the theatre nowadays. Those who know him simply refer him as ‘a guy in a wine commercial’. People barely realize that before he became a director, an independent filmmaker, and an actor, he terrorized American by broadcasting the H.G. Well’s novel “War of the World” on the radio featuring with the creative uses of narration as a Halloween episode of a radio series, and from that, he gained an instant fame within a few days.¹ Many of his great productions that were unfinished and kept on the shelf during his lifetime are now priceless items sought by many people who truly appreciate his films’ uniqueness.² The most interesting thing about Orson Welles is one of his productions called “Citizen Kane”.

Although Citizen Kane was the very first film directed and starred by Orson Welles himself about the life of Charles Foster Kane, the giant media mogul. It was said that the main character, Kane, resembles the American newspaper tycoon of the time, William Randolph Hearst. It was nominated for many notorious awards and renowned for its innovative cinematography. It portrays Welles’s gifted creativity in filming techniques. Back then, simple rigid camera angle for the interior of a building

¹ Wikipedia contributors. "Orson Welles." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 18 Jan. 2013. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orson_Welles>

² Paul Fraser Collectibles contributors. "Orson Welles Falstaff Masterpiece 'Hidden Manuscripts' Auction at Bonhams." *Paul Fraser Collectibles*. 15 Jan. 2013. <<http://www.paulfrasercollectibles.com/News/AUTOGRAPHS/2011-News-Archive/Orson-Welles-Falstaff-masterpiece-'hidden-manuscripts'-auction-at-Bonhams/8734.page>>

was common in the cinematography due to the fact that the setting was built for filming from a particular angle, meaning that there was no ceiling for the setting. Welles broke the rules by creating false ceiling for the setting and filmed the scene from low angle to give the sense of reality to the film. The technique is called ‘low-angle shots’ and can be observed in several scenes in the film.³ Moreover, he also introduced the proper use of the deep focus technique to provide high definition quality film. He implemented the technique even when it was difficult to do so by using optical printer which makes every detail in the scene become focused.⁴ Audience can observe what was going on in the foreground while examining the context in the background and thus, gives the audience the better understanding of the story. The sense of reality in the film was strongly expressed in a visual form like no other movies in that period and absolutely not expected to be found in the hands of an amateur like Orson Welles.

Not only in a visual form that the sense of reality was expressed in, but so as in the sound system of the film. One of the unique qualities that can be found in Welles’s production is the overlapping dialogue between the characters. Perhaps his experience in radio broadcasting was accounted for the idea. Having two or more characters speaking to one another with an interruption from each of them was unusual at that time as well as very natural and less formal. Some critics find it a bother by doing so. Nevertheless, overlapping dialogue could be found in many films later on after *Citizen Kane* was played in theatre, for example *Faces*(1968) and *Mash*(1970).⁵ Thus, it is possible to say that Orson Welles’s production of *Citizen Kane* has marked the turning point of cinematography in which films possess realistic sense. The use of

³Carriger, Robert L. *The Making of Citizen Kane*. 1996. p.64-92.

⁴ Nichols, Bill. *Movies and Methods: An Anthology, Volume 2*. 1985. p.60.

⁵ Kozloff, Sarah. *Overhearing Film Dialogue*. 1995. p.127-130.

music scores and sound effects was also regarded as one of Welles's specialty. He made use of music scores during the transition of the scene to make it transits more gracefully and more seamlessly.⁶ It was also used to enhance the emotion of the audience toward the film. The importance of using music scores and sound effects are said to be enlightened and emphasized by Welles who had an experience in managing the broadcasting system prior to making the film.⁷

Even though Orson Welles had never seriously done any cinematography prior to *Citizen Kane*, the film is renowned for its pioneering filming techniques and the overlapping dialogues which can be found throughout the movie.⁸ The sense of reality is in every line and yet, the narrative techniques used by Welles triggers many inquisitive minds whether they are watching a film or reading a novel. This is because not only that Orson Welles implemented non-linear narrating technique to tell the story of Kane's life; he also used many characters in the story as the narrators for different periods of Kane's life, from his childhood to the end of his life. Multiple narrators were again unheard in cinematography at that time. Each character gives the clue about Kane's life in flashbacks and the stories from each of them are all partly chained with one another and even more interesting, each character has its own story and therefore relays Kane's life from different aspects and points of view.⁹ From one character, Kane was a naïve child to him but to the others, Kane could be a vicious man. Audience can also observe the feeling of the character towards Kane from their facial expressions. All of these mentioned are the characteristics of the contemporary

⁶ Yahoo! Contributor Network. "History of Music in Film: Analysis of How & Why Film Scores Enhance the Emotional Import of Films: *Citizen Kane*" *Yahoo! Voices*. 21 Jan. 2013. <<http://voices.yahoo.com/history-music-film-analysis-why-film-36641.html?cat=7>>

⁷ Wikipedia contributors. "Citizen Kane." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 18 Jan. 2013. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizen_Kane>

⁸ Naremore, James. *Orson Welles's Citizen Kane: A Casebook*. 2004. p.169.

⁹ Rosemary Huisman, Julian Murphet, Anne Dunn. *Narrative and Media*. 2005. P.84.

films in which obvious lines are not always necessary and the body language brings out even more meaningful implication.

In a nutshell, *Citizen Kane* is one of the masterpieces in the cinematography because of the creative uses of the camera angle with the proper implementation of music and sound effects. As one can see that *Citizen Kane* and most of the films nowadays are similar in many aspects, they both tend to be realistic and make use of the figurative languages more than bland conversations. Flashback is now a common technique many films use to add complexion to the plot. Soundtracks and music scorings also have become a major element in the film production. The most interesting thing about Orson Welles is that not only that *Citizen Kane* was the pioneer of its kind in the past; the film itself is truly an inspiration for the other films including contemporary films in the present.