



Keystone, Simon Louvish, Faber & Faber, 2005, 0571226477, 9780571226474, . An Irish-Canadian of impeccably uncomic ancestry, Mack Sennett founded in Hollywood in 1912 the world's first studio devoted to movie comedy alone. For the next 20 years he presided over cinema's most famous and popular clowns - from Roscoe 'Fatty' Arbuckle, Mabel Normand and Charlie Chaplin, to Ben Turpin, Chester Conklin, Mack Swain, Ford Sterling, Louise Fazenda, Harry Langdon and very many more..

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King of Comedy , Mack Sennett, Apr 1, 2000, Biography & Autobiography, 304 pages. As he states in his final chapter, Mack Sennett strives to, & tell about the comedies and how we made them, and about the funny fellows and the pretty girls who acted in them

Pennsy steam and semaphores , Fred Westing, 1974, Technology & Engineering, 187 pages. .

Roscoe Fatty Arbuckle A Biography of the Silent Film Comedian, 1887-1933, Stuart Oderman, Jan 1, 2005, Performing Arts, 245 pages. Fatty Arbuckle's career came to a sudden halt amidst allegations that he raped and caused the death of a young starlet named Virginia Rappe. Though he was acquitted, the

Father Goose the story of Mack Sennett, Gene Fowler, 1934, Performing Arts, 407 pages. .

Areopagitica , John Milton, Jan 1, 1999, , 83 pages. This Elibron Classics title is a reprint of the original edition published by Alex. Murray & Son in London, 1868..

The Parade's Gone by ... , Kevin Brownlow, 1968, Performing Arts, 577 pages. A narrative and photographic history of the early days of the movies, combining fact, anecdote, and reminiscence in a critical survey of films, actors, directors, producers

Acting in the Cinema , James Naremore, Jan 1, 1990, Performing Arts, 307 pages. In this richly detailed study, James Naremore focuses on the work of film acting, showing what players contribute to movies. Ranging from the earliest short subjects of Charles

Theory of Film The Redemption of Physical Reality, Siegfried Kracauer, 1997, Performing Arts, 364 pages. Siegfried Kracauer's classic study, originally published in 1960, explores the distinctive qualities of the cinematic medium. In this new edition, Miriam Bratu Hansen

Mack Sennett's Keystone the man, the myth, and the comedies, Kalton C. Lahue, 1971, Performing Arts, 315 pages. .

Mack Sennett's Fun Factory A History and Filmography of His Studio and His Keystone and Mack Sennett Comedies, with Biographies of Players and Personnel, Brent E. Walker, 2010, , 663 pages. This is a comprehensive career study and filmography of the pioneering film producer and Academy Award winner Mack Sennett, cofounder of Keystone Studios, home of the Keystone

The Keystone Krowd Mack, Mabel, the Kops and the Girls (1908-1915), Stuart Oderman, Dec 30, 2007, , 204 pages. From the man who brought you Talking to the Piano Player (and its upcoming sequel) comes an amazing history of the greatest comedy studio in history - Keystone. At Mack Sennett

The keystone education is the keystone of progress: mix the materials badly, omit the most important, and the arch will collapse; omit character-training from education and progress will stop, Sir Frederick Gordon Guggisberg, 1924, , 59 pages. .

From his early aspirations to sing opera, to his time under the tutelage of D. W. Griffith, to the fortune and notoriety that his uncanny eye for talent deservedly brought him, Mack Sennett stood behind his belief in individuality and originality. Now, more than eighty years after Sennett rose to heights that epitomized the American dream, the acclaimed biographer of Laurel and Hardy, the Marx Brothers, and W. C. Fields offers a compelling account of comedy's transformation at the hands of a true master.

Regarded as the father of American slapstick, Sennett--iron-worker, boilermaker, actor, director, producer, writer, and creator of the infamous Keystone Kops--held audiences in thrall to a world where chaos was order and banana peels, car crashes, and leaps from tall buildings were a matter of course. As the cameras rolled and vaudeville gags morphed into celluloid wonders, the rising stars of Charlie Chaplin, Mabel Normand, and Gloria Swanson were born. Behind it all was the "King of Comedy," governing from his office bathtub.

In this irresistible journey into early Hollywood at its peak, Simon Louvish crafts a fascinating portrait of the enigmatic entrepreneur. Through film scripts, telegrams, even liquor bills, Sennett's world is skillfully re-created, offering a rare and humorous glance into the infancy and innocence of moving pictures.

Film historian Louvish, having previously focused on comedy legends of the early sound era (Stan and Ollie, etc.), turns his attention to Sennett, the silent film mogul responsible for the iconic Keystone Kops. Though his childhood wish was to sing opera, Sennett (1880-1960) eventually wound up in vaudeville, then shifted to film, landing a job at D.W. Griffith's studio, acting in and later directing short comedies. He struck out on his own when he launched Keystone in 1912. "Start with Sennett, get rich somewhere else" became a Hollywood standard, and the names that passed through the studio include Charlie Chaplin, Fatty Arbuckle, Ben Turpin and Gloria Swanson. There was also Mabel Normand, supposedly the great love of Sennett's life, though Louvish concludes their romance was invented, possibly to cover up Sennett's homosexuality. There's barely enough about Sennett's life to fill a book, though, so readers learn just as much about the other Keystone members, revisiting classic Hollywood scandals like Arbuckle's fall from grace and the unsolved murder of William Desmond Taylor. Although Louvish regards all his sources, from celebrity memoirs to fawning magazine articles, with healthy skepticism, he appears to have been seduced by their florid style. "Murky shadows gathered in the sunny glades where the movie people had frolicked in their make-believe innocence in never-never land" is a typical example, undercutting Louvish's potent historical research. Film synopses from Keystone archives increase the page count and, like the biography itself, may be of interest only to avid silent film fans. 47 b&w photos.

"Silent movie impresario, Mack Sennett, brought to the screen many celebrated clowns, from Chaplin and Arbuckle to Keaton, Ben Turpin, Harry Langdon, W.C. Fields, and the troubled, madcap Mabel Normand. In *Keystone: The Life and Clowns of Mack Sennett*, Simon Louvish blends wit, scholarship and insight in a delectable narrative that ends with a sigh, but remains utterly true to the pratfall-loving spirit of the 'master of fun.'" --Emily W. Leider, author of *Becoming Mae West* and *Dark Lover: The Life and Death of Rudolph Valentino*

"No one investigates the roots of American film comedy with a livelier spirit than Simon Louvish. *Keystone*, a close examination of that sad and funny genius of the silent movies, Mack Sennett, is

his latest, and, to my mind, his most delightful." --Stefan Kanfer, author of *Ball of Fire: The Tumultuous Life and Comic Art of Lucille Ball*

"At last Mack Sennett--a seminal figure in American and world film history--has been rescued from the historical limbo that has been his since about 1933. It's always the pioneers who lay the groundwork for those who follow, and fans of every Laugh Factory from Looney Tunes to Saturday Night Live owe Sennett an enormous debt, for which Simon Louvish has generously provided the down payment." --Joe Adamson, author of *Bugs Bunny: Fifty Years and Only One Grey Hare*

I'm a big fan of not only silent films in general but silent comedy in particular, so you would think that I'd be the natural audience for Simon Louvish's new book on Mack Sennett, D.W. Griffith's protégé and the man behind the Keystone Studio, which produced (or at least discovered) such comic geniuses as Charlie Chaplin and Roscoe Arbuckle. Well, you'd be right: I am the natural audience for "*Keystone: The Life and Clowns of Mack Sennett*." So why was I so disappointed?

It has some new information on the life of the Canadian-born producer and his life and times, but the book is so vilely written that I found it a chore to read. It almost feels like Louvish, who wrote a far better book on the Marx Brothers and other books on famous comedians that I have not read, fell under the stylistic influence of Gene Fowler, a previous Sennett biographer and the maudlin biographer of John Barrymore, whose prose style is replete with every sappy literary cliché known to man (memorably described by Edmund Wilson: "...the style couldn't be more journalistic in a flowery, old-fashioned way... [it] has no structure and no harmonics. It is something that is exhaled like breath or exuded like perspiration."). If you doubt my word and decide to read the book anyway, try and count the number of times Louvish uses the archaic word "quoth" in a sentence.

So I'm torn about this book. There simply aren't enough good books about this period, and there is some new information to be gleaned from Louvish's pages (although I found myself disagreeing with some, but not all, of his conclusions). But its wretched prose style, if you have any feeling at all for the English language, will set your teeth on edge. You might not care if you're a real fan of early silent comedy, and if that's the case go ahead and read it. But don't say I didn't warn you.

Of course, Sennett did not include his private papers in the collection so little is known of his private life--which he apparently kept private. Louvish posts hypotheses based on fact and states that these are Not Proven; he does NOT claim that Sennett was gay. Of course he is putting a modern gloss on the behaviour of people from nearly a century ago. People really did behave, and talk, differently then.

There are some erroneous statements in the book that could have been better edited; Chaplin toured the USA in a production called *MUMMING BIRDS*, not *EARLY BIRDS*; Buster Keaton was drafted in WWI, not enlisted; and Roscoe Arbuckle's *THAT MINSTREL MAN* was made for Keystone, not 'just as he was about to join Keystone.'

As comedy is central to the development of cinema, a book on Mack Sennett is essential. Sennett was a movie pioneer who produced some of the earliest slapstick comedies. The films spawned such important comedians as Charlie Chaplin, Roscoe Arbuckle, Mabel Normand, and Harry Langdon. They were also an early, albeit comparatively brief, training ground for the likes of Harold Lloyd and Charley Chase. Director Frank Capra enjoyed some of his early success writing and co-writing Sennett productions. Louvish examines Sennett the man and tells the story of Mack's work from his early days with D.W. Griffith to his own productions beginning in the early teens and lasting into the 1930s and the talking picture revolution. Even for comedy film buffs who have read a great deal about this genre, Louvish offers a lot of interesting information that does not appear in other sources. There have been few truly good books on Mack Sennett and his work. This one is quite good. Recommended.

The Keystone Studios were a sprawling, messy site in Edendale, California, with stages open to the sky and shack-like buildings whose roofs tended to fall in. A population of unruly comedians drawn from circus, vaudeville, burlesque, bars and building sites competed in ludicrous and perilous stunts

- crashing cars, leaping off high places, or simply belabouring one another with mallets and other heavy instruments. There was, they said, only once a fatality - and at least it didn't show up on the screen. Relentlessly they churned out two or more new one-reel comedy films every week.

They did not see themselves as contributing to 20th-century American culture. Yet the Keystone comedies, rough, violent and as vulgar as they dared to be, offer a surreal, skewed microcosm of early century America - or rather the two Americas, before and after the first world war. Before (Keystone was established in 1912), you have a feeling of people fighting ruthlessly for their place in a turbulent young society, among immigrants and vagrants (Chaplin's Tramp was born here). The films of the 20s show a world of go-getting materialism, the pursuit of cars, cash, position and girls.

Keystone brought to both worlds alike its irreverent anarchy. The universe is touched with the endless absurdity of people, fat and thin, giants and dwarfs, variously ornamented with monstrous whiskers and absurd attire. Dignity and authority are destined for the fall. Cops are figures of endless fun. Nothing is sacred, even mothers, fathers, beautiful women and babies. In the most material of societies, Keystone celebrates destruction - of houses, cars, furniture, clothing and anything else in reach. This was the catharsis of comedy.

The genius of the place was Irish-Canadian Mack Sennett, born Michael Sinnott. As an actor he had the luck to arrive at the Biograph Film Studios in New York at the moment when DW Griffith, a pioneer genius of telling stories with moving pictures, was discovering and defining the essentials of modern film technique. To Griffith's lessons, Sennett added what seems to have been his special genius for knowing by instinct who and what was funny. In 21 years, from 1912 to 1933, he made more than 1,000 films, and launched a succession of stars, from Charlie Chaplin, Fatty Arbuckle and Harry Langdon to the less funny Bing Crosby, until the depression, changing economies and changing tastes (some blamed the arrival of Disney cartoons), condemned this most energetic of men to a torment of idleness for the last three decades of his life.

Film history is a perilous business. The early days of Hollywood are obfuscated with lies and legend. Press agents constantly re-invented the life stories of the stars. Sennett himself was party to two fantasised biographies. Simon Louvish diligently sieves the myths and the scandals, with the advantage of being the first biographer to have full access to the archive of personal and business papers donated by Sennett to the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences in 1951, but so huge (ranging from scripts and stills to company balance sheets and Mother Sinnott's liquor bills) that it took 40 years to sort them and make them available.

The documents reveal that Hollywood business 90 years ago was not a bit less ruthless than corporate villainy today. They give the lie to the impression Sennett liked to present of happy-go-lucky improvisation at Keystone. On the contrary, the films appear to have been made from detailed scripts (samples are intermittently interpolated into the book and make amazingly dull reading). Writers would submit a dozen or more versions of a film title or a wise-cracking intertitle, for Sennett to make the final choice. Far from the old tradition of Keystone as a first-take studio, there is every sign that Sennett was tireless in reshooting if he thought he could do better.

Sennett sought to present a picture of himself as a loud vulgarian, chewing cigars and gobbing the juice, commanding the studio from the top of the watch-tower which was a famous feature of Keystone, or holding story conferences while stewing in a tub or enjoying a massage. Louvish hints at the much more complex and sophisticated man in whom a notable chronicler of modern America, Theodore Dreiser, admired "the force and the intelligence of him, his willingness and determination to give a satisfactory account of himself".

Was Sennett gay? Of course, a contemporary biography has to have its exposé, and this is Louvish's line. Is the legend of Mack and Mabel - Sennett's life-time adoration of the brilliant, beautiful but ultimately tragic comedienne Mabel Normand - just a cover-up? The legend goes that the two could never get round to marriage; that Mabel threw him over after finding him in flagrante with the actress Mae Busch, who thereupon beat up Mabel; but that Sennett revered her memory to his dying day, 30 years after Mabel's death.

"Who can look into a human heart?" asks Louvish, but then tries hard to do so. The gay line is not very persuasive, little more than that Mack remained a bachelor, and that there is no scandal of his interfering improperly with the famous Keystone Bathing Beauties. His name is linked with a couple of actresses besides Mabel, but his leisure activities were essentially those of a "man's man". Maybe the Mack and Mabel legend is not all that much more convincing, but at least it made a musical.

Much as I love anecdotes about the wild old days of Hollywood (back in the mists of time before the internet even), when I pick up a biography, then I sort of hope for more than just a string of loosely related tall tales. In this case, the book is ostensibly a bio of Mack Sennett, the King of Slapstick (who brought the world the Keystone Cops), but it does not tell us much about him, or how he built up his empire, but rather gives us a series of unrelated potted bios of the stars he built up (I...more
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A perfect book to read if you want to learn about the history and beginnings of american film. Early director Mack Sennett's life is brought to life as is the world of people around him. Special mention goes to the interesting addition of stories of the early actors and directors around him. It's interesting to see how they are just as screwed up as current day Hollywood.

I've read this several times (most recently as an antidote to Sennett's amazingly mendacious autobiography), and have always found it both informative and charmingly written. The inclusion of many original plot outlines and title lists from Sennett's papers are a delightful plus. There are a few minor errors and omissions, as is to be expected.

An Irish-Canadian of impeccably uncomic ancestry, Mack Sennett founded in Hollywood in 1912 the world's first studio devoted to movie comedy alone. For the next 20 years he presided over cinema's most famous and popular clowns - from Roscoe 'Fatty' Arbuckle, Mabel Normand and Charlie Chaplin, to Ben Turpin, Chester Conklin, Mack Swain, Ford Sterling, Louise Fazenda, Harry Langdon and very many more.

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