

KANSAS CITY GOES TO THE MOVIES  
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Kansas City has enjoyed a rich and rewarding relationship with the movies ever since motion pictures were introduced around the turn of the twentieth century. From the 1897 showing of three short films at the Coates Opera House<sup>1</sup> to the megaplex theaters that dot the metropolis today, Kansas Citians have embraced the movies. The city and its history have been portrayed in films like Kansas Citian native Robert Altman's *Kansas City* (1996) and Ang Lee's Civil War historical drama, *Ride With The Devil* (1999). Today, filmmakers come to the nation's heartland to screen their movies to audiences before they open across the nation, while the Kansas City Film Commission strives to bring new business to the region by encouraging filmmakers to take advantage of local locations and talent by shooting their films here in the first place.<sup>2</sup> Movies are glamour, hard work, compelling stories, and big business. And throughout the years, Kansas City has had its fair share of all of these.

MOTION PICTURES – POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT AND CITY PROMOTION

At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, live performances and vaudeville were big draws in theatres across the nation. That began to change with the advent of the motion picture. When the Coates Opera House showed "The Black Diamond Express," and two other short films by the Lumieres Cinematography Co. in 1897, the Opera House and its audience were taking part in a movement that would sweep their city and the nation. Although John Izod notes that "moving pictures seem at the turn of the century to have done better business in the amusement arcades than in vaudeville theatres, which suggests they appealed more consistently to a working-class than a middle-class audience," in just a few years, film distributors began to look toward more profitable venues as well as "improving the class of its theaters."<sup>3</sup> Soon, like nickelodeons and amusement parks across the country, some theatres began offering short, one-reel films along with their live entertainment. Films were becoming longer and more numerous, and Kansas City was keeping pace. By 1910 the city could boast nearly 100 motion

picture theatres.<sup>4</sup> This popular new form of entertainment wasn't appreciated by everyone, however.

According to Robert Sklar in *Movie-Made America*, the growing notoriety of nickelodeons and motion pictures drew the attention of "the middle-class men and women who served the institutions of social control."<sup>5</sup> In Kansas City, the Board of Public Welfare, said to be a first in the nation, got down to business in 1910. The Board embodied the essence of the Progressive Era as it condemned every "social evil" and injustice it could find in Kansas City – from intolerable housing to poor working conditions – and also took on the responsibility of upholding the morals of the community as well. As Kaspar and Montgomery note, "That was a paradox of the progressive ideal: Along with its liberal impulse for social justice came a conservative desire to restore order and values of old."<sup>6</sup> The Board proposed a censorship law, which was adopted by the City in 1914 – and in the first year of censorship, Kansas City banned 13 movies and cut 170 others.

Despite the outcry of the Board of Public Welfare, other city leaders saw possibilities for the new motion pictures beyond destroying morals or providing mere entertainment. At the dawn of the twentieth century the Commercial Club, a group of local business and civic leaders, was garnering favorable publicity for Kansas City in trade journals and national magazines. "The East Coast press, always skeptical upon arriving, left town with stories praising its reform politics, its yearly Priests of Pallas parade, the strong schools and modern notions about parks and boulevards."<sup>7</sup> To make it easier to get its message out to potential businesses or visitors, the Club decided to create a film solely for the purpose of promoting Kansas City as a great place for businesses to locate and conventions to come. Their promotional film gave Kansas City the honor of being the first municipality to use motion pictures for promoting its city. The Club hired local and out-of-town talent and used local car dealers to provide the autos necessary to get the filming crews around the city. The civic leaders proudly filmed the city's new system of parks and boulevards – the cornerstone of their City Beautiful campaign – capped off by a May Day Fete at Swope Park where nearly 1000 children danced and performed for the cameras.<sup>8</sup>

Not only were Kansas Citians promoting their city or flocking to movie theatres around town despite the censors' best efforts, they were also making their way to

Hollywood to seek their fortune on the silver screen. Stars like Jean Harlow, Joan Crawford, William Powell, Ginger Rogers and lesser-known actors like Buddy Rogers, Wallace and Noah Beery, were all from Kansas City.<sup>9</sup> Later, Craig Stevens, Don Johnson, Dee Wallace, Ed Asner, and Dianne Wiest would go to Hollywood and became familiar names to movie audiences across the nation.

### KANSAS CITY'S GRAND MOVIE THEATERS

Robert Sklar, a historian of American culture, wonders, "Who can re-create the experience of going to the pictures in the radiant dawn of popular mass culture?"<sup>10</sup> He notes that by the late 1920s virtually all large cities and most medium-sized towns could boast of at least one new, "sumptuous picture palace." Kansas City could enthusiastically boast many more than that. The Historic Kansas City Foundation's 1978 *'Possum Trot' Gazette* looks back at how many of Kansas City's early motion picture theatres reflected the "flamboyance and opulence of theater design during the 1920s when two of the decade's finest artistic expressions were its cinematic arts and the movie palaces constructed for them."<sup>11</sup> Many of the old motion picture theatres remained open and functioning until the 1930s or 40s, when – like the "legitimate" theatre they had replaced – they themselves were eventually replaced by television, drive-ins, and multi-screen cinemas in the suburbs. Most of the old theaters have been lost through time, but a few have remained as reminders of the city's past movie-going glories.

The opulent movie theaters were part of a remarkable period of growth in Kansas City during the 1920s. The number of building permits grew 65 percent from 1915 to 1923 – and movie theaters were a part of the boom.<sup>12</sup> Although Kansas City was beginning to reach southward, most of the theaters built before 1920 were located in what is still considered the downtown area – sometimes located within the same block and often built to look like palaces.<sup>13</sup> In 1912, the Empress Theatre opened at 12<sup>th</sup> and McGee, and The RKO Orpheum opened in 1914 at 12<sup>th</sup> and Baltimore where today's Muehlebach Hotel stands.<sup>14</sup> Over on Main Street, the Liberty Theatre opened in 1918 just south of 11<sup>th</sup> and Main Street, changing its name to the Roxy in 1947. The Main Street Theatre was originally opened in 1921 at 14<sup>th</sup> and Main as the RKO Missouri. It

reopened in the 1940s as the Main Street. The name changed again to Cinnerama in the 1970s, then to the Empire, and the theatre finally closed in 1985.

Just down the block, the Newman Theatre opened in 1919 with *Roaring Road*, a silent moving picture starring Wallace Reid. Walt Disney's first animation shorts, known as "Newman Laugh-O-Grams," were run alongside the feature films.<sup>15</sup> The Newman was a splendid example of the elaborate interiors found in some theaters of the time. A huge chandelier, 20 feet long, 12 feet wide, and lit by 220 candles hung from the center dome. The dome was decorated with hand-painted murals, "and the theater walls, with their cherubs and Greek figures, were acclaimed as works of art... The theater also had a nursery and a club room for gentlemen – luxuries never before offered in a local motion picture house."<sup>16</sup> The Newman, called the Towne 4 in the late 1960s, was razed to make way for City Center Square in 1972.

By the 1920s, theaters were gradually moving south along with the rest of the city's population. The ISIS was the anchor tenant when the Wirthman Building at 31<sup>st</sup> and Troost was built in 1919. Originally a silent movie house, it featured stadium seating and was used only in the winter. During the summer, an open air theater was used a block away.<sup>17</sup> Walt Disney worked for the ISIS and other theaters in the 1920s, drawing their on-screen ads. Carl W. Stallings, who later played background music for Disney cartoons, played the Wurlitzer organ for background to silent pictures and during intermission. Stallings later became a composer for Warner Bros. cartoons.<sup>18</sup> The ISIS closed in 1969 and was torn down in 1999.

The Tower Theatre opened at 12<sup>th</sup> and McGee at a cost of \$900,000 in 1921 and was named the Pantages for its owner, Alexander Pantages. It was a 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Theatre that seated 2,000. In addition to showing motion pictures, the Tower was also the only major vaudeville theater between Los Angeles and Chicago during the 1930s, becoming the last house to represent vaudeville to Kansas City audiences.<sup>19</sup> The Tower was razed in 1962. The Oak Park Theatre opened at 39<sup>th</sup> and Prospect and operated until 1958. It is currently a church, with its interior still more or less intact.<sup>20</sup> In 1926 the Mayfield, a truly suburban theatre at the time, opened at 71<sup>st</sup> and Prospect. It changed names to the Sun Theater in 1929 and ceased business in 1961. Like the Oak Park, it was also later used as a church.<sup>21</sup> The Plaza Theater featured the movie "Street Angel" when

it opened on October 2, 1928. In keeping with the rest of the Plaza architecture, its interior and exterior were of Spanish décor. The Plaza Theatre closed in 1999.<sup>22</sup>

A handful of the old theaters are still around today. The Gem Theatre opened just east of 18<sup>th</sup> and Vine in 1912 as a movie house exclusively for African-Americans and featured second-run westerns and action adventures. After closing its doors as a theatre in 1960, it operated as a church for a few years, but then lay vacant until it was restored as the “jewel of the 18<sup>th</sup> and Vine redevelopment plan” in the historic KC Jazz District. The interior has been expanded beyond its original walls, but the entrance and façade remain the same.<sup>23</sup> Its distinctive façade had been added in 1923 and was hailed by the *Kansas City Call* at the time as a “work of art and a triumph of engineering.”<sup>24</sup> Lowes Midland Theater was built in 1927 at 13<sup>th</sup> and Main as part of the Midland Complex, along with the adjoining 12-story Midland Office Building. Like the Gem Theatre and the revitalization of the 18<sup>th</sup> and Vine District, the Midland was considered to be a crucial part of an effort in the 1960s to keep Kansas City’s downtown area the entertainment, as well commercial and geographical, heart of the city. Although downtown revitalization stalled, Stan Durwood and AMC Theatres saved the theatre from being torn down to make way for a parking garage, spending over a million dollars to acquire and restore the theater to its original elegance.<sup>25</sup> The theater was designated a National Historic Landmark and listed on the National Register of Historic places in 1977, but closed again, the last of Kansas City’s old movie palaces. The following year, a long-term lease was signed with the Theater League, and the Midland now houses live concerts and plays.<sup>26</sup>

The Uptown Theatre opened at 37<sup>th</sup> and Broadway in 1928 to a sold-out crowd of 2,243 patrons, at the time making it the largest neighborhood theater outside of downtown. The early Art Deco style building was designed by Robert Gornell and the theatre design was completed by Austrian-born architect John Ebersson. Ebersson was the originator of the popular “atmospheric” concept, emphasizing fantasy and illusion and bringing the outdoor inside.<sup>27</sup> The ceiling was painted to resemble the night sky with imbedded tiny lights to give the illusion of stars. A fog machine provided clouds while fake birds and greenery added to the outdoor garden effect. The Uptown operated as a full-time movie house until the early 1970s.<sup>28</sup> Throughout the years since then, the Uptown has offered live entertainment and even dinner theater. It began a

new life in 1976 as a venue for musical concerts and underwent a \$1 million restoration, featuring Count Basie at its new opening in 1979. It fell vacant in the late 1980s, and has now been restored yet again. Today the Midland serves as a venue for concerts, dinner, parties, and celebrations of all sizes.<sup>29</sup>

Several other motion picture theatres owe their restoration to a partnership called the Fine Arts Group, headed by Wade Williams.<sup>30</sup> After years of hard work by the partners, the Rio and Granada Theatres reopened in 2002. The Rio is located in downtown Overland Park and was built over 50 years ago. The partners have restored the theater's former art-deco glory, using many salvaged elements from the ISIS Theatre at 31<sup>st</sup> and Troost. The Granada, which opened in 1927 just a few blocks west of downtown Kansas City, Kansas, has been restored with its "atmospheric" auditorium – mimicking the look of a Moorish garden – back to its original distinctive look. The Englewood Theater, an Independence landmark built in 1940, sports the largest indoor movie screen in Kansas City. The new Fine Arts Theater is housed in the old Aztec Theater on western Johnson Drive in Kansas. The theater, which was built in 1926, also has a Moorish look, which the partners carefully maintained in their renovations. The new Fine Arts Theatre, along with the Englewood and the Rio, is one of only three existing single-screen neighborhood theaters in the metropolitan area. Even though only a few of the original movie theaters with any of their original character intact are still in use in Kansas City, those that have been renovated to their past glory speak volumes about the experience of going to the movies in those early days.

Although opulent theatres were showing feature films by the 1920s, it wasn't until 1927 that one of the biggest developments in movie history came to Kansas City – the technological breakthrough of adding sound to the moving images. "Talkies" opened in Kansas City at the Globe Theatre at 13<sup>th</sup> and Walnut on Christmas Eve of 1927, with Al Jolsen in the *Jazz Singer* ad-libbing, "You ain't seen nothin' yet, folks. Listen to this."<sup>31</sup> However, it wasn't until the next year – when Warner Brothers demonstrated conclusively that they could generate profits with sound and their success began to threaten to steal audiences from other studios – that the majority of studios finally committed themselves to the new systems.<sup>32</sup> When they did, Kansas Citians couldn't get enough, although it took some time for theaters to install the new, expensive equipment.

## CHANGING AUDIENCES

But as time went on, people's moving-viewing habits began to change. In 1932, Richard M. Hollingshead recognized America's growing love affair with the automobile and introduced the concept of the drive-in theater in Camden, New Jersey.<sup>33</sup> The first drive-in west of the Mississippi opened in Kansas City in 1942 with the original name, Drive-In Theater. The seven-acre theatre accommodated more than 700 motor cars and boasted a 3,000 square-foot screen. Drive-ins, or "ozoners" as they were known in the early days, took awhile to catch on. Despite giving away key-and-license holders on opening night, Drive-In Theatre struggled during the war years as limits on fuel consumption made it more sensible to walk or take a bus to the nearest movie house.<sup>34</sup>

In the postwar boom, things changed dramatically and drive-ins flourished in the 1950s and 60s. In 1948, there were 820 drive-in theaters across the country and nearly 4000 theaters ten years later. In 1954, there were 124 drive-ins in Missouri. Although Kansas City drive-ins never became as exotic as some others around the nation, they did develop their own sense of character. The 1-70 and Twin were popular with families with young children because of their playgrounds, and the Fairyland had the unique background of the defunct amusement park roller coaster in the background. The drive-in attracted teens until the last 60s, when they went into a slump. Baby boomers went to college and their parents stayed home to watch television.

But even more significantly, just as Hollingshead had seen the possibilities for drive-in theaters based upon America's love of the automobile, Stan Durwood, president of locally-owned American Multi-Cinemas (AMC Theatres), recognized the potential of catering to America's growing suburban population.<sup>35</sup> Durwood, whose AMC Theatres didn't own any drive-ins, came up with the idea of placing small indoor theaters in or near the suburban shopping centers that were springing up to cater to suburbanite's needs. Durwood wasn't content with just showing one movie in these suburban theaters, however, and in 1962 AMC introduced the first multi-screen theater in the country at Kansas City's Ward Parkway Shopping Center. The company later introduced the megaplex complex to the country in 1995 with the opening of The Grand



24 in Dallas. Even before that, the number of drive-in theaters in Missouri had dropped in half by 1982, due in part to both the growth of multi-screen indoor cinemas and to the rise in property values which made it more profitable for drive-in owners to sell their now-valuable land to suburban developers.

Since the mid-1990s, drawing on a sense of nostalgia perhaps, drive-ins have been making a comeback as audiences rediscover the drive-in's value and family-friendly movie environment – which is accompanied by a feeling of going back in time. The I-70, Twin, 63<sup>rd</sup> Street, and Boulevard Drive-Ins are all alive and well. The Boulevard, which opened on June 30, 1950, has been open every summer since and is one of only three outdoor theatres in the world that features digital stereo sound (which is played through your car's FM radio).<sup>36</sup>

Throughout the years, Kansas City's moving-going habits have changed as the world and the city have changed. According to Wade Williams, who is restoring old movie theaters with the Fine Arts Partnership, "Over the years, something happened. The local theater industry stopped building single-screen theatres and instead concentrated on drive-ins. Then, in the mid-1960s, most theater construction was devoted to multiplexes such as the Glenwood in Overland. Such facilities, over time, helped render single-screen theaters such as the Englewood obsolete."<sup>37</sup> Today, Kansas City is still a great movie town, with huge megaplexes as well as a handful of restored neighborhood theatres and drive-ins.

And as always, Kansas City still keeps up with advances in movie technology. The city boasts the IMAX theatre at the Kansas City Zoo and the Extreme Screen at Science City in Union Station. The IMAX, which stands for maximum image, features a giant 6 1/2-story screen and 12,000 watts of digital surround-sound. The Extreme Screen at Union Station, a giant silver screen five stories tall and over 75 feet wide, features true six-channel digital surround sound, shows 2D and 3D films, and is the only 3D theater in a 200-mile radius.<sup>38</sup>

#### KANSAS CITY ON THE BIG SCREEN

Not only have Kansas City audiences flocked to a variety of motion picture theaters around town, Kansas City itself has been the subject of Hollywood movies

through the years. From *Kansas City Confidential*, a 1952 film noir crime drama to *Painting*, a low-budget independent film shot in 2000 in Kansas City, the city has made its way into the movies. Kansas City hasn't just been depicted in independent films, however. The city has also played a central role in a handful of films that have gained national and even international attention. From Clint Eastwood's *Bird* (1988) and Ang Lee's *Riding With The Devil* (1999), to Robert Altman's companion films from 1996, *Kansas City* and *Jazz '34*, to the Merchant Ivory production of *Mr. and Mrs. Bridge* (1990), Kansas City has been portrayed by Hollywood with varying degrees of success.

Several movies have depicted Kansas City's links with the heyday of jazz in the 1920s and 30s, including *Bird* (1987), director Clint Eastwood's film based on the life of Kansas City jazz saxophonist, Charlie "Yardbird" Parker. Forest Whitaker, who portrayed Bird, attended the U.S. film premiere of *Bird* in Kansas City and visited Parker's grave in Lincoln Cemetery in Independence. Although the city itself doesn't play a prominent role in the film, Mayor Richard Berkley proclaimed Kansas City, "Birdland" at a press conference on September 26, 1987.<sup>39</sup>

Kansas City native Robert Altman's feature film, *Kansas City*, was filmed in Kansas City in 1995 and drew upon Altman's familiarity with the Kansas City of his youth – the 1930s era of nightclubs, jazz, crime, and the free-wheeling politics of the Pendergast era. Altman was born in Kansas City in 1925 to prosperous, upper-middle-class parents and left town to fly bombing missions during WWII. After the war he moved to Hollywood, but returned to Kansas City for a time in the late 1940s early 1950s and worked at the Calvin Company, a leading producer of industrial films, commercials, government films, documentaries and educational films for several years.<sup>40</sup> Altman also released *Jazz '34: Remembrances of Kansas City Swing*, a 75-minute film, which was an improvisational jazz session filmed during the making of *Kansas City*.

Another piece of Kansas City history can be found in Ang Lee's film, *Ride with the Devil*, an unconventional Civil War film based on Daniel Woodrell's book, *Woe to Live*. Civil War experts who attended an advance screening of the movie, shot in and around this area in 1998, said that the film was "probably the most accurate depiction of the Kansas-Missouri border war ever committed to film."<sup>41</sup> Whether portraying southern

partisan bushwhackers from Missouri or anti-slavery guerilla jayhawkers from Kansas – the historians felt that the film refused to simplify the complex issues that dominated the border war. Although they agree there is no evidence that the “fire-snorting speech” in the movie made by Quantrill to the assembled bushwhackers before the 1863 raid on Lawrence ever happened, one noted it did allow the “movie Quantrill” to speak of the collapse of the jail in Kansas City, killing several women prisoners who were wives, sisters and mothers of bushwhackers. Although the cause of the collapse was never determined, the women’s deaths helped to contribute to feelings of revenge leading up to the raid. Overall, the historians hoped the film would prove useful as a tool to educate others around the country about what did happen between Kansas and Missouri during the Civil War. On a more “Hollywood” note, those attending the November 11, 1999 local premiere of the movie were greeted by a “shootout” on Nichols Road in front of the Palace Theatre – after which the Civil War re-enactors got up and posed with the moviegoers.<sup>42</sup>

Another major film – and one that doesn’t contain rip-roaring images of Kansas City’s jazz, crime and corruption, or Civil War violence – presents Kansas City in a very different light. *Mr. and Mrs. Bridge*, based on Evan S. Connell’s novels about growing up in an upper-middle class family in Kansas City during the 1930s and 40s, reflects the suffocating monotony of the genteel social life in the city at the time.<sup>43</sup> Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward starred in the film, spending several weeks in town during the filming, much of which was completed in a home just off Ward Parkway in Kansas City.

## THE SMALL SCREEN AND DOCUMENTARIES

Kansas City has also made appearances on television and in documentary films. The 1995 HBO special, *Truman* (1995) – filmed in Kansas City, Independence, Lee’s Summit, and Topeka – was based on a biography by David McCullough. Ken Burns filmed a documentary on Thomas Hart Benton set to coincide with the 1989 celebration of the painter’s 100<sup>th</sup> birthday and a major exhibition of his works at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. On a trip to the area to familiarize himself with Kansas City, Jefferson City, and the Benton home, Burns remarked that he saw the film as great way to acquaint the nation with a regional artist. “We need a painter who, when he says he’s

an American painter, covers the territory between the shining seas, not just the trek between Greenwich Village and East Hampton.”<sup>44</sup>

Other documentaries highlight Kansas City’s history as well. Attorney-turned-filmmaker Bruce Ricker’s *The Last of the Blue Devils* is a mixture of performance footage and archival photos and films that explain the history of jazz, interspersed with passages of musicians reminiscing about the heyday of Kansas City jazz in the 30s and 40s. Robert Butler, film critic for *The Kansas City Star*, calls the film “quite possibly the most important movie ever made in this town and certainly the only such feature film in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art.”<sup>45</sup> Although not in found in any museums, *Finding Buck McHenry* (2000), a film about a fictional Negro baseball legend, does put the spotlight on the Negro Leagues Museum in Kansas City. *Buck McHenry* wasn’t filmed in Kansas City, but it was filmed with the cooperation of the Negro Leagues Museum. The Museum provided the documentary footage seen at the beginning of the movie and allowed its traveling exhibition to be used to create a set that doubles as the museum.<sup>46</sup>

## MAKING MOVIES IN KANSAS CITY

Movies are big business, and Kansas City wants a bigger piece of the action. Filmmakers in the past have found that Kansas City’s location in the heartland of the nation can be a valuable resource as they test their films in front of live audiences before the final cut. Audience interaction is one reason Hollywood executives leave L.A to test their movies, and the studios found that a great place to get reactions to a certain movie was the Midwest. Tri-Star Pictures chose Kansas City as one of its five test markets. Gary Marshall, known for pictures such as *Pretty Woman* (1990) and *Runaway Bride* (1999) came to Kansas City for a test preview of the Tom Hank’s movie, *Nothing in Common*. (1986)<sup>47</sup> Director Robert Benton also turned to Kansas City to test audience reactions to his movie, *Places in the Heart* (1984). After producer Arlene Donovan and others watched the audience response to *Places in the Heart*, they made the cuts based on the research from the preview audience.<sup>48</sup>

The Kansas City Film Commission is working on bringing business to the state by encouraging filmmakers to shoot their films here, too. Jerry Fogel, a film and television actor and area radio host, was named the new executive director of the

commission in June 2003. Fogel plans to aggressively market Kansas City's film locations and hospitable atmosphere to the people in New York and Los Angeles who make decisions on where to shoot films.<sup>49</sup> And why not? In Kansas City, filmmakers can find such diverse locations as downtown buildings, the Plaza, the West Bottoms, country clubs, old-fashioned diners, mansions, blues clubs, old cemeteries – and Union Station – all within 20 minutes of downtown.<sup>50</sup>

Shooting films in Kansas City isn't only good for filmmakers, however. It's also great for the local economy. Film crews and technicians, actors and extras, caterers, film equipment suppliers, hotels – all benefit from the work brought into the city. In 2001 and 2002, film and commercial production resulted in direct expenditures of around \$8.5 million throughout Missouri.<sup>51</sup> The film *Mr. and Mrs. Bridge*, filmed in Kansas City in 1989, meant \$2.5 million to the local economy.<sup>52</sup> In his new role as executive director of the KC Film Commission, Fogel knows the importance of movies to the Kansas City community and is ready to fight the battle not just to market Kansas City around the country but to others in the local community to make them aware of the potential economic gold mine that films can be for the area.

Fogel's job is helped by the positive feelings filmmakers have had on previous films shot in Kansas City. The \$2.5 million independent period film, *Painting* – an interracial love story set in Kansas City during the Civil Rights era – spanned 15 years, all four seasons, and included a variety of settings. The film was shot in Kansas City in 2000, and the crew spent more than two weeks shooting at a Mission Hills home, the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, a small church in Weston, and in Tonganoxie, which served as a small Southern town. A Vietnam War sequence would be shot at either Truman Lake or Clinton Lake. While waiting for a train to pass by during shooting at Kansas City's Elmwood Cemetery, *Painting* co-director Peter Manogian commented, "there's no way we could have found locations like this in L.A. This is going to look like a \$20 million studio film."<sup>53</sup>

And when writer/producer James Schamus was in Kansas City for the local premiere of *Ride with the Devil*, he told the nearly 300 cast and crew members who attended a free screening prior to the premiere that director Ang Lee, who was in China shooting a martial-arts fantasy, that "Ang claims that making *Ride with the Devil* was the greatest experience of his filmmaking life. He wanted you to know that."<sup>54</sup> That's high

praise indeed, and comments like that can only help make it easier to attract big-name filmmakers and talent to Kansas City.

### WRAPPING IT UP

Kansas City is a great movie town – always has been, probably always will be. Whether watching the new silent motion pictures in the opulent theatres built in the 1910s and 20s; or going to the theatres and watching the exciting new talkies in the late 20s and 30s; or sitting under the stars at the drive-in during the 50s and 60s; or going to the megaplex at the mall at the end of the twentieth century, Kansas Citians love their movies. And movies have been good to Kansas City, too. Kansas City's early civic leaders were some of the first in the nation to use films to promote the city, and today's leaders are being encouraged to realize the economic value of promoting the city itself as a place for filmmakers to come and shoot their movies. All in all, it's been a great relationship that could get even better.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Velma West Sykes, "Kansas City Old-Timers Recall Days of Early Film Exhibition," *Box Office*, April 8, 1944. (Many of the newspaper articles were found in the Special Collections – Kansas City MO Public Library – Vertical Files. SC-KCMPL-VF–Theaters-Motion Pictures)
- <sup>2</sup> Matt Riggs, "Missouri on the Big Screen: Kate Arnold-Schuck turns Missouri's Resources into Box-Office Hits," *Missouri Magazine*, Spring 1995, 5-7.
- <sup>3</sup> John Izod, *Hollywood and the Box Office, 1895-1986* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 8-9, 21.
- <sup>4</sup> Ken Weyand, "Possum Trot Chronicles: Kansas Citians see their first motion pictures at the turn of the century," *Explore Kansas City*. January 2000. 26-27. (SC-KCMPL-VF–Motion Pictures)
- <sup>5</sup> Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*, First Vintage Books Edition (New York: Vintage Books, A division of Random House, 1976) 30.
- <sup>6</sup> Rick Montgomery and Shirl Kasper, *Kansas City: An American Story*, Monroe Dodd, ed. (Kansas City, MO: Kansas City Star Books, 1999) 175-76.
- <sup>7</sup> Montgomery, 154.
- <sup>8</sup> E.M.Clendening and H.G. Wilson, "The First Municipal Motion Pictures Ever Made," *Kansas Citian*, May 1913, 64-66.
- <sup>9</sup> "Kansas City's Famous Sons and Daughters," *Star Magazine*, October 19, 1975. (SC-KCMPL-VF-Prominent People)
- <sup>10</sup> Sklar, 86.
- <sup>11</sup> 'Possum Trot' *Gazette 1838-1978*, Historic Kansas City Foundation, 1978.
- <sup>12</sup> Montgomery, 200.
- <sup>13</sup> Weyand.
- <sup>14</sup> Chris Wilborn, *Saturday Matinee in Olde KC*. (Kansas City, MO: Wilborn & Associates Photographers, 1999). Wilborn's book was created from his collection of old photos from the early 1900s to the present. Captions beside the photos, some footnoted, others not, explain and illuminate the photos. References cited include the KC Star and Times; KC Journal Post; "KC Style" by Dory DeAngelo and Jane Flynn. 80.
- <sup>15</sup> Gina Kaufmann, "Kansas City's early-day motion picture theaters," *Explore Kansas City*, January 2002. (SC-KCMPL-VF–Theaters)
- <sup>16</sup> Wilborn, 82.
- <sup>17</sup> Wilborn, 95.
- <sup>18</sup> James Hart, "Appearing live on stage!: Library exhibit salutes the glory days of downtown theaters." *The Kansas City Star*, July 22, 2001. (SC-KCMPL-VF–Theaters)
- <sup>19</sup> Hart.
- <sup>20</sup> Wilborn, 99.
- <sup>21</sup> Wilborn, 98.
- <sup>22</sup> Wilborn, 104.
- <sup>23</sup> Jeff Shibley, "Diamond in the Rough: The legendary Gem Theater prepares to reopen," *PitchWeekly*, July 17-July 23, 1997, 14. (SC-KCMPL-VF–Theaters-Gem)
- <sup>24</sup> Wilborn, 98.
- <sup>25</sup> Dennis Stack, "Reborn Midland Reflects Many-Splendored Past," *The Kansas City Star*, July 11, 1965. (SC-KCMPL-VF–Theaters-Lowes Midland)
- <sup>26</sup> Steve Penn, "Theater, workers are treasures," *The Kansas City Star*, July 31, 2001. (SC-KCMPL-VF–Theaters-Lowes Midland)
- <sup>27</sup> Brad Finch, "The Grand Dame Returns to Broadway: For over seventy years, the Uptown Theater on Broadway has been packing them in," *Sideout*, Premier Issue, November 11, 1999, 16-19. (SC-KCMPL-VF–Theaters-Uptown)
- <sup>28</sup> Wilborn, 111.
- <sup>29</sup> Finch.
- <sup>30</sup> Information on the Fine Arts theater restorations came from several articles by Robert W. Butler in *The Kansas City Star*. "Renovations Close Theater," February 1, 2002; "Restored theaters ready for their closeups: Rio and Granada resurrected from cinema graveyard," May 15, 2000, and "Williams has fine plans for family of Fine Arts Theaters," *The Kansas City Star*, June 9, 2002.
- <sup>31</sup> Kaufmann.
- <sup>32</sup> Izod, 81.

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- <sup>33</sup> Except where noted, information on drive-in theaters was taken from three articles: “The Return of the Picture Show” by Greg Laslo in *Missouri Life*, April 2003; “Up From Swingsets: The Evolution of the Drive-In,” by Joel Laner, *Kansas City Magazine*, July 1981; and “Scuba-Diving Killer Mutant Monkeys From Hell! ... Or Just Another Night at the Drive-in,” by Jennifer Wilding, *Kansas City*, July 1984.
- <sup>34</sup> Montgomery, 249.
- <sup>35</sup> Stan Durwood, Biography from the Local History section of the KC Public Library. “Movie theater mogul dies,” *The Kansas City Star*, July 16, 1999, p A1 and “Friends, admirers gather to pay tribute to movie theater mogul Stan Durwood,” *The Kansas City Star*, July 24, 1999, p. C1.  
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- <sup>36</sup> Robert Butler, “Rolling Back the Years,” *The Kansas City Star*, May 21, 2000. (SC-KCMPL-VF-Theaters-Motion Pictures)
- <sup>37</sup> Brian Burnes, “Theater brings back glory days: Englewood marks 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary with film revival,” *The Kansas City Star*, July 10, 1999. (SC-KCMPL-VF-Theaters-Motion Pictures)
- <sup>38</sup> From the Web sites of The Kansas City Zoo and Science City at Union Station,  
<http://www.kansascityzoo.org/imaxbody.htm> and <http://www.unionstation.org/extreme.cfm>, accessed July 22, 2003.
- <sup>39</sup> Meyers, Daniel D., *Confessions of a Hollywood Publicist* (Kansas City MO: Four-Star Press, 2001) Meyers has been an advertising executive in Kansas City, a circuit supervisor and advertising with Dickinson, Inc., as well as an executive for Pacific Theatres in Los Angeles. It was in his capacity as an independent publicist for Warner Brothers, handling publicity, promotion, public relations, and advertising in Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska, that he accumulated many of the “showmanship stories” in this book, stories “intended to entertain and instruct the general reader.” 124-129.
- <sup>40</sup> Daniel O’Brien, *Robert Altman: Hollywood Survivor* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 6-7.
- <sup>41</sup> Robert Butler. Based on two articles by Butler on the historical perspective of the film, *Ride With the Devil*. “Speaking of the Devil: Local historians debate the facts and fiction of Ang Lee’s much-awaited Civil War movie,” and “Historically challenged? Try this ‘Devil’ for dummies,” *The Kansas City Star*, November 21, 1999. (SC-KCMPL-VF-Motion Pictures)
- <sup>42</sup> Robert Butler, “‘Ride With the Devil’ gallops onto KC Screen,” *The Kansas City Star*, November 12, 1999. (SC-KCMPL-VF-Motion Pictures)
- <sup>43</sup> Rebecca Christian, “Mrs. Bridge: Evan S. Connell’s classic novel of Kansas City society will be filmed by Oscar-winning team,” *Kansas City Magazine*, December, 1988, 13-16, 62.
- <sup>44</sup> Ann Lowry, “Benton in the Movies,” *Kansas City Magazine*, 1986, 17.
- <sup>45</sup> Robert Butler, “The Blue Devils in a New Key: A new DVD helps explain how a New York lawyer made a documentary masterpiece about Kansas City jazz,” *The Kansas City Star*, August 12, 2001.
- <sup>46</sup> Ward W. Tripplett III, “A fictional baseball legend – and a KC connection – comes to life on the screen,” *The Kansas City Star*, April 15, 2000. (SC-KCMPL-VF-Motion Pictures)
- <sup>47</sup> Meyers, 8.
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- <sup>49</sup> Robert Butler, “Fogel takes command of Kansas City Film Commission,” *The Kansas City Star*, June 25, 2003.  
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- <sup>51</sup> Butler, “Busy KC Film Office...”
- <sup>52</sup> Raleigh and Sherri Ragan, “Movie Magic: Hollywood Comes to Missouri,” *Missouri Magazine*, Spring/Summer 1990, 39.
- <sup>53</sup> Robert Butler, “Scenes from a ‘Painting’: Low budget, tight schedule can’t slow indie film shooting in KC.” *The Kansas City Star*, November 8, 2000. (SC-KCMPL-VF-Motion Pictures).
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