sese produced) and *The Age of Innocence* and a painfully abortive one for *Gangs of New York* (2002), when Bernstein's score was rejected in favor of one by Howard Shore. An apologetic letter from the director smoothed over hard feelings as the curtain came down on Bernstein. His Hollywood ending came with two fitting scores, one for Haynes's socially aware feature *Far from Heaven*, his final Oscar nomination, and the last for Turner Classic Movies's documentary *Cecil B. DeMille: American Epic* (2004), in which Bernstein appears.

Peter's book, in which everyone from John Wayne to Leni Riefenstahl turns up, is best enjoyed and indeed substantially enriched while listening to Elmer's music, and I second his recommendations of more obscure scores, such as those for *Gold* (1974), *Saturn 3* (1980), and *Heavy Metal* (1981). The portrait he draws of his father is fond, admiring, and complex. While doing so much for the movies and his profession, Elmer Bernstein rarely walked away from a thoroughbred, a yacht, a fast car, a family camper, or a house, sometimes to his detriment. But he never walked away from a good cause or a good fight.—**Robert Cashill**

Still Film Crazy After All These Years):

Collected Interviews

by Patrick McGilligan. New York: Sticking Place Books, 2023. 289 pp., illus. Paperback: 24.00.

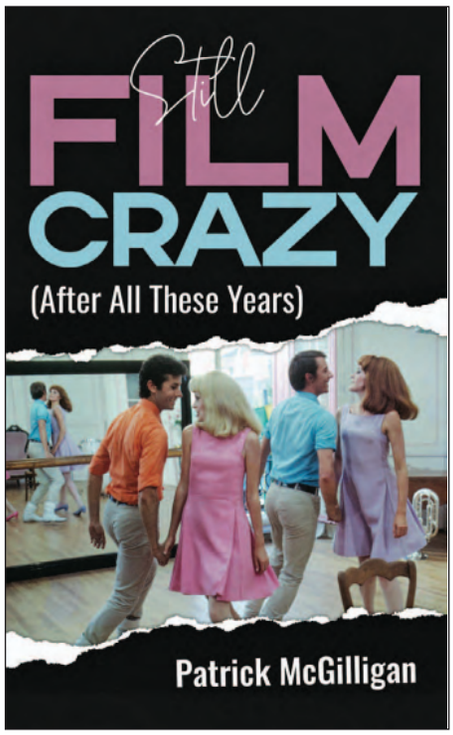
A prolific biographer of such cinematic luminaries as James Cagney, Robert Altman, George Cukor, Clint Eastwood, Alfred Hitchcock, and Oscar Micheaux, Patrick McGilligan has also performed invaluable service to cinephiles with his illuminating collections of interviews, such as the *Backstory* series devoted to screenwriters. His previous such collection, *Film Crazy: Interviews with Hollywood Legends* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 2000), focused on figures from the Golden Age of Hollywood; this new volume is devoted more to post-Sixties personalities. Disregard the title's insanity claim or the pun on Paul Simon's song: there is nothing demented in these responsive, entertaining, satisfying conversations.

McGilligan represents the gold standard of film interviewers, because he does the background research and has a grasp of film history inside out; he is respectful, empathetic up to a point but not fawning; he never asks dumb questions; he knows how to listen and pick up half-buried strands in the narratives; and he is not afraid to challenge or address controversies. Of course, some of his interviewees are more ebulliently eloquent and others more guarded. There is a good deal of grousing about studio numbskulls, on one hand, and empty compliments to colleagues on the other. But enough of each interviewee's personality comes through, one way or another.

The collection kicks off with a rollicking, unbuttoned Ken Russell, who confesses he is far more inspired by music than literature or film. Hence his biopics of Mahler, Tchaikovsky, and Liszt. When McGilligan asks him how he would describe his "visual aesthetic—the flashy, showy Ken Russell style," Russell answers, "The flashy, showy thing comes from Catholicism. I probably wasn't like that at all until I became a Catholic. Since Catholicism is a very flashy, showy religion, which isn't to say it isn't devout or sincere or any of those things—but it just is flashy, showy, flamboyant and god-knows what—I certainly wasn't any of those things until I saw the…film. Film Until I saw the film Ha, ha, ha. I mean, until I saw the light. Well, everything's a film—*Jesus Christ Superstar*."

Next comes Ralph Bakshi, who was riding high as an animator until he decided to tackle the Black experience with *Coonskin* (1975), which was attacked mercilessly by the Congress of Racial Equality as racist. Bakshi is still bitter and licking his wounds over that fiasco. He seems to convey the sense that because he grew up in a tough Brooklyn ghetto with Blacks, he has a perfect right to portray the urban underside.

A long, thoughtful interview with Clint Eastwood begins with Clint insisting he is not articulate, then demonstrating the opposite. About Sergio Leone: "He's very good with composition; he has a nice eye. He's very good with humor, a very funny guy—his humor is very sardonic. He's not very good at directing actors, he's only as good as his actors are—but most directors aren't very good at directing actors. The most a director can usually do with actors is to set up a nice atmosphere in which to work."



Eastwood is not alone in disdaining the acting schools he went through. Dean Stockwell also despised acting lessons and trusted only his "intuition." Still, it's surprising to learn that Eastwood's favorite actor when starting was Jimmy Cagney, his complete opposite on the screen. McGilligan tries to draw out Eastwood on the differences between his mythic figure in the Leone Westerns and his *Dirty Harry* persona. "I can intellectualize, sit down and talk about them for hours with somebody if they want to sit and exchange symbolism, or whatever. But I don't approach it that way; I start out on an animalistic level, and after I've got the script totally in mind, then I can move on to it on almost any kind of level. But I prefer to be drawn to it on that emotional level; if you start on an intellectual level, I think you're starting without the nucleus."

Eastwood is understandably defensive about his mentor Don Siegel and dismissive of the notion that *Dirty Harry* is a fascist film. McGilligan, who rarely shows his own judgments, surprisingly says, "I think *Dirty Harry* is Siegel's best film."

One of the author's subspecialties has long been the Hollywood Blacklist, as witness his fine collection *Tender Comrades: A Backstory of the Hollywood Blacklist* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1997). He has continued in this book to seek out figures singed by that disgraceful episode, such as Clancy Sigal, Anne Edwards, and Peter Davis. The best interview is with Edwards, who fled America for the expat Blacklist community in London, and for whom McGilligan shows a warm affection and regard. Refusing to generalize about informers, she says, "They are individuals as we all are with their own difficult histories. Not everyone possessed the steel it took to defy the Committee." McGilligan asks her why she was so hard on Carl Foreman in her memoir and so "conflicted or understanding" of her ex-husband Robert Rossen, when both men named names. She explains: "I can't compare Carl with Bob Rossen. I never knew Carl as I did Bob. I was deeply disappointed in Bob for naming names, and he knew that I was. But I could see that it ate him up, as it did not seem to do to Carl." Indeed, when Foreman employed uncredited blacklisted figures on his productions, he paid them half the going rate.

McGilligan's omnivorous interest in every aspect of motion pictures is evidenced by his interviews with Boston bankers, who explain on what basis they might finance a film, and with a pioneering independent video store owner who recounts why the business went bust. He also demonstrates his global range by including interviews with Pedro Costa, the Portuguese experimental filmmaker, and with Adoor

Gopalakrishnan, the dean of South Indian cinema. The book ends with a section on "French Connections," which consists of interviews with Michel Ciment, Bertrand Tavernier, and Grover Dale. The interview with Tavernier about his film *My Journey Through French Cinema* is especially compelling, as the scholarly filmmaker reels off names, insights, and corrective judgments. He takes Renoir down a peg: "Some of his films were overpraised by the New Wave… *Elena et les hommes* (1956) is a disaster and now looks ten times more dated than Clair's *Les grandes manoeuvres* (1955)."

I was bowled over by Tavernier's encyclopedic knowledge of film history. He shares that trait with Martin Scorsese, whose *My Voyage to Italy* (1999) was an inspiration for Tavernier's series. In his interview he says, "Stuart Heisler: It took me a long time to catch up with Heisler's [1940 film] *The Biscuit Eater,* and Martin Scorsese just wrote me that he's sending me a video of *Journey into Light* [Heisler's 1951 film], with Sterling Hayden, because he thinks the film's terrific."

"The task seems almost infinite," responds McGilligan.

"It is infinite. I think we are just starting the story of the cinema. A lot of territory still has to be explored."

How lovely to imagine these filmmaker friends, explorers forever young, swapping videos, scouting out new territory. But while the search may be infinite, the searchers are not. As a friend of mine commented, "They say when some learned people die it's like losing a library. With Bertrand it was like losing the whole Library of Alexandria." Fortunately, we still have Patrick McGilligan, fellow voyager into the infinite, to keep bringing us back more vibrant tales and reminiscences from the past.—**Phillip Lopate**

George Cukor's People:

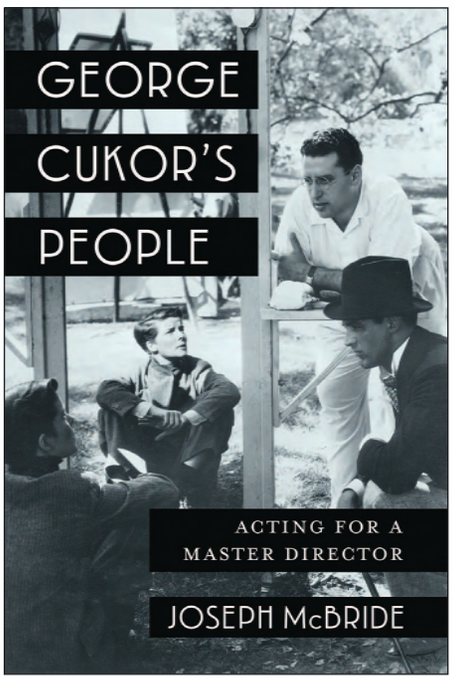
Acting for a Master Director

by Joseph McBride. Columbia University Press, 2024. 536 pp., illus. Hardcover: 40.00 and E-book: 39.99.

George Cukor is one of the abundantly productive Hollywood directors who challenge auteur critics with films in a wide array of genres, making it hard to tease out the consistent stylistic signatures and distinctive worldviews that are traditional marks of true cinematic artists. In his hefty new book, *George Cukor's People: Acting for a Master Director*, critic and scholar Joseph McBride takes umbrage at naysayers who question Cukor's auteur status. "Rather than being seen as a virtue," he writes, "Cukor's directorial versatility often has been held against him, as if it were to be seen as a crime for an orchestra conductor to be ambidextrous."

A word like multidextrous might better describe Cukor, whose five-decade career spanned the studio and poststudio eras, tapping into everything from drama and melodrama to comedy, satire, William Shakespeare and Charles Dickens, and a couple of the most charismatic musicals ever made. Can a uniquely personal perspective be pinned down in such a diversified filmography? Averring that Cukor chose to express himself "not in an overtly revealing way… but more covertly, through the text and subtext…of his source material," McBride makes an excellent case for the overall coherence of his work, with special attention to such frequently recurring themes as theatricality, masquerade, and the ambiguous relationship of the inner self to the persona seen by the world at large. Taking his cue from these concerns, McBride organizes his book around the prevalence of acting and role playing in the director's movies—a choice that serves a practical purpose for the book and for the field of film studies, which has paid too little attention to these understudied areas.

Although he became a consummate Hollywood insider whose movies often centered on "the privileged class enjoying its privileges," to quote James Stewart in *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), Cukor was a gay Jewish man who started life as a child of immigrants, and he could readily identify with outsiders and eccentrics. Hence his expertise at portraying characters "who behave 'theatrically' or with irony and self-conscious introspection," in McBride's words. This preoccupation is visible in an eye-opening number of films, reflecting Cukor's desire to cast light on both individual psychologies and their cultural contexts. Even in lavish productions geared to beguiling lifestyles and show-business pizzazz, Cukor maintained the analytical eye that "tended to qualify his view of the society people whose posh lives he explored onscreen."



Another complication in Cukor's auteur standing is his longtime practice of emphasizing his debt to powerful creative collaborators. This obviously included the top-line Hollywood stars who populate his pictures—they've never come bigger than Greta Garbo, Spencer Tracy, Katharine Hepburn, Cary Grant, and Judy Garland, to name a few—as well as such eminent screenwriters as Ruth Gordon, Garson Kanin, Philip Barry, and Donald Ogden Stewart; he made a big point of this in my 1979 interview with him, telling me "they're the authors and I'm the kibitzer." McBride argues that as deft as his stars and screenwriters frequently were, it took Cukor's adroit touch to elicit and orchestrate the full brilliance of their contributions. Complementing their efforts with his own research into background details and locations, Cukor transformed the pages of scripts into what McBride describes as "sparkling works of joint authorship."

Deep dives into directorial careers pose the risk of excessive partisanship—critics usually embark on such projects out of some degree of enthusiasm for their subjects—but McBride is admirably evenhanded in his assessments. Although he finds much of interest in Cukor's earliest efforts, it's in *What Price Hollywood?* (1932) that the director first surrounded his actors with what he called a "climate" of suggestive settings, sound, and cinematography that "enhances their characterizations and places them eloquently within a social context," all to serve his enduring goal of "blending comedy and drama in ways that seem more like real life" than like typical Hollywood confections.

McBride praises a great many of the films that followed, but he can be highly critical as well. *A Bill of Divorcement* (1932) seems "stagebound," the second half of *David Copperfield* (1935) is "a total letdown," *Romeo and Juliet* (1936) was "sunk in advance by its absurd MGM star casting," much of *Susan and God* (1940) is so "indifferently staged" that it "looks like a sitcom," *Born Yesterday* (1950) contains "vague liberal platitudes," *It Should Happen to You* (1954) lapses into "a dispiriting…paean to conformism," and there are so many problems in Cukor's 1981 swan song, *Rich and Famous*, that McBride breaks with his chronological approach in order to close the book with the much better 1975 television movie *Love Among the Ruins*. He even expresses disappointment with a whole stretch of Cukor films, telling how the director's disgust with studio damage inflicted on *A Star Is Born* (1954) ushered in "a period of disarray" and "trauma [that] marked the next few years of his peripatetic, somewhat scattered, fragmentary career." (*A Star Is*