

KONG IN KANE:
REFERENCES TO KING KONG
IN ORSON WELLS' CITIZEN KANE.

This paper will deal with several remarkable similarities found between Orson Wells' masterpiece of film, Citizen Kane (1941) and Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack's classic King Kong (1933). Both films were produced by RKO Radio Studios, but the similarities continue, as this paper will show. I will also try to explain why Wells felt it necessary to include these references to King Kong into his film.

The most easily proved reference to King Kong in Citizen Kane is a clip from Son of Kong (1933) that is used as a background shot in the sequence involving Kane's Everglade "picnic." The clip is of a glass-miniature shot, with several dark animated birds flying about. True, the clip was lifted from Son of Kong, not King Kong, but the two RKO Studio Kong movies are so intertwined that sometimes it is hard to tell them apart. In fact, much of Son of Kong was composed of left-over footage from King Kong. And the two Kong movies had the same producer, the same director, and essentially the same credits.

Could Wells just have been using this shot as stock footage? I don't believe that is the case. Why would Wells, with a virtual

unlimited budget that he had, choose to use stock footage? And when he had control of some of the best special effects men Hollywood had to offer? No, I believe that Wells placed the scene there for a purpose.

In another scene found during the 'picnic' sequence, a scene involving a fight between Kane (Wells), and Susan (Dorothy Comingore), a woman's scream can be heard outside their tent. And that scream bears a remarkable similarity to Fay Wray's scream in King Kong. I would not be surprised if it ^{was} ~~was~~ determined that it was Miss Wray's scream that was used in Citizen Kane. Between the scream and the Son of Kong clip, one almost wonders if somehow Kane and his party have been transported to Skull Island for the night.

Yours
sketching it
a bit
here -

Still some other similarities between Kane and Kong can be found in Kane's opera. Susan, starring in the opera titled Salamambo, looks alot like Ann Darrow (Fay Wray) appeared in Kong. In fact, the entire opera seems to be a scene from Kong. A blonde, white (and very white!) woman is surrounded by natives in costume, while the orchestra plays a menacing tune. The music used in the opera sounds quite a bit like some of Kong's. Bernard Herrmann (who later went onto score several fantasy films, including The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad) composed Kane's music. Hermann's opera score is directly reminiscent of some of Max Steiner's music from Kong.

Even the titles of the two films are quite similar. The

original title to King Kong was to be just simply Kong. Compare the two titles. Citizen Kane/King Kong. Kane/Kong. Whether this is just a coincidence or not, one must admit it is worth noting.

So why? Why would Wells place several Kong inspired items in Citizen Kane? I believe that Wells was inspired by King Kong, although not nearly to the extent as he was by John Ford's Stagecoach. (Which Wells claimed he watched over forty times!) But perhaps Wells is also saying thanks to Kong- because Citizen Kane owes its very existence to King Kong. Orville Goldner and George Turner say it best in their book, The Making of King Kong. "...it should be noted the one of the more important aspects of King Kong is that it made a great deal of money. It rescued RKO-Radio Pictures from bankruptcy, thus being directly responsible for the hundred of films made by that lamented company during the last twenty-odd years of its existence..." "...Among the many (films) are the Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers musicals, The Last Days of Pompeii, Gunga Din, and Citizen Kane..."

So perhaps Orson Wells is paying both thanks and homage to another great film- King Kong.
I wonder why he didn't call the film King Kane?

Although I left unconvicted my "score" and "music" examples (because you didn't include tracks for me to compare) I'm pleased with this effort.

It's original and refreshing.

A

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bessy, Maurice. Orson Wells: An Investigation into his Films and Philosophy. Translated by Ciba Vaughan. New York City, New York; Crown Publishers, 1971.
- Glut, Donald F. Classic Movie Monsters. Metuchen, New York: Scarecrow Press, 1978.
- Goldner, Orville and Turner, George E. The Making of King Kong. London: AS Barnes and Company, 1975.
- Gottesman, Ronald. Focus on Citizen Kane. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Printice Hall, 1971.
- Murray, Edward. Ten Film Classics: A re-viewing. New York City, New York: Frederick Unger Publising, 1978.
- Sobchack, Thomas and Sobchack, Vivian C. An Introduction to Film. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980.