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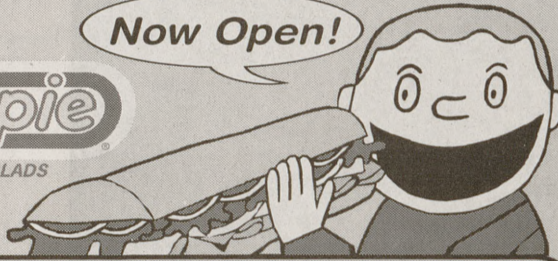
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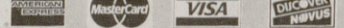
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**AGGIELIFE**

Page 6 • Wednesday, November 17, 1999

**'RKO 281' reveals making of Welles classic movie Citizen Kane for the first time**

LONDON (AP) — Liev Schreiber, a relative unknown, plays legendary filmmaker Orson Welles in the new HBO film "RKO 281." But perhaps an even more astonishing impersonation finds Britain standing in for the United States in this bewitching behind-the-scenes account of the most celebrated of all Hollywood films.

"I told them that was the way I wanted to do it," director Ben Ross said. His choice has paid off handsomely, not least considering that the modestly budgeted 90-minute TV film has the look of a major studio feature.

The \$12 million venture, from a script by playwright-turned-screenwriter John Logan (*Never the Sinner*), premieres Saturday at 7 p.m. on HBO. The cast includes John Malkovich as Herman J. Mankiewicz — Welles' collaborator, as well as occasional adversary, on the 1941 classic — and Roy Scheider as George Schaefer, the beleaguered RKO Studio head who gave *Citizen Kane* its title.

*Kane* began life with the working title "RKO 281," which was the production number given it by the studio.

Dominating a starry supporting lineup are James Cromwell and Melanie Griffith, both in terrific form as media magnate William Randolph Hearst — the inspiration for Kane — and his mistress, Marion Davies.

Fiona Shaw and Brenda Blethyn appear, jointly cast against type to droll effect, as gossip titans Hedda Hopper and Louella Parsons.

It's the filmmakers' ingenuity and cost-effectiveness that were evident during a visit to the set last spring, where a sound stage at Bray studios west of London was doubling as the great hall at Xanadu, newspaper mogul Charles Foster Kane's formidable manse in the re-enacted filming of a scene from *Citizen Kane*.

Production designer Maria Djurkovic created an enormous polystyrene fireplace and winding staircase dressed with elaborate statuary to suggest Welles' version of San Simeon, the magnificently over-the-top California "castle" that the real Hearst called home.

"What are the two things one really remembers? The staircase and the fireplace," Djurkovic said. "That's where we put our money."

The shoot, say the filmmakers, has been a series of adroit substitutions in which even the reliably gray English weather turned unusually Californialike.

"God shone on us," co-producer David Lewis said.

And so a trendy Soho restaurant named after the director's venerable meeting place in Derby, while the staircase at San Simeon was a derelict portion of St. Pancras railway station.

An Islamic hall dating back to the 1870s and the director's impressive Leighton House, a one-time home-turned-museum and gallery, doubled as the bedroom at San Simeon.

And a private home was found in the London suburb of Dorking for a scene in which John Malkovich gets pushed into a swimming pool.

**"I'd heard about it chiefly through the Peanuts cartoons. They were always referring to Welles and 'Rosebud' and some sled."**

— Ben Ross  
Director of "RKO281"

"I'd heard about it chiefly through the Peanuts cartoons," he explains. "They were always referring to Welles and 'Rosebud' and some sled."

Schreiber, who plays Welles, is probably best known from *Scream 2*, Wes Craven's horror sequel as well as *A Walk on the Moon* and *Jakob the Liar*. He is 31 (Welles was 26 when *Citizen Kane* opened) and he gained 25 pounds to look the part.

"For me to accept playing the part, I had to do a certain extent I had to say, 'This is an alternate universe,'" the actor said. "Like that great *Star Trek* 'where there's another Spock' where there's another Captain Kirk."

Schreiber is now readying an off-Broadway production of another strong personality. His "Hamlet" will be at the Public Theater.

Welles and Hamlet in the same year? "It's just a bad joke," Schreiber said. "The most gigantic act of hubris ever!"

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