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Hermes Pan: The Man Who Danced With Fred Astaire



Synopsis

Armed with an eighth-grade education, an inexhaustible imagination, and an innate talent for dancing, Hermes Pan (1909-1990) was a boy from Tennessee who became the most prolific, popular, and memorable choreographer of the glory days of the Hollywood musical. While he may be most well-known for the Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers musicals which he choreographed at RKO film studios, he also created dances at Twentieth Century-Fox, M-G-M, Paramount, and later for television, winning both the Oscar and the Emmy for best choreography. In *Hermes Pan: The Man Who Danced with Fred Astaire*, Pan emerges as a man in full, an artist inseparable from his works. He was a choreographer deeply interested in his dancers' personalities, and his dances became his way of embracing and understanding the outside world. Though his time in a Trappist monastery proved to him that he was more suited to choreography than to life as a monk, Pan remained a deeply devout Roman Catholic throughout his creative life, a person firmly convinced of the powers of prayer. While he was rarely to be seen without several beautiful women at his side, it was no secret that Pan was homosexual and even had a life partner. As Pan worked at the nexus of the cinema industry's creative circles during the golden age of the film musical, this book traces not only Pan's personal life but also the history of the Hollywood musical itself. It is a study of Pan, who emerges here as a benevolent perfectionist, and equally of the stars, composers, and directors with whom he worked, from Astaire and Rogers to Betty Grable, Rita Hayworth, Elizabeth Taylor, Sammy Davis Jr., Frank Sinatra, Bob Fosse, George Gershwin, Samuel Goldwyn, and countless other luminaries of American popular entertainment. Author John Franceschina bases his telling of Pan's life on extensive first-hand research into Pan's unpublished correspondence and his own interviews. Pan enjoyed one of the most illustrious careers of any Hollywood dance director, and because his work also spanned across Broadway and television, this book will appeal to readers interested in musical theater history, dance history, and film.

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Customer Reviews

"I always considered Hermes Pan to be my 'other father', and though I knew much of his story, in this wonderfully informative book John Franceschina has filled the gaps." --Ava Astaire

McKenzie"John Franceschina's *Hermes Pan: The Man Who Danced with Fred Astaire* restores glory to an overlooked dance genius, while also bringing back to life the golden age of Hollywood musicals. I ran out and began renting every *Hermes Pan* DVD I could find." --Richard Hornby, Professor of Theatre, University of California, Riverside, Theatre Critic, *The Hudson Review* "The life and work of one of Hollywood's most prolific dance creators has finally been written. Above and beyond *Hermes Pan*'s iconic partnership with Astaire on nineteen films over a period of 35 years, Franceschina gives us incredible detail on the multiple tasks a Hollywood 'Dance Director' of the 1930s'-1950's performed." --Larry Billman, author of *Fred Astaire: A Bio-Bibliography*, and *Film Choreographers and Dance Directors* "Hermes Pan was a uniquely American choreographer. His stylish dance direction defined not only the style of Hollywood film dancing but also that of American artistic dance as a whole. Anyone interested in the history of dance in America should know what is in this fine book." --James Thomas, Professor in the Department of Theatre and Dance, Wayne State University "Interesting reading." --DC Theatre Scene "Read this book with YouTube videos by your side." --Dance Magazine "Hermes Pan: The Man Who Danced with Fred Astaire provides a wealth of factual information about Pan's life and his movies, with the salutary effect of sending the reader back to look again at his films with a heightened sense of the process that brought those films to the screen." --Dance Chronicle

The author of numerous books on theater history, John Franceschina is also a former professor of theatre at Pennsylvania State University. Off-Broadway he has served as dance arranger and musical director and as accompanist for Angela Lansbury, Elke Sommer, Nell Carter, Jan Peerce, Robert Merrill, Lotte Lenya, Paige O'Hara, Chita Rivera, and Gwen Verdon.

This book covers **EVERYTHING** about Hermes Pan...unfortunately, the font size is a bit small and

the reader better have good eyes or good 'readers'. Not much is written about Mr. Pan and this book fills in the gaps...When combined with the Koval book of celebrity Interviews: "People Will Talk"...one can get a better sense of the man: his likes and dislikes and of course, his experiences of working with Fred Astaire.

Insightful. It's about time someone did a study of this talented man. Came away with a better understanding of the creative process between the artist and the choreographer.

I've loved the collaboration between Hermes Pan and Fred Astaire but never knew much about Pan's background or his work without Astaire. I learned a lot and now have a long list of musical films to add to my play list.

I love reading these stories about behind-the-scenes Hollywood.

There aren't enough words to describe this mans talent or life. Such an incredible journey. Such incredible insight into the inner workings of films and studios for a dancer.

Not many people know about Hermes Pan, and if you do you're probably as much in love with Fred Astaire and the role dance played in many classic films as I am. Even for people like me, this book might be almost too detailed and thus can be laborious to go through. I confess to jumping to parts where Hermes Pan is actually in action and not delving into the peripheral stuff. You'll get to see lots of Hermes Pan, nonetheless, and what you see, you will definitely love. In the book are also many snippets about Fred, Cyd Charisse, Eleanor Powell and other familiar faces, their photographs. When you finish the book you feel slightly more acquainted with these superstars and will have a tale or two to share at the dinner table!

This is a wonderful book. Probably most people who know his name at all know Hermes Pan as the choreographic assistant of Fred Astaire. In fact, this book shows that he was the dance director for many many more movies. A wonderful and much needed tribute to a prolific contributor to the golden age of American musical films.

Fills big gap in Hollywood history, of a man revered by his peers who worked with almost everybody and only sometimes got credit for his contributions, even with multiple Academy Award citations. It

will always be argued who did what when he worked with Astaire, but the combination was legendary, and his solo work dominated a lot of what we saw across multiple studios. The private man was so private, you don't really get a sense of him.

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