

# Robson: Friendly Persuader

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If one were to pick a director whose work typifies what Hollywood does best—entertain—there is no need to look further than Mark Robson.

Such Robson pictures as "The Champion" and "The Harder They Fall" may have said a great deal about the boxing profession in particular and the perils of success and fame in general, but first and foremost they were entertainments. Equally engrossing was "The Bridges at Toko-Ri" — yet who could forget at the end that unflinching close-up of William Holden lying dead in Korea, a casualty of a war he didn't want to fight in the first place. (More recently, Frank Sinatra met a similar fate at the end of the director's suspenseful and exciting "Von Ryan's Express.")

For most of his career Robson has specialized in bringing best-sellers to the screen—and in numerous instances has improved upon them in the process. To most everyone's surprise "Peyton Place" and "The Prize" turned out to be pretty good pictures despite their sensational sources.

Perhaps this is why he was asked to do "Valley of the Dolls."

"You have to realize that a novel is one thing and a screenplay is something else," begins Robson, outlining his objectives on his latest assignment.

## Film-maker's Job

"Nobody can deny that Jacqueline Susann wrote interesting characters. Our job as film-makers is, with our own individuality, to tell the story of these three girls the best we can. I'm not sure I know what good taste is or that anybody else does either. Style, not taste, is the thing."

Those three girls who lose their footing in the swirl of show biz and resort to pills—Miss Susann's treacherous "dolls"—are being played by Barbara Parkins, Patty Duke and Sharon Tate.

Few people have come to directing with a finer background than Mark Robson, who has just been honored in his hometown of Montreal at Expo 67. While at UCLA he took on a part-time job at Fox's prop department, and eventually became a film editor at RKO. There, he and director Robert Wise worked on three Orson Welles films — "Citizen Kane," "The Magnificent Ambersons" and "Journey Into Fear." ("Orson was terrified of the cutting room," recalls Robson. "We'd run film in the projection room for him, and he'd ask for things we thought couldn't be done.")

After Welles' dismissal from RKO he and Wise as a "punishment" for being part of the director's team were assigned to the B production unit headed by the late, esteemed Val Lewton, under whose guidance a group of distinguished horror pictures were made.

"Val was a very gentle



**DIRECTOR**—Filmmaker Mark Robson has talent for presenting what is expected in unexpected ways.  
Times photo

man, articulate, a fine writer. One of the most literate producers in Hollywood. In our unit Jacques Tourneur was the director, DeWitt Bodeen the writer.

"It was the beginning of the psychological horror cycle. When Jacques moved up, Bobby and I alternated as directors. We read James Agee's great reviews. 'My God,' we thought, 'Is that what we've done?'"

Today, Robson's uppermost concern is to come up with ways of cutting the rapidly spiraling costs of production in Hollywood. "Costs have been doubling over the past five years. What cost \$2½ million then costs \$5 million now. We should work to eliminate all those costs that don't show on the screen.

"Our studios and equipment are outmoded. In Europe most movies are made with Ariflex cameras instead of the heavy old Mitchells. It's basically a hand-held camera you can put on a tripod. A child can pick one up," reports Robson, who envisions the studio of the future to be vertical rather than horizontal in structure. Sound stages could be stacked one on top of another with a central elevator core for the rapid and easy movement of equipment.

"Today your transportation costs can add \$150,000 to your budget—without ever leaving the lot. The revolution has just got to come. It's just a question of doing it," he said.

At 53 Mark Robson, after 35 years in Hollywood, remains as unpretentious as his pictures. He and his pretty wife of 30 years live in a handsome oriental-modern Westwood home filled with important works of abstract art and ancient artifacts.

After you have talked at length with this kindly, soft-spoken man you come away realizing that he wants you to be aware that he is in touch with all the latest trends and styles in film-making from abroad and responds to them whenever appropriate within a commercial context. "In 'Valley of the Dolls,'" he says forthrightly, "I am attempting to strike a balance, presenting what is expected in all the unexpected ways I can."