



Lion of Hollywood: The Life and Legend of Louis B. Mayer

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Lion of Hollywood is the definitive biography of Louis B. Mayer, the chief of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer -- MGM -- the biggest and most successful film studio of Hollywood's Golden Age. An immigrant from tsarist Russia, Mayer began in the film business as an exhibitor but soon migrated to where the action and the power were -- Hollywood. Through sheer force of energy and foresight, he turned his own modest studio into MGM, where he became the most powerful man in Hollywood, bending the film business to his will. He made great films, including the fabulous MGM musicals, and he made great stars: Garbo, Gable, Garland, and dozens of others. Through the enormously successful Andy Hardy series, Mayer purveyed family values to America. At the same time, he used his influence to place a federal judge on the bench, pay off local officials, cover up his stars' indiscretions, and, on occasion, arrange marriages for gay stars. Mayer rose from his impoverished childhood to become at one time the highest-paid executive in America.

Despite his power and money, Mayer suffered some significant losses. He had two daughters: Irene, who married David O. Selznick, and Edie, who married producer William Goetz. He would eventually fall out with Edie and divorce his wife, Margaret, ending his life alienated from most of his family. His chief assistant, Irving Thalberg, was his closest business partner, but they quarreled frequently, and Thalberg's early death left Mayer without his most trusted associate. As Mayer grew older, his politics became increasingly reactionary, and he found himself politically isolated within Hollywood's small conservative community.

Lion of Hollywood is a three-dimensional biography of a figure often caricatured and vilified as the paragon of the studio system. Mayer could be arrogant and tyrannical, but under his leadership MGM made such unforgettable films as *The Big Parade*, *Ninotchka*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Meet Me in St. Louis*, and *An American in Paris*.

Film historian Scott Eyman interviewed more than 150 people and researched some previously unavailable archives to write this major new biography of a man who defined an industry and an era.

Lion of Hollywood: The Life and Legend of Louis B. Mayer Details

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Eyman

From Reader Review Lion of Hollywood: The Life and Legend of Louis B. Mayer for online ebook

Karie says

I have long been curious to read a really good book about Mayer. The problem that I often encounter with film related biographies is that they either canonize or demonize their subjects, offering only one side of what is always a very deep, multi-layered complicated person's life. Many of these books also tend to be very poorly researched, which I find annoying. To me, the same standard of research, accuracy and integrity should be applied to a star bio that say gets applied to a bio of someone like Abraham Lincoln or Winston Churchill for example. Often though, that is not the case. Many star bios I've read tend to be conjecture, gossip, lies and often wildly unsubstantiated claims. Fortunately this biography of Louis B. Mayer is a great one that is incredibly well researched and a compelling read. Being that I love film history, I've often read many rumors and stories about Louis B. Mayer in various other biographies. Lion of Hollywood goes to great lengths to present an accurate and balanced portrait of the man.

The book chronicles Mayer's impoverished childhood and his humble beginnings as a junk dealer. He began at the very ground floor of the film business at a time when it was all just developing and being formed as an industry. He was a great showman with an eye for talent and a relentless drive for success. As the head of M-G-M, he put quality first and often did so at great expense. That is certainly not done as often today. The book goes beyond his career achievements and into the complexities of his mind, personality and background. One of the M-G-M stars once referred to Mayer as "the best actor on the lot" and they weren't kidding. In spite of his reputation as a ruthless titan, Mayer could produce tears and even sobs on a moment's notice in order to persuade an actor to take a role or to leverage a deal. He had a flair for melodrama that would put almost any performer to shame. Mayer valued the idea of America and good clean family films. It becomes clear that Irving Thalberg was the true artistic force behind the studio in the early years and was far more interested in taking risks. The book also chronicles Mayer's difficult and often fractured relationships with his wives, daughters and co-workers. The book also provides interesting perspectives on what various actors thought of him. There are some who loved him dearly and others who swore that he was the devil incarnate.

I wondered upon starting the book how I would feel about Louis B. Mayer after I had finished reading it. Having finished, I can only say that I have mixed feelings. I do however agree with a quote in the book from filmmaker Richard Brooks, "So, MGM gave me opportunity after opportunity for seven and a half years there I paid my dues and I learned my craft. And I learned it from some great people. The Mayers and the Warners and the Cohns--the did some terrible things, but they loved movies. I can't say that about many film executives nowadays. They don't even like movies."

I think his sentiment says it all. If you are looking for a great Hollywood bio, I highly recommend Lion of Hollywood: The Life and Legend of Louis B. Mayer. It is well written, brilliantly researched and a fantastic read.

Samantha Glasser says

Eyman has a good sense of humor that permeates the scholarly writing. "...and-- perhaps the least enticing title in the history of motion picture properties-- 'Volunteer Organist.'"

Richard Tolleson says

Louis B. Mayer has been a character in a number of recent television shows, and I wanted to get to know more about the real man. He was a fascinating character, with all the good and bad that being a captain of industry entails. It's amazing that Mayer, as well as the other founders of the big Hollywood studios, told the story of America and its people, even though they themselves were immigrants to this country. The MGM studio no longer really exists, but as long as people watch classic movies, L.B. Mayer's legacy will endure. Scott Eyman takes a very literary approach to the book, which, although it is well researched, is not footnoted. (He saves his annotated list of sources for the end). My only complaint with the writing style is that he seems to go from one great yarn to the next, and often there's very little connecting the two. But that's a relatively small annoyance, and well worth putting up with to enjoy this tale of a larger than life man who build an empire, only to lose it when he lost touch with the changing tastes of an America that suddenly wanted their entertainment served up for free on 19 inch blurry screens.

Carol Niehaus says

This is a well written, interesting and entertaining biography. It is extensively researched and a balanced moral inventory of both virtues and imperfections. I love a rags to riches story and L.B.Mayer is an American Dream. He started as a poor, Jewish, Russian immigrant child. He hustled for scraps, pressed his nose to the glass of fine restaurants, and found magic backstage at a local theater. I found myself compulsively reading to discover more and more. Who is this man? How did he become a Bel Air mogul and do I even like or respect the guy? As I hoped there are plenty of gems about the stars of the era. What kept me engaged in the story however, is that the main character is presented as complex and multi-faceted. L.B. Mayer could be grand, magnanimous, idealistic, deep feeling and intuitive and a great salesman and executive with an eye for talent and a gift for delegating. He could also be deeply insecure, cut throat, petty, vindictive, immature and foolish. LB's primary drive may have been survival and the bottom line. He was power hungry and money mad. Yet, he also seemed genuinely interested in making good movies. He took pride in his product. Ultimately, I can't help but admire someone who left a legacy of film as rich as MGM's Golden Years.

Estelle Maher says

An incredible amount of research has clearly been laboured over this book. An insightful look at early Hollywood. However, there is some detail within that left me saying 'really?' But hey, Hollywood isn't exactly a normal place is it?

Luke Devenish says

Wow, what a behemoth - both in man and book. I loved this. So absorbing. So many other books about the people who passed through MGM during the golden years invariably do a hatchet job on old LB - pick up any book on Gable, Garland or Harlow, for example - but this exhaustive biog redresses the balance. The Mayer that emerges here is a compelling individual. Flawed, yes. Manipulative and ruthless, undoubtedly.

But also compassionate, loyal, generous and brilliantly gifted in the business of making of movies. A true visionary and a great leader, brought undone by hubris and a refusal to acknowledge changing times. As well as being the definitive book about Mayer, this is also the definitive book about MGM. I've not read a better one on the fabled studio. It strips away the legendary gloss of the MGM product to show just how that gloss was applied - and conceived. MGM's dizzying rise in LB's hands and its protracted decline without him is a textbook rags to riches to rags story, in this case told on a grand scale, impacting the lives of thousands. A true tragedy. LB was the man who had everything, the mightiest fish in his pond, but when the pond dried up, his rage and grief and, ultimately, his total bewilderment at what befell the world he so loved, are very human. And very moving. This is the great strength of this book. Legendary figures are made recognizable human beings - humble factory workers, in fact. Highly recommended for scholars of Old Hollywood.

Olethros says

-Realpolitik en la industria del cine-

Género. Biografía.

Lo que nos cuenta. Acercamiento a la vida y figura de Louis B. Mayer, hombre que se hizo a sí mismo desde sus orígenes como humilde inmigrante ruso llegado a Canadá hasta convertirse en el último de los hombres fuertes (pero fuertes de verdad, casi omnipotentes en su campo) de Hollywood y, por ende, del cine mundial.

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Jeff says

As a lifelong Movie lover,the history of Hollywood ,(as in the Beginning)has always been something I am still drawn to.The tremendous creativity and talent,making what was considered a passing fad,motion pictures,(read :T.V. in the 50's)into the art form of the 20th century.Louis B Mayer was one of the founding fathers.One of maybe 5 or 6 who changed the face of American culture,Louis is considered,as in M.G.M.s lion logo "King of the pack."

Scott Lyman has written an exhaustively researched book that shows the previously much maligned 'monster' to be a brilliant street savvy emotional, genius.He believed people wanted to see themselves as human beings with a moral code.Good people,as we all want to be,but fall short of.That's why his choice of Actors became Stars.He knew who we would like and want to emulate.This was not totally manipulative but something he believed in in the depths of his soul.Author Eyman skillfully avoids scandal ,for the most part,and concentrates on Mayer and M.G.M.,to his credit.

Even if you only have a passing interest in bygone Hollywood,this book will open your eyes to what was a wonderful and exciting time in history.

We need people like Louis B Mayer today.Of course people like him cannot exist in today's world.More's the pity.

Margaret Pederson says

Such a thorough biography of Louis B. Mayer, it was very entertaining and fascinating to read. With so many different people interviewed it definitely gave the impression and Mr. Mayer was a complicated individual who was different things to different people. I felt I had a well-rounded impression of his life as well as his family's. Highly recommend it!

Christine says

This book is a monster--the whole time I was reading it, the only thing people said to me was, "Wow, that's a big book!" But the size shouldn't frighten anyone. It's large because it's exhaustively researched, and Scott Eyman had access to mountains of personal papers and to some of the "famous Hollywood stars" Louis B. Mayer made famous. The rise of Louis B. Mayer really parallels the rise of the Hollywood machine as we know it today; in fact, the entire Hollywood system as it is today wouldn't exist if it weren't for Mayer. They didn't call MGM of the 1930's and 1940's the dream factory for nothing! MGM made movies people wanted to see and to escape into, and they made stars that people either wanted to be or wanted to be with. Many of those stars were hand-picked by "LB" and groomed to stardom by his hand. Eyman's book offers a great look into the history of what we now take for granted, and also illuminates a fascinating man whose legacy has been mostly forgotten.

Greta says

Excellent, thorough, and balanced account of the life of Louis Mayer. Probably packed with more anecdotes than is strictly necessary, but they aren't dull.

Graceann says

In-depth biography of one of the most powerful, and divisive, figures in Hollywood. Everyone had or has an opinion on Louis B. Mayer and most of them are included here. Also included is his life story and his background machinations. Revealing and fascinating.

Aurora says

Engaging. Great stories from behind the scenes of the dream factory. Only biography endorsed by the Mayer family.

Donald Trump (Parody) says

Uncle Roy used to tell me that while all communists were Jews, not all Jews were communists. This is one of the good ones. He supposedly ran Hollywood, back when they made decent movies that you take everybody to go see. The last time I took Barron to see a movie, it was this movie with blue aliens raping dragons with with ponytails, and in 3D! GROSS! But that oversensitive weirdo loved it, which should tell you something about the movies they're making today: they're taking advantage of kids who maybe have some problems like Barron, and in the name of entertainment they're leaving the parents with the results. I tell ya, the fire I walked through for that fuckin' kid. He ain't been the same since. Anyway, if you wanna know about a time when Barron shoulda been watching movies, even though they woulda made me put him in a hospital back then, THIS is the book for you! MAZELTOV!

Mel says

At times, this book felt insurmountable to read to finish -- a massive and fascinating (and at times, impossibly long-winded) tome of the movie icon Louis B. Mayer. Despite its length, I was captivated by LB's story and his historical significance on the movie-making industry. This is likely not a book that you can finish over a weekend, nor will you want to, to truly immerse yourself in his world, but you will enjoy it for its broad and comprehensive characterization of the "Lion of Hollywood" and his relationships with some of the biggest names in movie history and how he came to be -- the star-studded name dropping of the bygone, glamorous era of movies is Hollywood gossip at its best and an added pleasure!
