



Showstoppers: Busby Berkeley and the Tradition of Spectacle

Martin Rubin

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The name Busby Berkeley, creator of the dances for films such as 42nd Street, Babes in Arms, and Million Dollar Mermaid, is synonymous with the spectacular musical production number. Films, television commercials, and MTV videos continue to use "Berkeleyesque" techniques long after Berkeley himself and the genre that nourished him have faded from the scene. The first major analysis of Berkeley's career on stage and screen, Showstoppers emphasizes his relationship to a colorful, somewhat disreputable tradition of American popular entertainment: that of P. T. Barnum, minstrel shows, vaudeville, Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show, burlesque, and the Ziegfeld Follies. Rubin shows how Berkeley absorbed this declining theatrical tradition during his years as a Broadway dance director and then transferred it to the new genre of the early movie musical. With lively prose and engaging photographs, Showstoppers explores new ways of looking at Busby Berkeley, at the musical genre, and at individual films. Appropriate for both specialists and general readers, Showstoppers is an exuberant study of a figure whose career, Rubin notes, "provides an extraordinarily rich point of convergence for a wide range of cultural and artistic contexts."

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