

Hitchcock is dead at age 80



ALFRED HITCHCOCK

Alfred Hitchcock, Hollywood's master of suspense, died peacefully at his home yesterday at the age of 80. Obituary, Page 27.

'Artist of anxiety'

By Bruce McCabe
Globe Staff

Propriety will, of course, forbid the epitaph Alfred Hitchcock said he wanted: "You can see what will happen to you if you are not a good boy."

His credo was simple and economic: Seem to take nothing seriously. Asked for a rave about Ingrid Bergman's performances in "Spellbound" and "Notorious," he responded: "She behaved well." Of Barbara Harris' performance in "Family Plot" he was

able only to summons: "She did as she was told."

He loathed the aura of self-consciousness that surrounded actors. When Sean Connery, on the set of "Marnie," asked him what his "motivation" was supposed to be, Hitchcock answered: "Learn your lines." When Eva Marie Saint, on the set of "North by Northwest," asked him why it was on this particular train that she meets Cary Grant, Hitchcock told her to ask the screenwriter.

He didn't like a lot of talk. While shooting the James Stewart version of



Hollywood's artist of anxiety

★ HITCHCOCK

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"The Man Who Knew Too Much," he rebelled against the idea of Stewart running down a flight of stairs and explaining an important bit of business while the London Symphony Orchestra was playing. Hitchcock's objection was that he couldn't hear the orchestra. He advised Stewart to "just run and wave your arms."

Hitchcock had the best of all possible worlds. He was a commercial filmmaker. Truffaut, who revered him, described him as "an artist of anxiety, like Kafka, Dostoevsky and Poe." He brought his pictures in on time and on budget and they made money. He never made less than \$10 million on a Hollywood film. He described movies as "an industry," not an art.

He was repelled at the idea of scores of technicians standing around while a director made up his mind what to shoot next. Everything was planned out on paper first. "Why not?" he asked. "Imagine an architect going out to direct a bricklayer, one brick at a time, building a house. He uses a blueprint. And so do I." Another time he described his art thusly: "A story is as basic as this: A man comes through a door. How?"

He gave murder a good name because he was as tasteful about it as he was about everything else. He got away with murder. He said he could never make a musical because "as the camera panned the chorus line, the audience would be wondering who'd be shot. It would be the one whose leg stayed up when all the others came down."

He used to say he made "Psycho" in black and white solely so that the audience wouldn't be offended by the sight of Janet Leigh's blood going down the plughole.

"Psycho" cost \$810,000 and has made over \$17 million to date. Hitchcock made it as an experiment. He wanted to see if you could shoot a feature film as quickly and cheaply as a television show. He was intrigued with television, a medium which brought him a different kind of celebrity. It kept him current. He liked television, he said, because "it has brought murder back into the home — where it belongs."

He disliked violence and sex in the cinema. "I don't believe in raw sex," he said. "I like my sex quite definitely cooked, preferably served with piquant sauce." He disliked ostentation. "The most money I've spent on a picture is \$4.5 million for 'North by Northwest,'" he told Vernon Scott. "When you work with a smaller budget you're forced to use ingenuity and imagination and you almost always come up with a better picture."

The fascinating thing about Hitchcock was that the modest exterior disguised a feverish imagination. He said he learned his sense of "timing" in school from a Jesuit priest who let him choose the time he'd be whipped for an infraction. His father taught him fear by having a policeman pretend to lock him up in jail at the age of 5.

Although Hitchcock claims to dislike revenge as motivation, it is not hard to see his brilliant work as revenge on the turn of mind that would do such a thing to a little boy. His idea of fun was to put a ticking bomb under the table of two unsuspecting chatterboxes in a crowded restaurant. Yet the cardinal rule was that when the bomb went off — if it went off — no one should be hurt. He believed his most important function was "to lead the audience to believe one thing is true when it's just the opposite."

The sad thing about Hitchcock's death is that he won't be around to correct all the cinematic outrages (or films) that are perpetrated in his name. It's really kind of scary.