

Wilder, Billy (1906-) Encyclopedia Article

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Wilder, Billy (1906—)

Born Samuel Wilder in an Austrian village, this six-time Academy Award winning director, screenwriter, and producer was dubbed Billy after Buffalo Bill of the 1880s traveling western show. That American nickname apparently foretold, in the wake of the Nazi rise to power, his 1934 emigration to Hollywood where he joined fellow European exiles, learned English, and cultivated a legendary career that indelibly marked American movie history. With partner Charles Brackett, he co-wrote acclaimed comedies like *Ball of Fire* (1941), then scripted, directed, and produced a string of hugely popular films, including the quintessential film noir *Double Indemnity* (1944), and *The Lost Weekend* (1945). Their alliance culminated with the savage portrayal of Hollywood in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950). With I.A.L. Diamond, Wilder created *Some Like it Hot* (1959) and *The Apartment* (1960). His self-produced works more flagrantly expressed his cynicism and penchant for vulgarity with *Ace in the Hole* (1951), betraying a jaded sensibility ahead of its times.

Further Reading:

Lally, Kevin. *Wilder Times: The Life of Billy Wilder*. New York, Henry Holt, 1996.

Sikov, Ed. *On Sunset Boulevard: The Life and Times of Billy Wilder*. New York, Hyperion, 1998.

Zolotow, Maurice. *Billy Wilder in Hollywood*. New York, Putnam, 1977.