Sirk, Douglas (1900-1987) Encyclopedia Article

Sirk, Douglas (1900-1987)

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Contents

Sirk, Douglas (1900-1987) Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

Sirk, Douglas (1900-1987).....3

Sirk, Douglas (1900-1987)

Born Claus Detlev Sierk in Denmark, Douglas Sirk emigrated first to Germany and then, with the rise of Nazism, to the United States where he directed some of the biggest grossing melodramas of the 1950s such as *All I Desire* (1953), *Magnificent Obsession* (1954), *All That Heaven Allows* (1955), *There's Always Tomorrow* (1955), *Written on the Wind* (1956), and *Imitation of Life* (1959). These movies were clearly marketed as "adult films" whose social concerns such as class and race relations justified the graphic, voyeuristic displays of upper-class lifestyle, psychological malaise, sex (ironically Rock Hudson starred in eight of Sirk's movies as the quintessential American heterosexual male), and murder. Considered in turn by critics as subversive critiques of family values and of the 1950s sexual repression or as products celebrating the consumeristic and affluent ideologies of the decade, in the 1980s and 1990s, Sirk's melodramas have come to be regarded, in Barbara Klinger's words, "as 'camp,' as outdated forms that exuded artifice in everything from narrative structure to depiction of romance."

Gene Siskel (left) and Roger Ebert

Further Reading:

Byars, Jackie. *All That Heaven Allows: Re-reading Gender in 1950s Melodrama.* London, Routledge, 1991.

Halliday, Jon. *Sirk on Sirk.* London, Martin Secker & Warburg, 1972.

Klinger, Barbara. *Melodrama & Meaning: History, Culture and the Films of Douglas Sirk.* Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1994.

Mulvey, Laura. *Visual and Other Pleasures.* London, MacMillan, 1989.