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Ted Hope: Portrait of the Producer as Bildungsroman

Adam Leipzig · Wednesday, September 3rd, 2014

How does one become a producer?

As Ted Hope reveals in his entertaining, behind-the-scenes new book, *Hope for Film: From the Frontline of the Independent Cinema Revolutions* , it happens step by step, with educational missteps along the way. For anyone who is a producer, dreams of being a producer, or just wants to understand how the movie world really works, this book is a must-read.

Hope has been a central fixture in the birth and development of the American independent cinema, beginning in 1990 when he co-founded Good Machine, a production and sales company, with James Schamus, and he has produced more than seventy films. It would take about ten of us normal mortals to equal Ted's extraordinary output; he's done an amazing amount in a still-going-strong single career. Among his well-known efforts are *The Ice Storm*, *Happiness*, *American Splendor*, *Eat Drink Man Woman*, *The Brothers McMullen*, *Safe*, *Martha Marcy May Marlene*, *Super* (photo above), and *21 Grams*. Hope's diverse slate includes nearly two dozen movies by first-time filmmakers.

Hope for Film is written in an admirably honest, conversational voice, beginning with Hope's earliest experiences in cinema and moving, somewhat chronologically, through the digital revolution to the present day. "Most problems in the film business come from the misconception that all adults are capable of good behavior," he notes wryly. Hope offers previously-unknown details about deal-making and festival entries, and shares much about the colorful personalities he's worked with, including Schamus, Hal Hartley, Ang Lee, Tamara Jenkins and Todd Solondz. He also reveals, for the first time, the boardroom battles that ended his brief tenure at the San Francisco Film Society, and what brought him to his current post as CEO of Fandor, one of the new, well-funded Free Range Distribution companies.

Yet Hope doesn't tell his story by focusing on the calendar; instead, he brings us along on his path to becoming a producer. The book is organized in ten chapters, beginning with "Inspiration" and concluding with "Change," with each chapter representing a trait Hope has learned and developed as he became who he is today. That's why it's best to think of this book as a *bildungsroman*, the story of a person's spiritual growth and development, rather than an autobiography or a tell-all tale. It's the narrative of how Hope has constructed himself.

Optimism is one of the hallmarks of a great producer. There are times during every film's development when only the producer's enthusiasm keeps the project alive. True to his name, Hope displays optimism in abundance, and it is a play on words he uses in the book's title as well as his

popular blog. “Though technically the word *independent* evokes isolationism, in reality, it’s about community,” he explains.

Hope is as much a critic as an advocate for independent cinema; he calls for a “complete system reboot,” and concludes with an appendix of 141 problems and opportunities with which the independent film world must contend. We all grapple with these big issues; having Ted Hope declare his education through defeats, triumphs and core principles gives us perspective and encouragement.

You can read an excerpt from the book [here](#).

Hope for Film: From the Frontline of the Independent Cinema Revolutions  is available on Amazon .

Top image: Rainn Wilson in ‘Super,’ a movie about everyday people who don super-hero garb, produced by Ted Hope. Photo courtesy IFC.

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