

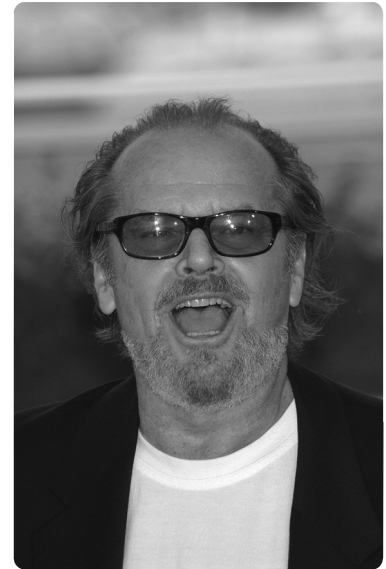
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How Jack Nicholson predicted the future of Hollywood

by Scott Campbell

(1) When Jack Nicholson first started making his way in the weird and wonderful world of cinema, the movement called 'New Hollywood', when the film director, rather than the studio, took on a key authorial role, hadn't even started yet, but he would go on to become one of its biggest beneficiaries.

(2) After following in the footsteps of countless future legends by sitting under Roger Corman's invaluable learning tree, Nicholson gained an understanding of the filmmaking process from multiple perspectives, which played a huge part in helping him navigate the constantly changing face of the industry.



(3) The film Easy Rider propelled him towards the mainstream, making Nicholson part of the unlikely leading men who would go on to define the 1970s. Once he sank his claws into the A-list, he refused to take them back out until he abandoned acting altogether on his own terms four decades later.

(4) He was one of the faces of a seismic shift at every level, but he didn't lose a step when 'New Hollywood' ran its course. Instead, he emerged at the forefront of another trend that was soon to become commonplace, navigating a lucrative contract for himself that saw him take a lower salary in favour of back-end profits and merchandising royalties for playing the Joker in Tim Burton's Batman.

(5) Nicholson had an inkling that the blockbuster paradigm was about to change forever, and he made a conscious effort to put himself at the forefront of it, much like he'd once completely forsaken his screenwriting and directing aspirations when 'New Hollywood' let it be known he had a chance to make it to the very top as an actor.

(6) With that in mind, discovering that Nicholson predicted another massive shift in the landscape shouldn't come as that much of a surprise. Then again, he made his Nostradamus-like call in 1993 long before the internet was popularised, and well prior to the explosion of gossip websites, social media, and the rampant rumour-mongering celebrities have to contend with in the age of 24-hour news cycles that couldn't care less about the moral pitfalls of sensationalism and misinformation.

(7) “These days, everyone wants to be in the know about the movie business,” he seethed to Utah based paper Deseret. “It’s amazing how resonant the smallest piece of insider gossip is.” Lo and behold, fast forward 30 years, and his proclamation continues to grow more relevant and prescient with each passing year.

(8) In the modern age, it can often feel as though folks are more interested in behind-the-scenes scuttlebutt and salacious speculation than the films themselves, and they’ve got the perfect conduit to indulge those interests via smartphone or computer. Anyone with a keyboard can be a critic, anyone with an internet connection can relay their opinion, and a lot of people pass themselves off as being a great deal more studious about celluloid than they actually are.

(9) Needless to say, Nicholson called that one, too. “People who are far removed from the moviemaking scene, you’d think they were as knowledgeable as legendary producer and studio executive Darryl Zanuck the way they talk,” he suggested. “The entrepreneur/impresario in me has always felt that it’s been a long, big mistake getting the public involved at this level of knowing how much a film cost and who’s doing what.”

(10) Not that he could have guessed in the early ‘90s, but he was spot-on once again. Thanks to the level of access everybody has to either world-famous names or high-profile productions — again, with social media at the forefront — it can be genuinely damaging to a movie’s reputation to arrive in cinemas carrying bad buzz, which affects not only the production’s bottom line but often those of the actors involved.

(11) Films can get trashed for costing too much money, actors can be placed in the crosshairs of cancel culture, the personal lives of A-listers are under a constant state of scrutiny, campaigns and petitions spring up with reckless abandon to try and force change that isn’t going to come, none of which were things Nicholson had to content with during his legendary career.

(12) And yet, he saw it coming long before his retirement, albeit on an incrementally smaller scale. Skip to the present day, and virtually everything he was wary of has come to pass.

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