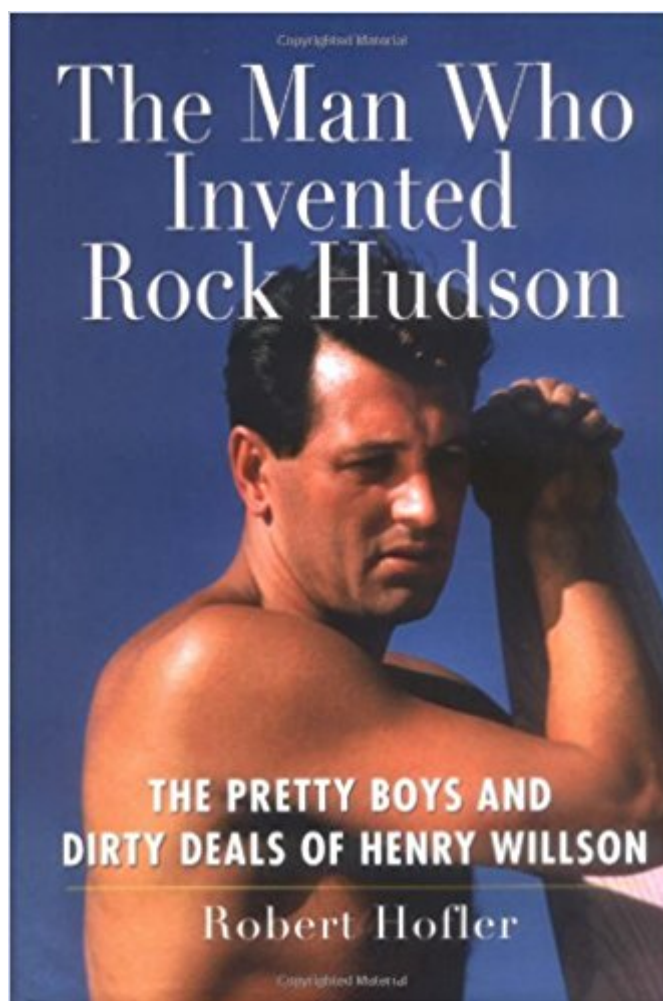


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# The Man Who Invented Rock Hudson: The Pretty Boys And Dirty Deals Of Henry Willson



## Synopsis

Henry Willson started off as a talent scout under powerhouse mogul David O. Selznick, for whom Willson procured women. The starmaker-to-be was therefore on the lookout for promising newcomers— as actors, lovers and sometimes both— when he received an unsolicited photograph from a movie star hopeful named Roy Scherer. Unbeknownst to Willson, the photograph of the handsome young man with bad teeth would have not only a career-defining impact for himself but, more importantly, redefine Hollywood's concept of the male heartthrob. Roy Scherer became Rock Hudson and for the next twenty-five years Henry Wilson became the man behind movie "beefcake." The Man Who Invented Rock Hudson delves into Willson's life in explicit, unsparing detail. Variety reporter Robert Hofler deftly chronicles Willson's maneuvers to sidestep the FBI's investigation into Hudson's sex life; the starmaker's use of off-duty L.A.P.D. cops and Mob ties to scare off Hudson's blackmailers; Hudson's "arranged" marriage to Willson's secretary, Phyllis Gates; as well as Hudson's affair with a Universal Pictures vice-president to help secure starring roles in *Magnificent Obsession* and *Giant*. Additionally, the book digs into Willson's other star clients, including Robert Wagner, Troy Donahue, Tab Hunter, and John Derek.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Those who think Hollywood's current predatory political scene and celebrity partner-swapping activities are new phenomena would be wise to dive into this tell-all tale of Henry Willson, an agent

who became a major star maker to actors like Rock Hudson, Tab Hunter and Troy Donahue in the 1950s. Rapacious, ambitious and fond of a sex-for-roles strategy, Willson (1911–1978) is a compelling character worthy of this extensive biography. His story, too, illustrates the rise of the studio star system, in which actresses were pimped out to movie executives by their agents, and actors married to cover their homosexual liaisons. Hofler, a former Variety senior editor now the publication's theater reporter, delves into this shadowy, sometimes seamy world with particular relish, and his writing has all the sizzle of the films his subjects starred in. He includes interviews with a number of Hollywood insiders (Roddy McDowall and Shirley Temple Black, to name two), and shows remarkable sympathy for Willson, offering a glimpse into a man and an era that may be past, but whose effects linger still. Photos. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Henry Wilson was a Hollywood reporter turned agent who represented, among other actors, several who were gay, and his specialty was not only seducing young Hollywood material but also "butching" them up for acceptance on the silver screen in the heartland, where, in the 1950s and 1960s, the idea of a matinee idol being homosexual simply could not be conceived. Wilson was gay himself but not handsome; however, he certainly knew a handsome face when he saw one, especially the handsome face out of which a successful film career could be made. One of Wilson's major clients--one of his major inventions--was Rock Hudson, and it is through Rock's story that this delicious yet sad history of Hollywood in that era is refracted. Hollywood was publicity driven and gay-repressed back then, but finally, what really has changed? Hofler's chronicle is an important contribution to the behind-the-scenes history of the movie industry and pairs nicely with the recently published Tab Hunter Confidential. Brad Hooper Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

This author rambled on so much I just skipped so many pages. There were errors in dates etc. and places. Rock Hudson was not married in a church but at a hotel. Also he passed away October 2nd, 1985 (not August 5th 1987 - as stated in the book by Robert Hofler). With these errors the details had not been well researched. Would not recommend the book. I was disappointed with it.

This book was written in a strange style which made the first half a difficult read. Having worked in Hollywood for the last 50 years, many of these stories were familiar to me. Also, I met Henry Willson at Villa Frascati in the early 60s. Yes, I got the familiar line and, no, I did not bite. His reputation

preceded him so buyer beware. It is amazing to see what compromises people will make for a chance at celebrity. I do not judge as they were driven by their ambitions.

I grew up watching Rock Hudson and Doris Day movies with my mom. I remember when he died and when the world found out he had AIDS. This book is very interesting and easy to follow. It makes him and everyone around him seem real, not just names. You come away realizing that the real Rock Hudson was just a country boy made good. You will read about his real life friendship and flirty ways with Doris Day. You'll see how he lacked confidence in himself and how hard he worked to keep the fact that he was gay hidden from Hollywood and his fans. If you like biographies about famous celebrities and the stars they worked from days gone by, this is the book. I highly recommend it.

This book is a Gay Gossip-Lover's document covering the life of a legendary Hollywood agent, Henry Willson, and his stable of "pretty-boy" actors, many of whom he stage-named (e.g., Rock, Tab, Rory, etc.) and many of whom were gay or bi-sexual. Tho' Willson himself was a "closeted" gay man, all the "straight" producers & directors knew the score --- & please remember that this was a time when homosexuality was criminal & punishable by imprisonment. It was also the time of the rise of tabloid gossip magazines such as "Confidential", whose editors liked nothing more than unmasking the sexual shenanigans of the stars --- the seamier the better --- and sexual transgressions of any sort were its main course. Willson was also an obnoxious alcoholic and quite sexually voracious. To become his client involved some type of sexual trade-off. But Henry definitely made stars of many handsome men after much grooming and polishing, of course. Rock Hudson, nÃfÂ©e Roy Fitzgerald, fared best of all these beauties --- tho' his voracious homosexual appetite kept Willson sparring with gossips, & at one point required him to trade Rory Calhoun's secrets (he was a felon & ex-con) in order to protect Rock's "salacious proclivities ". This is very much a "guilty pleasure" of a book --- tho' many may find it silly & inconsequential, I would say to them: "that is the point"! So lighten-up and enjoy . . .

Like most books these days, it could have used a better editor. But it's a lot more compelling and readable than I expected, and it makes a good argument that Hollywood needed Henry Willson -- with his bevy of idealized Rocks, Tabs, and Guys -- as much as he needed Hollywood. And, of course, when tastes changed, Hollywood abandoned Willson. So it shall always be. Willson's deals may have been dirty, but so were most of his peers'.

I picked up this book, honestly not expecting much... maybe some exaggerated ego-boosting tales of Henry Willson (which of course, we got)... but I was pleasantly surprised by how much heart was in this story. They showed the good with the bad, and I'm sure everything needs taken with a grain of salt, but I was definitely fascinated by Rock Hudson's rise to fame that was portrayed here.

More of a gossip driven expose' on a particular Hollywood scene/era, than a biography of Henry Willson. A less reputable aspect to the 40's - 60's Tinseltown star machine is covered in all of it's sordid "glory". The seamier side to many A-list and no-list figures of the day are exposed in frank detail. Once read, you likely won't be able to look at certain films, television shows, or celebrities in the same fashion as you once did. Yet, you also won't have much of an understanding of the man at the center of it all, aside from what he did and where those actions ultimately left him.

A little more bio on Rock Hudson would complement the title more.

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