

HARRY SALTZMAN



Tony Richardson affectionately dubbed his Woodfall partner Harry Saltzman “a huckster, a sublime huckster.” The Canadian-American impresario is fondly remembered by all who knew him as a truly larger-than-life character, the walking, talking epitome of the showbiz wheeler-dealer, forever on the lookout for the main chance.

But to suggest that Herschel (not Harold) Saltzman was solely interested in personal financial advantage would be to do the man a considerable disservice. He helped set up UNESCO’s film division in 1945, bailed out Orson Welles’ late masterpiece *Chimes at Midnight* (1965)—absolutely nobody’s idea of a sure-fire moneymaker—by purchasing international distribution rights for \$750,000, and at the end of his long, colourful career produced Serbian maverick Emir Kusturica’s *Time of the Gypsies* (1988), winner of the Best Director prize at Cannes.

BORN: SHERBROOKE (QUÉBEC, CANADA), 27TH OCTOBER 1915

DIED: PARIS, 2
8TH SEPTEMBER 1994

Like Welles and Kusturica, Saltzman always ploughed his own furrow—to the point of volatile eccentricity, his restless energy forever brimming with ideas and schemes. Born in Québec and brought up in New Brunswick until the age of seven, he then moved with his family to Ohio before running away from home at the age of 15—he joined a circus two years later, enjoying a long spell on the road.

The showbusiness bug evidently bit deep: in the 1930s he moved to Paris—ostensibly to study political science and economics—but quickly carved a niche as a talent-scout supplying performers to music-halls all over Europe. Always a itinerant internationalist, he hopped back and forth across the Atlantic through the 1940s and 1950s, dabbling in many branches of the business (for a while he made a killing from coin-operated “hobby horses” in department stores) and finding particular success producing for the stage. The mid-fifties saw him established with his family in London, where he made his feature-film debut as a writer/producer on Ralph Thomas’s Bob Hope / Katharine Hepburn comedy *The Iron Petticoat* (1956)—a notoriously troubled production.

Two years later he would join forces with John Osborne and Tony Richardson to create Woodfall Films, although his involvement would only extend to the company's first three releases: *Look Back in Anger*, *The Entertainer* and *Saturday Night And Sunday Morning*. The first was something of a flop; the second, a success; the third reportedly made its entire budget back in the first week of distribution. Having hit the financial jackpot with this unexpected smash, Saltzman then proceeded to shrewdly pounce upon an even more lucrative bonanza.

Enthused by Ian Fleming's novel *Goldfinger*, he pursued and bought the film rights to all of the 007 novels and stories (bar *Casino Royale*) from the author, securing a six-month option in June 1961 which resulted in *Dr No* (1962). The rest is history; Saltzman's name will probably always be primarily associated with the James Bond franchise—the fourth most successful series in world cinema, with cumulative global takings of more than \$7bn.

To make these films, with his partner Albert R. "Cubby" Broccoli, Saltzman formed the company Danjaq (named after their wives Jacqueline and Dana) and its offshoot Eon, which went on to exclusively produce the "official" Bond pictures. As John Patterson wrote in *The Guardian*, "Saltzman superintended the writing, sculpting the character and the essence of the franchise—accentuating the Englishness of it all—and pushed for the roughneck Sean Connery as Bond over the effete James Mason-ish toffs mulled by Fleming and [Broccoli.]"

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He would end up selling his share in Danjaq to United Artists in 1975, in the midst of severe cash-flow problems after a series of ill-advised business decisions—among them 1969’s ill-fated all-star epic, *The Battle of Britain*. But by this point he had been closely involved with nine Bond movies up to and including *The Man With the Golden Gun*. Saltzman, via his company Lowndes Productions, had also funded three much grittier spy dramas starring Michael Caine as Len Deighton’s bespectacled hero Harry Palmer, starting with *The Ipcress File* (1965).

There has long been considerable speculation that Saltzman was particularly drawn to the espionage genre because of his own wartime activities with the OSS—precursor to the CIA—after he became an American citizen in 1939. It has even been suggested that his path crossed that of Fleming (who worked for British Naval Intelligence) during this murky period. “I really strongly believe that he and my father shared some similar experiences,” his daughter Hilary once remarked. “Even though they couldn’t publicise it, I really think Ian felt that this series was safe in my father’s hands.”