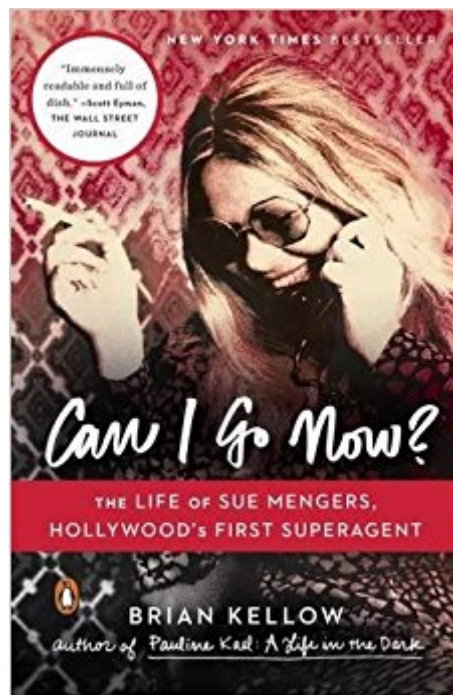




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Can I Go Now?: The Life Of Sue Mengers, Hollywood's First Superagent



Synopsis

“To call Sue Mengers a character is an understatement, unless the word is written in all-caps, followed by an exclamation point and modified by an expletive. And based on Brian Kellow’s assessment in his thoroughly researched *Can I Go Now?* even that description may be playing down her personality a bit.” —Jen Chaney, *The Washington Post*

—A *NY Times* Culture Bestseller —An *Entertainment Weekly* Best Pop Culture Book of 2015 —A *Booklist* Top Ten Arts Book of 2015

A lively and colorful biography of Hollywood’s first superagent —one of the most outrageous showbiz characters of the 1960s and 1970s whose clients included Barbra Streisand, Ryan O’Neal, Faye Dunaway, Michael Caine, and Candice Bergen. Before Sue Mengers hit the scene in the mid-1960s, talent agents remained quietly in the background. But staying in the background was not possible for Mengers. Irrepressible and loaded with chutzpah, she became a driving force of Creative Management Associates (which later became ICM) handling the era’s preeminent stars. A true original with a gift for making the biggest stars in Hollywood listen to hard truths about their careers and personal lives, Mengers became a force to be reckoned with. Her salesmanship never stopped. In 1979, she was on a plane that was commandeered by a hijacker, who wanted Charlton Heston to deliver a message on television. Mengers was incensed, wondering why the hijacker wanted Heston, when she could get him Barbra Streisand. Acclaimed biographer Brian Kellow spins an irresistible tale, exhaustively researched and filled with anecdotes about and interviews more than two hundred show-business luminaries. A riveting biography of a powerful woman that charts show business as it evolved from New York City in the 1950s through Hollywood in the early 1980s, *Can I Go Now?* will mesmerize anyone who loves cinema’s most fruitful period. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books; Reprint edition (September 6, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0143108875

ISBN-13: 978-0143108870

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.7 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 140 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #441,020 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #162 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Theatre #1418 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Movies > History & Criticism #3608 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Actors & Entertainers

Customer Reviews

“Even the brightest star is occasionally eclipsed by a moon. Sue Mengers was a moon. . . . Kellow is the first to pull back the caftan, to consider what really made Mengers Mengers. He has made a specialty of forceful showbiz women—previous subjects include Pauline Kael and Ethel Merman—and she fits easily into that pantheon. . . . [Mengers] came of age as the moving pictures, and seemingly the world, burst into Technicolor. Kellow vividly renders this time of alliterative rat-a-tat names begat of the typewriter—Boaty Boatwright, Freddie Fields, Lionel Lerner, Maynard Morris—and restaurants that treated regulars like family: Downey’s and Lindy’s and Sardi’s. . . . [a] reflective and soulful book.”

—Alexandra Jacobs, The New York Times Book Review

“To call Sue Mengers a character is an understatement, unless the word is written in all-caps, followed by an exclamation point and modified by an expletive. And based on Brian Kellow’s assessment in his thoroughly researched Can I Go Now? even that description may be playing down her personality a bit. Gutsy, pushy and savvy, Mengers was the take-no-b.s. power agent for many of Hollywood’s boldest bold-faced names in the late 1960s and the ’70s. . . . Can I Go Now?—a title inspired by something Mengers often said to cut short conversations—offers plenty of dishy, inside-’70s-Hollywood stories, including tales from those soirees at her Beverly Hills home. . . . Kellow doesn’t shy away from highlighting her negative traits as well, qualities that often worked at odds with her strongest attributes.”

—Jen Chaney, The Washington Post

“Picture Joan Rivers with less of a filter, bulldozer-setting ramped up to 12, shpritzing venom alongside comic abuse. Imagine that, and you’ll start to get a vague idea of the lioness named Sue Mengers. . . .

[Kellow’s] book is immensely readable and full of dish.”

—Scott Eyman, The Wall Street Journal

“Super-agent Sue Mengers handled some of the hottest stars in Hollywood. . . . Brian Kellow’s new biography, Can I Go Now? derives its title from one of her favorite ways to end a phone call. As one of the most powerful agents in Hollywood for two decades—Time magazine described her as a cross between Mama Cass and Mack the Knife—Mengers was uncensored. She also was a skilled negotiator. And

a trail blazer for women in the male-dominated field. Susan King, The Los Angeles Times
“Mengers was the first woman to amass the sort of power she did, representing Barbra Streisand, Gene Hackman, Michael Caine, Candice Bergen, Ryan O’Neal, Mike Nichols and so many more. But Mengers, as this insightful, often hilarious and celebrity-filled book relates, was a mass of contradictions. Larry Getlen, New York Post
“[Kellow] brings her rollicking personality to life with outrageous anecdotes while pointing out the behaviors that doomed her. . . . In the 1990s, she walked into a party, looked around and muttered to her companions, ‘Schindler’s B-list.’ Her biography, however, is A-list all the way. Paul Teetor, LA Weekly
“Colorful is the kind of code word one uses when actual examples can’t be published in a review. Kellow fills his lively book Can I Go Now? with enough ribald tales of Mengers being colorful to fill a crayon box. That she could be endearing as well as rude and insulting to the people she represented is surprising and just one aspect of a fascinating personality Kellow places squarely in the context of the way the movie business worked at that time. . . . Kellow give[s] Mengers the place in Hollywood history that she deserves. Douglass K. Daniel, The Associated Press
“Before there was Ovitz or Ari, there was Sue Mengers. During the peak of her clout in the 1970s, the brash barrier-breaker helped popularize the idea of the Hollywood super-agent. The media lapped up her comic crudity . . . her legendary dinner parties attracted Tinseltown’s A-list, and 60 Minutes came calling to do a lengthy interview that captured Mengers dishing and deal-making. . . . She didn’t believe in gussying up hard truths and could be brutally candid with her clients. That lost her some accounts . . . but it also earned her respect. “Everyone prized her honesty,” Kellow said. “In a town like Hollywood, that’s hard to come by. . . . She was a scrutinizing, tough Jewish mama.”
Brent Lang, Variety
“An absorbing read. Clark Collis, Entertainment Weekly
“With his new book Can I Go Now?, Brian Kellow follows up his 2011 biography of film critic iconoclast Pauline Kael by telling the story of Sue Mengers, the first enormously successful female agent in the movie industry. As the representative for many of the major players of the day . . . Mengers helped to define a new concept of Hollywood stardom for a new, post-studio system era. Mengers also set a new standard for female power in the workplace, with a brash, inimitable style that mixed sweet talk and harassment, employing feminine wiles more often than not as a weapon. . . . The story of how a strong woman steamrolled through the Hollywood glass ceiling is an important one, but what makes Can I Go Now? worth reading is its careful chronicling of what

happens after the glass shatters, and that woman has to figure out how to stay on top without revealing her wounds.

• Karina Longworth, *Slate* “A minor masterpiece of Hollywood history in its most exciting, glamorous, and gossip-wise period.”

• Liz Smith, *New York Social Diary* “Mengers was a complicated, powerful trailblazer, one who barged down doors for women and changed the nature of the talent-agent business. Kellow’s absorbing biography not only peels back the layers to reveal the true nature of this fascinating individual but also delves deeply into the film industry in the latter half of the twentieth century.”

• Booklist (starred review) “Effortlessly readable, especially for Vanity Fair enthusiasts and film buffs.”

• Library Journal “From the 1950s through the 1980s, Sue Mengers represented some of the most famous names in show business. . . . [The agent’s] coveted gatherings, her bawdy appearances at premieres and nightclubs, and a profile in *Vanity Fair* made her as recognizable as her glamorous roster of actors, and she worked tirelessly to promote them—not just to get them parts, but also higher and higher salaries. . . . Kellow, an admirer of Mengers’s spunk and achievements, serves her well in this deft, entertaining biography.”

• Kirkus Reviews Praise for *Pauline Kael: A Life in the Dark* “[A] smart and incisive biography. . . . [Moviegoers] are in for a colossal eye-opening. [Kael’s] love for film has no present-day counterpart. . . . Mr. Kellow’s clear, independent view of his subject is his book’s most valuable surprise. . . . Kael liked to disparage what she called ‘œsaphead objectivity. But Mr. Kellow is no saphead, and he makes objectivity a great virtue.”

• Janet Maslin, *The New York Times* (Editors’ Choice) “Illuminating.”

• The New Yorker (Reviewers’ favorites from 2011) “[An] entertaining and insightful biography, as much a study of her criticism as a narrative of her life. . . . [Pauline] Kael emerges from [Kellow’s] biography as a great cinematic character, a kind of *Citizen Kane*, with a life lived and shaped by the dark.”

• Elaine Showalter, *The Times Literary Supplement* “A smart and eminently readable examination of the life and career of one of the twentieth century’s most influential movie critics.”

• Los Angeles Times (blog) “To appreciate Kael’s trailblazing, you have to see it in its broader context. Luckily, that backdrop is filled in with sure-footed sophistication by Brian Kellow in *Pauline Kael: A Life in the Dark*, a fair-minded and deeply reported Kael biography.”

• Frank Rich, *The New York Times Book Review* “[A] rich, thorough, and admirably fair biography.”

• Entertainment Weekly (Best Nonfiction Books of 2011) “[Pauline Kael] got into my bloodstream more than any

other critic. So I have been waiting most of my life for a smart, insightful biography like [Pauline Kael: A Life in the Dark] to take me beyond and beneath the hypnotic thrill of her prose. — Ben Brantley, The New York Times (Critics' Picks) From the Hardcover edition.

Brian Kellow is the author of *Pauline Kael: A Life in the Dark*; *Ethel Merman: A Life*; *The Bennetts: An Acting Family* and the coauthor of *Can't Help Singing: The Life of Eileen Farrell*. His articles have appeared in *Vanity Fair*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Observer*, *Opera*, and other publications. Kellow lives in New York City.

Can I go now? is yet another example of the delicate and fine balancing act any biographer walks when analyzing an individual against their role and/or participation in a cultural paradigm shift. Mr. Kellow threads the needle once again with adept candor and proficiency as he did with his biography of Pauline Kael. Elements of the period when Menger's achieve (some might say seized) her power and influence intersected with the crossroads of a shifting cultural and, to a greater extent, economic transformation in the town dominated by a single industry. Thoughtful, insightful, edisly yet never disrespectful of either the subject nor any of the myriad of individuals who have provided back ground and comment as raw material for Kellow to mold, this extremely readable and enjoyable book is far from the oddly flat biography of such a colorful character.. Janet Maslin of The New York Times penned in her oddly suspect review. Doubtful Ms. Maslin was reading the same fully dimensional biography I read. Perhaps the not so transparent undercurrent of her review, i.e. a bit of jealousy mixed with an East Coast bias to a mostly West Coast industry, lay manifest to her assumption. It seems Mr. Kellow has a penchant for that delicious (with Kael and now Mangers) period in Hollywood history that has been under-analyzed. I for one, not only enjoyed the read but came away with informed knowledge of a critical period in moviemaking and of an individual who help shape its profile.

This book of *Can I Go Now?: The Life of Sue Mengers, Hollywood's First Superagent* by Brian Kellow touches on both Menger's early life and her later life. Some of the multiple tidbits in this book; pictures starting after page 118 of Sue Mengers as a child in Hamburg Germany, pictures of Sue Menger with her mother Ruth Mengers, her cousin Leo Senders engagement party photo, a photo of Sue Mengers with her friend Boaty Baotwright etc.

There is also a mention that Sue Menger worked to help Paula Prentiss obtain a role in the 1973 version of the movie Westworld (page 122).

This is a no hold barred biography about a woman leader talent Sue Mengers who tells it like it is in the early days up until the 90's. Sue Mengal is a real character that makes you laugh at her boldness starting in the early days when women were expected to be in the home and not making millions dueling in Hollywood and New York. Sue has Clients starting with greats like Streisand and going through the lists of many of the most famous stars of the Hollywood and their friends. She is known for her Great Parties that she uses a a ruse to make friends and then sign dozens of the biggest names of the "Silver Screen" . It is really a hilarious adventure you take with her as she raises hell and becomes the go to person for most stars.....She is wacky and bold and the book tells it all. I found it very entertaining and funny.....A great read if you want to know about the grit and grim she faced working her way to the top. She is another largely unknown person that operated behind the scenes helping make the movies we all so loved. It is a easy and very well written book about this historical woman.

Very interesting life of a woman who wanted to be an actress, but since that didn't pan out became an agent to actors in a business that she loved.Sure, she was aggressive and salty, but she had to be in a business dominated by only men at the time. She flourished when movies were driven by characters and plot, mainly the 60's & 70's. Things started to deteriorate for her when all movies had to be blockbusters like Star Wars and became franchises expected to make big money every time. Sue had her faults, but she certainly loved actors and the movie business. Wellwritten, fascinating book about a woman born in Germany who became a talent agent to major movie stars in the US at a time when very exciting,non-formulaic movies were being made.

I chose this book as I remembered Sue ,her career, and life . Good insight into her psyche. Drawback is if a younger reader; one may be lost by days, people,and time that has past. I was quite moved by loyalty of Sue,s close friends. Some of us have experienced such a relationship.. It is moving to know such loyalty still exists. One understands the need for a break for a bit,but came back out of love and understanding.

The hard-working author is perhaps too "straight arrow" for the story of this bawdy broad. Kellow's research is formidable, his writing clear and concise. But an outrageous character like Mengers

needs somebody like the late Joan Rivers to dish the dirt and bring her to life. That said, Kellow's book contains lots of interesting Hollywood background (with emphasis on deals and backstabbing); and it's highly entertaining...up to a point!

This book was raucous, fun, insightful, and informative. I grew up knowing this woman's name. I lived in Los Angeles most of my life, and I saw her name every day in the entertainment columns of our newspaper. I saw her once, in person, and she was so bright and loud and vulgar; I think she was jokingly berating her companion as they walked from their car to a restaurant in Beverly Hills, but now, after reading this, I am not so sure she was joking. This writer took what could have been a very dull and indulgent book and made it a delight to read. Mengers is a woman who set the bar for other women in her industry, yet wasn't interested in helping them succeed. Her devotion to men and her desire to please was fitting for her time, yet she was way ahead of her time where career women were concerned. And the inside dish on some of the people in her orbit is delicious. Fun read.

Having once met Sue Mengers when working in Hollywood, I can attest that she was everything you might expect. But I expected more from the book by Brian Kellow. The story was chopped up and did not flow well for me. Kellow spends too much time trying to psychoanalyze his subject and not enough time sharing the dozens of legendary stories. I had a really hard time staying with the book, despite of my high interest in the subject.

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