

## MICHAEL USLAN

merchandising, toys and games.

### **Why did it take a decade to get the first Batman film made?**

Every single studio turned me down. Warner Bros. had the right of first refusal because they owned DC Comics. I couldn't even get in the door. All the studios said, "You're crazy! You can't do serious comic book films with dark superheroes. And for God's sake, nobody has ever made a movie based on an old television series!"

Columbia Pictures said, "Batman will never be a successful movie because our movie Annie didn't do well." Hollywood didn't embrace comic books. They looked down their noses at them. I had to convince them that comic books are not a genre. They are a source of great stories and characters the way novels are. It took years.

### **How did you finally get the first movie made?**

After we'd been turned down by every studio, my partner Ben [Meiniker] said to me, "Michael, back in 1969 when I was running MGM, I interviewed three young men to be presidents of production." One of those guys was Peter Gruber, who was then partnered with Neil Bogart at Casablanca Records. Casablanca was just about to start making pictures. Peter was young, hip, and Ben thought he might get it. He put me on the phone with Peter, and I did a quick pitch. He loved it. Two days later, Ben and I flew out to L.A. to pitch in person. At the end of it, Peter said, "Let's do it. We'll bankroll this thing." That's how we got underway. Then in 1986, [director] Tim Burton became associated with the project.

### **What do you do as executive producer of the Batman films?**

There are so many different types of producers today. Some are financial, some business, some creative or a mixture. I like to think of myself as a creative producer. When I go out to put together a project, I look for something that is a great story with great characters, obtain the rights to that property and then find the right writer, director and stars so that I have a package I can find financing and distribution for.

### **Do you have a favorite Batman movie?**

If you take our first revolutionary Batman movie and couple it with Christopher Nolan's three Batman pictures, that represents everything I hoped to have done with Batman.

### **Which actor captured Batman's essence?**

I don't think that their portrayals of Batman were all that different, but their takes on Bruce Wayne were. This is all about Bruce Wayne. When Tim Burton first said he wanted Michael Keaton to play Batman, I was beside myself. All the years I spent trying to do a dark and serious Batman movie down the drain because we were going to hire a comedian. "Mr. Mom as Batman?!" Tim Burton was absolutely right. Michael Keaton [Batman, Batman Returns] made it all work. Val Kilmer [Batman Forever] did it in a very darkly romantic, stylized way. George Clooney [Batman & Robin] was the warm and fuzzy guy next door. And I think Christian Bale [Batman Begins, The Dark Knight, The Dark Knight Rises] nails it for every generation of Batman fans.

### **What can we expect from the latest installment, The Dark Knight Rises?**

If you're like me, an utter Batman fan and comic book geek, you've seen Christopher Nolan prove how much he loves and understands this character. He has flawlessly executed his vision. Fasten your seat belt and get ready for an amazing conclusion to his trilogy on July 20, 2012.

The Boy Who Loved Batman by Michael Uslan is available at bookstores everywhere or directly from [TheBoyWhoLovedBatman.com](http://TheBoyWhoLovedBatman.com). #