

Humor Is Serious Business for Comedian Lloyd Who Makes But Few Pictures

Few Writers Can Turn Out Acceptable Stories for the Popular Actor; Current Broadway Play Would Do, But Is Not Available.

By PAUL HARRISON

HOLLYWOOD, July 27.—(NEA)—The reason you see so few Harold Lloyd comedies is that scarcely anybody seems able to write a Harold Lloyd story.

Mr. Lloyd himself will tell you that it is absolutely necessary to have a story. "Not like the silent days when I'd get a gag man, a director and a general idea, and we'd start in the middle of the picture, maybe shooting toward both ends without knowing how it eventually would begin or finish."

So now the producer spends much of his time granting audiences to authors, authors' agents, and other purveyors of ideas colossal and terrific. Some of the writers are internationally famous, but their representatives talk, and Lloyd listens, deadpan. After half an hour he says, "Sorry, but I got a date to go bowling. Maybe you can sell that story to Spanky McFarland or Stepin Fetchit."

Only two naturals—both Broadway hits—have come to his attention in the last three years. One was "The Milky Way," which he bought and made into a successful picture. The other was "Three Men on a Horse," for which he would have paid \$175,000 except that it wasn't for sale.

After he gets a story, though, Lloyd usually strays far from the script during production, and then remakes the picture following the first preview. The original version of "The Milky Way" was so bad that he walked out in the middle of the initial showing. Then he worked furiously for three months remodeling it to acceptable form.

He is fond of observing that making comedies is a very serious business. In 1902, at the age of 13, he was playing Little Abe in "Fos of the Pribervilles," and dreaming of being a great dramatic star.

Later, working for Hal Roach, he played heavies, character roles, and juveniles. One day the comedian quit and Roach said, "Harold, you might as well be the comedian, too."

So Lloyd became "Willie Work" and then the slapstick "Lonesome Luke," a Chaplinesque character, though dumber. But for injury to his eyes, he might never have thought of wearing glasses. The eyes recovered, but by that time Lloyd had discovered the comedy value of well-rimmed spectacles, which he now wears lensless. This new identity projected him to prominence and his own producing company.

THE cost of present-day filming has soared Lloyd from the years when he was considered almost incidental to funmaking. Buckets of water tossed from cat-walks, loaded cigars and electric chairs once were devices of studio routine. Lloyd recalls that whole day was devoted to ribbing an over-sensuous gateman.

On location trips, members of the cast would be singled out as victims, and just before quitting time would be hustled into ridiculous costumes and makeup. Then the company would sneak away and leave them to get home as best they could.

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Not even the most erudite authors etymologists have a chance against Lloyd, the master. He has set a whole corps of secretaries to transcribing all the five-letter words from an unabridged dictionary. He has memorized thousands of them—words such as hamlet, pipit, scribe and xebec.

The funnyman is hypercritical of his own performances, but a pleasant and lenient boss. Almost every one on his staff has been there more than a decade. Wally Howe, bearded bit-actor, has been Lloyd's stage and handymen for 30 years.

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WHERE, WHAT, WHEN

APOLLO

"Poor Little Rich Girl," with Shirley Temple, Alice Faye, Jack M. Hall, at 11:45, 1:45, 3:45, 5:45, 7:45, 9:45.

CIRCLE

"Goodnight, Beulah," with Henry Fonda, Mary Brian, and 10:30. Also "The Return of the Bad Men," with George Marshall, at 12:30, 2:30, 4:30, 6:30, 8:30, and 10:30.

LOEWS

"Buck," with Jean Harlow, Cary Grant, and 10:30. Also "Counter-Attack," with George Marshall, at 12:30, 2:30, 4:30, 6:30, 8:30, and 10:30.

KEITH'S

"It's a Boy," with Bert Wheeler and Bob Woolsey. Also "The Will," with Charles Rogers and Mary McLeod Bethune, at 11:45.

LYRIC

"Earl Brown," with Earl Brown and June Travis, at 11:45, 1:45, 3:45, 5:45, 7:45, 9:45.

ALAMO

"The Devil's Squadron," with Richard Dix, and 10:30. Also "The Peck," with John Ford, at 11:45.

AMERICAN

"Bullets or Ballots," with Edward G. Robinson, Alvin Karpis, and 10:30.

OHIO

"Gilly Brides," with Bert Wheeler and Bob Woolsey. Also "The Will," with Charles Rogers and Mary McLeod Bethune, at 11:45.

O'Brien to Star in

Historical Movie

Timex Special

HOLLYWOOD, July 27.—George O'Brien, who first starred in "Daniel Boone," is to walk back into pages of history and emerge as "Sam Houston, Pioneer."

The film story, written by Edmund Pinchot, portrays the colorful soldier in his struggle to aid in the founding of the Texas Republic, and his rise to the presidency of the Lone Star Republic.

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LYRIC MANAGEMENT, EMPLOYEES CELEBRATE THEATER'S SUCCESS

By JOHN W. THOMPSON

"There's no future in vaudeville," "Motion pictures are the only profitable entertainment."

Don't waste money on vaudeville shows, Charlie."

Exactly 100 weeks ago, Charles M. Olson turned a deaf ear to such exhortations, then started the Lyric on a policy of stage shows with feature movies.

Now the Lyric is one of a dozen theaters in the country that weathered depression, playing vaudeville week in and week out. And Mr. Olson, whose career started in the wrestling ring (the once was one of the state's outstanding mat artists), sat back in his office chair today and grinned as his theater celebrated its one-hundredth consecutive week of vaudeville.

Others are Envious

Movie house operators have been known to turn slightly green when they glimpsed Mr. Olson's box office figures. For Charlie, as he's known to almost every one, has a way of making businesses successful.

Aiding him in operation of the Lyric and management of stage shows, Mr. Olson has Ted Nicholas, who started at the Lyric as an usher, later obtained experience in handling big stage productions at the Indiana.

During 100 consecutive weeks of vaudeville, the management spent \$283,031.68 for stage show talent alone. During that time, 2295 performers were hired, 1291 of whom were men and 1004 were women. Of the stage shows presented, 47 were units (ready-made) and 52 were modeled locally by Mr. Nicholas and Mr. Olson. The number of acts booked during the 100 weeks totaled 555.

Teak Long Shot

Charlie Olson took a long shot when he opened the Lyric Sept. 12, 1912, as a vaudeville house, holding the property with a 99-year lease. But business boomed, and in 1918 the theater was renamed "Lyric" and the stage turned around to its present position.

In 1927 the Lyric again was rebuilt, and movie short subjects were used to fill in between stage shows. The same year Mr. Olson sold his interest and retired to his estate in Santa Monica, Cal., believing his theater was over.

But by 1933 things weren't going so well at the local house, and at insistence of the ground owners, Mr. Olson came back. After several months of trouble, during which the theater was closed, Mr. Olson got things to operating right by December. Stage shows and full length pictures were featured until June, and it ran through the summer with pictures alone. At the close of the next season, in June, it was decided to attempt, for the first time, stage shows and pictures through the hot months. Strangely enough, attendance was better that summer than it had been during the previous winter. And it has held up since.

Booking vaudeville that comes up to the standards demanded by Indianapolis audiences is not easy, according to Mr. Nicholas. Mr. Olson spends half his time traveling from Indianapolis to New York, Chicago and Detroit, dipping up material for the vaudeville acts. He has a "phantom" mike as he broadcasts her "thank you." Back stage is another mike through which Mr. Nicholas

announces the stage acts. He makes announcements in rhyme, another Lyric innovation.

Still another microphone sends messages to performers' dressing rooms beneath the stage. When the organ is used, there is a microphone for Lester Huff. Another microphone is placed in the orchestra pit for soloists.

Duke Ellington and his band hold the Lyric's attendance record, having played to 40,000 and 40,000 persons in one week. Close behind is the Maj, "Amateur" Unit No. 1, which featured little Frances White, who flew to Indianapolis the day after she made a hit on the major's Sunday night radio hour.

Lyric patrons' movie favorites are Warner Baxter, Joe E. Brown and Jimmy Cagney. They also like Glenda Farrell and Warren William.

Lyric patrons like comedy, and according to Mr. Nicholas, old-

fashioned, obvious "slapstick" is coming back. Britt Wood, "nick" harmonica player, holds the record for repeat performances, having played at the Lyric 10 times during the last 16 years. The management, however, tries not to repeat any act within a year.

The Lyric celebrates its one hundredth week of vaudeville with very little flaunting of banners. The record is possible because Showman Olson believed in consistent quality rather than periodic flash.

"Camille," the much discussed production which is to star Greta Garbo and Robert Taylor, is to have many interesting scenes from the theater as supporting players. Lenore Ulric and Fritz Scheff are two of the latest famous names to be considered. Interesting is the occasional appearance of Fritz Scheff on the air and extraordinary is the fact that her voice is still good. I saw her in New York last winter. She not only displayed much of the old vivacity and charm which sent her to the top ranks in the theater, but she definitely was of the opinion that she would begin a new career in the movies.

Roset, a Russian, a former solo dancer with Pavlova, is in charge of dances in the "Camille" production.

"The dances will be costumed and staged as of the period of 1850," says Roset. "They will include the waltz and quadrille. I am hoping for a day when some producer will have the courage to make an entire feature picture of pantomime. Surely the old Russian ballet would be a splendid medium for expression—comedies and tragedies without the spoken word. I advocate that if a script were written—a ballet story where dancing and pantomime were the mediums of expression—the picture would be a success. Of course the musical background would play a big part in such a picture. In "Camille" there is one situation which is a dramatic bit in the story and which occurs in one of the dances I am staging. I am happy about it. It only for a few moments, it gives me a chance to give how I feel, and convey a convincing pantomime act."

Drawings, Pictures Are Studied

Art Directors Van Nest Polignac and Carl Gustaf studied hundreds of photographs and drawings of Dublin in order to create sets for "The Plough and the Stars."

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