

## Movies and Retailers Face Same Problems

Director Says Each Can Prosper From the Other's Experiences

By W. G. Van Schmus

Managing Director, Radio City Music Hall

The Fifth Ave. department store and the de luxe motion picture houses only a few blocks away have more in common than first meets the eye. Each has something to sell, and

whether it is entertainment or merchandise it must be done on a large scale. It is not the occasional purchaser of yachts or diamonds or mink coats who spells the success of their enterprise, but the average consumer, man-on-the-street who buys thousands of hats and shoes and common pins—and theater admissions—every year.

To create a desire, to satisfy that desire and to bring the customer back again and again is the fundamental problem of both the retailer and the theater manager. It demands showmanship, an understanding of human nature and honesty in keeping faith with the public. Every merchant who creates an attractive store window to beguile the eye, who has a fashion show or gives sking lessons or sponsors the frayed nerves of last-minute Christmas shoppers by carols from a mysterious choir, is proving himself a showman.

### Theater Also a Business.

On the other hand, the theater is—by the same token—another business, in the last analysis. The patron in the front of the house indulges in all the comforts, luxury, glamour and artifice that imagination and ingenuity can contrive, but behind the scenes is a well-ordered, hard-working organization which combines efficiency, system and co-operation to achieve its results as in any successful business enterprise.

Because they have so much in common each can prosper from the other's experience.

Theaters must follow the example set long ago by the Fifth Avenue merchants of using advertisements in the newspapers which are striking by virtue of their simplicity rather than their extravagant claims. By tempering their enthusiasms and relying upon simple statement of fact to sell their product on its merits alone, they better themselves in respecting the intelligence of their prospective public. Good taste and sincerity are rewarded by a will to believe and the creation of confidence on a firm foundation.

### Employees Attend Preview.

Every new picture is, in a sense, a gamble, for the public taste is constantly changing. In our own theater we are fortunate in being able to "feel the public's pulse" by previewing each picture before it is booked before an audience of some many of our six hundred employees who care to attend, a generous cross-section of all types and tastes. Written comments are studied carefully for the forecast they give of its degree of success.

In the same way we are keenly alive to our audience reaction by means of reports made by members of the staff on any comments or criticisms which are overheard.

All letters from patrons are read with care. Any legitimate criticism or complaint receives prompt attention, and constructive suggestions are often constructive. It is surprising the number of gracious responses that are evoked by an intelligent, straightforward reply to a query.

It is our effort to learn not only what our audiences may like or dislike but also why, and in this way more closely approximate the ideal of perfect entertainment.

Occasionally approaching perfection is not enough, however, to insure success. It is the quality of any product that counts, and only by consistently maintaining a certain standard is it possible to create confidence. Motion pictures still have a way to go in this respect, but more and more producers are awakening to the general intelligence of the great American public and beginning to branch out into new and experimental fields. So long as the will of the double-feature continues to impede the progress of the industry is impeded.

The first-run houses are able to fight it best by proving in dollars and cents the superiority of quality over quantity to the satisfaction of the consumer, the exhibitor and the producer alike. Building up faith, creating a "motion picture habit," is one problem of the theater manager which is best accomplished by adherence to a strong policy.

In the last analysis the retail store and the motion picture theater find their primary objective to be of service to the public. We are measured by three things:—our ability to make our wares attractive, to be honest and accurate in advertising, and our ability to maintain a certain standard and create a reputation, our ability to provide a pleasant and harmonious atmosphere, create a "mental frame" worthy of the picture within.

## Gangster Plot for Musical

What happens when gangsters take over a recording studio forms the plot of Republic's "Manhattan Merry-Go-Round," a new musical which may become an annual feature. Incidentally, the scheme of the plot offers a fine opportunity to introduce the variety of talent that has come to characterize the screen's musical spectacles.

The gangsters, who are headed by Leo Carrillo, are loan sharks and they take command of the studio when someone defaults on interest. Then the competition starts, most of them arising from the activities of James Gleason, who persuades such stars as Cab Calloway and Ted Lewis to perform at the point of a revolver. While waiting for one of these performers to appear a young man named Joe DiMaggio shows up and he is taken for an opera singer. Starred in the picture are Phil Regan, the ex-Brooklyn policeman who became one of radio's first stars, Ann Dvorak, Henry Armetta, Boyer, who plays Napoleon, and the

## Season Offers Bette Davis

Three years ago a young lady from Massachusetts named Bette Davis played, the self-centered waitress who spurns the love of a crippled and sensitive boy in the pictureization of W. Somerset Maugham's distinguished novel, "Of Human Bondage." The crippled youth was Leslie Howard.

Since then Miss Davis has made a name for herself as one of the most capable actresses in American motion pictures. Last year she won the award of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for the most distinguished performance of the year.

And now Miss Davis and Mr. Howard are reunited in a Warner Brothers film which will be released during the fall. "It's Love I'm After" is the name, and it's a light bit of comedy about the adventures of an actor and an actress who make love on the stage—and off.

There are not so many in Hollywood who would be capable of the change of pace, but Miss Davis and Mr. Howard live up to the traditions of their craft.



A cigaret helps Bette Davis consider her lines in the Warner's film, "It's Love I'm After," that brings her together again with Leslie Howard.

Greta Garbo is more beautiful than ever as the love of Napoleon in Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's forthcoming "Conquest."

Between shootings of Paramount's gigantic panorama of the old West, "Wells Fargo," Frances Dee takes a leisurely stroll.

## Greta Garbo's Director Explains How It's Done

Clarence Brown always smiles vaguely when someone asks how he directs Greta Garbo. Then, if he feels like talking, he says:—

"You don't direct her."

Although that sounds a bit paradoxical, Mr. Brown knows what he is talking about because he has directed the Swedish star in seven productions, including her latest, "Conquest," with Charles Boyer, which will be released by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer later in the fall.

**Sure of Herself.**

"She comes on the set sure of her lines, sure of what she is going to do," Mr. Brown goes on, "and she has an uncanny gift of expressing emotion."

"When she decides on the meaning of a scene, she needs nobody to tell her how to play it or how to read her lines. A suggestion as to the right camera angle, the right movement for pictorial composition, may be necessary, but that's all. After all, a player cannot see himself."

"Once in a while we differ on the significance of a scene. Then we argue it all out until we are sure of ourselves. But that does not involve the question of how the scene is to be acted."

**Studied Napoleon.**

"Conquest" is the story of a little known incident in the life of Napoleon. His romance with the Polish countess, Marie Walewska, who was probably the only woman who ever really understood the French Emperor. Miss Garbo, Mr. Boyer, who plays Napoleon, and the

others in the cast became bibliophiles, more or less, during the filming of the picture in order that their characterizations might be vivid, yet consistent with historical records.

"Would she have done this?" Miss Garbo would ask Brown when some little action was in doubt. "Do you think this is in character?"

Memoirs and letters then would be consulted so that Marie Walewska might emerge as a woman, rather than a figure of history. Often Charles Whitaker, research expert, and Bernard Hyman, producer, were called into conversation to try to settle a point.

### Personal Research.

In her dressing room on this set Miss Garbo kept such books as "The New Poland," "Paul Walewska," the Gasiorowski novel on which the play was based; Bred's "Opinions and Reflections of Napoleon," and a volume of French etiquette in the period of 1800 for ready reference. She conducted more personal research for country. Since then he has directed

her in "Anna Christie," "A Woman of Affairs," "Romance," "Inspiration," "Anna Karenina," and now in "Conquest." Only two other directors have ever directed her more than once—Edmund Goulding in "Love" and "Grand Hotel," and George Fitzmaurice in "Mata Hari" and "Mysterious Lady."

People who worked on the picture found Garbo apparently happier in her surroundings than they had found her for years. Frequently she remained on the set after the filming of a scene to chat with Karl Freund, European cameraman, instead of retiring to her dressing room. She joined in the "personality" game with Director Brown and the cast and crew, and occasionally she played indoor baseball with the director, who found the exercise good for a recently broken arm. She throws a ball just like a boy, it seems. Between scenes, she often walked back and forth in the sunlight with her famous athletic stride.

### Worried About Scene.

One morning Brown seemed worried after she finished a scene and she asked him what was wrong. "I don't know exactly," he said, "but something was out of tune."

Then a wardrobe attendant rushed frantically out on the set with a gold brooch in her hand. Garbo had forgotten to put it on her gown and this was what had bothered the director because it had been there the day before.

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### THE LONG, LONG STORY OF A QUEEN.

One of the great film spectacles of the season will be "Victoria the Great," produced by Herbert Wilcox and distributed by RKO-Radio Pictures. This picture presents Anna Neagle as the magnificent queen in gradually aging sequence from her coronation at 19 to her diamond jubilee at 79.

Sixty years a queen! Miss Neagle carries the difficult role on through scene after scene with ease and sublime understanding, say those who have seen the film in preview. Anon Walbrook plays the role of Albert, and their love story is one of the tenderest sequences ever captured on the screen.

## Lubitsch Demands Beauties Pulchritude Essential on the Screen, Says Director

By Ernst Lubitsch.

Regardless of how good an actress she might be, I will never direct a star who is not beautiful, and, as long as that is true, and it will be true until pictures acquire depth, or the third dimension—and maybe even after that—movie stars will have to be beautiful.

That is why I selected Marlene Dietrich as the star in "Angel," my most recent picture, and that is why I responded so readily when Mary Pickford invited me, thirteen years ago, to come to Hollywood and direct her in "Rosita," my first Hollywood picture. And that is why Claudette Colbert will be the star of my next film for Paramount, "Bluebeard's Eighth Wife." Now, this point of view is not superficial, nor is it because I minimize the importance of good acting. The opposite is true. I want my stars to be good actresses also. But if I have to give a little, I would prefer that it be in acting ability rather than beauty.

### Secondary on Stage.

Such would not be the case if my medium were the stage. Then I would say beauty is of secondary importance. But in the movies—ah,

there you are making a dish for the eye. The movies talk now, to be sure, but they are still movies, and you see them rather than hear them. As long as that is true, and it will be true until pictures acquire depth, or the third dimension—and maybe even after that—movie stars will have to be beautiful.

All feminine stars, for both stage and screen, should possess, both beauty and acting ability, with emphasis upon beauty for the screen, acting ability for the stage.

Standards of beauty are always changing. It is one of the things that a director, in casting his picture, must always keep in mind. As I look back over the years, I can see how the tastes of the theater-going public have shifted about. It also impresses me with another fact, which is that a few players possess an indefinable quality which keeps their beauty ever fresh in the public's eye.

### Still Attractive Today.

An example that comes to me off-hand is that of Norma Shearer. More than ten years ago, in 1927, to be exact, I directed her and Ramon Novarro in "The Student Prince." Most of her contemporaries of that period have faded from the scene on account of that shift in tastes which I have mentioned. But I can conceive of her as being as attractive to the public today as she was then; perhaps it would be more true to say her beauty has taken on even greater luster.

Right after making "Rosita," I started casting "The Marriage Circle." There were two actresses at that time who had won the eye approval of the public. They were Marie Prevost and Florence Vidor. Although I would still consider these women attractive if they were available, I don't think they would have the approval of the public today. However, there was no doubt in that day, and they were given leading roles in the picture.

I think our modern beauties on the screen have a certain suavity—and I confess that my personal tastes are more in line with the present trend. Marlene Dietrich is a good example of the modern type. There is a great divergence between her and Claudette Colbert, for example, but yet this quality I have mentioned gives them much in common.

In contrast with the type that prevailed a decade ago, they both make an ingratiating, subtle appeal to the eye. Their beauty persists in the mind like the echo of a

phrase in a symphony. That is something that the old-timers didn't have—not for me, anyway.

I am glad any time to toast to the beauty of the stars I directed in a day now definitely in the past—to the beauty of Pauline Frederick, May McAvoy, Pola Negri, Clara Bow, Irene Rich, Patsy Ruth Miller, Lilian Tashman, Florence Vidor, and Camilla Horn. Their beauty did much to launch a great industry, that of pictures. All of us are indebted to them.

### A Face of Her Own.

But to return to contemporary screen beauties, I consider Marlene Dietrich outstanding. She is a striking example of a woman who possesses another virtue which is indispensable for a motion picture star. She has a face of her own. Nature has an uncanny way of duplicating faces, not only among members of the same family but in persons totally unrelated. There are types of faces that are duplicated frequently. If the type is already represented on the screen, it makes it pretty hard for another person of the same type to succeed in the same medium.

On the other hand, beauty must not be of too rare a type, it is utterly strange the public will accept it only in exotic roles. In other words, the player will be definitely typed, which is a great handicap. Marlene Dietrich's beauty is highly distinctive. There is no other face even approximating hers on the screen. I have never seen one off the screen. That is one reason I was anxious to obtain her. She is a star opposite Herbert Marshall and Melvyn Douglas in "Angel." I think a sculptor probably would tell you that her beauty is about as close to perfection as human beings ever come. Next time you see her on the screen watch her hands. They are as good looking as her legs.

### Rare and Distinctive.

There is much loose talk about glamour in Hollywood. It is a word of Scotch origin, you know, which connotes beauty seen through mists. In view of this, I can't help but think my "Angel" is the only true exponent of glamour in Hollywood. It is the sort of glamour that the camera catches. There is another conception of glamour in Hollywood. It has to do with long motor cars, yachts and midnight promenades in the moonlight—all of it largely concerned with private life. But Miss Dietrich's beauty, her glamour, gets on to the screen, and that is why I was happy to have her in my picture.

## Season's Screen Glitters With Many Spectacles

Practically Every Star in Movieland Appearing in One or More Pictures

(Continued from first Hollywood music selected to accompany action. Forecast Page.)

"The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" is being perpetuated with sound and with freckle-faced Tommy Kelly, of the Bronx.

### Zola and the Queen.

A picture depicting eighteenth century England and Queen Victoria's reign may arrive concurrently with one called "Love on Toast." The life of the great French writer, Emile Zola, the development of transportation in the United States, pioneer days in Chicago, life on that rocky shelf of Alcatraz, the building of the American West between 1844 and 1870, intimate scenes in the paddock of a great race track—these are a minutely fractional part of the subjects that are coming under Hollywood's consideration.

Fans who are primarily interested in stars can rest assured that they will be able to inspect their favorites again this fall. Practically every star in the business is appearing in something, some of them twice. Greta Garbo will be the Countess Walewska, beloved of Napoleon, in "Conquest," and Marlene Dietrich appears as the wife of a European statesman in "Angel." Joan Crawford is to be seen in both "The Bride Wore Red" and "Mannequin," and Leslie Howard in "Stand-In" and "It's Love I'm After." You can also see, to select a very few—

Mario Oberon, George Arliss, Bette Davis, Franchot Tone, Eddie Cantor, John Barrymore, Myrna Loy, William Powell, Simone Simon, John Bennett, Henry Fonda, Carol Lombard, Frederic March, Edward G. Robinson, Edward Arnold, Ben Bernie, Walter Winchell, Fred MacMurray, Joan Blondell, Joe E. Brown, Barbara Stanwyck, Herbert Marshall, Dolores del Rio, Spencer Tracy.

### New Players Introduced.

A whole host of new faces and new personalities is being introduced to screen audiences this fall. Among the promising ones are Sigrid Gurie, a young lady from Norway, who plays the daughter of Kubla Khan in the Marco Polo picture; Zofia, a dancer of Swedish descent, who used to appear with the Monte Carlo Ballet Company, and Oscar Homolka, a Viennese star of stage and screen who already has a small but appreciative audience here through films she made in Europe.

Practically every company is testing one of those mammoth musicals in which operatic arias, tap dancing, chorus numbers and lyrical love-making are strung together with the barest outline of a plot. Most of these films are new editions under titles that have been made popular during the last few years, and a couple of these musical ventures have been launched as annual productions. One of them is bringing W. C. Fields back to the screen after a long absence, due to illness.

### Many Musical Films.

Even in the musical films, producers are giving increasing attention to the type and quality of

As usual, several stars from the Metropolitan Opera Company, including Grace Moore, Lily Pons and Nino Martin, are reappearing in pictures this fall, and they will be joined by such new recruits from the musical world as George Balanchine's American Ballet and Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra.

Several films dealing with the lives of Beethoven, Chopin and other composers are scheduled for release soon after the first of the year.

The musical theme which proved so successful during the last season in such films as "Captains Courageous" and "Souls at Sea" will not be neglected. Besides "Ebb Tide," there are a number of pictures of adventures at sea, including a colorful production of "The Hurricane," another sea yarn by the authors of "Mutiny on the Bounty." And technicolor, by the way, will be emphasized this fall. A number of big-time producers already have made several productions in full color, and other firms are employing it more or less tentatively, but more generally than in previous seasons.

### Disney Cartoon a Feature.

One of the outstanding technicolor productions—and, in fact, one of the events of the season—will be the release around Christmas of Walt Disney's first full-length animated cartoon. It is "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," from the Grimm fairy tale, and the preparation lasted over two years at a reported cost of \$1,000,000. If it is well received, Mr. Disney plans to release one full-length cartoon a year in the future.

It will be interesting to compare his efforts with those first feature cartoons that used to accompany Howe's Travelogues—how many years ago was it, now? The producers regard "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" with a good deal of justice as a sort of landmark in the film industry, like the advent of sound.

### Filming Broadway Hits.

Hollywood's interest, financial and otherwise, in the activities on Broadway is bearing a rich harvest, with several hits of last season about to be released in pictures. Katharine Hepburn and Ginger Rogers share adventures in a theatrical boarding house in "Stage Door," an adaptation of the Edna Ferber-George S. Kaufman play. Kay Francis, Verne Tassdale and Anita Louise play the leads in "First Lady," and Claudette Colbert and Charles Boyer play the titled White Russians in "Tovarich," which finally is going to be released as "Tovarich" instead of "Tonight's Our Night." Another play in the films is "Storm in a Teacup," the European success which the New York Theater Guild put on last season as "Storm Over Paris."

And that's a quick preview of the biggest season Hollywood has ever planned.

## Frances Dee Beats Deadline

Let us, for the moment, consider the case of Frances Dee and how it came about that she is a Hollywood movie queen, to use a phrase that you never see in Variety. You remember that Miss Dee turned in a striking performance in "Souls at Sea," and this winter you can see her in Paramount's historical film, "Wells Fargo," an account of the development of the American West from 1844 to 1870.

Miss Dee was a sophomore at the University of Chicago in 1930. Her family took her out to the West coast during a vacation, and Frances thought it would be grand to get in the movies. Her family thought her idea was foolish, but they let her stay in Hollywood on one condition:—If she was still an extra at the end of one year she would return to the university to finish her studies.

Time passed and Miss Dee was still an extra. Then, one day, when the year was nearly up, she was having luncheon in the commissary and the appreciative French eyes of Maurice Chevalier were turned toward her. Well, it was the Cinderella story all over again. Soon she was playing opposite him in "Playboy of Paris," mama and papa never alluded to the subject of college again, and Frances has gone from one part to another, each a little better than the last. Isn't that a pleasant little story?