

# Directing Easier Task Today

## But It Is Also Much Less Fascinating Than in Silent Day, Says John Ford

By John Ford.

(Academy-winning director ("The Informer"), now directing "The Hurricane" for Samuel Goldwyn.)

Directing motion pictures is an easier task today than it was in the hey-day of the silent films. It is also a much less fascinating job. Sound, by affording more media for telling the story, has made the director's job infinitely easier and has cut down greatly his leeway.

In silent pictures the director had to tell the story with the camera and the camera alone. That required a definite technique and made demand upon all the director's resources.

Today I fear that the art of telling stories by motion pictures is becoming lost. It is too simple to take the easier way of telling the story through dialogue, and thus lose the most vital factor of the motion picture, the motion. In effect, in most cases today we are getting a greater or lesser degree illustrated dialogue.

**Ventures a Prophecy.**  
I'll venture the prophecy that if somebody today made a picture completely without dialogue, told the story only with the camera, and then "dubbed" in sound effects and music after the filming was completed, the production would be a smash hit. Against this, of course, one must balance the fact that the public has become accustomed to dialogue and might resent its complete elimination. I have found, however, that moving, visual entertainment has always been more satisfactory to the audience than verbal entertainment can possibly be.

We did this—elimination of dialogue partially—with "The Informer." We have done it to an even greater extent with "The Hurricane," which I have just completed for Samuel Goldwyn. Dudley Nichols, the scenarist, who has worked on both "The Informer" and "The Hurricane" with me, has always felt with me that wherever the moving camera can tell a graphic story of human beings, that story is far more vital and moving than any words can ever be.

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Changes are due in the motion picture industry from the director's standpoint. With the coming of sound the "committee method," so called, came into being. Previously the method of making pictures had been the "combination method"—the producer, the writer and the director. And the director started on the idea with the writer and followed through until it was completed on the screen.

My complaint as to the "committee method" is that no one man's idea is carried through in entirety. The picture, by necessity, becomes a composite work. If books were written under the "committee method," I'll venture to say that they would not maintain their clear flow of story.

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The young fellows who have been coming up have been "whipped around" a bit. If this tendency continues, the newer generation of directors will be relegated to something of the position of stage manager with a road show. And we don't want this to happen.

Specifically, we hope eventually to do something constructive about the associate producer. In so many cases he is not producer, director, cutter nor writer and becomes only a sort of "military policeman." When the associate producer is not properly qualified and operates only as "middleman" between the producer and the director, it is exactly as if one were driving an automobile with two steering wheels.

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There are two ways of making a picture. One school of directors employs the direct, forceful approach that discards everything that is not essential to the basic idea underlying the story. The other school uses the method of indirection that employs by-play and suggestion, side-plot and flashback.

It is the difference between the lion and the cat. The lion goes direct to the kill, a straightforward smashing attack. But the cat plays with the mouse, patting it, pretending to ignore it, delaying the inevitable issue.

I prefer the direct forceful method. I believe that a picture's basic idea is more important than the story that is told. A story can be trivial.

Granted the worth of this idea, I believe that nothing should be permitted to interfere with its development.

Now history is not so accommodating as fiction, though it may on occasion be stranger. Nor is the point that history is trying to make through its Pastors and its Zolas always realized at the moment of impact. Sometimes the message is realized only when the years have brought it into perspective. History does not mind taking its chances. History no doubt figures that it will get its message across sooner or later.

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But a director has a different problem. He is trying to convey to some definite idea, something that must be developed emotionally. In order not to distract attention, the events of the story being told must come in an orderly, consequent procession, the one following the other in logical sequence.

That, I think, justifies some slight rearrangement of history.

If you were to take the life of Emile Zola, the novelist and crusader, and make it into "The Life of Emile Zola," a complete, pictorial biography of the man, you would have a film that would run anywhere from six hours to a couple of days.

But it was the Dreyfus case that made the story timely, that gave it its wide audience acceptance. There are thousands of Dreyfuses in the world today, innocent victims of systems or castes of one sort or another. Their names may be Cohen, Miller, Jones or Smith. But there is no Zola to fight their case for them.

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## Extras See Big Preview on Coast

### Cinema Club Girls Are Guests of "Stage Door"

Hollywood has a theatrical boarding house called the Cinema Club, presided over by Ma Smythe, a motherly woman. She rules with a kindly sway over a brood of twenty girls who have come from every part of the country, with but a single thought—you guessed it—movie stardom.

It's a typical boarding house. For eleven dollars a week your screen-struck girl gets her bed and board. She associates with other Hollywood-mad girls. She gets free of charge the sage advice of Ma, who knows all the answers about getting from under and on top.

The Cinema Club is run in dignified fashion by this ex-vaudeville trouper who, growing too old and heavy for the hard theatrical life, took to boarding house management because it enabled her to associate, if indirectly, with footlights and grease paint.

**Bound for Special Preview.**

Ma isn't often dictatorial with her "girls." But one recent evening at 6:30 she summoned her charges to an early dinner and told them, between gulps of lamb stew, that they were bound for a special preview. The girls—Blondes, brunettes and redheads—whooped their delight. It wasn't often that they had enough spare cash to attend a major preview.

They didn't have to ask what picture it was, for Ma Smythe continued speaking after a moment. "It's called 'Stage Door,'" she said. "It's about stage-struck girls like you who live in a New York boarding house and hope they'll become great stage stars. You'll know those girls," she concluded.

What Ma Smythe didn't tell her screen-struck girls was that Gregory La Cava, who directed RKO Radio's picture of "Stage Door," the George S. Kaufman-Edna Ferber Broadway success, had two girls spotted in the Cinema Club for weeks taking down conversations of the club girls for dialogue in "Stage Door." She wanted to let the girls see that for themselves.

The Cinema Club girls saw their favorite stars, some not five feet away. That some day, they too, might be the cynosure of all eyes as they awaited the preview showing of one of their pictures.

**A Living Document.**

To a declining salvo of hand-clapping "Stage Door" was flashed on the screen—and for the next hour and a half the Cinema Club girls of Hollywood almost forgot to breathe as they watched the story of "Stage Door" unfold—watched the hopes and aspirations of a group of girls ambitious for stage careers eat ham-on-rye and dream of the units of success.

Ma Smythe was right in taking her "girls" to see "Stage Door." She knew it was a living document of the theater, vibrant and honest. "Stage Door" ended and the Cinema Club girls left the theater deep in thought. They had seen themselves on the screen, by proxy of Katharine Hepburn, Ginger Rogers, Gail Patrick, Andrea Leeds and the rest of the feminine players in the picture. They had seen life, as they knew it to be.

That's a sarong Frances Farmer is wearing in the Paramount picture, "Ebb Tide," which will bring her together with Oscar Homolka, celebrated European actor. Pat Paterson (above) enjoys a holiday at Palm Springs after completing her role in Walter Wanger's "52nd Street."

## Jimmy Durante Sigma Psi After a Day in College

### Comedian Turns On His Poisonality And Robert Taylor Goes to Europe

By Jimmy "Schnozzle" Durante.

Star of Columbia's "Follies of 1938."

Well, folks, here I am back in Hollywood. And what do I find? They fit me out in a skull cap and a sweater and send me to college. What can a guy like me learn at college. I ask you? I can already speak Algebra as good as anyone.

All the stars came down to the train when I blew in. There was Garbo, Grace Moore, Claudette Colbert, Irene Dunne and a lot of big shots. So I turned on the poisonality. And what did they think happened? All the girls picked up their bags and got on another train headed for New York. That kinda got me to wonderin'. Maybe it was another conspiracy. I bet they was just jealous of my romantic career in Europe. Did ya hear about how I had all the colleges of Ireland and the belles of Scotland under my thumb?

When I went down on Hollywood Blvd. everybody was talkin' about Robert Taylor. So what do I do? I check up on him, that's what. And who is Taylor? He's a nobody. He's got the women hypnotized into thinkin' he's a great lover. Baw! Wait till Durante does his stuff again. Taylor will wish he was back at Pomona College.

**Proves His Superiority.**  
Here's somethin' else that proves my superiority. I went through Pomona College in one day. What about Taylor? It takes him four years. I had to go to Pomona for my first scene in "College Follies of 1938."

Gee, what a cinch! I just walks right through the college and comes out a member in good standing of Sigma Psi. What a life! What a life! Makes me feel like I was a kid again—back in the Bowery fish market.

Did I ever tell you about Gertrude Niesen? She's in the picture, too. Gosh, but she's nuts about me. I think she's a nice gal, too. They all get serious about me, though. So what are ya goin' to do? When I first walks on the set Al Rogell comes up to me. He's the director. He says to me, "Jimmy, take that cigar out of your mouth. College boys don't smoke cigars." So I ups and tells Rogell somethin'. I

says, "That ain't a stogie, that's my nose! Boy, that stopped him!" Who dya think is the Dean of the college? Raymond Walburn. Can ya take it? He and Charles Starrett are palmy walrus in the picture. Starrett and Joan Perry do a love scene. But wait till you see Durante. I'm the real love interest. I put one on with Gertrude Niesen that will make your head swim. When the gals find out I'm the chief love interest in the picture, what do they do? They comes up and slaps me on the back and says, "What castin'! What castin'! You'll be a star overnight." Some flattery, huh?

**A Spanish Fandango.**  
The other day I sat down next to Chaz Chase who eats stuff. The first thing I knew I lost my shirt. What do I do? I looks around quick like and there goes my shirt down Chase's gizzard. Johnny Green and his band boys were missin' a pair of outanets the other day. I didn't tell anybody, but if there was'n a Spanish fandango going on in Chase's stomach, my name ain't Taylor—I mean Durante.

Everybody's having a big time out here in Hollywood College. Some of 'em never saw the inside of a college before. But not Durante. I'm matriculated at Pomona. It's a good thing I got back when I did. The women out here were gettin' lonesome. When I was in Europe I keeps getting telegrams from the stars. What did they say? They said we want Durante. So what do I do? I hops a boat for Hollywood. As soon as I get here what does Taylor do? He goes to Europe. Taylor knows when he's licked. As soon as he hears about Durante, the great lover, he skips town. Is he mortified!



## Mme. Flagstad Will Be Heard In "Big Broadcast of 1938"

Richard Wagner was an irascible gentleman who had a magnificent capacity for disregarding the comforts of everyone except himself, and he apparently derived a sort of sadistic pleasure from inflicting musical hardships upon the unfortunate men and women who were destined to sing in his music dramas.

The result is that the great Wagnerian singers constitute an extremely hardy and an extremely limited race. Yet there is one woman singing today whom no Wagnerian enthusiast would hesitate to name along with Materna, Lili Lehmann, Olive Fremstad, Nordica Emma Eames and the few others who made history at the Metropolitan and the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth.

She is, of course, Kirsten Flagstad, the Norwegian Bruennhilde whose New York debut a few years ago inspired the critics to predict a revival of interest in Wagnerian music throughout the country. This prediction has been justified over and over again by the crowds that attend every symphonic program which includes selections from "Tristan and Isolde" or the "Ring."

Now motion picture audiences are to be given the opportunity to see and hear Madame Flagstad for the first time.

Her debut comes this fall in Paramount's "Big Broadcast of 1938," which also brings W. C. Fields back to the screen after a prolonged absence due to illness. Madame Flagstad is doing a scene from "Die Walkure," the second opera in the tetralogy of the "Ring."

Giulio Gatti-Casazza, the former impresario of the Metropolitan, and Arthur Bodansky, conductor, gave Madame Flagstad an audition in a little hotel at St. Moritz in July, 1934, on the urgent recommendation

of the late Otto Kahn. They were impressed, but they were not swayed off their feet. They doubted whether her voice could fill the tremendous amphitheater of the opera house in New York, but they decided to take a chance.

Madame Flagstad sailed for this country in February, 1935, and a few days after arriving here she made her debut—as Sieglinde in the same opera from which a scene will be seen in the motion picture. And if there was anyone in the Metropolitan that afternoon who did not realize that he was present at an unforgettable debut, he must have been both deaf and blind.

Madame Flagstad will play opposite Melvyn Douglas in Columbia's approaching picture, "I'll Take Romance."