

Directing Easier Task Today

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

By John Ford.

(Academy-winning director of "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 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. This 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 loses the most vital factor of the motion picture, the motion. In effect, in most cases today we are getting to a greater or less 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 reception 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 com-

plete elimination. I have found, however, that moving, visual entertainment has always been more satisfactory to the audience than verbal entertainment can possibly be.

We have partially, with "The Informer," gone to the "committee method." 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" can, 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.

In the case of "The Hurricane," we have tried what we mean by a motion picture rather than a picture with dialogue. It has dialogue scenes, naturally, which chart the plot, and dialogue scenes through the entire film, but to the camera is left the main task of unfolding the story.

Directors Organize.

Through the Directors' Guild we should tell our story with the elements—with the wind and the air and the water, with billowing sails, rolling waves, roaring gales—and with people facing these elements, not talking about them. We rely upon moving bodies, crashing buildings, action, motion, people in active situations. In other words, we have tried to make a vital motion picture—not a written play transformed onto celluloid.

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 objection 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.

Storms Tell the Story.

Goldwyn agreed that Nichols and I should tell our story with the elements—with the wind and the air and the water, with billowing sails, rolling waves, roaring gales—and with people facing these elements, not talking about them. We rely upon moving bodies, crashing buildings, action, motion, people in active situations. In other words, we have tried to make a vital motion picture—not a written play transformed onto celluloid.

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Protection of Newcomers.

We also hope to maintain our position and prestige as directors through the guild. In this respect the guild will be primarily helpful to the newer and younger directors. As a matter of fact the only thing we are asking is the protection of the younger directors.

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 the movie 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.

Dieterle Gives Views on Historical Movies

Slight Rearrangement Often Necessary, Says Zola Director

By William Dieterle

(Director of "The Story of Louis Pasteur," "The Life of Emile Zola" and other pictures.)

It has become a familiar saying that men and nations write history, then Hollywood rewrites it. Ever since the motion picture makers turned to historical subjects they have been accused of adulterating truth with large doses of simple syrup, to mention only the polite and printable complaints.

I think I should admit at the outset that there is considerable truth in the accusation. I should admit that a lot of pictures have contained a great deal more kind fancy than cold fact. But I think I should not plead guilty wholly and throw myself on the mercy of the court.

The critics are not always entirely accurate, although they do generally, and I sincerely thank them for it, point the way to us. For instance, the most recent comment against "The Life of Emile Zola," my last offering, was that of a critic who said that in real life Captain Alfred Dreyfus was killed by an assassin along around 1908, where in real life he still was going strong at the end of the film. The critic erred slightly. Captain Dreyfus lived until a couple of years ago.

Two Methods Used.

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 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 Pasteurs 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.

Fair Distribution Problems.

But a director has a definite problem. He is trying to convey to it 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.

I suppose it is impossible to make a historical picture without some compromise. "Zola," I think, has it in a minimum degree, but I guess it is there. The picture itself was an experiment, and I thank the Warner Bros. for the great freedom they granted in the making of the film.



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

Richard Wagner was an irresistible 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 mental 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, Lilli 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



Barbara Stanwyck stars in the RKO Radio film "Breakfast for Two."



Lyric Grace Moore will play opposite Melvyn Douglas in Columbia's approaching picture, "I'll Take Romance."

of the late Otto Kahn. They were impressed, but they were not swept 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 she was present he must have been both deaf and blind.

When I first walked 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



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 Ms. 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 Ms. 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.
Ms. 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—Bionas, brunettes and redheads—whoopee 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 Ms. 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 them when you see them."

What Ms. Smythe didn't tell her screen-struck girls is that Gregory La Cava, who directed RKO Radio's picturization 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. They thrived at the thought 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 deafening salvo of hand-clapping "Stage Door" was flung out the window—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.

Ms. 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.