

Jack Warner Traces Origin of Talkies

First Words Spoken Accidentally by Al Jolson in "The Jazz Singer." "Disraeli" Among Early Successes.

By Jack L. Warner.

I don't believe that any one in our company realized the full import of the story brought back from New York by my brother Sam and Maj. Nathan Levinson some time in 1926. They had seen a demonstration of a talking picture device—the first of all such devices they had investigated that seemed destined to become really practicable.

All companies producing silent pictures at that time had been watching the experiments with sound pictures and most so-called experts in Hollywood were convinced that sound from the screen was still a long way off. But Sam's enthusiasm was so great that almost before we knew it we were deeply involved in the production of pictures that talked.

At first we made only short subjects, feeling our way along in this new and strange field. Most of those we kept on the shelves, but when "Don Juan," starring John Barrymore, was released in 1927 in New York City it had a fully synchronized musical score—the first ever recorded for a feature picture—and there were several shorts shown with it. Will Hays talked from the screen, Martinelli sang, as did Marion Talley.

New Impetus Needed

It was an impressive performance but we were not ready nor equipped to go into heavy talkie production at that time. Neither were the theaters of the country equipped to show the talkies and many millions of dollars were needed to so equip them. Yet we knew, as producers, that the motion picture industry needed some new impetus. We were slowly dying on our feet and nothing we seemed to be able to do helped the situation.

Nothing, that is, until the Vitaphone came along to jar everybody out of their lethargy. It is movie history now, of course, but at that time it was not easy to raise the necessary money to investigate and perfect the talking picture. My brothers and I decided to risk all or nothing on the Vitaphone, the name we had selected for our talking pictures.

Made "The Jazz Singer"

We made "The Jazz Singer" with Al Jolson in the leading role. Jolson sang in that and partly by accident spoke a few words into the microphone that were eventually left in the finished picture. "The Jazz Singer" was shown in New York on Aug. 5, 1927. The few spoken words brought that first audience to its feet and assured the eventual success and popularity of the new medium of entertainment.

But my brother Sam, had died in Los Angeles just one day before that opening and that took all the pleasure and pride out of the event for us.

A two-reel "short" was stretched into five-reel length and named "The Lights of New York." I doubt if any picture ever returned so much profit for a modest investment.

By the time the second Jolson picture, "The Singing Fool," in which there was much more dialog recorded than in "The Jazz Singer," was released, every major company in the industry was in a stage of turmoil. Talking pictures were here to stay.

The Most Hectic Years

The years 1928-1929 were probably the most hectic in the history of Hollywood. In common with other major companies, Warner Bros. tried many new things. We made "On With the Show," in the new and then almost untried Technicolor. Its most remarkable moment was that in which a yellow taxicab drove on the screen. In "Song of the West" we tried outdoor Technicolor for the first time in an important feature picture.

George Arliss came to the talking screen and made "Disraeli," which won an academy award and brought pictures to the attention of more important audiences. We made a series of musicals, operettas, such as "The Desert Song," "Viennese Nights," "Sally" with Marilyn Miller, and "Show of Shows" with 40 or 50 well-known stars in the cast.

Meantime the First National studios in Burbank, which we had absorbed, were under the supervision of Hal Wallis, turning out such notable successes as "Little Caesar"—the real beginning of the gangster cycle—"The Dawn Patrol," "Son of the Gods" and "Five Star Final." Warner Bros. shocked but intrigued the amusement world with the most sensational gangster picture ever made, "Public Enemy," and counterbalanced that with an Arliss comedy called "The Millionaire."

A Daring Experiment

In the second year of the depression, while the nation faced a change in administrations and an uncertain financial future, we made our most daring experiment.

We filmed "42nd Street," an elaborate and new-style musical, introducing spectacular dance numbers. "42nd Street" started the musical cycle all over again and we followed quickly with "Gold Diggers of 1933" and "Footlight Parade," pictures which gave the world entirely new ideas of screen spectacles and helped bring our company through the darkest period of depression.

Still another venture undertaken under the stress of uncertain conditions was the filming of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," with Prof. Max Reinhardt directing. Here, again the Warner company tried out totally new fields and found them profitable. Paul Muni, whose previous pictures, "I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang" and "Black Fury," had been important sociological screen documents, began his series of screen biographies, the first being "The Story of Louis Pasteur," and

In New Musical



Irene Dunne is now appearing from coast-to-coast in her most successful moving picture musical, "High, Wide and Handsome," with Randolph Scott. Produced by Paramount Pictures, the film was written by Oscar Hammerstein 2d, lyrics by Jerome Kern and directed by Rouben Mamoulian. The background covers the exciting days of oil discovery in Pennsylvania. The score contains a number of unforgettable melodies, including "Allegheny Al." Miss Dunne also has the leading role in a forthcoming musical, "The Awful Truth," for Columbia Pictures.

Wanger Likes His 'Stand in'

By WALTER WANGER

Fashions in movies may come and go, but one fashion remains eternal and constantly recurring—that of making Hollywood War pictures, musicals, gangster epics—all of these have had their brief fling of popularity, only to be consigned, once the heat is off, to the dust heap of oblivion.

New trends come along to take the place of the old. But satires on Hollywood always come back flourishingly for more.

That was among the things that I had to consider before I decided to make "Stand-In," a Clarence Buddington Kelland bladder-swipe at Hollywood.

More important than that, I had to decide whether I thought Hollywood was ready for a kidding. I have not thought so, up to this time, and that is why I have not attempted a cinema satire of the cinema.

Hollywood, to coin a phrase, is now grown-up, it is sufficiently entrenched as an art form to resist the subversive efforts of any sort of fair-minded satire. It was with this conviction that I undertook the production of "Stand-In."

Hollywood, to the layman who knows next to nothing about its hard-working inmates, is a sort of never-never land, an Academe for the sportive Pans who live within its golden precincts.

Unfortunately for the common conception, that is not true. Like any other large industry (we are now the third largest in the country, and a fast-growing baby) the

movies have their foibles. And as such they are fair game for any able satirist.

When I started "Stand-In" I determined that this would be the picture about Hollywood to end all pictures about Hollywood (though of course, I knew it could do no such thing). But, at any rate I determined that I would not miss a single variable in the film colony that would lend itself to satire. As a result, the bankers, the producers, the directors, the actors and actresses, even the extra and bit player, come in for their share of kidding.

Leslie Howard, who plays Attorney Dodd, the human editing machine, is the arch-prototype of all bankers. He thinks in terms of dollars and units. He computes the box office possibilities of pictures through the medium of differential and integral calculus rather than through potential audience appeal.

He is a symbol of all that is logical, mathematical and cold coming up blunt and bewildered against the blatant confusion of Hollywood. As Lester Plum, Joan Blondell answers the fiercely moot questions of what becomes of child stars after they grow up. Miss Blondell's characterization shows Miss Plum (known nicely as "Sugar Plum" when she was the Shirley Temple of her day), to be a highly sophisticated and slightly hard-boiled young lady who has nothing but the utmost distrust for the fame that the screen offers to its principals. Hers is a role that is based much more solidly on the stuff of actuality

rather than on that of amusing fiction.

As Douglas Quintain, producer, Humphrey Bogart (who in "Stand-In" reforms sufficiently to leave his submachine gun safely under the carpet at home) is given the first sympathetic role since he burst, restily on the cinema world as the killer Duke Mantie in the "Pettiford Forest." Or am I mistaken in thinking that a producer, under any circumstances, could be a sympathetic fellow? Quintain is habitually costumed in a polo shirt, riding breeches and boots, looking very much the producer who would rather straddle a horse than an official armchair placed comfortably behind a button-infested desk.

Far better known for eccentric tactics is the director, who has supplied the eager press agents with a preponderant portion of copy. Alan Mowbray, as Koleski, a rabid Russian, rolls into one of the outstanding tricks and mannerisms of the most pictorial of the bafon-wielders.

So there you have it. If we missed anything at all in "Stand-In," we'd like to be shown. As I said before, we wanted to do this thing up brown. We wanted to miss no single element that is Hollywood. In addition we tried to be fair.

"Stand-In" was directed by Tay Garnett, one of the best men in the business, and a man who has been around Hollywood long enough to have a nodding acquaintance with every amusing detail of idiosyncrasy that it boasts.

First Technicolor Picture Made in Railway Car

By DR. HERBERT T. KALMUS

Some Boston Tech men under the direction of the writer had among them ideas in embryo of what has since become the Technicolor process for photographing and making prints of motion pictures in natural colors. The late William H. Coolidge and C. A. Hight, now president of the U. S. Smelting Co., were the original financial agents.

Considerable experimenting had been done, small scale preliminary results were shown, pictures of a sort were actually thrown on the screen, and there was considerable excitement all round.

Coolidge and Hight were to organize a corporation to own, control and develop this enterprise, and among other assignments I was to bring in a suitable name for this corporation the following morning. This was in 1915.

As a Tech man, and not many years beyond graduation day, the word "Technique," the name of our annual class book, was fresh in my memory. And obviously it was color—so putting the words "Technique" and "color" together, I invented "Technicolor."

We originally called upon Messrs. Coolidge and Hight for \$10,000. How ridiculous that seems now. After some time it grew to \$300,000. With that money we built our first laboratory, which was a railway car, equipped with all necessary machinery to sensitize and develop negative, and to make rush prints.

This car we ran over the rails to Florida. It was stationed on the siding of an ice house, where it functioned as a laboratory for the production of the first Technicolor picture, "The Gulf Between." This picture starred Grace Diamond and Niles Welch.

Upon completion I screened "The Gulf Between" for Mr. Erlanger in New York, and we made arrangements to put it out as a road show. That first Technicolor process was an additive one, requiring special attachment on the projector in the theater booth and plenty of added light compared with black and white.

After watching the show in Buffalo for a few days I decided that to keep special attachments in register required an operator who was a cross between a college professor and an acrobat, and right then and there Technicolor gave up additive processes and special attachments on the projector.

I believe in the subtractive process with the color on the film. In that way the work of rendering motion pictures in natural color is done in the laboratory, where it belongs, and not as an added task and responsibility of projection in the theaters.

One of the early landmarks in the history of Technicolor was a contract which the writer made with Douglas Fairbanks for production of "The Black Pirate" entirely in Technicolor. The picture did well at the box office and received extraordinary praise from the critics. But it was

a headache for Technicolor. Our process was then two-components and our prints were double-coated. The first all-talking, all-Technicolor picture was "On With the Show," produced by Warner Bros. in 1929. Jack Warner, for his company, was the first to contract for an important series of feature productions in Technicolor. In this series was "Gold Diggers of Broadway," which has grossed over \$3,500,000 and still ranks among the first half-dozen all-time outstanding box office attractions.

The difference between the Technicolor three-component product of today and two-component up to 1932 is truly extraordinary. In the latter the skies were greenish, foliage unreal and many compromises had to be made throughout the spectrum. With the three-component process skies, water, foliage, faces—every shade of every color may be faithfully reproduced.

The writer felt it safest to try out the newly born three-component process first with cartoons and later to pass to the more complicated problems of studio production. Hence in 1933-1934 we had Disney's "Three Little Pigs" and the "Big Bad Wolf" among many delightful Silly Symphonies. The first serious attempt at three-component work in the studio was in the short subject, "La Cucaracha," which met with such tremendous success in 1933.

Whitney Company Formed

The success of "La Cucaracha" satisfied Merion Cooper, Jack Whitney, John Wharton and their associates that the three-component process was free from the shortcomings of the two-component process. And so an agreement was entered into under the terms of which Pioneer Pictures, formed by these gentlemen, undertook to produce eight important Technicolor features and serious steps were taken in connection with Technicolor financing.

Following the success of "La Cucaracha" there have been produced hundreds of short subjects and many feature-length productions. Recently there has been a flow of successful Technicolor pictures, among which are: "The Garden of Allah," "Trail of the Lonesome Pine," "Amana," "God's Country and the Woman," "A Star Is Born," and "Vogues of 1938."

It has no bonded indebtedness nor preferred stock outstanding and no bank loans. It has a net working

Lineup



A lineup of favorites who are coming to the Circle Friday in "This Way, Please." Reading from top to bottom, Mary Livingstone, Charles (Buddy) Rogers and Betty Grable.

Republic Discovers New Faces

Although Republic Pictures is notably prolific in turning out themes like "The Lone Star Ranger," "Dick Tracy Returns," "The Fighting Devil Dogs" and other serials which collect a lot of money at the box office, every now and then the studio turns out features of another type.

One of these "Escape by Night," a gang thriller with a new slant, made its debut last week. Three more of gentler hue are slated for release in November—"The Wrong Road," "Portia on Trial" and the widely heralded "Merry-Go-Round." Republic usually has names to bolster its scrips, but since everyone else is going in for discovering new things, it is not to be left out of a vogue. Tamara Geva was signed at the end of the long, prosperous run of "On Your Toes" on Broadway. But she is hardly new to people who follow names in either branch of the theater.

An 18-year-old, hazel-eyed blonde named Gloria Rich, epitomizes Republic's idea of a discovery. A studio talent scout found her doing short subjects at the Biograph Studios in the Bronx, and placed her under contract. Her first part is a niche in "Manhattan Merry-Go-Round," but it is only a starter,

for black and white, the difference is not sufficiently great, but that pictures like "The Garden of Allah" and "Vogues of 1938" show box office returns which abundantly repay this added cost.

Meanwhile, Technicolor is steadily improving its quality and reducing its cost, and what Technicolor has done to improve the appearance of some of the stars on the screen and to reduce their apparent years has been the talk of Hollywood. Not infrequently we hear a star say that he or she never wants to be seen in black and white again.

Growing Use of Color

We are living in a world of color, and the public will not be satisfied with its entertainment in black and white once it is possible to have it in color. A growing use of color in advertisements, in magazines and in amateur photography is growing evidence of this fact.

Color properly used by the producer will help to create moods, will intensify the dramatic effect and will greatly enhance beauty. These are all integral parts of showmanship and of entertainment.

At first sound was thought to be a novelty in motion pictures and one not likely to persist. After the producers have had the experience with Technicolor that they had with sound when it became highly perfected, color will no doubt sweep the industry just as did sound, and eventually black and white pictures will be as rare as silent pictures are today.

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