

David Selznick Proves 'Fine' Pictures Pay

Producer Sets Box-Office Records
Breaking Precedents with Classics

To attribute any but practical motives to a motion picture producer in these eruptive times—no matter how lofty his critical standards—is the height of naivete. Prestige is all very fine, but it doesn't butter any payrolls or change bright red figures into stolid black, and black, as any supervisor knows, is becoming to all types of ledgers.

Thus, when Hollywood sanctimonious prates of "fine" pictures it really refers to product which, in spite of unusual theme or treatment, rates at the box office. It refers to that seven-day wonder, the successful wedding of mammon and the arts. It refers, inevitably and invariably, to David O. Selznick.

Six years ago, when Selznick's name was first coupled with so-called class pictures, such as "Bill of Divorcement," "Animal Kingdom" and "Westward Passage," professional observers predicted that he would go broke making films that lacked the sensational element. They were wrong, of course.

The 35-year-old executive went a step further—he took Dickens down from the shelf, blew the dust of prejudice off that worthy, and broke box office records with "David Copperfield" and "Tale of Two Cities."

His motives, he himself will admit, were not altruistic. He is a business man—not an educator. As Selznick puts it:

"No amount of ballyhoo about the artistic function of the motion pic-

ture can affect the fact that the primary and guiding purpose of all film production is to provide entertainment for the greatest possible number of persons. All of us in the industry realize that the basis of good entertainment is a good story and that no array of box office names can overcome weakness in the plot or in the treatment of the script."

Selznick believes that a good picture story must be up to date, but that does not mean it must be based on yesterday's headlines. Certain books and plays of other times—other centuries, even—will always retain their appeal, and it is those stories which will continue to furnish his sources.

Why Selznick-produced pictures appeal to the more adult cinema-goer as well as to the heterogeneous mass known to the trade as "turnip chicks" is explained by the unmitting, almost slavish devotion to detail which is characteristic of this film maker.

Selznick's services to the industry

as a developer of fresh talent is another cogent factor in his success. In 1932 the young producer saw in Katharine Hepburn something more than a lanky young Vassar girl with a haunting voice, and by casting her opposite John Barrymore in "Bill of Divorcement," he gave her an opportunity for stardom which she realized to the full.

Previously he had chosen Kay Francis for her first important role in "Street of Chance"—and in 1934 he brought Fred Astaire from New York to make "Dancing Lady," thereby launching the career of a unique screen personality.

"Gone With the Wind," for which no cast selections have as yet been announced, will undoubtedly uncover new names, and in "Nothing Sacred," starring Katharine Hepburn and Carole Lombard, Selznick drafted the light, heavyweight boxer, Maxie Rosenbloom, who had never faced the cameras before.

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the moment, and "In Old Chicago" tells the story of a struggle so typical throughout the world, of man's aspirations and frustrations as expressed in the growth of a mighty city.

Story More Important

Not that it should be assumed from any of the foregoing that a producer should confine himself to the contemporaneous and obvious. Great stories are great no matter what historical period they treat, and certain human relations—the most important—offer eternal problems.

From all this, it's probably clear that I, for one, think that the story in a movie is more important than the star or stars.

But actors are important; after all, you can't tell the story without them. And this brings up the third quality a producer must possess or cultivate: an enthusiasm for public entertainment. He must listen to the radio as much as he can, and he must create an alert staff to look for talent all the time.

Cites Technical Problems

What is the future of motion pictures? A producer can but consider a few fundamentals. It seems likely that stories, men to produce them and actors to play them will be needed for a long time to come in the movies. The possibilities of television are great, of course, and last year's impossibility is this year's commonplace.

It's well to remember that man is a gregarious animal. He likes company on his journeys through life, and what better reason can he have for gathering with his fellows than to hear and see a good story well told?

As to the artistic advance of motion pictures, there once again, I

think, we must all be indefinite. There are technical difficulties still to be overcome, but one by one they are being solved. Still the limitations of the screen are many.

First of all, producers are merely very human people, growing for truth and beauty in a medium that still new. In the second place, standards change; what is artistic to one generation will seem stale and flat to the next. Individual producers, in their time, have known failure. The art itself endures and we profit from our own mistakes. Now and then, we achieve something to be proud of—only we haven't the time to be proud. This much I can say: Movies are better than they ever have been, and they will keep on getting better.

When you stop to consider that during the last year there has been an average weekly attendance at motion pictures of half the population of America and the British dominions, and that this year looks even more prosperous, you will understand how much a producer has to work for and what a responsibility it is.

TERM FOR BENNY

Paramount has completed negotiations with Jack Benny which bind the star comedian to the studio for a straight four-year term contract and specifies a minimum of eight pictures to be made during that time.

OTHER INTERESTS

As a sideline to his professional work, Louis Weevers of the famous "Weevers Bros. and Elvira" is district sales manager in Arkansas for a trailer manufacturer. Frank Weaver and Elvira own and operate a 30-acre resort on Lake Taney-

500 Native Actors in Mutiny

Khyber Pass
Indians Refuse
To Die in Battle

MARXES MOVE

Times Special
NEW YORK, Oct. 5.—The Marx Brothers, whose previous movie antics have been confined to the M-G-M lot, have signed to make three pictures for RKO Radio.

Their first film under the new banner will be "Room Service," the John Murray-Allen Boretz smash hit now on Broadway. This will mark the first time since their starring in "The Marxes have appeared in anything other than a vehicle written especially for them and with their collaboration.

a movie death had no special symbolic force. A rebuke was made, and the natives this time died with the necessary fervor required for the sequence.

"Mutiny in the Mountains," which is made for Alexander Korda, is taken from the story by A. E. W. Mason. Subu, the Indian lad who created something of a hit in his first picture, Robert Flaherty's "Elephant Boy," is the star. As a running mate he has Desmond Tester, the young English lad who played the boy king in "Nine Days a Queen," and was later blown to hypothetical bits in Hitchcock's "The Woman Alone." The adults who play in support include, up to this point, Vivian Leigh, Raymond Massey, Valerie Hobson and Roger Livesey.

The unit which was making the difficult technicolor shots of the mountainous scene of the picture was headed by Gregory Ratoff. They based their early headquarters in Peshawar, to make their first technicolor shots of the forbidden area north of the Khyber Pass, which is about 100 miles from Russian territory.

Zanuck Studies News for Ideas

By Darryl Zanuck

Vice President in Charge of Production for Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp.

The producer of motion pictures, like every other man engaged in large-scale enterprise, should have, above all, the faculty of foretelling public taste. There is this difference, though, between a maker of pictures and all the other lines—the picture maker can tell immediately whether or not his forecast has been correct. In other words, a producer virtually stands or falls by every production that comes out of his studio, for box office returns tell the world at once whether he has touched the public mind with a success or missed it with a failure.

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