

Looking at Hollywood with Ed Sullivan

Will the Movie Industry Return to Chicago?

By ED SULLIVAN

Hollywood, Cal.

IF THURMAN ARNOLD, assistant United States attorney general, is as successful as the movie industry fears he will be in his anti-trust suits against the major companies, it means that moving picture companies will have to abandon or get rid of their theater chains.

It means, too, that the movie field will then be open to independent movie companies, because Arnold's plan is to force the movie magnates to get out of distribution and exhibition of pictures. Under the plan an open market for films would be produced. It all sounds very involved, but actually it isn't at all involved. It simply means that under such a setup Chicago financiers could very well establish great movie studios right there in Illinois and add an important industry to that area.

If such comes to pass it will be poetic justice, because back around 1912 Chicago shared the movie industry with Hollywood. The Essanay company, long one of the leaders in film production, was based in Chicago in a lodge hall at 62 Clark street. It made the scenery on the third floor, carted it down to the second floor, and posed the actors in front of the sets. Then business prospered and Essanay moved into more spacious studio quarters in Argyle street. In the meantime Selig, the animal man, was making silent pictures at the corner of Western avenue and Irving Park boulevard.

Ben Turpin, Francis X. Bushman, Beverly Bayne, Wallace Beery, Henry B. Walthall, Charlie Chaplin, Lon Chaney, J. Warren Kerrigan, Rod La Rocque, Bryant Washburn, and Clara Kimball Young were just a few of the movie colony who lived,

worked, and played in Chicago a quarter of a century ago. An extra girl was Gloria Swanson. A bit player was Edward Arnold. Top salary was \$200 a week. When Bushman commanded \$750 a week the nation whistled its incredulity.

If Director Harry Webster, one of the first of the movie directors, wanted to film a desert sequence, he carted his players to the Indiana dunes. If he wanted to shoot ravines he took them to Starved Rock. Then the war came along to kill the goose that laid the golden eggs for George K. Spoor and Bronco Billy Anderson, who had combined their talents and names to produce Essanay. Selig retreated from the firing line, too. Thus the movie industry quit Illinois.

The movies went to California for two succinct reasons—one, the climate and scenery; two, because the state of California cooperated in tax allowances. Illinois now doesn't have to yield to California in any of these essentials, and I'll explain why.

Today climate and scenery are of negligible importance. The movies have perfected process shots to the photographic point where they can fool even the most expert. Say, for instance, you have a movie company in Chicago. The action of the story is in Singapore, and you want to have your actors act in Singapore streets. The studio manager cables a movie operator in Singapore and tells him to photograph certain streets and certain buildings. He explains in the cable just how much light he wants on them, what sort of negative film to use, so that the blending process will be rendered more simple.

Now the shots of Singapore arrive and are developed. A special moving picture camera projects the Singapore scenes on a regular screen. As the film appears on the screen the actors speak their lines and make their movements in front of that screen. When you see the process blend on the screen in your



Gloria Swanson when she was about 17 years old and an extra of the old Essanay company. At right, above: Ben Turpin, the man with the comical cross eyes. (Essanay photo.)



Beverly Bayne, heroine of many of the old Chicago productions.



Believe it or not! This is Wallace Beery of away back when.



Francis X. Bushman, idol of the film fans of another generation.



Clara Kimball Young, a celebrated star of the early pictures.

A FEW OF THE MOVIE COLONY OF CHICAGO A QUARTER OF A CENTURY AGO



Bronco Billy Anderson, the "A" of "S & A" (Essanay).



A scene from a movie production. The background here might well have been photographed in a side street in Paris, so deft are producers today in patching foreign backgrounds into American-made films.

new celluloid setup, because once the government cracks down the movies will be a wide-open proposition.

Older generations of Chicagoans will have no difficulty in recalling the movie colony as it existed in 1912 in their city. Those who remember it best, I think, are the veteran stagehands who find backstage at Chicago theaters. Most of them worked as set carpenters for Essanay and Selig. Their experiences are fresh in mind. They remember the day when Webster was directing a poker game on the second-floor studio. Suddenly there was a shout of dismay. They had filmed a poker

game, but there had been no poker chips showing, and it was imperative that poker chips be displayed for the purpose of the story. It was Sunday and no stores were open where poker chips could be purchased. An unsung hero solved the dilemma. He went to the commissary and got some ginger snaps and cut them down to poker chip size. Necessity mothered invention. To get a hill effect cameramen prostrated themselves on the ground and filmed the heads of actors who stood on chairs. Thus was won the illusion of height. In mob scenes, where prop men had work to do, they dressed as Indians or cowboys

so that the audience wouldn't realize they were intruding in the name of mechanical art.

The stagehands of Chicago almost to a man have very little to say in honor of Wallace Beery. They remember an experience they had with him when he was leaving Essanay in Argyle street for the lush celluloid pastures of California. They determined to touch off a party in honor of his trek west. They took up a collection so that they could send a taxicab for Beery at his lodgings. He refused to ride in it, allegedly demanding a limousine. So he didn't show up at the party, and the stagehands never have forgotten it.

Beery could have made amends for this social grievance when he returned to Chicago years later to make a personal appearance at the Chicago theater. The stagehands were prepared to forget all about his previous curtness. When he came backstage one of the veterans who had worked at Essanay with him hailed him cordially. Beery managed a look of complete blankness. So the stagehands have their own opinion of the M-G-M he-man star, and it is not exactly flattering. Gloria Swanson, who had been an extra girl at Essanay, also indicated she didn't want any "I remember when" references from the stagehands.

Lon Chaney, who had a card in the stagehands' union out of Denver, was their idol. Chaney had no hifalutin' ideas of his own importance. Even when he was world-famous he'd come backstage and tug at ropes with the stagehands.

Francis X. Bushman is another "regular" in the opinion of the men who pull the backstage pulleys and lifts. Bushman, when he was in the chips, was regular, and just as regular when his fortune was wiped out.

If the movie industry returns to Chicago, even a considerable part of it, it would be a great thing for the city and the state. It would spread employment. Musicians, stagehands, painters, sound technicians, hotels, apartments, business stores—all would profit. If the Chicago Association of Commerce is as astute as I believe it is, it'll probe this thought carefully and go into every phase of it exhaustively. The Thurman Arnold investigation creates an entirely new movie horizon, and mechanical inventions make Chicago a logical bidder for the studios.

Voice of the Movie Fan

Letters published in this department should be written on one side of the paper. If you wish a personal reply please inclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Dear Mae Tinée: In the picture "Little Miss Broadway" I saw El Brendel for the first time in several years. The first time I saw him was in "Just Imagine."

Could you find space for his picture, biography, and the cast of characters of "Just Imagine"? BILL GUSTAV JOHNSON.

Editor's note: I reckon we can scrape up a little space for you. Mr. Brendel was born in Philadelphia, Pa., March 25, 1898. He's 5 feet 9 inches tall, weighs 165 pounds, and has light hair and blue eyes. Educated Central High school in Philadelphia and University of Pennsylvania. Appeared in vaudeville and legitimate shows for many years before entering motion pictures. He's married to Flo Bert, professional. Here's the cast of "Just Imagine":

Single 0.....El Brendel
LN-18.....Maureen O'Sullivan
J-21.....John Garrick
D-6.....Marjorie White
RT-42.....Frank Albertson
Z-4.....Hobart Bosworth
MT-3.....Kenneth Thomson
X-10.....Wilfred Lucas
B-36.....Mischa Auer
AK-44.....Sidney De Gray
Commander.....Joseph Girard
Looloo, Booboo.....Joyzelle Loko, Boko.....Ivan Linow

Dear Miss Tinée: Righto, Miss or Mr. W. B. B., as the case may be. The British are a bit of all right.

Recently I dropped into a neighborhood theater to see "A Yank at Oxford," principally to view some of that much exploit-

ed Oxfordian scenery. But after about the fifth scene I suddenly became aware that I wasn't looking at the scenery, and I found myself engrossed in the performance of a tall, slender Britisher with a shy, quiet smile and a subtle, vibrant acting ability that shone all over the screen and over and around Mr. Taylor, completely eclipsing him.

I'm speaking of Griffith Jones, of course. Imperceptibly he stole that picture inch by inch from Taylor till no one in the theater was aware of the fact that Taylor was in the cast. In the face of Taylor's obvious "mugging" his restraint was as refreshing as a julep. You began to watch for him and wish for his quiet presence in the midst of the rest of the hubbub. (For Pete's sake, are all the producers asleep? Why doesn't somebody grab him for American films?)

As for Mr. Taylor, the less said the better. W. B. B.'s suggestion to find another picture, call it "A Britisher at Harvard," and let Mr. Taylor play the part of the statue was pretty good. "The Spirit of Spring," or something, with laurel in his hair and Garbo in his arms. Or, still following W. B. B., just let him keep rowing down the river and out of the movies.

As for Griffith Jones, I'm going out and find another theater where "A. Y. A. O." is playing. What's good enough for the British is good enough for me! Rather!!! M. GUESTE.

Editor's note: Does your eye itch or your foot itch—or anything? Because Robert Taylor's fans are thinking about you! And O—WHAT they're thinking!

Dear Miss Tinée: I think "Carefree" was a swell picture, although it was not up to the par of their other pictures. It had no tunes as catchy as "Top Hat," "No Strings," or "The Continental," which in my humble opinion are among the best songs of their many pictures.

A columnist in a popular movie magazine says that the plot is weak, but who cares, what with the Astaire-Rogers danc-

ing combination? Something that makes up for the weak plot is the scene in which Ginger is hypnotized and goes around the skeet club shooting people. That was the best part of the film.

As a by-note to that weak plot columnist, let me say if you want a weak plot go to see "Tropic Holiday." I couldn't even FIND the plot.

Yours very truly, ED CHESTER.
Editor's note: Say fans, just give us Rogers and Astaire. To see them dance is all we care. A plot and trimmings we can spare. (THAT'S poetry.)

Dear Miss Tinée: Orchids to Margaret Sullivan in her recent picture, "Three Comrades," for I think she did a wonderful job. If you could possibly squeeze in her picture in your column I would appreciate it very much. Thank you!

Yours very truly, R. S.

Editor's note: Yes, didn't she do a fine job! Again we "squeeze" with pleasure.

Dear Miss Tinée: So at last you've seen the light! About Martha Raye, I mean. The little lady never has gotten what I could call an even break from you, but then you and I agree only about 75 per cent of the time, so that's all right. I'd like you to know my opinion of Miss Raye, though, because it seems to start arguments whenever I express it. She's sweet, one of the few film folk who really possess that quality. I don't mean a sugary, insipid, counterfeit sweetness, but an in-

tangible part of the personality that manifests itself involuntarily. I don't think any actress can simulate this quality; when she tries you get something like Janet Gaynor, and I think her true personality has never been projected on the screen. My nominations for the possessors of sweetness are these: Myrna Loy, Deanna Durbin, Joan Davis, Fannie Brice, Spring Byington, and, among the men, Jimmie Stewart.

Another thing I'd like to comment on is this discussion about the screwball comedy. My only argument against it is the old one of "too much is enough." It seems to me that Irene Dunne and Katharine Hepburn have been most fortunate in the stories they have drawn for this kind of picture. Of course, if any one had come into the theater in the middle of the picture I imagine that the shock would be quite severe.

This brings up another point. Did it ever occur to you that the reason so many of the moviegoers refuse to accept their favorites in any but the most stereotyped parts is for this very reason? If one goes to a movie in the middle of it he naturally has no chance of following the development of the story, if any. For instance, I think that Joan Crawford could do handsomely by a well written biography of Lola Montez, and if one saw her as the young Irish girl coming home from India, and her career gradually building up into the adventurous saga it finally became, Crawford should be magnificent. But even I would have my doubts if I saw my first glimpse of the picture with her as the mistress of Ludwig of Bavaria or of Franz Liszt. Do you think there is anything to this theory? If so, it would seem that any true improvement in movie casting would depend on changing the habits of the fans rather than the producers.

Hope this first letter isn't too long or too boring to you.

Good luck. J. R. DUNNE.
Editor's note: Interesting you are, sir, not boring! Glad to receive you into the corner.



MARGARET SULLIVAN Praised for her work in "Three Comrades."