

NO END TO SCREEN (R)EVOLUTIONS

FIND NEW WAYS IN SIGHT, SOUND

With the storm over stereophonic sound still in the air, industry attention is already focusing on the new developments in projection optics and their implied promise of simpler and more effective operation.

Demonstration of the Tushinsky lens on the Coast has cued exhibitor realization that the end is not yet in the technical (r)evolution which seemed to find its climax in CinemaScope. Now the industry has already accepted as a fact that the widescreen is here to stay, and with this realization the engineers are back in their labs, working towards the difficult goal of standardization tailored to individual theatre needs.

Already there are reports that the Tushinsky lens, while pointing the way, is by no means the last word; that such big optical outfits as Bausch & Lomb, realizing the need for a compact and flexible optical projection unit, are working on variable lenses capable of taking any ratio and projecting it with a minimum of light loss. Various other systems, differently constituted but all basically compatible, are said to be nearing the marketing stage.

Most striking aspect of the Tushinsky lens is not only its adaptability, but its price. It'll sell for about \$700 a pair, which compares to the \$1,800 a pair now charged for CinemaScope lenses.

In his report to the Theatre Owners of America membership, Walter Reade, TOA prexy, also evaluated the variable anamorphic (Continued on page 20)

Warner Prints 2:33 To 1 On Single-Track Version Of C'Scoped 'Command'

Warner Bros. first CinemaScope picture, "The Command," which is being issued both with and without stereophonic sound, is 2:33 to 1 ratio as to the single-track version. C'Scope pix with full four-track sound are projected at the 2:55 to 1 ratio.

WB's non-stereo prints have single-track optical sound with the old-fashioned narrow sprockets. Hence, the reduced width of the picture.

IN FEBRUARY, CHICAGO FILM BIZ CLIMBED 10%

Chicago, March 9. Film grosses here last month were up about 10% over February, 1953, while total amusements in the city fell 2% under that month a year ago. Theatres paid City Tax Collector's office \$99,555 last month and \$90,654 for the same month in 1953. On the other hand, the aggregate of amusements, theatres included, accounted for \$148,280 in city taxes last month against \$155,510 the previous year.

In January and February combined, theatre biz has gone up approximately 7% over the same period last term, with \$189,044 posted this season against \$177,103 last year.

Lindbergh In C'Scope

Deal has been set for Warner Bros. to release "The Spirit of St. Louis," which Leland Hayward will produce, with Billy Wilder scripting and directing. Filmization of Brig. Gen. Charles Lindbergh's 1927 New York to Paris flight will get the CinemaScope treatment and will be made in WarnerColor.

This is Hayward's second distribution arrangement with WB, the producer already having a deal with the company for "Mr. Roberts," the film version of the stage play he presented on Broadway.

Shortage Shortage

Hollywood, March 9. Shortage of midgets is holding up casting of "Jungle Jim and the Moon Men" at Columbia. With only 11 little people registered at Central Casting, Sam Katzman is looking for at least 200 of them to play moon men.

Hollywood's pro midgets include Billy Curtis, Johnny Bamberg, Harry Monte, Buster Resmondo, George Potts, Henry Stone, George Chirillo, Jerry Marin, Luz Potter, Charlotte Sullivan and Hazel Resmondo.

Very Few Exhibs Seek 20th Aid On Equipment

Only a handful of exhibs—20th-Fox puts them at 10 or 12—so far have taken advantage of 20th's offer to intercede for them with the equipment companies so as to get better credit terms in ordering stereophonic sound units.

Interpretation put by 20th on this lack of response is that the smaller houses are buying the sound anyway. Company has been advised by at least one equipment outfit that fully 90% of their sound orders come from small-seaters.

Number of CinemaScope-equipped houses in the country now is put at in excess of 1,800. According to the 20th policy now in force, no theatre not equipped fully for 'Scope showing, i.e. with stereophonic sound, can book any of its widescreen pix. Same dictum has been laid down by Metro.

Offer to aid exhibs in obtaining better terms from the equipment companies was made by 20th as an echo to insistent theatre complaints that they couldn't afford the sound innovation. Equipment outfits are understood to require a down payment of 25% and a payoff over a two year period.

Rivoli, N. Y. Showcaser, Closing for Lack Of Suitable Film Product

Rivoli Theatre, N. Y. showcase which seats over 2,000, has posted a closing notice. House, which installed CinemaScope equipment a few months ago, figures to shutter shortly unless suitable product can be nabbed and there's apparently none in sight. The United Artists Theatre Circuit outlet is eyeing Paramount's "Elephant Walk" among other entries but so far there's no deal in the works.

Rivoli has been playing 20th's "King of the Khyber Rifles" for the past 11 weeks, holding it over despite low income. Film company hasn't made any other C'Scopes available to the theatre, preferring to introduce its anamorphic product at other locations, mainly the Roxy.

In a sense the Rivoli lights-out will represent a casualty of 20th's switch to C'Scopes. The house often played 20th product when that company had a heavier lineup in conventional format. Installation of the widescreen equipment was done on anticipation of C'Scopes from 20th and other distributors, obviously. But Metro's continuing romance with Radio City Music Hall resulted in "Knights of the Round Table" being booked at that house. M-G's others also will go the same route. Warner's "The Command" was sold to the Paramount. This left the Rivoli with only 20th as a possible source but a deal only for "Rifles" was made.

W. E. Mitchell, formerly personnel manager of the Interstate circuit, has been promoted to regional manager succeeding William O'Donnel who resigned to join Trans-Texas Theatres, Inc.

Harvest of Orders, Paramount Dream On Ozoners' VistaVision

Paramount, estimating that drive-ins now represent 19% of domestic market money, feels its new VistaVision widescreen process has a strong edge over 20th-Fox's CinemaScope for the lion's share of the ozoner trade.

It's underlined that 20th's requirement of stereophonic sound and the resultant confusion over placing multiple speakers in each automobile hasn't hit well with the drive-in operators.

On the other hand, Par boasts, VistaVision is being peddled without any audio conditions. A dimensional sound system is recommended by Par (three horns placed in the rear of the screen) but exhibs have their choice of taking or leaving this. In any event, only the conventional one speaker in each auto will be necessary.

WARNERS SEEN WITH 20TH, M-G ON STEREO

Warner Bros. appears to have joined 20th-Fox and Metro in their policy of releasing CinemaScope pix with stereophonic sound only.

What made WB change its mind—if it changed it at all—isn't known. The first WB CinemaScope, "The Command," is being released in double version, with both stereo and standard sound. However, the company has never specifically stated whether this is its regular practice or whether the multiple versions apply to the one film only.

At any rate, "The Command," while called a CinemaScope pic, didn't actually start out as such. It was shot with Carl Dudley's Vistarama lens, then went under the WarnerScope tag, and finally ended up as a CinemaScope.

Exhibs, many of whom feel 20th and M-G should supply them with non-stereophonic versions where there are requests for them, have praised WB for their "Command" policy, the impression apparently being that it applied to all of the WB CinemaScope product.

Next CinemaScope film to come from WB is "Lucky Me." Skedded after that are "Ring of Fear," "The High and the Mighty," "The Tallman" and "A Star Is Born."

Will Hays Came Into the Picture Biz Under Conditions Similar to Today

By GENE ARNEEL

Will H. Hays, who died Sunday (7) at 74, became "czar" of the picture business some 30 years ago when conditions strikingly paralleled the state of the industry today. For, then as now, censorship and the overworked term, morality, were in the spotlight. Further, Hays was in office only a few years when radio began its mammoth growth and crippled the pic boxoffice, temporarily but alarmingly. And similarly, television took a short-term (couple of years) grip on the nation before leveling off to its proper niche in the show biz scheme of things.

But the similarities give way to sharp contrast at this point. The devastating blow dealt by radio was a cue for some producers to strain even more so, with result that "shock values" on the screen, as a means of winning audiences away from the earphones, resulted.

This same approach could not be taken in combatting tv. The standards established under the Hays regime to curb both indecency and

Sex Appeal and Gum

Omaha, March 9. Local theatre manager Ted Emerson employs a janitor to remove shopworn chewing gum from seats, calculates his house scraps off about 52,000 sticks annually. Further facts:

Westerns and gum go together three to one over romantic musicals. Kids love the first, are bored with latter.

Tushinsky Claim He Can 'Squeeze' Excites Interest

Film companies are showing very considerable interest in Joseph Tushinsky's claim that his variable anamorphic lens can be used to "step down" a CinemaScope film into almost any desired ratio for normal wideangle projection.

Ability to derive standard versions of 'Scope pix via an optical printing method has been claimed on several occasions by 20th-Fox technicians, but so far there've been no demonstrations, possibly because 20th is in no hurry to convert.

Competing studios, however, are in a different position. Practical application of the Tushinsky lens to this purpose would save them hefty coin since, at the moment, they are forced to lens actual duplicate versions at a cost ranging from \$250,000 to \$350,000.

One company exec commented last week that lack of practical proof that CinemaScopes could be "converted" into standard ratio prints had definitely been a retarding factor in the expansion of his studio's CinemaScope sked.

According to Tushinsky, not only can regular prints be "squeezed" into a wider ratio, but anamorphic pictures with their 2.55 to 1 'Scope ratio can easily be cut to 2 to 1 or 1.75 to 1 or less in the optical printing utilizing his variable lens. At the moment, 20th is the only studio which hasn't covered itself by lensing its CinemaScope productions also in standard duplicate. Exception is "The Robe," which was shot twice to provide a print for 16m reduction.

It isn't clear at this moment where this leaves 20th in the 16m field since it's understood that the 20th brass isn't happy with the results achieved via the Bell & Howell narrow-gauge anamorphic system. 20th doesn't have a very extensive 16m foreign biz, but its 16m domestic circulation is quite extensive.

Actually, recklessness and indiscretion had become identified with the film trade circa 1920, had stirred agitation for all sorts of censorship statutes, and motivated the invitation to Hays to clean house and stave off bluenoses who might have paralyzed Hollywood.

Inherited a Headache

Industry veterans recall the period well: The Fatty Arbuckle mess; other violent celebrations in Hollywood; scandals concerning narcotics, alcoholism and lavish living all had served to give the overall business a black eye in the public viewpoint.

The Motion Picture Producers & Distributors of America (now the Motion Picture Assn. of America) was in existence but without force. Charles C. Pettijohn, attorney for the film companies collectively, recommended the appointment of Hays, who was Postmaster General (Continued on page 26)

MOBILIZING FOR WAR OF 'SCOPES

Hollywood, March 9.

Metro production toppers and technical personnel, including Dore Schary, Eddie Mannix, Louis K. Sidney, George Sidney and Douglas Shearer, were among a group of production and exhibitor leaders who witnessed a demonstration of Paramount's VistaVision today (Tues.).

At the same time, Paramount production chief Y. Frank Freeman revealed that the studio would immediately launch its fourth VistaVision picture. Film, "Strategic Air Command," starring James Stewart and June Allyson, is set to roll in Miami on March 22. Already completed in the process is "White Christmas," with "The Big Top" currently shooting. A Cecil B. DeMille production, "The Ten Commandments" is in the preparation stage.

Among other industryites who viewed today's demonstration were John J. Fitzgibbons, prez of Famous Players, Canada; Herbert T. Kalmus and other Technicolor execs, Gunther Lessing and reps from Walt Disney, Stanley Kramer, reps from Columbia, Warner Bros., Allied Artists, and Eastman Kodak.

Fitzgibbons termed the process as the best developed to date. "Among its many favorable factors," he said, "is that it makes every seat in the theatre a good one for the patron. This is most important to me as an exhibitor." (Continued on page 24)

New York Sees Tushinsky Lens (Now SuperScope) At RKO's 86th March 22

Hollywood, March 9.

SuperScope is the new trade name for the variable anamorphic lens developed by Joseph and Irving Tushinsky with RKO cooperation. First public trade showing is set for March 22 in N. Y. at the RKO 86th Street theatre. Showing will be sponsored by RKO Theatres, Theatres Owners of America and Allied States Association.

New lens is currently in production and will be available in quantity within two months, at an approximate price of \$350. Like Paramounts VistaVision, it will be made available to the entire film industry. Joseph Tushinsky announced that a contract is being arranged whereby National Screen Service would handle the sale and rental of the lenses to theatres.

SuperScope differs from other systems in that anamorphic positive prints are made from normal straight photography. In addition to its ability to give standard or wide-screen projection to a regularly-lensed film, the variable lens can be adjusted to handle "squeeze" prints in various anamorphic ratios. These range from 1.75 to 2 to 1, and, if necessary, the 2:66 to 1 ratio used in CinemaScope.

According to the Tushinskys, the exhibitor is not required to invest in other equipment, aside from the cost of the SuperScope lens. Present equipment may be used without any functional changes. The height of the screen remains the same, although widening of the screen is required in case the theatre is not equipped with wide-screen.

Jones Buys So. Cal. Nabe

San Diego, March 9.

Burton Jones, operator of two film houses here, added another to his string by acquiring the Egyptian Theatre from J. R. McDonough, who took it over from Fox West Coast a year ago.

Egyptian, formerly an 800-seat nabe house, will be renamed the Capri after a three-month remodeling job costing \$75,000. House will be converted for extended runs.