

The Cinema

by John Escott

(Adapted book. Pre-Intermediate level)

CHAPTER ONE

'Let's go to the cinema!'

Today it is possible to buy or hire a video and watch a film at home, but millions of people all over the world still prefer to go to their town or city cinema for a 'night out'. And before television arrived in people's homes, a visit to the cinema was something really special to look forward to.

The 'golden age' of film-making - and going to the cinema - was between about 1930 and 1950. Film stars seemed like kings and queens. Cinemas were 'picture palaces' where, for the price of a ticket, you could enter into a magical world where anything and everything was possible.

In 1946, 1,650,000,000 cinema tickets were sold in Great Britain. That's thirty-three tickets for every man, woman and child in the country.

And in the year 1939 - the year when audiences first saw *Cone With The Wind* - 30,000 people were employed by the big film studios in Hollywood. They made 400 films every year. Americans called the moving pictures, 'the

movies', and fifty million of them went to the cinema every week. They wanted to see the magic of the movies!

But how did it all begin...?

CHAPTER TWO

In the beginning

The first moving pictures were simple 'shadow shows' or 'shadow plays'.

Then came the magic lanterns which projected painted glass slides on to a screen. These became very popular in Europe in the 18th century, and lantern showmen travelled from village to village.

But in the 1820s, Nicéphore Niépce invented photography, and soon photographs were used instead of the much more expensive glass slides. But these were not movies. The pictures did not move. To make moving pictures it is necessary to take a large number of photographs very quickly, one after the other. Then, when the photographs are projected, the person or animal in the picture appears to move.

In 1878, the British photographer, Eadweard Muybridge, who was living in California, fixed twelve cameras beside a racetrack and took pictures of a racehorse - very quickly, one after the other. The American inventor, Thomas Edison, watched the work of Muybridge with great interest. (Edison had invented the phonograph - an early 'record player' - in 1877.) By 1890, William K. L. Dickson, who was working with Edison, had managed to take 'moving pictures' with something called the Kinetograph.

In 1893 the world's first film studio was built by Edison in West Orange, New Jersey. Actors from Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, and Barnum and Bailey's Circus were filmed there. The films were shown in Kinetoscope machines. These machines did not project the film on to a screen, they had 'peep-holes' that one person at a time could look through.

It was the Lumiere brothers, in France, who invented a camera and projector in one - the Cinematographe. Now large audiences could watch projected pictures on a screen. And because films were longer, people were happy to pay more to see them.

The Lumiere brothers gave the first performance of their Cinematographe in Paris in 1895, in a room under the Grand Cafe, 14 boulevard des Capucines on 28th December. They borrowed a hundred chairs from the cafe, but only thirty-five seats were sold at one franc each. But it was the world's first 'film show'.

Then Edison introduced the Vitascope projector in New York on April 23, 1896. And by the end of that year, films were flickering on screens all over Europe and America. (Films were often called 'flickers' or 'flicks'.)

At first, people did not mind what they watched, it was exciting enough just to be able to see real moving photographs of people and animals.

But slowly films with stories began to appear, and the Frenchman, Georges Melies, began to use clever

photography to make strange things happen. These were some of the first 'special effects'.

Film fact

There was a bad accident in May 1897. A Cinematographe show was part of the great Charity Bazaar in Paris. But the projectionist was careless and the film caught fire. This started an even bigger fire, and 140 people died. Many of them were very rich and important people.

CHAPTER THREE

The cinema comes to Hollywood

How did Hollywood begin? A Kansas couple, Harvey and Daidia Wilcox, came to Los Angeles in 1883, when there were just orange and lemon farms in the area. Three years later, they owned fifty hectares of land which they called Hollywood.

The Wilcoxes sold the land, bit by bit, and the first Hollywood studio was built in 1911 by the Nestor Company. The American filmmakers came to California because the weather was good, and because the Californian workers were cheap to employ. In 1913, Cecil B. DeMille came to Hollywood and started what became known as Paramount Studios. Universal Studios started about the same time, the Fox Company two years later (joining with 20th Century Pictures in 1935), United Artists in 1919 and Warner Brothers, MGM, and Columbia in the early 1920s. If you wanted to 'get into the movies', Hollywood was the place to go!

The first films were silent. The words of the actors appeared on cards which were shown every twenty seconds or so. Suitable music was played during the film by an orchestra, or by one person on a piano.

Edwin S. Porter was the filmmaker who introduced film 'editing' - cutting the film and putting it back together again with the shots in a different order. This made the films

more exciting to watch. His film, *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), is a good example of this.

Until 1910, audiences did not know the names of their favourite actors and actresses. Actresses were given names like 'The Biograph Girl' or 'The Vitagraph Girl' or were not named at all. Carl Laemmle, chief of Independent Motion Pictures (which later became Universal Studios) was the first to name a star, when he employed Florence Lawrence. By 1913, every studio was naming its actors and actresses.

CHAPTER FOUR

Famous faces

Although the first films were silent, during the years after 1910, going to the cinema was becoming more and more popular.

Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton were busy making audiences laugh.

Rudolph Valentino, an Italian actor, became the 'great lover' of the silent screen, and millions of women sent him love letters after films like *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* and *The Sheik* (both 1921). Sadly, he died in 1926 when he was only thirty-one.

Douglas Fairbanks was the star of some of the best adventure films... and audiences loved the beautiful Clara Bow.

One very famous silent film was *The Birth of a Nation*, directed by D. W. Griffith. It was first shown in 1915 and was almost three hours long. It was about the American Civil War, and a lot of people who had never been inside a cinema before came to see this film.

The first 'serial' - a film shown a bit at a time, usually one bit (or 'episode') each week - arrived in 1912. Audiences rushed back each week to see the next episode. A favourite serial was *The Perils of Pauline* (1914) starring Pearl White. Pearl had to fight Indians in one episode, was pushed off the Rocky Mountains in another, and was blown up at sea in

another. But she always seemed to escape for another exciting day.

Film fact

By 1916, Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin were each earning \$10,000 a year. By 1918, both had contracts for more than \$1 million a year.

CHAPTER FIVE

The golden age

The golden age of the cinema began with the talkies - when the actors on film were able to talk for the first time. In 1927, at New York's Warner Theatre, Al Jolson, the Russian-born Hollywood actor and singer, spoke, and sang six songs in the Warner Brothers film, *The Jazz Singer*. The first words that he spoke in the film were: 'You ain't seen nothing yet!' The audiences loved him.

At first there were many problems with talking pictures. Microphones picked up the noises in the studio, directors had to stop shouting orders to the actors, and the actors had to learn all their words.

Some stars of the silent screen could not make the change to 'talkies'; audiences laughed at their funny voices. But the deep, mysterious voice of silent star Greta Garbo was a great success when she appeared in *Anna Christie*. The film magazines said: 'Garbo talks!' (She also made it fashionable for women of the time to wear berets!) Garbo's career ended in 1942 when she left Hollywood, saying that she would never act again.

By 1930, all films were 'talkies', and many actors and directors moved from the theatre into the cinema. Actors like Edward G. Robinson, Spencer Tracey, Humphrey Bogart, Clark Gable and Bette Davis began to appear on the screen.

Musical films began to be popular in the 1930s. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers starred in *Flying Down to Rio* (1933). This was the first of nine films which they made together.

And then there were the fast-moving crime films of James Cagney, Humphrey Bogart and Edward G. Robinson. One of the best was *The Roaring Twenties*.

The 1930s also introduced 'singing cowboys' like Roy Rogers and Gene Autry. But it was the film *Stagecoach*, directed by John Ford in 1939, which made a star of one of Hollywood's most famous cowboys - John Wayne.

The year 1939 was when audiences first saw what is now sometimes described as the greatest film ever made: *Gone With The Wind*, starring Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh. The book appeared in 1936 and sold a million in the first six months. The film has earned more than \$300 million, and won eight Oscars (with the first one ever given to a black actress, Hattie McDaniel, who played the part of 'Mammy').

Film fact

Alfred Hitchcock made the first British talking picture in 1929. It was called *Blackmail*, and was first written as a silent film. Hitchcock quickly added words and sound when he saw how popular talking pictures were becoming.

CHAPTER SIX

The 'star system'

In 1932, Technicolor introduced a camera which could produce 'natural' colours for the films that were shown in the cinemas. Filming in Technicolor was expensive, but soon every kind of movie could be seen for the first time 'In Glorious Technicolor.'

The golden age of the cinema continued through most of the 1940s. Audiences filled the 'picture palaces' in their towns, enjoying exciting films like *Citizen Kane*, *Casablanca* and *Double Indemnity*, and musicals like *Meet Me in St Louis* and *Easter Parade*.

During the Second World War, many people went to the cinema for another reason as well. They could see the main film, but they could also see newsreels - films of the week's news - with all the latest film and information about the war.

At this time, actors worked for just one company. This was known as the 'star system'. MGM Studios told everyone that it had 'more stars than there are in heaven' working for them; stars like Judy Garland, Mickey Rooney, Jean Harlow, Spencer Tracy, Clark Gable and Joan Crawford.

Studios often chose or wrote stories especially for their big stars.

And sometimes a director would be brought in from another studio to do a film because that star liked him, or

worked well with him. Or a cameraman would be brought in because he knew how to make the star look his or her best on screen.

The Academy Awards are given every year by the US Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. They are called 'Oscars', and they are supposed to have got their name because they looked like the Uncle Oscar of Margaret Herrick, a lady who worked in the Academy film library. The first Awards were given in May, 1929, and the Oscars were awarded for silent films only. In 1930, the award-giving was broadcast on the radio, and today it is seen on TV by millions of people all over the world.

Film fact

One star, Marlon Brando, was paid \$2.25 million for ten days work on Superman (1978). He appears on the screen for about ten minutes in the film.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Bigger and better!

In the 1950s, people stopped going to the cinema two or three times a week, and stayed at home to watch TV instead. The cinema queues got shorter, and the film companies realized that they had to fight back. They tried to do this by making films that looked as different as possible from TV.

TV in the 1950s was in black-and-white, and the pictures were shown on very small screens. So the cinema produced Cinemascope, which made it possible to show films on a much wider screen than ever before, and, of course, in colour. And 'big screens' meant 'big' films that looked good on a wide screen. Films like *The Robe* (1953) and *Ben Hur* (1959).

Then came 3-D, where the pictures seemed to jump off the screen at the audience.

Warner Brothers had a success with *House of Wax* in 1953, and there were nearly twenty more 3-D films shown in cinemas that year. Alfred Hitchcock's *Dial M for Murder* (1954) was popular. But the people in the audience had to wear special coloured glasses to see the effects of 3-D, and they soon became bored with having to do this. And so the studios stopped making 3-D films.

Cinerama films were popular for a short time, but it needed three projectors and a bigger screen again to show

them. People had to move their heads from side to side to see what was happening at both ends of the screen! But Cinerama films were very expensive to make, and it was difficult to put the very big screens into most cinemas.

The studios continued their fight with TV, but television was becoming more and more popular. Then, in 1955, RKO studios needed money quickly to stay alive, and they sold their films to television. Other studios soon began to do the same and old films became popular on TV.

But although the 'golden age' of the cinema was finished, films continued to be made. And there were some big successes - like the James Bond films *From Russia with Love* (1963), and *Goldfinger* (1964). There were popular family films starring Julie Andrews - *Mary Poppins* (1965) and *The Sound of Music* (1965). Then the 1970s brought *The Godfather* (1972),

Jaws (1975), *Star Wars* (1977) and *Superman* (1979). In the 1980s, young people hurried to see *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), *Ghostbusters* (1984), *Back to the Future* (1985) and *Batman* (1989).

And in the 1990s came Stephen Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993) with its wonderful special effects and exciting story. You can see the video of *Jurassic Park* at home on your own television. But the special effects are much more frightening on a big screen in a dark cinema.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Animation

Mickey Mouse, Tom and Jerry, Popeye, Rugs Bunny. All these famous cartoon characters began their lives as simple pictures on paper.

Cartoon characters are painted on to sheets of clear film, called 'cels', so that the painted 'background' can be seen through the unpainted parts of the cel. Then they are photographed. Each cel will have one picture, and each picture will be a little different, to make the characters appear to move when they are projected at twenty-four pictures every second.

The characters must look and sound the same in every film.

Everybody recognizes the voice of Bugs Bunny ('Eeh, what's up, Doc?'), spoken by Mel Blanc. Blanc also gave the character the name 'Bugs'.

The most famous producer of animated films was Walt Disney. He introduced Mickey Mouse to audiences in 1928 in a black-and-white cartoon, Plane Crazy. At first the mouse was called Mortimer, but then the name was changed to Mickey.

Disney also produced the first Walt Disney colour cartoon, Flowers and Trees (1932), and the first animated feature film, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. More followed: Pinocchio, Fantasia, Dumbo, Bambi, Cinderella,

The Sleeping Beauty, 101 Dalmatians, The Jungle Book, Aladdin, The Lion King, Pocahontas and The Hunchback of Notre Dame.

Walt Disney studied at the Kansas City Art Institute. He made animated cartoons for the Kansas City Film Ad Company before going off to Hollywood and starting a company with his brother Roy in 1923.

In the film Who Framed Roger Rabbit? (1988), cartoon characters and real actors appear together.

Today, more and more animators are using computers, instead of employing people to do all the painting.

Some animators use marquettes (models) instead of pictures, and bend the model's arms and legs, or change its face, to make the character 'move'. Creature Comforts, produced by Aardman Animations, who use models in all their films, won an Oscar for best animation.

CHAPTER NINE

Behind the camera

A lot of people are needed to make a film, as well as the actors and actresses. They are all the other people whose names appear at the beginning or end of a film. Some of them have strange-sounding jobs like 'Best Boy' or 'Key Grip'. Let's look at just some of them.

Producer - the person who chooses which film to make, who gets the money needed to make it, and who takes care of all the business problems.

Director - the person who decides how to 'shoot' (or film) each scene, and who controls all the actors and other people who are helping to make the film. The director is the one who shouts 'Action!' when he or she is ready. One piece of film which is filmed without stopping the camera is called a 'take'.

Screenwriter - the person who writes the screenplay or script of a film. Sometimes many screenwriters are employed before a director is happy with a screenplay. And when a book is made into a film, it is not usually the writer of the book who writes the screenplay. A screenwriter is usually given this job.

Editor - the person who 'cuts' and then puts together the film after the filming has finished, and makes it into the final movie.

Set Designer - the person who arranges the furniture and scenery needed in the film. The designer often plans by making models of the scenery before working on the final set.

Wardrobe Designer - the person who designs or chooses the clothes that the actors wear in the film. These are often got from special companies who keep every kind of film and theatre clothes that you can think of.

Gaffer - the lights and lighting chief in the studio.

Best Boy - the Gaffer's assistant.

Key Grip - the person who moves the camera around.

Boom Operator - the person who moves the microphone above the heads of the actors when they are speaking.

Film facts

In the film, Cleopatra, made in 1963, 26,000 costumes were used. But 32,000 were used to make the film Quo Vadis in 1951.

Warner Brothers paid \$5 million to American writer, Tom Wolfe, to make the film of his book, Bonfire of the Vanities (1990), starring Tom Hanks, Melanie Griffith and Bruce Willis.

CHAPTER TEN

Inside or outside?

In the very early years of the cinema, almost all filming was done outside. Today, filming is done 'on location' when it is impossible to build a real city, or a mountain or something, inside the studio. Also, some directors prefer to film on location. It is then that the cameras go out into the real world.

All of some films are shot on location, but others have only short outside scenes to join with the scenes that are shot in the studio.

As an example, suppose it is important to show a policeman arriving at an office on Fifth Avenue, in New York, and meeting a businesswoman inside the building. A location film crew will 'shoot' the policeman getting out of a taxi on Fifth Avenue and walking into the office building. But the scene where he meets the businesswoman in the office will be filmed inside a studio, perhaps days or weeks later.

All studios have large 'stages' where the sets are built. One of the biggest in the world is at the British studios of Pinewood in Buckinghamshire, where one of the stages is 102 metres long.

Sets are sometimes used for more than one film, and this was very true for cowboy films that were made in the 1920s and 1930s. Then, a Hollywood studio often made

thirty or forty of them in a year, and the street where the cowboys had their final gunfight often appeared in film after film, with only small changes.

Film facts

The largest number of locations used in a Hollywood film was 140, for *Around the World in 80 Days* (1956).

The largest number of cameras used for a single scene was forty-eight for the sea battle in the 1925 film of *Ben Hur*.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Special effects

Special effects are used when it is too difficult, too dangerous, or too expensive to do something in the usual way. They are used to make the audience think that they are seeing something which they really are not.

For example, small models of towns or buildings are very useful. In films, when you see a house catch fire, a plane crash, or a bomb blow up a ship, you are probably watching a model house, plane and ship. But you do not realize this when you see it on the film.

The big dinosaurs in the film Jurassic Park (1993) were not real, of course! Lots of models were made of each of them.

Today, computers are used more and more in special effects, making the impossible seem possible.

The first 'special effect' happened in the film The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, which was made in the Edison studios in 1895. The audience appear to see Queen Mary's head being cut off, but the director stopped the camera and changed the actress for a dummy, whose head was cut off in the next shot.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Stunts and make-up

Stuntmen and stuntwomen are used when something is too difficult or too dangerous for the actor to do. Every stunt is carefully planned before filming, and must be as safe as possible.

They wear the same clothes and make-up as the star, and are usually filmed so that their faces are not seen clearly.

They wear special clothes that will not catch fire if they are to be filmed in a 'burning' building (although often there is more smoke than fire, and the fire is carefully controlled).

Stuntmen often wear padding under their clothes so that they do not hurt themselves when they fall from something like a horse or a moving car.

Guns are not real guns, and knives are usually made of rubber so that they will bend when somebody is hit. Stuntmen who fall from buildings will fall onto something soft (which you won't see in the final film, of course!). The important thing is that it looks real.

Some stars do their own stunts, although film companies would prefer that they didn't. The director doesn't want his star to get hurt - it's too expensive for the film! Mel Gibson did all his own stunts in *Mad Max Beyond the Thunderdome* (1985).

The make-up artist can change a nice-looking actor into something very frightening... or a beautiful young actress

into an old woman. It took eight-and-a half hours each day to change the actress Francesca Annis into a 100-year-old woman in the 1982 film Krull.

Rubber masks are made for the actor to wear when it is necessary to make very big changes to their face. Wigs, beards, moustaches, false eyelashes - all these things help to make a 'character'.

It is even possible to make a man look like a woman!

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Picture palaces

The greatest of all the 'picture palaces' built in the 1920s and 1930s was the Roxy Cinema in New York. It cost \$12 million to build and had 6214 seats. Three hundred people worked at the cinema, with sixteen projectionists and 110 musicians. It also had a hundred singers, and a group of dancers to keep the audience happy - and its own hospital! The Roxy opened in March 1927 and closed in March 1960.

Most of the cinemas in the big cities seemed like palaces to the film-goer. Inside were comfortable seats, thick carpets and coloured lights.

There was often a restaurant, and sometimes a dance floor, too. Some American cinemas had creches where mothers could leave their babies while they went to watch the film.

A man or woman played a cinema organ while audiences waited for the film to begin. The organ came up out of the floor as the music started.

Film fact

The drive-in cinema became popular in the early 1950s in America - very popular with young people! More than 4000 drive-ins opened between 1948 and 1956.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

What happens next?

Today, cinema audiences are much smaller (and usually younger) than the audiences of the 'golden age'. Many of the 'picture palaces' are now 'multi-screen' cinemas with four or five small cinemas inside one building.

Today's films appear on video, and then on TV, after they have been seen by cinema audiences.

But some old films don't look so good on TV. Cowboy films are an example of this. The wonderful scenery in films like *How the West Was Won* needs a large screen to show it at its best. Television can't do it. For many people, the cinema is still the only place to watch a film.

One of the cinema's newest ideas is IMAX projection. A screen 19 metres high and 15 metres wide, and excellent sound, makes an audience feel that they are 'really there'.

IMAX DOME theatres have a big, 30 metre screen which puts the audience right in the centre of everything that is happening in the film.

And with IMAX 3D, people find themselves reaching out to try and touch what they can see, it is so real!

There are nearly 150 IMAX theatres in different countries all over the world, and more are being built every year.

So this is cinema today.

And as Al Jolson said in The Jazz Singer, 'You ain't seen nothing yet!'

- THE END -

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