

# "IN ANSWER TO YOUR QUESTIONS"....."

## Famous Hollywood Director Replies To "The Listener"

**I**N November of last year, "G.M." *The Listener's* film critic, was invited by Paramount Pictures to send eight questions to Preston Sturges, Paramount director, in Hollywood. This was part of a publicity "stunt" for the latest Sturges film "Sullivan's Travels," in which twenty of the motion picture writers or critics of the leading newspapers and magazines of the world were each invited to ask Sturges eight questions which he undertook to do his best to answer. "G.M." was chosen by Paramount to represent New Zealand; and after having been delayed for some months because of the war and because Sturges has been busy on a new picture ("The Palm Beach Story"), the answers to "G.M.'s" set of questions have just arrived from Hollywood, together with some photographs, and are printed here.

**A**S I suggested when my questions to Preston Sturges were originally published in the Christmas issue of *The Listener* last year, I was hopeful of receiving some interesting replies in this international "Question-and-Answer Press Conference." Its main purpose was, of course, to draw attention to Sturges and *Sullivan's Travels*, which he wrote as well as directed, but his previous work in such films as *The Lady Eve*, *The Great McGinty*, and *Christmas in July*, showed him to be a man of such originality and fertility of mind that his answers were likely to be very much more than mere stereotyped "puffs" for himself and his studio. The results are certainly not disappointing: Sturges has obviously taken the business seriously and put a good deal of thought into his answers. They will, I am sure, be read with interest by all who are interested in the cinema.

Here are the questions and answers, followed by a reproduction of the Preston Sturges signature:

### 1. Question:

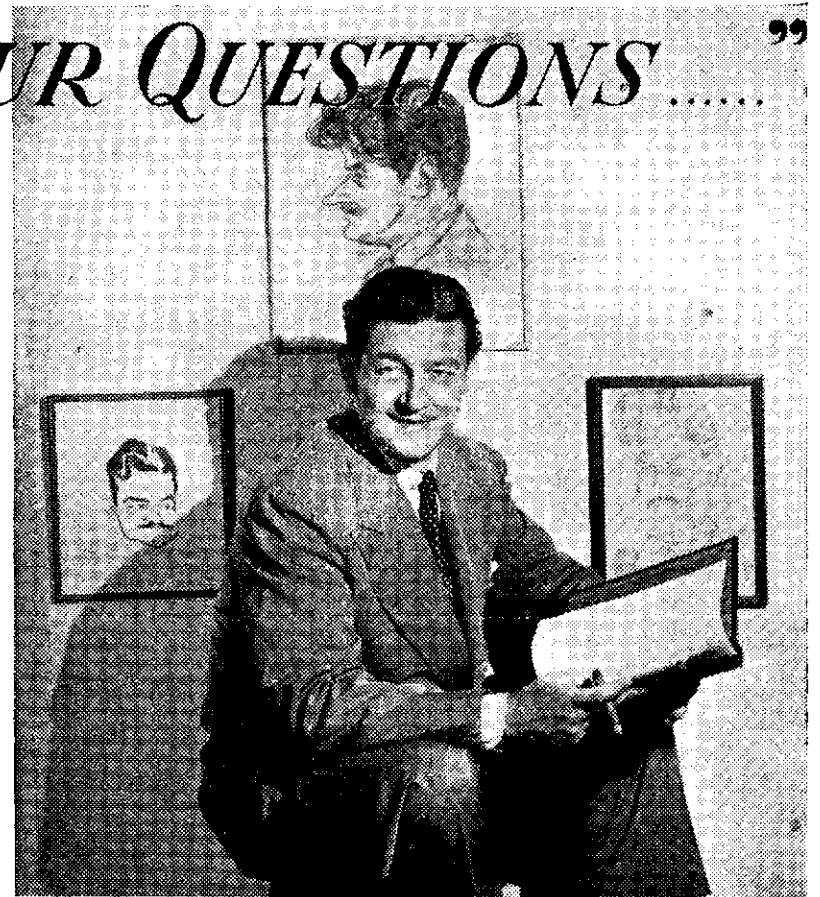
Do you think that, other things being more or less equal, the director is the most important person in the making of a film? I do, so don't be too modest.

### Answer:

*Not of necessity. Shaw is the most important thing in a Shaw picture, no matter who directs it.*

### 2. Question:

In your opinion, is there any chance, in British and American films, of directors coming to have a "star value" of their own with the general public, as has happened in France, and to a very limited extent with films directed, say, by Capra,



LOOKING UP THE ANSWERS? Preston Sturges in his study, surrounded by caricatures of himself

Korda, Lubitsch — and of course Sturges? I mean, what possibility is there of the public being made "director conscious," so that they

will be attracted to a film as much by the "Sturges touch" as by the Taylor profile?

### Answer:

*The chances are slight, I think, because the public is not conscious of direction, only of its results. Directors became very important in the silent days when they were also the authors, and this importance has carried over into sound pictures.*

### 3. Question:

Which do you prefer: that a critic should express his candid, personal opinion on a film, even though it may be most unfavourable, or that the newspapers and magazines, under pretence of reviewing films, should fill their columns with puff paragraphs from which the note of criticism is absent?

### Answer:

*By all means let him express his candid personal viewpoint. Only let the owner of the paper be careful in his choice of a critic. Let us be sure that the critic is a critic.*

### 4. Question:

In the long run (or even the short run), do you think that candid criticism is (a) harmful, (b) helpful to the film industry?

### Answer:

*No true art can be driven from the theatre, as witness the strip-tease which flourishes in spite of all efforts to suppress it. Commerce can be injured by criticism, never art.*

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**HERO-WORSHIP?** Sturges says that the director he admires most is Ernst Lubitsch. Here he is being very attentive to Lubitsch at the opening of the new Sturges restaurant in Hollywood—for this remarkable man also runs a restaurant and a Diesel manufacturing plant in his spare time



**"A PANNING SHOT** on a split screen" is Sturges's favourite trick of direction, he says. Using the word "pan" in one sense, this double-exposure trick shot of Sturges the director expressing contempt for Sturges the author, seems to illustrate it