

"The Screen Still Uses The Tradesmen's Entrance"—Preston Sturges

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5. Question:

Do you think that the film industry of America in general is being used, consciously or unconsciously (a) to help bring the United States into the war; (b) to bolster up the existing social and economic order, and for this reason is more concerned to provide dope for the masses instead of making films which courageously tackle the vital problems of the day?

(Note: This was written before America came into the war.)

Answer:

We are getting a little deep-dish here. This question would be better answered by a searcher for the deep truth who works on 16 mm. than by a simple commercial guy like myself; however, I imagine that the film industry, like any other prosperous industry, is on the side of the party in power at the moment and consciously or unconsciously promulgating its doctrines, defending its social and economic order and refraining from constantly inciting revolution in the souls of its customers. That refers to the boys downstairs in front. It doesn't mean that there aren't a few people on the third and fourth floors who are occasionally permitted to do what they please. When the first floor is attacked too often by the third floor, there is a lull.

(Note: It should perhaps be explained that the reference to "a searcher for deep truth who works on 16 mm." is to the makers of documentary or educational films. As for "the boys downstairs in front", this is a reference to the big business executives who are located on the ground floor of the Paramount Studios; and the "people on the third and fourth floors" are the directors, producers and writers—including Sturges himself.—G.M.)

6. Question:

What possibilities and limitations has the screen as compared with the stage (that is, can the stage do anything that the screen cannot?), and

to what extent do you think that the screen's possibilities have yet to be realised, particularly in the treatment of serious and controversial themes? (The success of some of Shaw's plays in screen form does seem to suggest that there is a big market for the more "adult" and intelligent type of film).

Answer:

The possibilities of the screen as the modern theatre have hardly been scratched, partially due to the fact that the screen has not yet been "received." We still use the tradesman's entrance in the temple of art. Our best theatrical critics would not be found dead in a movie palace. This will not always be so. The best minds will come to the pictures and then, as the song goes, "just you wait and see."

7. Question:

What is your own favourite trick, or technique, of direction?

Answer:

The pull back and panning shot on a split screen.

8. Question:

Which director's work do you admire most of all (apart, if you like, from your own) and why? And if I'm not being too greedy in asking it, which film star do you admire most of all, and why?

Answer:

Lubitsch.
Raimu, because he makes me howl with laughter.

Cordially yours
P. Sturges



STARS BEHIND BARS: Veronica Lake and Joel McCrea in a scene from the new Sturges picture, "Sullivan's Travels." This is the story of an idealistic film director who, tired of making "popular" pictures decided to see the seamy side of life for himself with a view to producing a film-with-a-message. He is accompanied by a disillusioned Hollywood "extra" girl; and one of their experiences is shown above

THOSE answers don't seem to call for much comment. They are, I think, very penetrating, and in general I find myself very much in agreement with them, but I would suggest that Preston Sturges's view that there is only a slight modest in answering Questions 1 and 2. In a Shaw film, "other things" are by no means "more or less equal"—the author dominates everything. And Sturges's view that there is only a slight chance that directors will come to have a "star value" of their own is not only contrary to what many critics believe or hope, but is also at odds with the

opinions or many film executives and publicists.

So far as the answer to Question 7 goes, I must confess it baffles me, and also a technical expert to whom I referred it, and I have a suspicion that Sturges may have been indulging in a gentle but legitimate leg-pull.

Raimu, whom Sturges names as his favourite film star in Question 8, is the famous French comedian whom we in New Zealand have seldom seen, though I seem to remember that he was the mayor who married his cook in *Un Carnet de Bal*.

—G.M.



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