

SILENCE GIVES WAY TO SOUND

1925 THE WORLD OF MOTION PICTURES 1935

From Chaos And Confusion Comes A Newer And Saner Industry

An Eventful Ten Years In The Film World

IN 1925, the first year of the period dealt with in this special entertainment number, the craze for bigger, better and more ornate picture palaces was well under way, and Australian and New Zealand cities were vying with each other to see which could cram the most yards of carpets, the greatest number of statues, the most fountains and the biggest orchestras into its theatres. For one shilling the humblest person in the land could spend an hour or two in a building that, for heavy magnificence, would put a Babylonian palace to shame. He could sit in a super-comfortable seat, his feet on a super-soft carpet, his ears caressed by music from a super-large orchestra and his eye delighted by a super-production. Heaven knows to what lengths and breadths these picture palaces might have gone if the talkies had not come along and killed the craze for huge picture palaces stone dead!

In 1928 there were the first rumblings of the storm. Cables told of some queer invention that was known as "talky-soundy movies." A well-known New Zealand theatre magnate, interviewed, scoffed at the idea and said that the whole thing was a new-fangled notion that would die down just as rapidly as it sprang up. A few months later—in March, 1929,—New Zealand's first talkie theatre was opened in Wellington.

Famous film stars discovered that a "poifect" face meant less under the new order than a decent speaking voice. Warner Brothers, a film company which, by its own admission, was tottering toward bankruptcy before the talkies, came back with a flourish and cleaned up a cool million pounds with its first talkie, "The Singing Fool." Other companies were hard at work reorganising their studios, getting rid of well-known stars whose voices were against them, importing stars from New York and London, buying up musical comedies and stage plays.

While Hollywood was thrown into chaos and confusion, the talkies gave fresh life to the British film industry which had languished for many years. Stage stars were recruited, famous playwrights and directors threw themselves into the game, personalities from the Continent arrived in London prepared to work for the audible screen. To-day Great Britain is in a strong position in the film world and film-goers' prejudice against English-made pictures has disappeared.

The excitement which flared up with the arrival of the talkies had scarcely died down when Hollywood was smitten by another kind of excitement—the Wall Street crash and the succeeding depression. Again there was confusion—carefully-made plans were thrown in the wastepaper basket; highly-paid executives were tossed out on the pavement, big stars found their equally big salaries clipped in half. Hollywood—scatter-brained child of the boom years—was learning the "facts about life." To-day the film business, both in America and England, is on a sound footing with greater attention being given to the choice of stories, stars and directors. Opposition from England, too, is fierce—and the picture-going public is reaping the benefit.

The day of the ornate picture palace is gone, too. In its place there is the "intimate" type of house—small, ideal for sound, comfortable, but not pretentious.

It didn't take theatre-owners long to discover that the big barns of picture-houses couldn't hold a candle to the small places for sound reproduction, and dozens of theatres have been remodelled and reduced in size in the past year or two. Amalgamated Theatres, Ltd., has built numerous houses in New Zealand during the past four years, and every one of them has been small and mostly of the one-floor type. Where it has not been possible to alter a theatre the walls have been padded and draped to cut out the echoes which proved so disturbing in the early days of sound.

Buzz of Activity in Australian Films

Famous Stars and Directors

THERE has been no more interesting development in films in this part of the world during the last few years than the rise of Australian talkies. The film industry in the Commonwealth was "getting somewhere" when the talkies dealt it a staggering blow. Recovery was slow, but it was sure, and to-day Cinesound is laying plans that are worthy of attention in Hollywood and London. Stars with international reputations are being imported, fresh capital is being put into the business, world-famous directors and cameramen are arriving from America. Cinesound is drawing up a production schedule that will put such stars as Clive Brook, Bebe Daniels, Reginald Denny, Anita Page, Ben Lyon, Anna May Wong and Polly Moran into future Australian pictures.