

HE MADE FILMS



PHILIP CROSS

... In the dress of Andalusians.

IT was a very quiet street in Wellington, all very orderly and sane and commonplace, after the typical New Zealand manner.

Two housewives stood on the footpath having a chat in the sunshine, some children played at the end of the street.

In leisurely fashion a Scottish terrier waddled across the road, stopped outside an iron-railed gate and poked his nose between the bars, then waddled off again.

Roamed Far

AND I knew that inside the house with the iron-railed gate was a young man, whom I wanted to see for the "Record," who had roamed most of the world: Mexico, South America, London, the Continent; had acted in "Western" films, had produced "floor shows" in London, had made films in Spain, had been once apprenticed to the bull-ring, had recently fought with Franco's army, and had now come back to New Zealand.

The sky above the street was blue, and empty of aeroplanes. I apologised to the Scottish terrier, pushed him aside and opened the gate. It all seemed a bit unreal that the young man should be in this quiet street under such a peaceful sky.

He is Philip Cross, son of Dr. Cross, of Wellington. He left New Zealand ten years ago on his adventures round the world.

ALL his life he has had a love of horses, and in his youth he rode his own horses in the New Zealand show ring

No doubt it was this love of horses that first led him into "Western" films in which he starred in Hollywood and in England for about five years.

Later he was employed by Carl Hyson, American producer, husband of Dorothy Dickson, the English star, and went into partnership with him in Carl Hyson Productions.

They were a company formed to provide ideas, costumes, figures and ensembles, and special camera-angles for musical and dancing films.

THEY worked out all the camera-angles for the Gracie Fields film, "Queen of Hearts"; for the scenes in which she was shown being thrown out of a window and being swung about by her hair.

"For this," said Mr. Cross, "she was 'doubled' by a Mexican cowboy friend of mine who ran my stables in London. He wore her clothes and a wig. Of course, when he was being swung round apparently by the hair his features were scarcely visible."

When Gracie Fields was being thrown out of the window by the international star, Balliol, it was again the diminutive Mexican cowboy who was thrown through the window.

"And the window?" I asked.

"Was cellophane," said Mr. Cross.

I asked him about Gracie Fields.

Woman of People

SHE is very simple, he said, and very blunt. She has no hesitation in calling a spade a sanguinary shovel. She is a woman of the people, and she will always remain so. She would hate to be thought anything else.

"The secret of her success is her absolute reality and her absolute sincerity under all the ballyhoo of publicity. This is what endears her to the hearts of millions of simple English people of the provinces, who care nothing for the fashionable goings-on of London but love to see her doing the simple things they do themselves."

THERE was more film work for Philip Cross when he went to Mexico to assist in the production of Eisenstein's "Thunder Over Mexico," a highly imaginative production for which hundreds of thousands of feet were shot and only 5625 feet of film were used.

Then, in 1935, the young man went to Spain to make some films of his own. In the south of Spain, 60 miles north of Gibraltar, was a place called Alcala de Los Gazules, with a marvellous climate.

It was an old Moorish type of town, built on the side of the hill. One looked up from below and saw the beautiful old houses going right up into the heavens.

HE set out to make a film with the aid of two stars and the people of the village. He called it "Futility," a simple, homely story of real life about the rich girl who had everything and yet craved for the things of the poor girl... home, family life and motherhood.

"It sounds trite," said Philip Cross, "but you must remember that it was all made against the background of old Spain and with the aid of villagers who still lived the life that had been lived in that place for the last 300 or 400 years."

"It showed the waterboy bringing back his donkeys with the stone jars full of water from the well up to the village and ogling the servant girl who stood on the steps of the house, and bringing her a flower that he had picked by the wayside."