

Hollywood at the Crossroads

Defining the Creative Front
before Television

Tom Moriarty

WITH an admirable casualness of manner some local radio fellows called in the working press recently to witness a demonstration of television and listen to descriptives of the mechanics of the new sound-and-sight medium. And there before us Young Mother Hollywood had another baby . . . a child some day destined to take its place in the play-pen and howl the living pants off the rest of the brood—movies, radio, music, big theater, little theater, dance, and festival. How soon television becomes the fair-haired boy of the village depends upon a number of manufacturing and economic factors, but certain it is that television's future is as rosy as Shirley Temple's.

Something about the actuality of this latest technological miracle gave a person pause when once again in the familiar background of a hooting Hollywood street. Here were the gods of electric impulse bearing a new gift, and here was the perpetual backdrop of the Santa Monica Mountains and the plains of the old ranchos to receive it, accept it, and allow the little people of the big barns to play with it, exclaim over it, cannily figure a twist to it that could make it their own . . . their own and nobody else's and if you want it you'll have to come to Hollywood to get it. . . .

Indeed, the umber range of the Santa Monicas seemed to exhalate a pondering moment there in the twilight, as if puzzled itself over this colony of technicians and exhibitionists that dash around in all directions at its feet.

The first people came for the sunlight. True—but the bright sunlight on moving images is no longer a factor and therefore why all the other activity? Why has the place turned into the "gold rush camp" of the art world? A corny American village metamorphosed into a streamlined International Settlement as seething with conflicts as is Shanghai?

Yes, it's entitled to definition, is this ferment of talent and paraphernalia and obtuse wills. It's entitled to definition if only to mark this arrival at the crossroads, for certainly a year or two from now Hollywood will be a completely different place, and new practices may alter working, living, and playing conditions to such an extent that the present phase will be lost forever and aye to the record of type.

Television

Here then is one aspirant's definition, with an assist to the voice of the mountains at dusk. It's not a *complete* definition, for such would have to be a catalogue of small print. . . .



HOLLYWOOD is the particular Creative Front in the world which has completely mastered the technique of volume-self-projection in all of the arts. It is hardly possible for any person to do any creative thing in Hollywood without unconsciously playing to the whole wide world. To attempt an artistic thing here for one's simple delight is to be mistrusted before the bar of public approbation, Hollywood's last court of appeal. Volume-self-projection, with all of its attributes of volume-money and volume-prestige and volume-temporal powers, is the ruling ideal of the Hollywood idealist. The streets of the region are but the wings to the invisible stage of the world.

With all the changes that have rapidly occurred between the pepper-tree era and pep-campaign present times, Hollywood has not only remained the world's model for the apparatus and the technique of volume-self-projection, but has so far outdistanced other creative centers in this respect that they appear hopelessly buried in oblivion. Vienna, Salzburg, Rome, Moscow, Boston, and Philadelphia must content themselves with home-consumed artistic manifestations. Only Broadway, fighting for its artistic life with the single weapon of the theater, can now compete, though against odds, with Hollywood. Only Broadway's compactness has enabled it to survive, and who knows but what television's future abilities may eliminate the advantage of Manhattan's ready-made market-place for purchasers of living-heard-and-seen entertainment?

But though Broadway appears to be headed for the outgoing chute in the next decades, the Creative Front of Hollywood bears evidence of continued growth in the coming Television Era. As a dictator, controlling the media of volume-self-projection, Hollywood will control the sources of entertainment and thus consolidate its position as the years roll on. And judged by progress since the pepper-tree era, when Hollywood became a metaphor for wild parties and screwy people and a meretricious art, it would seem that this Creative Front will accept its new responsibilities and administer them benevolently—that is, by heeding the findings of scouts who make it their



Television

business to learn the temper of the world's people and by trying to satisfy the people lest the indignation of the mob result in destruction of the entire fascistic set-up.

Today Hollywood is not a tangible place, of course. Its physical location slips around like quicksilver, from desert to ocean to valley, and includes strips and sections of Los Angeles, Beverly Hills, Culver City, Pasadena, the Santa Monica Mountains, and the San Gabriel and San Fernando valleys. Today Hollywood is a super-Broadway split up into little chunks and set out in the sun to get acquainted with the birds and the bees. Today, Hollywood's adolescent metaphor is about as apt as the word republic is for Austria.



Now let's get off the high horse of generalization and look at the units in this Creative Front sequence. Dating back to when Hollywood Boulevard was named Prospect Avenue, we know that the person who could put on make-up was top dog. Then came the rise of the person whose voice had an affinity for suave electrical imprisonment. Then came the Indians—the radio singers, readers, and general exponents of invisible vaudeville. Soon the writing men descended as locusts—and before Carrie Jacobs Bond got through wondering why these strange bands of artistic Hessians did not like the veranda of the old Hollywood Hotel any longer, the place called Hollywood was a seething mass of plunging personalities . . . all aware that volume-money, the new *croix de guerre* of art, followed volume-self-projection . . . and all out for that big dough!

Some of them got the volume-dough and called it a day, leaving the gates open for another seeker of security. Some of them got the money and went about pyramiding it, for the love of power instead of security. What a thrill to get out of the gipsy class at last! Most of them got no dough, no security, and very little recognition. And this latter group for the most part is the backbone of the Hollywood Creative Front today.

Think of the creative sparks a-flying when thousands of actors, singers, writers, and technicians dig into their trenches of temporary ignominy and determine to fight it out until they win the chance at volume-self-projection! No wonder that movie producers, radio producers, and musical directors realize that if they so desired, they would not have to go outside Hollywood for a single bit of creative material or personnel, be it for story or vaudeville turn or song. It's a wise thing, however, that the biggies do go outside, for every excursion for talent usually results in new blood coming here to join up and enter the trenches.

It's entirely natural, then, that

Television

the pressure of this constant creative activity should get into the community life much in the manner that a box of fireworks would make itself known. The result is seen in the overflowing calendar of artistic or quasi-artistic events and entertainment. There are undoubtedly more theaters lit, more radio studios resounding, and more concert platforms alive daily in the Hollywood Creative Front than in any artistic center in the world. Work of creating new pictures goes on, of course, like one of those chromiumed, automatic sausage-grinders.

So the candle burns away at both ends, and two and a half million moths in the greater Los Angeles area do not believe as does La Mil-lay that it will not last the night. They flock to the flame of a thousand efforts at artistic creation, and they take unto their wings a bright reflection. The moths are no longer ordinary ones creeping in a dim and sprawling city. They are sophisticated moths now, and the colors of the flame are attractive, and the warmth of gregariousness is fine....

Did you ever see an automobile salesman or a Safeway Store clerk at the door of the Carthay on a premiere night? He's paid say five and a half buckawallas for a ticket, and by Jesus he's a part of that glamour picture. So he goes through his daily duties the next day and the next week with a certain pleasure of the mind, and he thinks of those poor donkeys back in Davenport who live dull lives. So he buys better clothes and lives up to his neck in a standard of living that gives him and the good wife and the attractive bambino much joy. Thus does the presence of the Creative Front act as a sort of fender polish on the body politic of Los Angeles. Aliveness, awareness, a state of keeping-up-with-Hollywood become second nature—thus permitting stores, real-estate companies, and transportation sellers and servicers to prosper in providing needs, and the escapist merchants (night clubs, Bonifaces, liquor dealers, restaurant keepers, and pleasure promoters) to prosper in providing vanities.

Now this effect on the regional economy is not entirely caused by the activity of the Creative Front's big middle class. It is influenced also by the basement brigade and the tower level of the Creative Front.

The basement brigade you'll find among the grifters hanging around Hollywood and Vine, or among the tipsters in the hotel lobbies. They came avowedly as camp followers, with little or nothing to offer, yet their presence is a tribute to the fact of Hollywood's position as a creative center. The sensational and pornographic sides of any big league creative center need entrepreneurs too.

It is the tower level of Hollywood,

Television

however, that belies the old synonym of sin. Here you find more earnest (sincere is not the word yet) personalities in one group than you will find in any other world-congeries of the creative. They know that the immutable law of volume-self-projection declares that according to his lights the artist deserving volume-money and volume-prestige must ever and on end be interesting. They work like hell and play like hell not for themselves particularly but to be ever interesting to that Safeway clerk or automobile salesman in the Carthay lobby. (This devotion is cashable at contract time.)

And since such prodigious work and play must be done in "big production" settings in keeping with volume-self-projection's laws of conduct, the home-making brains of the world come to Hollywood where the upper crust offers them a natural market transcending markets elsewhere. The best dreams of the best architects, mural painters, landscape gardeners, and sports equipment designers are thus strewn about a hundred hillsides, canyons, and plains. But inside those symbols of solid success, you'll find precious few screwy people and even fewer wild parties. You'll find instead some who sit around and grimly plan the escape from meretricious art, that last still partially applicable portion of the old Hollywood metaphor.

It's somewhat amazing at that to see what grew because the earliest raw film-stock required bright sunlight to pull a clear image through the lens. And being a sentimental mugg, I'm all for asking the televisioners (when they are ready) to shoot out their first national sound-sight play in the form of a pastoral staged under the pepper trees of Sunset Boulevard.

ROB WAGNER'S SCRIPT



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