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The Exhibitors

Author(s): David Paletz, Michael Noonan, Bart Pirosh, Max Laemmle and Shan Sayles

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DAVID PALETZ AND MICHAEL NOONAN

The Exhibitors

EDITOR'S NOTE: To most readers of this journal, the film is primarily of concern as an art—practiced, fitfully and against dire odds, by a dedicated band of directors, writers, actors. It is important to be reminded, therefore, that the center of economic gravity of the film industry really lies, not in the spectacular studios, but in real estate. It is in the thousands of theaters where films and public finally meet that the costs of the entire production and distribution mechanism must be raised. The most crucial pressure-point in the complex process by which film-makers propose, while distributors and exhibitors and public dispose, is the box-office.

Some affect to despise the box-office as the blind agent of mass pressures; some regard it as the oracle by which every decision should be made; to the lucky director it can sometimes be his vindication against the arbitrary opinions of producers. But not much is known outside the trade about who actually presides over the box-office. Below, to follow up the documentation given to current Hollywood production methods in our Spring 1965 issue, we present interviews with three exhibitors. Their operations characterize three important trends in the ways movies are now being presented to the American public: the drive-in, the art theater, and the nudie-cutie house. We also attempted to secure an interview with an executive of the powerful Fox West Coast theater chain, but repeated efforts finally met with a flat refusal. Luckily, however, many factors are common these days to drive-in and "walk-in" theaters.

The interviews have been condensed for publication, and questions raised by the interviewers have often been indicated by general headings.

THE DRIVE-IN

BART PIROSH is an executive of *Pacific Drive-Ins*, a growing chain which also operates walk-in theaters in the Los Angeles area.

Background

I got into the business because I was out of a job in 1929 and I wrote a letter to 100 large corporations, just a general application, and Metro-

Goldwyn-Mayer was one of the two answers I got. (The other was from a shoe store.) They hired me as a student booker; I was 21 years old at the time. This was in New York City. Then they sent me to Albany and Cleveland for training and to Milwaukee as a feature booker. After 3 years I went to work for Fox Mid-West Theatres, which is an offspring of the company which is National General Corporation today. Worked there for 3 years as a booker and I quit my job and came to the coast and went to work for Fox West Coast Theatres as a booker. I was with them for 21 years with some time out for the Army during the war. Then I quit my job there and came to Pacific. At Fox West Coast I was a booker and then I was assistant head of the Booking Department and eventually I became the head of the Buying Department. I had some disagreements with basic company policy and I finally quit and came here.

The business is an interesting business, it's a changing business. However, I would say my primary reason has been financial, I work for money and if I were offered a job which I thought was much more interesting and intriguing but it involved an appreciable reduction in financial recompense, I wouldn't take it. My first obligation, I think, is to my family and to myself and to my future. I have seen the pendulum swing back and forth two or three times from when business was good and on the upgrade and then it declined, and then it's hey-hey, everybody's going to build a million theaters, and then they go into bankruptcy. Now the building is on and inevitably the pendulum will swing back and people will find something to attract them for a while. A number of theaters are going to be hurt very badly and actually a number are being hurt now. But . . . I like the work, I enjoy the work to a degree. It gets to be a chore at times; I'm not particularly fond of motion pictures as a means of

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entertainment, but this is the stuff I work with. Same as a man who makes radios doesn't have to enjoy listening to radios. But it keeps you busy and it pays well.

A booker is a man who decides, either unilaterally or in consultation with other people, what picture he will play in a specific theater on a specific date. For example, we agree with Columbia on terms for *Cat Ballou*—we will play it in a drive-in theater in a certain area and then the booker selects, in consultation with Columbia, the theater in which it will play and for how long and so on. He has to fill out the program with a second picture, with short subjects, and he has to know, in order to do this, the tastes of the public; the kind of pictures he thinks will appeal to the people in those theaters. There used to be a very strong distinction between film buying and booking. Today it is pretty much of a piece and on most pictures there is no expanded discussion, at least in our theaters, of the terms, because things fall into a pattern after a while and the gross of the picture in the individual theaters pretty much determines the terms it will receive, at least in our operation. If a picture grosses \$4,000 in a theater, it may receive 25% of the gross; if it's \$7,000, it may get 40%; if it does \$14-15,000, they may get 50%.

We play a lot of pictures which are first-run Los Angeles on a multiple run. For instance, this past week, *Help* was first run. *Sons of Katie Elder* was first run. We get some of the so-called important pictures first run. We get all of the junk offered as first run because of the type of service that we have. Sometimes what you would call junk will do a lot more business for us than the top picture; than some of the alleged quality pictures. For example, *The Outrage*. A picture like that is mediocre in our theaters. Actually, *Outrage* wasn't a big picture anyway. No, pictures like *Taboos of the World*, which are garbage; *Mondo Cane* or stuff like that. *Fanny Hill*, which is coming up, will do a lot more business than a number of pictures that we would do well with, *Casanova 70*, for example, which is a classic picture. *Pink Panther* was just so-so in the drive-ins.



PHOTO: LAURIE MILLER

The drive-in audience is comparatively an unsophisticated audience and your sophisticated comedies, your musicals, your so-called class pictures do much less business in drive-ins than they will in the walk-in theaters in most areas. Our audiences are primarily a family audience. We have a double, a twin audience. We get the teen-agers and the young 20's and the daters. We live on the family audience—the family with the young children to whom several things are important, all of which have been spoken of to death, but it's true: no baby sitters, you don't have to dress up, no parking charges, you have complete privacy, the cost is less over-all because children under 12 years are free. We have a 50¢ admission for juniors up from 12 through 15 and the families fudge on the ages and we don't try to make an issue of it and when we play a picture with family appeal, a big western like *Cheyenne Autumn*, or *Help*, we will average, perhaps if we have 5,000 cars in the theaters in the course of a week, we will perhaps have 5,000 children. In Honolulu we sometimes have considerably more than one child per car. Our audience basically is the lower-middle class.

Business

Business in many areas is very good. Business is very good for the distributors today. We are in a seller's market, in most areas, especially the urban areas. There are more theaters wanting a picture or wanting a good picture, than there are good pictures available. Up until 1950, per-

haps even past that, you were in a buyer's market where, because of the rules under which pictures were being sold, the national circuits could pretty much dictate the terms on which they played the pictures. Not completely, but they bought the pictures on very reasonable terms. But the studios up until the late forties were prosperous and everybody was making enough and they owned circuits of theaters and they were happy. Now after the divorce [the antitrust decree "divorcing" production and exhibition interests], with the start of independent productions, you run into a situation where the man who makes one picture doesn't care what happens to the theaters at all and doesn't care what happens to the producing company. He just knows that he made a picture and he will get more money for this picture if it's released the first of July than any other time and this is the date he wants. And if Columbia says, well, we'd like to handle your picture but we can't guarantee the first of July, he goes to somebody who will, frequently. And when he makes the deal, he reserves to himself the right to designate the release date, to approve advertising figures. This is if he's an important producer or a hot one, somebody thinks he's important at the time. Now this has created a terrible scarcity of pictures on the so-called off-seasons, starting from August until Thanksgiving. During this period (actually until Christmas) there are very few of the so-called important pictures, pictures on which they hope to gross \$7 to \$10 million, released. The man who has an important picture during this period has, in most towns, several people fighting over the right to play their picture first-run. For example, when *Mary Poppins* was released last year, or *Great Race* this year. They are able to command very high terms from the theaters that will bite. And they impose very severe conditions on the theaters that want to play it. If you wanted to buy *Mary Poppins* last October, you had to guarantee a minimum of 12 weeks playing time, which took it through New Year's, into the middle of January. You had to guarantee minimum terms of 60% for the first four weeks, 50% for the next four weeks. Again the 90-10 deal,

which means 90% over an agreed-upon figure. You had to agree to charge certain admissions. Now it's illegal for the distributors to tell a theater what admission price to charge, but the theaters that played it all had pretty healthy minimum admissions, especially children's admissions. And coincidence hardly covers what happened at these times.

You take a picture like *My Fair Lady*. Warner's, when they first released it, laid out a minimum that up to a certain time, and I don't know what the time was, they would not accept less than \$50,000 advance guarantee, to be paid before the picture opened, and that the minimum terms accepted would be 70% for a certain period of time and so on. So when things like this happen and when you have such a scarcity of pictures, I'd say 30 weeks a year at least, for theaters like ours, you're in a seller's market and film terms increase bit by bit.—Partly because of the very sharp higher terms on certain pictures, but a general creeping-up of terms because of the fact that in most instances a distributor with a good picture has a thing that people are competing for. But people say that . . . well, Pacific, they can name their own terms, because they have most of the good drive-ins in this area.

We actually have in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, including Orange County and Long Beach, going out as far as San Bernardino, we have approximately 40 drive-ins. But we will have three or four in one competitive area. In the San Fernando Valley we have nine drive-ins, I think. So this means that we need three or four pictures each week. Well, there aren't 156 pictures made in a year, so obviously some of the pictures have to play two or three weeks in either an individual theater or in the area, moving from one to the other. When we played *Goldfinger*, before we completed our showings of it, it played in every first-run theater we operate. So we are under the same stress of looking for pictures that the man is who has two competitors in his little town. With the exception of the summertime and Thanksgiving week and Christmas week, possibly Eastertime, we're in a scramble for pictures. Everybody has

a picture to release at Christmas or two and there you may be in a buyer's market for a week or two, but if you try to take advantage of your strength that week, you're punished very severely later on. Look, this is like any other business, like politics, you run into power plays and you have to be realistic and you have to analyze your strength as opposed to the strength of the other man. This is also true in film buying and booking. You're in a tug of war for one thing. All the money comes in the box-office. Now the fight is on: how much of it does the theater keep, how much does the distributor keep, and then the fight is between the distributor and the producer. Before that you have had the tug-of-war between the personalities, the director, the writer, the star. And you have people now who get 10% of every dollar that comes through or 10% of . . . when they say the gross, they mean the film rental. Now this is all money and there's no romance. This is a money business.

The Films

I won't book, and we don't play the so-called nudies in our theaters, and for various obvious reasons. We are primarily a family operation and we will not play a lot of the art pictures, or so-called art pictures. For instance, *The Lovers* we wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole because we would get more hell from our patrons who object strenuously at times to pictures like *Shot in the Dark*. We got objections when we played *Tom Jones*. In fact, we try to be more careful than most theaters. We will play *Casanova 70*; we will do only fair. A lot of people say we shouldn't be playing it. It will be dubbed. You see, you can't read sub-titles in a drive-in back of the first few rows. We tried on *La Dolce Vita* to develop, the producer tried to develop, a larger sub-title that could be read in the drive-ins. He couldn't do it, so we couldn't play it. He wanted to play drive-ins and he wouldn't, or couldn't, dub it. What the problem was, I don't know. They may have thought it would not have been worthwhile. You see, that kind of picture I don't think we would have done well with.

The drive-ins do proportionately better with the big westerns and big outdoor pictures. These are usually the best grosses. And real good family pictures. Our top gross since I've been here have been pictures like *The Vikings*, *The Parent Trap*, *Carpetbaggers*, the Beatles' pictures do well, *The Alamo*, *Ben-Hur*. *Major Dundee* was a bomb, knocked dead. They didn't like it, they didn't want it. See, the advertising is very, very important and I say again, we have an unsophisticated audience and crude ads don't reach them and arty ads don't reach them and sometimes we just don't know how to reach them if we have a picture that we think that they will enjoy. But the title or the advertising or something doesn't appeal to them. People always know, because we can open a picture in Fresno, Los Angeles, and Phoenix on the same day and it will be big in all three or it will be dead in all. Now there *may* be local differences. Pictures with a Mexican background do better in Phoenix than most places, or in Los Angeles. For several years we made consistently high grosses on horror combinations and science-fiction combinations and the gimmick combinations, but these things sooner or later run their course. The latest fad, in our theaters at least, was the beach-party films, the young kids at the beach with the surfboards, and we did tremendously on the first two or three, but it's pretty difficult to do more than a few things on a surfboard and it's pretty difficult to get any different-looking young fellows and young girls, bikinis can't get much skimpier, the boys can't get much more rugged-looking, and the kids get tired of it and the old people do. And ever since I've been in this business we've had the cycle thing. This goes back years.

The James Bond things will run their course. Abbott and Costello were the hottest names in the picture business for a year or two and then they trailed off. The first Bond picture, which I think was the best one so far, *Dr. No*, did a fair business, the next one did better, repeat runs were good on the picture, and on *Goldfinger* the roof blew off. Everybody decided that now was the day that they wanted to see James Bond. *Thunderball* is coming out this Christmas

and it's a guessing game. I am inclined to think it will do less than *Goldfinger* and I would say that the Bond picture released in 1968 and 1969 will not be in the same league with *Goldfinger*. But you just don't know.

I think what has killed or severely hurt the horror pictures is the overdose of this kind of stuff on television. Every night the little kids are looking at the monsters to the point where they're not afraid of the monsters anymore. Now we're running through a cycle where there are some very big grosses as the pictures get a little more nudity and a little more risqué situations. But this again, they will get up to their ears with it and it will tail off.

We run just about every picture of any merit that is released except pictures that we think are completely unacceptable to our people, like the very sexy foreign pictures, and the nudist pictures. We didn't play *Mary Poppins* (this is the one important picture in the last year or so); we haven't played it because of several reasons, one of which was the way they released the picture, another was their insistence that we charge for children and we just have made up our minds that we're not going to run any picture where we have to charge for children. We get our patrons in on all our junk . . . so why stick them on something good?

We played *The Collector* in Fresno and we thought we were going to drop dead with it and we did very good business. And based on that we're booking it here. Now in Fresno we played it with *The Great Escape*. We're playing that here. We had a combination that did business; we don't know if it's a combination or *The Collector* alone, and we don't want to take any chances. This way we know we're right, we have a program that is playing right. You try to eliminate as much as possible, in any business, as much risk as you can. This is why before somebody will launch a new cigarette nationwide they will try it in one or two areas. We try as much as possible before we commit ourselves to the unknown quantities; a *Collector*, a monster program, a horror program, a teenage program without names. We try in advance to play it in a town like Phoenix, or in Fresno, or in Portland,

because if it drops dead there, we've only dropped dead in one drive-in. Drive-ins in this metropolitan area are bigger and more expensive to build and to operate and have far greater grossing possibilities, so then we feel much safer.

We don't dignify this with any term like market research. Sure, once in a while a picture will do well in one of these towns and here will do comparatively poorly. We try to control it as much as possible. We will not permit the distributor or the producer to go into these towns and dynamite the campaign by intensive additional gimmicks in the advertising campaign or by pouring double the normal amount of advertising money in.

Programming

In the drive-ins we insist on running two feature films even if it's a four-hour feature like *Ben-Hur*. We start our shows in the off-daylight-savings-time at 6:30. This is our policy. The people know they can come to the theater at 6:30 and it's open and the show starts. It starts with a cartoon and then the feature. In the wintertime we play the second feature first, which puts our main feature on normally between 8 and 8:30. By that time we feel the majority of the people who want to come to the show are in the theater and they don't have to come in at the middle of a picture. And we think that this is very important, more so than ever today because the people are accustomed by television to seeing everything from the start. In the old days when movies were a family thing, you came in the middle of the picture and it didn't make much difference. But pictures today have more content than they had; they're not as stereotyped; stories are deeper today than they used to be, so we think this is very important. We do the same thing in our walk-ins. We have the Pantages here now. We have Cinemas—the dome, on Sunset Boulevard, is ours. We have the Picwood Theater, the Paradise, the Encino out in the Valley, Reseda, Rolling Hills, we have some theaters in Long Beach. We have theaters in Honolulu. As for foreign films, we didn't show 8½ because of its content. We play

very few foreign pictures. *That Man from Rio* did miserably; a miserable picture. We have played a number of the Italian dubbed pictures. When *Hercules* was released, I think it was the biggest picture we played that summer, at the box office. Today, these things are a drag on the market. With very few exceptions, we won't even play them as a second. Steve Reeves now is a second-picture star.

The Audience

It's a very funny thing about the James Bonds. The first James Bond picture did its best business in the class neighborhoods, where people read books. Now I doubt very much whether the majority of our people read a book in a year. I just don't believe it . . . of any kind. These are people who possibly went through high school and who were not literate, no literary bent, probably went through on C's and D's. They are working in factories and in jobs that do not require high intelligence. They're good, the American middle class, the good substantial backbone of the country—the overwhelming majority of the people . . . the people that Lincoln, you know the thing, "God must have loved the common man because he made so many of them." These are not the people who live in Belair, or Westwood or Menlo Park or Palo Alto. These are not the people who attend the east-side theaters in New York. These people drive 30, 40 miles to work so that they can live in a nice little house in the San Fernando Valley and give their children the kind of place they didn't have when they were growing up. They're up to their ears in mortgage debt, they buy the houses for nothing down and \$400 down and \$500 down and they pay their bills religiously but are 14 days late on the mortgage because of necessity. These aren't the foreign-car purchasers, these are the people who buy Ford and Chevrolet and Plymouth and to them they are the only cars that are made. The great majority of these people . . . a great many of them, this is the high spot of their week, attending a theater. These are people who make . . . look, don't forget your average factory salary today is maybe \$103, \$105 per week, something in that

neighborhood. Now when you take off the withholding tax, you take off the living expenses, there is damn little left for entertainment. And they've bought a television, they're either paying on it or they have paid for it . . . now television has all novelties worn off. A year, year and a half after they have the TV it's "I like it, but Tuesday nights there's nothing on, Friday nights there's nothing on." And if you look at television, Friday and Saturday nights are their miserable program nights. And these are the nights that these people can go out and they have two and three and four kids and the husband comes home Friday and she says we're going to get out of this damn house tonight or I'm going to jump out the window. She has the kids around all week, especially in the summer. Now Saturday is the day and Sunday is the day when the husband does not have to get up at 7 or 7:15 to go to his job and here is a place where, if they have two or three kids, for \$2.50 or for \$2.00 or for even less in some areas they can go and they can be entertained for four or five hours and if it's summertime they can go there at 7 or 7:30 and the kids play. We have playgrounds in all the theaters, we have swings and slides and things for them. We close the playground when the show starts, but for half an hour or an hour adults can sit in a car or sit on a bench near where the kids are and the kids are having a ball and they sit there and some of them bring box lunches with them, or buy in our snack bars—you know we have big elaborate snack bars in these theaters. Some of them, I'm sure, bring in a six-pack of beer, and it's a big evening. And it's inexpensive and they see the same picture that they could have spent \$2.50 or \$3.50 or \$5.00 to see. So these are the people that are the backbone of our business, and they're not interested in art forms. They don't know from nothing about art forms and they care less.

However, their taste is getting more sophisticated. Ten years ago *Tom Jones* could not have been released in the United States. No major company would have released it; I don't think anybody would have. And if theaters had been playing it, in a number of areas, their licenses

would have been revoked and they would have been raided. Now this is true in books too. How long ago was it that *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was given an okay to be sold in this country. There is a general broadening of what is acceptable today.

I haven't seen *The Loved One* yet. I don't think it's going to get a nickel any place. Possibly in some northern areas. On a picture like *The Loved One* we will have had ample performances before it's ever offered here. Because the picture obviously will be sold through one theater in Los Angeles and a number of spots and it will go to San Francisco, and when a picture opens in San Francisco it's made available to Fresno, so we will get a performance without trying. You asked me would I insist on a performance. Now you're back in the power department. *The Loved One* will be released by Metro; Metro is one of our very important suppliers and I may get my arm twisted. Here again it's against the law for a distributor to condition the sale of one film upon another. Well, that's the law and it's theoretically correct but God help me if I try to work on that basis because I just won't get some of their other pictures that are really good. I'm not arguing for or against it, it's just one of the facts of life.

Advertising

The way advertising works in Los Angeles is that the distributor decides he will spend say \$15,000 on advertising a picture in Los Angeles. Of which \$6,000 will go to newspapers, \$6,000 on television, \$2,000 on radio, and so on. And each theater in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, that you see in the ads of the theaters, he contributes X dollars to the campaign. We have taken a position, because sometimes some of these people go completely crazy on the amounts they want to spend, we have set a maximum per theater and if the distributor wants to spend \$25 or \$35,000 and up to \$50,000, we will not go over that maximum which we'll contribute when they spend \$13,000 or \$14,000. The way film deals work, the distributor gets the major part of the extra money that comes in on a picture.

I think an outstanding example of what you can do with advertising is the picture *Poor White Trash* a couple of years ago. Now this was a picture that was made seven or eight years ago called *Bayou*. It was a second feature. UA released it and got no returns. The man who had made the picture got it back, the releasing deal was over. He recut it a little bit, put in a couple of sensational scenes and made a new advertising campaign and used a couple of trick words, spent a barrel of money, and it was one of the biggest pictures we played in our theaters that year. And this was solely because of a well-conceived and well-executed campaign with a gimmick: "Positively no one under 16 permitted in the theater, policemen on duty who will turn cars away with children." The parents would say we "Want to bring our . . ." "I'm sorry, you can't do it." The picture was horrible, but they said, by God, we tried to go in that theater last night with our kids and they wouldn't let us in and it really must be something. They were burned, the picture was terrible. We don't do this very often. But we played this the first week in December when normally we would be empty and we were full. So, people do a lot of things for money that they shouldn't do. It's like the Madison Avenue advertising man who is working on a campaign on cigarettes and he knows that as a result of his work he may be causing 100 or 1,000 people 15 years from now to get lung cancer. It's like Oppenheimer working on the atom bomb. When he is torn in every direction and he . . . finally something impels him to do it and it's generally money. Not always, but generally.

Reviews

If reviews meant anything we wouldn't play a number of the pictures we play, because these are the ones that are ridiculed and ripped up and down. Our public pays no attention whatsoever. And the pictures that come in heralded by great reviews frequently go flat on their butt. I don't think reviews mean anything in our theaters and, actually, with the exception of art pictures in New York City, I don't think they mean much any place. We feel that there are

four prime advertising media that mean anything to us. One is the trailers of coming attractions which we run in our theaters. Obviously everyone who sees it is a prospective patron because we know they come to our theaters; they're there now. We have to be, we feel, in the newspapers because this is something that is there for reference. We feel that if people decide to go to a show tonight they frequently look in the newspaper to see what's playing. We think that television is very important because of its tremendous impact, the immediacy that it has. And radio—because of the amount of driving that people do especially here in Southern California; anyone who comes to a drive-in obviously is going to have an automobile, and probably has a radio in it. Now we have taken some polls, we've had research organizations from colleges for a course, and also, of course, we have our marquee advertising and most of our theaters are on well-traveled streets and highways and put on there the stars and the time the show starts. But we feel that television and trailers are our most important selling means.

Word of mouth determines how long a picture runs. This is essentially the most important because you can open two pictures the same day and get approximately the same gross, then by Sunday night one may be doing 25%, 35% better. So it is obvious people do talk about movies. In a great many areas people read about movies.

It's not an exact science. We're not in the kind of business where we're dealing in tangibles to a great extent. It's not like making shoes, where you know if you make a thousand pair of shoes and its costs you so much in the way of overhead and if you can sell them at this price, this is going to be your profit. When we open on Wednesday, we don't have any idea what we're going to do.

Concessions

We have, as you have observed if you have ever been in a drive-in, we have ample concessions stands. All theaters have them today. It's quite obvious that this is a commercial enter-

prise and they're important in that they turn in a good revenue. This is different than the picture business. We know who we're paying for it, we know if we sell so many, we make so many dollars. Here again we try... we don't charge as much in our drive-in theaters as in the walk-ins. For the people paying \$2.50 admission the extra few pennies don't mean anything. We are dealing with generally a lower-income bracket and we try not to charge all the traffic will bear. We could raise the prices on some of our items. Now we've had big discussions on it, but we think that for essentially selfish purposes that in the long run we're better off trying to let the people get stuff at a price they can afford to pay. Now this is a business decision, the same as we could get higher admission in a number of our theaters than we are getting.

Drive-In Costs

Well, it's less expensive than running a theater, a Chinese Theater or the Pantages Theater because if you're on Hollywood Boulevard, the value of land is such that your rent or the price you have to pay for the theaters is expensive. Without the land, you're talking about \$500- or \$600,000. And the land, when you need 15, 20 acres in good areas, is very expensive. Where we were able to buy land at decent prices, the company bought the land. We have leased land, we have ground leases, we have theaters that we lease entirely, both walk-ins and drive-ins. This is no different than a company like Fox National General or ABC Paramount. But the drive-in can gross more than any theaters with the exception of the large, first-run theaters in the biggest cities. A drive-in in Anaheim can gross as much as a drive-in can in Los Angeles or New York. There is no such thing as an average gross. It depends on the theater and the town. We have drive-ins that have grossed over \$25,000 in a week. Not very often. We have theaters where the highest gross we've ever had is \$1,600. The minimum can be nothing, or \$5 or \$50. When we have fog, we have no income. If we have torrential rain, our gross is cut to practically nothing. If we have a thick fog, the picture doesn't reach the screen from the pro-

jection room. Then we have to either refund the money or give the people fog-checks. If we have rain and only one car shows up, we run the entire show because we want people to say that Pacific is open all the time. We have had a \$2.00 gross in an evening in one theater.

Pressure Groups

Pressures from groups are getting less and less. If you would try to book a Charlie Chaplin picture today, you would still get intense pressure from the American Legion and all the right wingers. There has been, from time to time, some pressure from the far left. I don't think it has any material effect. Again, we try to be careful of what we run. We would certainly not want to run any picture that we felt was out-and-out Communist propaganda or out-and-out propaganda for a John Birch Society or Ku Klux Klan. Our patrons are the moderates, the middle class.

Improvements

The business could be improved, in the obvious sense, by better pictures, and more of them, pictures with more box-office appeal, not quality, see. When I talk about a good picture or a bad one, I'm talking about money. As for old films, I have taken a position that I will not play anything in our theaters that has been shown on television. First, because the very few times this has happened by accident in an area where we didn't know it had been shown, we got a number of complaints, and I think rightfully so. I don't know how it would affect the box office and I don't propose to try because here again you're into a money area. We are competing with television for pictures. We play a number of reissues and reruns and after the distributor or the owner of the picture has gotten as much money as he can gouge out of television for it, I don't see why we should dump our money on top of it to make that a more attractive route

for him. We want to persuade him to sell pictures to the theater. I think that the impact of television is gradually waning. But I will tell you something. You have no idea the number of people who apparently look at television all the time. The biggest box-office weekend in the motion-picture business that I can recall was the weekend after the Kennedy assassination, when the people came just in droves. Because they couldn't see regular television programs they got out of their houses. This was true all over the United States. There may have been two reasons. Maybe one was just "Let's get the hell out, this is driving us crazy." But I think the big thing was that they couldn't see their normal garbage. But this is true. Television is here and you can't eliminate it. It's like saying, would the smog go away if the automobiles weren't here. Well, the automobiles are here and we have to live with them and you have to learn to live with . . . whether you like it or not, whether you agree or disagree, you have a situation in Viet Nam, and you have a this and a that, and you have to accommodate your life to reality, and television is here.

In any event, the big reason for the surge today in theater attendance and theater building and everything is the boom, the war-baby boom. Young people. You see, people over 50 or over 40 generally are not motion-picture fans. And I can tell you why, because I got there and I'm over 50: you've seen almost everything in these two or three or four years and it's rubbage. . . . If you mature as a person should, a lot of things that were very, very important even in your forties get less important. You begin to agree with F. Scott Fitzgerald about the bitch goddess of success . . . I mean this stuff, because you say the power and the glory and you see the people who've attained it and you see what's happened to them, and this is what drives, I guess, a lot of people to religion because they despair and they say there doesn't seem to be any reason for it.

THE ART THEATER

MAX LAEMMLE is the owner of the leading independent art house in the Los Angeles area.

Background

Originally, after having finished high school in Germany, I went into my father's oil business for two or three years. At that time I met with my uncle, the famous Carl Laemmle, who was the founder and president of Universal Films. And I was mostly anxious to know languages. So I said if I could work in Paris, I would love to join you. After having been in Paris only a few days, he called me from London and said he would like me to stop in London, I want you to perfect your English and I will later on have you come to the United States to give you further training there, etc., and painted me a very rosy picture of my future possibilities with him. I convinced my father to let me go and went to London for six months of training. By that time I spoke English well enough and then he had me come to New York, from where I was sent as a student salesman for a few months to Montreal.

Then I went for six months to Hollywood, where I got training in the studio in all kinds of things. But mostly in distribution. At that time I was considered ready and was sent to Europe, where I was travelling all over as Carl Laemmle's personal representative, reporting on Universal Films distribution. After having done that for about a year, which gave me vast experience and a fairly intimate knowledge of the European markets, the manager in Paris quit and I was appointed to that job, with supervision of Belgium, Spain and Portugal. I was barely 24 then. I gradually became District Manager for Europe, and had seven or eight offices under my jurisdiction.

That lasted about four years but I had a falling out with Carl Laemmle and went into business for myself. I went into the export business, where I sold French films all over the world. But I had a great hankering for California. My brother and I decided if we could find a good theater there we would buy it. He was from

Chicago, with a theater in Lowell, Indiana. I was still living in Paris, was already married, had a little son. This was shortly after Munich and I still had my parents in Germany and I was very anxious to get them out. So, I was anxious to get out here and I was very fortunate that things worked out. We bought our first theater here which was the Franklin theater in Highland Park. Now I have three theaters but I lease out one and I'm actively managing and conducting the affairs of only the Los Feliz in Hollywood and the Esquire in Pasadena with my son Robert.

Also, as you know, I have completely changed over from general exhibition to the rather special field of fine art and foreign films. And, I'm very happy and I'm enjoying it tremendously and feel extremely fortunate in respect that I'm able to make a living out of an activity which I so thoroughly enjoy.

Two principal factors prompting that decision were: (1) The very stiff competition that

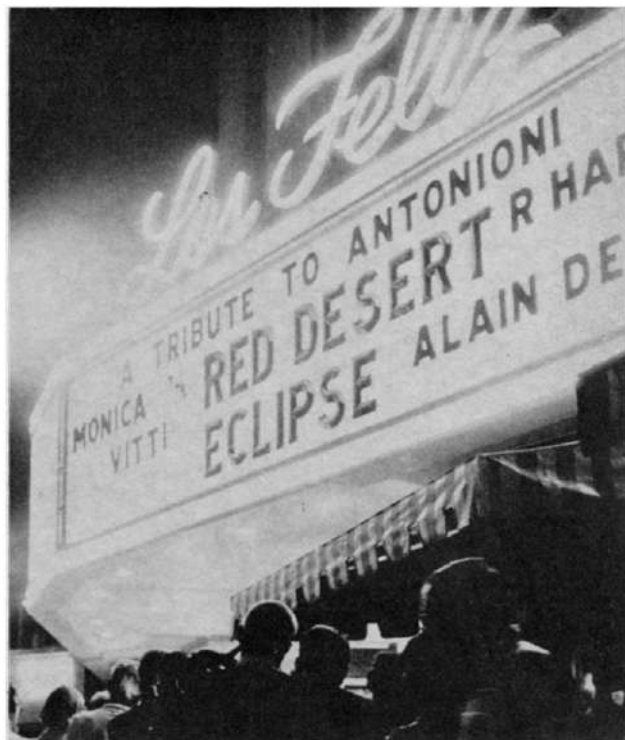


PHOTO: LAURIE MILLER

existed for Hollywood films; there were always at least four theaters competing for product, which was in short supply and everybody wanted these films first run in the area. (2) Even then my familiarity with European product prompted me every so often to book an outstanding foreign show rather than book a poor Hollywood show and this happened more and more frequently with success. I started this as long as 15 years ago. The film *Circle of Love*, which is a remake of *La Ronde*, brought back very vivid memories of my first showing of *La Ronde*, which was about 15 years ago. When I first saw *La Ronde* I liked it very much but my reaction was, "Gosh, I would never be able to show that in my Los Feliz Theatre." It was then strictly a family theater, a neighborhood theater, I was very conscious of the family trade. But about a year or a year and a half later I did work up enough courage to show it and it was a big success. I held it for three weeks which was unheard-of then and did quite well with it.

Work

At about 9:30 or 10:00 my working day begins and I'm working usually all day, mostly phone calls. I sit on the phone, read my mail, sit on the phone, and plan my booking, my advertising. It has to be ordered, it has to be planned, it has to be brought to the papers or the paper sent to pick it up, and so on. My own personal part in the business is mostly the negotiations for the films. It's the most complicated and the most intricate part of the business because the film business has always been rather one-sided. The distributor has the upper hand because the supply is shorter than the demand, especially if you want the good films. And that goes, of course, just as much for the foreign as for the American films.

I work at the theater mostly on the busy weekend nights. I've gotten in the habit of staying up late at night because I sometimes stay until closing or else I do a lot of reading at night and I'm not interrupted by phone calls. I book my programs from a very personal point of view. I have always enjoyed the good things in these films and I have always made it a point to show

if possible only films that I like and enjoy, that I could show with a certain amount of pride and justification. Of course, I cannot always say that my own personal liking is *always* the determining factor. Very often I'm a little bit unsure about how much I like a film and other opinions have a certain influence on my decisions. If I find that a film is generally considered worthy and has received approval, it may be an influence on my own decision. But on the other hand, I have enjoyed sometimes asserting my own judgment by showing a film which has not received general approval. Take films like, among the American-made ones, *On the Bowery*, *Come Back Africa*, *The Cool World*. Among the foreign ones, *Web of Passion* [*Leda*], and films like *The Naked Autumn*, *Friends for Life*. I'll be showing *Before the Revolution* and *Salvatore Giuliano*.

You see when I choose a film, and even though I may have serious questions in my own mind about its commercial potential, I do everything I know how and can do to make it successful. This is where I think our strength lies. We prepare campaigns very studiously and very carefully and we map out ads, stories, programs for mailing, etc. Thus we have established ourselves with educational institutes and with student publications. I think it is this totality of our effort that makes a success out of certain films which really hadn't been successful elsewhere. I believe that by forewarning the public and preparing the public for something unusual they will not only accept it better but will enjoy it better; they will talk about it to their friends and if enough people do that, this can make the difference between success and failure. I very rarely show films I do not like and offhand I couldn't even think of one case where I have done it . . . no, I can think of one, *Julie the Red-head*, a French film. I didn't like that. I bought it on the strength of some excellent New York reviews that I found in the press book and on the strength of a couple of jolly nice performances, but as a whole I did not like it, and it was a miserable flop. It was awful. But maybe this has also to do with the fact that I went into it without any conviction. It was to fill a

hole—we had a week open and there was nothing else available so I took it. It wasn't a bad film but it certainly wasn't anything worthwhile and it was nothing I could sell with confidence. I did like *Shot in the Dark* although I was fully aware that it is not really an art film. I felt that it had sufficient style and professional creativeness and sufficient entertainment value in a good sense, you know, that it wasn't cheap entertainment, but really the kind of entertainment that everybody could enjoy.

Obtaining Films

Being in the business, of course, I usually know who handles what. Most films are represented by local distributors. If they are not, then it immediately becomes a problem because most of the time the New York distributor is reluctant to deal with us directly because he wants to make a distribution deal with a local distributor. But we have ever so often made deals directly with New York.

I know about a certain film having read about it, not only about its quality but also about the fact that it has opened in New York so I know it is now officially available. There is absolutely no way of getting films unless the U.S. rights have been bought by some importer-distributor. Very often, of course, I know about the worthwhile films from reading periodicals. And the trade papers, like *Variety*, report about the festivals and so on, and about new showings that were either critical or commercial successes in Europe, even without festival prizes.

To give you an example of the process, take *Red Desert*. I wanted it very badly, ever since I learned that it was available in New York. When I first contacted the distributor in New York he said he would soon come here and contact me when he gets here and probably it would be distributed through a firm here called Emerson Films. I called Emerson and they knew nothing about it. They didn't even know yet that they would definitely be going to handle the film. They were not sure yet. So about 2 months later the distributor from New York was out here and he gave me a ring and we had a talk and he said I won't be able to send the print until

probably July. Well, we are close to July and the print hasn't arrived yet. And I haven't yet seen *Red Desert*. Meantime, however, Emerson Films is definitely the distributor; they want a big guarantee and they don't say how much, they just say you have to come up with lots of money before and how much are you willing to offer? So I said how can I talk to you about figures without seeing the film? He said well I'm sorry I can't show it to you, I haven't got a print yet. On the other hand, he threatens that Rosener is willing to buy the film. Which is possibly true because Rosener has a circuit of about seven or eight theaters out here on the West Coast and has a representative in New York, who reports to him and who negotiates for him. So he has the jump on us at times. [Ed. Note. *Red Desert* ran for two rather unsuccessful weeks at another theater; Laemmle played it later, and more successfully, double-billed with *The Eclipse*.]

Just about the same story happened to *La Peau Douce*. The distributor wanted a big guarantee and also they wanted early playing time, which we didn't have because we were booked up in our theaters with some other commitments. They didn't want to wait. Also, there again, the Cinema, which is owned by a big chain, they have a buyer in New York. That buyer is right at the source. Also he has the advantage of being able to offer an outlet of more than 30 theaters, it's closer to 40 now. So, they can guarantee to book a film into many of their theaters and they probably do that ever so often. So the thing of difficulty for us is to get the so-called important films; important mostly from a point of view of box-office. The films that come with a big reputation the circuits are likely to get before us because of the powerful competition these circuits like Fox West Coast, the Art Theater Guild or the Rosener circuit, can offer. Anyway the so-called big picture is very bitterly fought for.

We did get *Umbrellas of Cherbourg*. Maybe they didn't fully realize that that picture did have great potential commercially and maybe they were a little bit afraid of such a film, sung from beginning to end, and quite unusual. . . . I

was very lucky. We played it very successfully for six weeks.

Not always is competition so keen. I saw *Muriel* at the invitation of United Artists in a screening room with their manager, sales manager, and two or three salesmen and bookers, plus about four or five exhibitors. Everybody was completely bewildered and puzzled by the film . . . I mean all of the United Artists gang just thought it was a big joke. They didn't know what it was all about. We later showed it as part of a French Film Series which was successful. Our innovation of a film series does not give extra bargaining power with distributors, except it affords me the possibility of sometimes buying a film which hardly anybody else wants, but which I can make a success within the context of a series.

The distributors have various ways of dealing. If they have a big winner, they usually want what is called front money. That means a guarantee in money, which can range up to \$20,000 or even much more. A film like *La Dolce Vita* at the time got a \$75,000 guarantee for first run in Los Angeles. In the competitive war the distributor usually doesn't tell you I want so much of a guarantee. He asks how much will you guarantee? You will never know in the end if he doesn't play one against the other. There's no assurance of that; in fact, everybody does; everything points to it.

Sometimes we offer, sometimes the distributor demands, and most of the time it is a matter of bargaining and finally agreeing on the terms. For instance, for the top features most of the time they want a percentage of box-office gross but quite frequently we will buy a film flat, sometimes for a very high price. Usually the exhibitor prefers to buy flat because then he is completely the master of his decisions. He can decide how much to spend on advertising, or not to spend, and he doesn't have to render any accounting, which is time-consuming because when you have an agreement whereby the distributor participates in advertising you have to substantiate how much you spend. You can't just tell him I spent \$1,000. You have to bring in invoices and tear sheets and records and account-

ing and these figures are usually not available until several weeks after the engagement has ended because only then you get all your billings together and this is a very time-consuming and to me odious job to do. Whenever I can I like to get away from that; it's very unproductive. So, for that reason, plus for the reason that usually we come out better, I prefer to buy a film flat if I can. But most of the time the distributor will not sell flat. If he thinks he has a film that is likely to do well he will insist on a percentage. The second feature is usually bought at a firm price . . . \$100, \$200 or whatever their price may be, that is being deducted off the gross, off the top of the gross and also, of course, federal taxes are deducted. From then on he participates in every dollar. Now very often the percentage is subject to what is called a "sliding scale." That means, the more we gross the higher our percentage becomes. The percentage is applied according to a scale which relates to the amount of money we take in for a week and as the gross goes up, so does the percentage, from the first dollar on—meaning if we gross low the percentage may be as low as 25%. If we do very well, the percentage may be as high as 50% and, in some cases, on a blockbuster like *Tom Jones* there are deals where the percentage is as high as 70%, from the first dollar up.

More and more now the large distributors are interested in acquiring foreign films. They do it for various reasons. There has been at times a shortage of product and they can handle these films with very little extra effort. But I believe they have financial interests very often in the making of these films. They, for instance, co-produce in France, for purposes of quota productions: they have to have a certain number of French films in order to be able to distribute so many American films. Also they have an eye on the whole world market. Such a film is being produced with an eye not only on say France or America, but with an eye on the market in Europe and Asia and South America and so on. Because most of these films have distribution all over the world. And so you find that Metro is actually co-producing films in France and distributing them all over the world.

Programming

This is a double-bill territory, meaning that as long as all of the competition is doing it we have to do it. The only exception are those few theaters that are able to get the top attractions. Yet very often they don't do well and the reason very often is that their single attraction is not strong enough. Or they don't present them with enough dedicated work that bridges the gap between the exhibitor and the public. I have a whole file on good shorts that I would love to play and I refer to it when the need arises. Most shorts are being made available through distributors and others are merely seen at one-night showings at UCLA or so, and are not available in distribution, actually. There are lots of good shorts on the market, but the so-called artistic shorts are very little in demand and the distributor who handles them knowing that there is only a very limited demand usually out-prices himself because of his realization that only a few bookings can be hoped for and, therefore, those few bookings have to bring in as much money as possible. This is a vicious circle, so very often some of the good shorts are so hard to get because of the impossible demands of the distributor that they are laying around. Certain excellent shorts have hardly had any bookings because of the price. For instance, *Chagall* probably would have had a much wider distribution if it hadn't been for the high demands. We paid for that, when we first showed it, as much as we pay for a feature film. It was probably worth it. We showed Trinka's feature-length film *Midsummer Night's Dream* first run. We're one of only two local theaters that showed that film—and flopped with it, by the way.

Pressures

My only brush with pressure groups was when in a few instances we wanted the support of the Catholic Church in this area when we showed a series of children's matinees during summer and at another time when we showed a film which I consider a semi-art film, called *The Reluctant Saint* and which I thought was a well-done film, not a great one, but interesting and done with creative imagination that I enjoyed. And the

natural thing was to bring it to the attention of the church groups in this area so they could give support, which only the Catholic Church refused, and I became aware of the fact that the Catholic Church in this area considers our theater as "persona non grata" because we have at times shown films that were on the condemned list. I don't know which ones. They never told me . . . they never made any specific reproaches or accusations or anything. The main thing is that we may show a very adult film, let's say *Odd Obsession*, the Japanese film, which is one of the most outspoken I would say, or shocking if you want to use that word, except that it is highly creative and done with a great deal of taste and imagination; at least that's the way I felt about it. But we had no problems; there were no complaints, there were no attempts on the part of any youngsters or teenagers to go and sneak in. We don't have that problem. It is quite amazing to me that we are never faced with that problem, that young ones and under aged would try to come see these films. We never had a brush with the police nor did we ever have any pressure actually. We did have a couple of anonymous complaints at the beginning when we started to show foreign films but they were mostly the chauvinistic type of comments: Why don't you show Hollywood films; isn't our product good enough?

The only time that I did seriously consider the problem of self-censorship was several years ago at the time when I wanted to show *Limelight* very badly and Charlie Chaplin just around that time had gotten into serious trouble with the government, for being a foreigner and leftist and so on. And I made several announcements from the stage at the time and asked the public for a show of hands whether they felt that we should show *Limelight* adding that we will not participate in any political controversy or take any side on politics but merely as a creative work by a genius that was recognized the world over as such. The showing of hands was overwhelmingly in favor and from then on I had many letters saying "Why haven't you shown it, you seemed to make such a valiant effort and so on, why haven't you come through?" In the

end the deal was rejected by Chaplin and he withdrew the film from the market.

I would not show *Blood of the Beasts* only because the film is so cruel . . . put it this way, it would be very hard to take for most of the customers as I see it and I feel that it is just too much to endure. Now to some extent I have those same misgivings about *Night and Fog* and yet I would like to show it much more eagerly than *Blood of the Beasts*. I don't think it's "entertaining" and yet it is a very important film. I think it should be seen both because of the way it's made and because of the way it deals with that particular subject. And I still hope someday I will show it. [Ed. Note: He did, in the context of a Tribute to Alain Resnais program.]

Critics and Reviewers

Let's put it in a general way. There is usually no solid agreement even among the highly reputed critics. Therefore, I have never felt any allegiance to any one critic whose opinion I would respect to such a degree that he is the judge for me. I do look to the critics generally and a film that has received high critical acclaim has to me that much of an advantage. Mostly, I would say, the magazines, but also the newspapers. *Time*, *The New Yorker*, the *New Republic*, *Life* and then, of course, the periodicals, *Film Quarterly*, *Sight and Sound*, *Films and Filming*, and so on. Their consensus has a great deal of, I wouldn't even say influence but meaning to me. Mostly they supply me with ammunition. They inform me about the film and its styles and what some people think of it or how they interpret it and they give me the possibility to quote them and they also give me food for thought which permits me in turn to write program notes. No question about it that when I write program notes I do it after study of what other people wrote.

The paper that counts most here seems to be the *L. A. Times*. When a good *Times* review appears, and especially with a good headline, or let's say a rave review, it is noticeable at the box-office. I don't think it matters terribly much who writes it. But Kevin Thomas is the only one who really has made himself a niche as far as review-

ing foreign films are concerned. Nobody else has done it nearly as consistently (nor with as much dedication) during the last couple of years. Now when Phil Scheuer for instance reviewed *Muriel* badly it did not seem to hurt it. This seems to be a contradiction of what I said a moment ago. But it really isn't, because when a film like *Muriel* comes along which enjoyed quite a reputation with the people who know about this type of film, then nothing will detract them. They want to see that film and if they like it they will talk about it. It is an important enough film that this will overcome a bad review. But on the other hand, for instance, *Naked Autumn* which was practically unknown, even by the "In" crowd, very few people knew about it, nor did they know about its director, François Leterrier, whose first film this was, so there was very little to justify any hope for public acceptance of this film at the box office. We had an outstanding review in the *Times* written by Kevin Thomas and the film took off on opening day. But there is also praise which can be damaging, such as that a film is slow or deliberate or documentary or highly informative. What I do miss on the local scene is more editorial comment on films as an art. The local press seems to consider films only in terms of Hollywood's, editorially. Films in terms of an industry and a commerce. Very few writers write on films as an art. They very rarely write on creative artists, their style, on the trends of film-making, on the interrelationship of the various influences and the creative trends in various countries. No attention is paid to those things. The press is underestimating the caliber of its readers if it does not discuss film as an art. We have actually requested and at times obtained very fine cooperation when we launched some of our new series. We have requested that the series should be discussed as a series, the way we approach it. And they have, maybe shorter than we would have liked, but they have commented on the series and on our approach and a few have done it in an interesting way. What is the theme of the series, what is the approach of the series, how we try to attract a more dedicated and faithful audience by the series approach and so on, and how we are

able to present, and rather successfully at times, a film which otherwise would have very little commercial chance, by presenting it within the context of the series. But they had to be prodded to do so, they had to be convinced to do so, they had to be sold on the merits of such writing. What I find lacking is the spontaneous appearance of articles from writers of stature, that might have something to say about film as an art . . . which it is.

Audience

The easiest way to try to analyze our audience is on the basis of our mailing list. However, that only shows us one thing, that an overwhelming majority are *Times* readers. We ask for comments and recommendations and we know that a lot of them are foreign movie fans . . . they know what they are talking about. We know that geographically our audience is not at all limited to our immediate surroundings, but on the contrary they come from amazing distances. We have mailings from ranges of 50 to 100 miles or more and quite a few of them. We attract, amazingly enough, many many people from Beverly Hills and even Santa Monica and so on. They come even from Long Beach at times. Some of them say they come into town just to see the show, and they are all ages. We do have on a Saturday night more the dating age, the young adult crowd, but on a weekday night we have more of the mature and even sometimes rather old people. When we have a French series we get quite a lot of French people, but not nearly 50% of our audience is ever of the ethnic source. The biggest draw film we showed was *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, and *Two Daughters* was one of the worst.

Summer used to be, years ago, a bad season. Nowadays summer can be a very good season because of the absence of high-caliber TV programs. When there is a big TV event, such as the Academy Awards, or an important Presidential speech or a major political campaign, then everybody's box-office is hurt. Maybe ours less than that of the more general type of theaters, who play Hollywood products. I think our audi-

ence is less susceptible to be attracted by political events or a major boxing match or things like that. Even on Academy Awards night our attendance is sometimes surprisingly good if we have a good attraction but usually we feel it very strongly.

Television showing of foreign films will have an effect. I don't know how much. I've heard of cases where films have been shown after TV showing and still were a success but we have had one or two bad experiences. We would not deliberately show as our main feature a film that had been on TV. But we might choose a second feature that had been on TV. Now I don't know whether *Citizen Kane* was ever on TV but about two years ago we used it as a companion feature to *Come Back Africa*. I did it very deliberately for the purpose of adding strength to the box-office because I felt *Come Back Africa* needed that kind of support and I was anxious that *Come Back Africa* should be successful and that many people should see it. And *Citizen Kane* did accomplish that purpose. We had a good three-week engagement of that double bill.

We are gaining constantly new people, a new public that is interested in foreign films and that wasn't before. How this happens we don't know. Most of the time somebody takes somebody else and says let's go and see it and one knows what he is doing and the other maybe doesn't and if by chance it happens to be something he half-way enjoys maybe he tries it again and gradually becomes interested. Other people approach it as a means of improving their knowledge of language. We have many students when we have the right film. For *Umbrellas of Cherbourg* we had many groups that came with their teachers, as foreign-language students. They came from amazing distances with buses in groups of between 25 and 50 and made reservations in advance and arrangements for special student rates and told us how much they enjoyed the film and how beautifully the French language was recorded and pronounced in this film . . . which was true, it was quite extraordinary. I could understand and enjoy every single word and syllable, that's why it was so very suitable for that purpose.

Expenses

The biggest expense is usually our overhead, our constant overhead which is rent and payroll, and the other big item is advertising and, of course, a very big item is film rental. One can or cannot spend a lot of money advertising and one can and cannot pay a lot of money for film. But the constant, heavy burden is the overhead. In other words, there's always some audience; there's always a few hundred people who will come and see practically anything but if it doesn't cover your overhead, you're caught in a hole. This is the big risk.

There are, of course, two approaches to advertising. One is the approach that you address yourself to what you imagine to be your audience, and you slant your advertising to that audience. If you were talking to somebody you know, you talk to such a person in the language that you know that person will understand and appreciate. But there is the other approach that is to try and gain over an audience that may not necessarily already be your audience. And that other approach is a very costly one. There you address yourself to practically everybody. There is a constant debate in our own minds about which is the right thing to do. It is a waste of money to try such costly means as, for instance, newspaper advertising to the vast readership of a metropolitan newspaper, and try and impress them with what you have to offer. They may not at all be interested in what you have to offer. When our *a priori* audience is really a very limited audience to whom we should talk on their level of language, on their level of interest, on their level of appeal. We do consider it necessary to do a certain minimum of advertising.

We feel that our mailing list is our most important means of publicity. Our customers are very impatient if they don't get their mailing piece from time to time and ask us, well, how come I haven't received anything for so long. And very often we haven't mailed out anything for a long time because the cost of these mailings is quite considerable and we do it only when we have enough material to make up a program. The list is in excess of 10,000. We do our own

mailing. We usually get out a mailing for several programs at a time. About four times a year. There's supposedly not any relationship between news column-inches that you receive in a newspaper and the amount of advertising that you do. I'm sure that with some papers there is, but they do not admit it. In other words, some papers will not print a review unless you also advertise. Some papers more openly than others admit such a relationship. In principle let's say the amount of free space that you get, either by reviews or by occasional small articles or by photographs, does not necessarily relate to the amount of space you buy. But again, I say not necessarily.

Improving Business

I believe that very few exhibitors know their products sufficiently well from a point of view of what the films really are. They read about them in the trade papers, they know their box-office takes, they may know a little bit by perusing a press book, which gives you all the information that the distributor has prepared for the publicizing of the picture. But very few view the film and not enough attention is being given to the proper programming... how the films will go well together. This is one of the very important factors to me: a program should be somehow compatible, that the things that go into one program should not clash, that the films should somehow have a certain affinity. And, of course, this becomes more important when you make up a series. We try to give a series some common denominator, some content, some idea that we try to underscore and thus give the series meaning.

Concessions

Concessions are important in two senses. It is a service to the audience without any question and it also helps to pay the rent and so on. In the case of drive-ins, it's a major part of the business. In the case of the average theater, it's an important part of the business. In the case of the art theater, it is of very little import as part of the business. In the case of, let's say, a drive-in, a drive-in would never play a single bill.

To them the concessions are very important and they will at all times play a double bill. Even the so-called blockbusters and super-spectacles, they will still double-bill. But to other theaters, the major consideration for double-billing is the box office and not the concessions. As an art theater, we even supply Swiss imported chocolates on sale as well as some of the domestic, and our clientele buys that product more avidly than the rest. And as a little sideline, we sell some of the better cinema magazines and occasionally a book like the one by Pauline Kael, one of the very well-known critics and film writers, and we will occasionally sell a good record album if it relates to what we are playing, as we did in the case of *Umbrellas of Cherbourg*. We sold over 200 records in the two theaters and we will do it again in the case of *Circle of Love*, which has a beautiful score.

The Business

The advent of our fine arts and foreign film policy has been very beneficial and we have grown with this change of policy. Since our remodelling we have had a better theater and since my son Robert has joined me as a full-time partner and co-worker this has given it added strength. There are more art films today and there is possibly a broader market for foreign films and this is constantly on the increase, in spite of some of the negative happenings, such as the Janus debacle, if you want to call it that. [Janus Films, a distributing firm which had made its name with the Ingmar Bergman films, recently went out of the theatrical distribution business.] It merely indicates a shifting of the foreign-film product from the small independent distributor to the larger and sometimes big distributor, you know, such as Joe Levine's Embassy, and Walter Reade-Sterling. Even the major companies, such as 20th Century-Fox and Columbia and United Artists and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, have come into the act and they are handling foreign product and that has put the squeeze on the smaller, independent distributor. So it is not a drying-up of the market altogether. It's merely a shifting. Fox is now distributing Buñuel's *The Diary of a Chamber-*

maid. Will they make money with it, will they do the film justice? Who knows?

Now about bringing in noncommercial films, Columbia, under their Royal banner, brought over *Salvatore Giuliano* but it is already acknowledged to be a commercial flop. I haven't seen it yet and I don't know whether I will like it or not, but I'm very keenly interested to see it. Columbia probably won't make money with that import from what I know about it now. So they do sometimes venture beyond the orthodox.

I hold to the view that universities or any other nontheatrical shows should be limited to an either educational or to a highly cultural point of view and should not be geared to the emphasis of filling a large auditorium for a big box-office take. Mostly I resent that they take away some of the product that we need. There is a shortage of product and every time that a large showing at Royce Hall at UCLA takes away a film that is going to be available in theatrical distribution, they have taken away the prestige of our showing a first run in this area. And they have taken away some 1900 potential customers. On the other hand, as long as they show films with an educational point of view or when they trace the development of the film as an art by showing a retrospective of great films of the past and thus stimulate an awareness of the art of the film with the student, this is something which we would support and we have supported. When they show a film like *Moderato Cantabile* there is nothing in my opinion that justifies it except that it is a good film; but we like to show good films too—this is our business. We have a big investment, we have a big overhead. Royce Hall has no big investment, they have no big overhead. It is an unfair competition and we will be missing this kind of film for our bookings or else we take a big gamble if we were to book it after they show it. In some cases this gamble may be just an imagination on my part. In other cases films that we showed following Royce Hall were flops, for instance, *Zazie*, *Two Daughters* and *Paris Belongs to Us*. They were nothing. Others, like *Lady with a Dog*, were successful.

I'm very grateful that our business has pro-

gressed nicely. In fact, I'm in the mood to expand. Our biggest problem is to make people aware of what we have and when we have it. The most frequent comment that I have from my customers is, "Oh, if I had only known that you showed *that*, I wanted to see it so badly!" We use every available means of making it known. We are listed every day in all of the daily newspapers. We take out special ads. We have our mailing list and yet so many people miss a certain film they wanted to see. They procrastinate and they don't come in time. And later on they are sorry. They were potential customers; they wanted to see the film; they knew about the film, and yet they didn't make it in time. How to solve that problem . . . if I knew how to do that I would be a millionaire.

THE NUDIE-CUTIE

SHAN SAYLES, who studied film at UCLA before going into the exhibition field, operates several nudie-cutie houses but also art theaters and theaters showing regular Hollywood films.

Background

Ever since I was a kid I was fascinated with advertising and promotion, and I found theaters very enjoyable business. Ever since I can remember I've always wanted to be in the business of bringing entertainment to people or recreation . . . I don't know what you want to call it . . . because we commit an awful lot of things in the name of entertainment. My first job was as an usher at 40¢ an hour in a motion picture theater in Detroit. The pictures that were being exhibited when I went to work were re-issues of *Rebecca* and *Jamaica Inn* and I can remember pictures like *Trio* which became tremendous hits at the box-office, and, of course, that's when coffee first came into the theaters. Actually, I got into the theater business at a very good time because theater business was on its way out and everybody knew it. And, new things were important then.

I don't so much enjoy the administrative end of what I do. As we've grown into a larger com-

pany I've had to do things that I normally wouldn't care to and, as a result, I'm now surrounding myself with assistants and employees and I can do what I used to do ten years ago, which was strictly handle promotion of motion pictures and the over-all operation of theaters, new locations, design. Now I'm the president of Continental Theaters, a holding company. Well, it's not really a holding company, it's an administrative company and it administers the buying of motion pictures, the booking of motion pictures, the advertising of them and supervises the management, including all the book-keeping and what have you, of all the theaters that come under our operation. (Some of the theaters that are handled by this company are theaters that I do not own. We simply handle the administrative end of it.) The company has been very successful since it was formed. I have an associate who handles the distribution business and who acts as the vice president of this firm. Then we have a third partner, who was brought into the company approximately two years ago to handle the real estate acquisition in the development of the theaters.

So, actually, I handle at the present time, or supervise, practically all the fields that I've mentioned. My first love has always been the advertising and promotion of films and public relations, and actually, making the theaters more accepted in the community. We more or less got side-tracked here about three years ago with big profits on the so-called nudie theaters and I've always been waiting for the bottom to fall out, only the bottom doesn't fall out. It seems to be getting stronger and stronger and stronger which has put me in kind of an embarrassing position because I've urged the build-up of the art or new theaters as a means of stopping the gap when the bottom falls out of the nudies. But the nudies, which used to do \$3,000 a week, are now grossing \$8,000 a week. Some people say there's no accounting for public taste, I say there's always an accounting for public taste.

Films

I like all kinds of films. I suppose the ideal film that I enjoy is probably the film that is both a

EXHIBITORS

critical and a box-office success. For example, *Those Magnificent Men in Their Flying Machines* I thought was a good "entertainment," as you people say. I would say *Sound of Music*, while it's a big piece of schmaltz, it's a thoroughly enjoyable piece of entertainment. And critically, it's been fairly well received. Or, a picture like *Mary Poppins* I think is a fine entertainment. Now, I can go right from there to a film like *Moderato Cantabile* and think that this is a masterpiece. And if it's promoted properly I like it even better.

I think we better make it clear that there are three different categories of exploitation pictures and it is very important that you understand that. Number one, there is the so-called exploitation picture.

The exploitation picture proper usually is a film where there is a hard-core story. Many times they are foreign films that have been dubbed for the American market, often French, Finnish, Swedish pictures. There's a picture playing at the Apollo Theater right now called *No Morals* and *The Naked and the Wicked*. *No Morals*, I don't know what the original French title was, but it's one of Jeanne Moreau's early pictures, and it is a typical exploitation picture. A picture, oh good grief, there's hundreds of them, and we've played them. Just get a newspaper and go through it, most of the films in the Apollo are exploitation pictures. There will be some nudity in the film, but very little. Most of it is the violence type of picture that many times has a sexy story line or something of that type. Normally they're black and white, and normally they do a lot of business. Of course, the primary reason for them has been that they always capture the great revenue in the New York area because nudity, nudist films were not allowed in New York until recently. And the same way in many other parts of the country. Now the floodgates have been opened and I guess you can run just about anything. So, however, the Apollo does nicely on the exploitation picture.

Now the nudist pictures are films that are either supposedly filmed in a nudist camp or are filmed in a nudist camp and they simply



PHOTO: LAURIE MILLER

picture a lot of people walking around with no clothes on, playing volleyball, and all that kind of crap. Now that stuff goes through vogues of popularity. During the thirties we had a picture called *Aletia, the Land of the Sun Worshipers*, that was tremendous, or we had *Nude Valley* or something. During the forties I don't think we had any nudist pictures, in the fifties I don't think so. In the late fifties a picture called *Garden of Eden* was made which was a sensation wherever it played. We made a lot of money on that picture and during the early sixties a picture was made in England called *For Members Only*, which was retitled by us to *The Nudist Story*, which was sensational. It played at the Apollo, I think three months.

However, then we have what we call the nudie pictures, which are pictures like *The Immoral Mr. Teas*, *Not Tonight Henry*, where there is nudity depicted as part of a story—but an awful lot of nudity with a lot of girls in kind of silly situations. They're usually all in color.

I wouldn't put the 16mm in any category. I say that they are in a category of strictly 16 mm girlie shows. I would put them in the category of arcade movies that you have down on the street or maybe in a nudie category. It would just depend. Some of the pictures we've made for our theaters are in the nudie category.

Theaters

In three of our theaters we run so-called exploitation type pictures. In one of the theaters we run strictly foreign films, from Russia, Poland, Israel, and that theater has turned out to be quite an unusual success. Valley West Theater runs current Hollywood films. The

theater was designed originally to be an art theater. However we found it could operate more profitably with films like *How the West Was Won* and *The Unsinkable Molly Brown* and that's the policy it's now on.

The Vista Continental, when I first took it over in 1959, was the established rat-hole for Russian films on the West Coast. It operated on a three-day-week basis and in the summertime it was closed. The man that operated the theater used to go to Scotland every summer, and that was the end of it. When I took the theater over I remodeled it to some extent and up-dated the run of films. However, we had the thing called the cultural exchange which was perpetrated on the exhibitors and the public in this country and, as a result, all of the Russian pictures were taken away from me and instead of playing in the dumpy Vista were put into the Fine Arts, where they dropped dead. And I used to have to wait six months and then I would play the pictures and still do just as much business. However, for about a six-month period there was a dearth of product for me. So, one day, completely by accident, we booked a picture called *The Immoral Mr. Teas*, and it was booked in against my better judgment. The film turned out to be so successful that it played one year in the Vista and it made so much money that it enabled us to go into other theaters. At the present time, the Vista is probably one of the top money-making theaters in the United States.

The Europa has had kind of a ragged history. Of course, when I took it over the first thing I did was take that wall out between the two theaters and the reason for it was that distributors would not make any films available to us because it was too small. It is still too small; we only have 320 seats. However, when we first operated the theater it was operated as more or less a first-run theater or a re-issue theater. So, eventually we closed the theater, completely revamped the operation, changed the name, and opened it up as the home of Russian film in Los Angeles. From the day it opened it has been profitable. However, we found that there was also a market for Polish pictures in Los Angeles

which has been thoroughly overlooked and we put them in too and they proved fairly successful; there's an audience that has to be developed. We've shown many of the Russian so-called classics and we did very well. However, you see, the trouble is that, with the exception of one, the community does not support our theaters, and so we have an up-hill fight all the time. In other words, most of the people, most of the Jewish people who came to the Europa theater to see *Sallah* did not even know there was a theater there. Now that theater has been there for 30 years and they still did not know there was a theater there.

Getting Films

In determining what I'm going to play, I try to more or less run a pulse on the country. I subscribe to 92 newspapers all over the country and I set aside one day a week to do nothing except cull the periodicals which we subscribe to (about 40), and all the newspapers. We take about five international publications. And I try to get an idea not only from the name of the picture but also the advertising campaign, as a basis for what we're going to play. There are certain areas that excel in promotion and exploitation of certain pictures. Frankly, when it comes to a nudie or an exploitation picture, the campaign is just as important as the picture is. And there are certain cities, like Toronto, Miami, and, believe it or not, Columbus, Ohio that have theaters where they have absolutely wonderful advertising campaigns. So, many times what we'll do is simply write a letter and ask that we be permitted to use the campaign. Nine times out of ten they let us do that.

Then, of course, we sometimes get ideas for booking combinations and so forth for our regular commercial theaters. However, that only is as far as the specialized situations go, like the Europa and the exploitation theaters. As far as the other theaters go, where we play established Hollywood products, we are forced to accept the films that are offered to us on the availability that they are offered to us. Everything is by bid arrangement.

A lot of our Russian films come from one dis-

tributor in New York, Artkino Pictures. Now they are unofficially exclusive Russian film distributors in the United States. However, not officially. Anyone can distribute Russian films if they want to. The same goes for Polish pictures. Now I deal with three men that are located, one in Pittsburgh, one in Detroit, one in Chicago, on Polish pictures. They usually go to Warsaw once or twice a year to pick up the films. Most of the films are not acceptable here because they are too colloquial. Many of them are simply not for our Polish audience here. In fact, many times the air-freight bill on these films is much more than they ever earn, because we screen everything we show and all the films are shipped here, they're screened, and then they are approved or rejected. In some respects there are distributors for the so-called nudie-cuties. It depends. Certain films have distributors, others don't. You have to buy them directly from New York or from the producer, depending on how important the picture is.

I'll tell you, the nudie market is really an amazingly simple market if you will keep it simple. But too many people want to get arty or they want to get big-business. It amazing how simple it really is. For example, we have two theaters where we have completely eliminated 35mm pictures. This nudie craze, of course, it's been with us for 50 years, but right now it's so old it's new. We have gone right back to the peep shows of 50 years ago; that's exactly what we've done. Now, five, six, or seven years ago, you know, *The Immoral Mr. Teas* was sort of the modern granddaddy of these pictures. And, of course, prior to that time, we had what we called the Main Street movies, that used to be shown off and on in various out-of-the-way theaters, and pictures that were distributed here by a man named Dan Funny—*Virgin in Hollywood* and crap like that. That went out of vogue, and we came in here with technicolor nudie pictures where women's breasts were fully exposed for the first time. For about two years we rode on the crest of what you might call bourgeois popularity. People thought it was the thing to do. And you could go to a dentist's office or a doctor's office or a

lawyer's office and you could hear *The Immoral Mr. Teas* being discussed because all of the so-called intelligentsia had to rush down and see what was going on. I'll never forget the day that I ran into Kenneth Macgowan walking into one of my theaters.

We then felt that the nudie had to have a story and it had to have some kind of justifiable redeeming grace in order to get someone to come in to see it. Well, it was a joke. We found ourselves paying 40% and 50% for pictures which were doing maybe \$2,500 or \$3,000 per week. I threw it all out and I put in nothing but 16mm girlie shows and we doubled our grosses because we found the public is interested in one thing only, and that is girls. They're not interested in any color or any story or any old men ogling the girls. They want to ogle the girls. And, as a result, the theaters have just turned into a bonanza. So, I would say, getting back to your comment about young film-makers, yes, if they want to come in and learn how to shoot girls, and, incidentally, pick up a few other interesting things about our business, it would be a good place for them to start. At least they could keep the film in focus, which helps. I've produced several myself.

As far as the nudie field goes, there is not a sellers' market. Other people haven't got into it. Most of them have gone broke, because they don't understand the market. I know a lot of people who have made a lot of money off it, Russ Meyer is one man who's made money off of it. However, there are many many more who have lost money in a business that they should never have had to lose money in. They should all be profitable, but they don't know what to do.

Now, the big thing, though, is this business about the commercial Hollywood theaters. I would say that it is becoming more of a buyers' market than it has been in the past five or six years, perhaps. Now, when I say that I mean that if the buyer has the right plant to exhibit the merchandise in, if he has a beautiful new theater with adequate seating capacity, plenty of parking, well-groomed staff, and an intelligent buyer and booker, I would say, while it still

is a sellers' market, it isn't so much so. It definitely is a sellers' market in small towns and in areas where there are theaters competing severely for the product without one distinguishing plant. Now you might say, for example, the San Fernando Valley is an example of a hard-core sellers' market. It would not be that if someone would buy a 2,000-seat beautiful theater. That would be eliminated right there.

Schedules

When you get into the nudie business, you have to throw out all preconceived notions and anything you know about commercial Hollywood pictures because nothing applies. Now, in New York, for example, many theaters do a lot of business in the afternoons. That is not the case here in Los Angeles. There are very few theaters here that ever do any business before 7:00 PM and I don't care what you're running, *Tom Jones*, *Gone With the Wind*, or *Girls on the Beach*. That isn't the case with the nudie theaters. Most of our business in the nudie theaters is done between 10:00 AM and noon. Now, no one believes that, but that's true. And the second largest shot of business comes between midnight and 2:00 AM. Now, bear in mind that I'm speaking of my own nudie theaters. But I suspect that what I tell you is true of other houses. Although those theaters do not open up early in the morning, and I don't know why they don't. Of course, I often find myself in a position of doing something and everybody copies me. That may sound egotistical, but I don't mean it to. We've been copied by everybody in town. If we do one thing, they'll do it. I'm surprised they haven't gone all night and I'm surprised they're not open 24 hours a day. We find it very profitable.

Obscenity

Anyone who is in the business of exhibiting films that could have questionable "social redeeming importance" had better have *some* idea of what obscenity is. Even so, not that I don't know what it is, and not that I don't feel that I could express it very clearly, but I'll tell you that is one thing that we are continually being

asked to define, and the courts can't define it and I can't. I can tell you this . . . the reason I won't answer that question directly is only because I have been in a position of acting as a witness or being subpoenaed on occasion, not to protect myself but to protect others, and to come up with this obscenity definition is just too confining, I don't want to do it. I can tell you, though, that there are certain areas that we avoid as far as the kind of films that we show. For example, we do not permit any public hair to be exhibited in any of our films. In San Francisco and Sacramento, and in Fresno, there are theaters, very prominently located, that I have been in recently and in all three of them, particularly the one in Sacramento, I thought I was inside of a women's bath house. I've really never seen so much complete nudity in my life. This particular theater in Sacramento is within a stone's throw of the state capitol. Incidentally, there is another theater in a suburb in Los Angeles that has the same thing. We have not resorted to that.

Pressure Groups

We have been subjected to rather bizarre attempts at pressure, none of which have ever been serious. In all the years that we've been running exploitation pictures there has only been one arrest and the arrest was on a completely ludicrous basis and was thrown out of court, in a very memorable display of temper, by the judge. It happened almost four years ago in the Apollo on Hollywood Blvd. In front of the theater a poster was exhibited on a motion picture called *The Ruined Bruin* and on that 40" x 60" poster was a picture from *Playboy* magazine, from an article on this picture; a picture of snapshot size had been clipped from the magazine and pasted on this poster. There was a girl's bare breast exposed in this picture. Now, her breast was probably about the size of the eraser of this pencil and bear in mind the size of the poster. Well, a vice-squad officer came in and arrested the manager for exhibiting a lewd and obscene photograph. He was immediately taken down to the Hollywood police station, booked and fingerprinted and treated like a

hardened criminal. Well, I was called on the phone and he was quite upset, as I was, and I came over and bailed him out, and, of course, I thought . . . I didn't actually know what had happened. I thought there was a morals charge on the theater, someone had been hurt or something, I didn't know what was going on. Finally, one of the officers told me what had happened. Well, it was so foolish that we decided to make a regular case out of it, and we originally planned to go to a man named Stanley Fleischman, who is more or less an expert. We decided not. We decided to just go to our regular attorney. When the judge asked to have the evidence presented, the District Attorney's office came in with this great big poster and the judge said, well, what's wrong with the poster and they said, why there's an obscene photograph here—and he couldn't see it. That was the funny part of it all, and the court admonished the DA's office for wasting the time and money of the public.

And I can recall one time we had a call here from a councilman in the Hollywood area complaining that he has received calls from PTA groups, mothers complaining that their children have to walk past the Vista, which is right at Hollywood and Sunset Boulevard, on their way to school. They thought that the pictures in front of the theater were corrupting these children. I told him, after a little thought, that if that was all the mothers were worried about, sending their children to school down one of the worst streets in the nation, then they had absolutely nothing to worry about.

Other than that, we haven't really had any pressure. We've had much more pressure with the Russian pictures. For example, when they were originally exhibited at the Vista in Hollywood, the local headquarters for the Republican National Committee were right next door. Now I happen to be a registered Republican and I was subjected to all kinds of pressure and I couldn't figure out where the pressure was coming from. The police would come into the theater and say that a complaint had been made that we were taking up all the parking area. So they painted loading zones on curbs to keep

people from parking two or three hours. Then we used to have investigations also every so often where the police would come in and say that there was fighting in the theater because someone called someone a Communist and then there was pressure about *The People's World* which is a publication in San Francisco in which we advertise. Finally there was a direct call which came to our theater from the Republican group next door having to do with parking or something and I went over to see them and said I had been a regular and generous contributor and I believe my money had even gone through that office and when they found out who I was and that I was running this kind of pictures, they didn't quite know what to say and it proved to be rather embarrassing. I lowered the boom on them and told them that if they wanted to be critical they could at least be constructive in what they had to say, but that was one type of pressure that was a little amusing. We've had threats of bombing of theaters, we have had . . . I'm talking about strictly the Russian pictures. But the most severe pressure I've ever had since I've been in the theater business has been from the Negroes and it was specifically from the NAACP over the exhibition of *Birth of a Nation*. And that pressure was so serious that I called the Police Department out to protect the theater and to protect me. This was in 1957, when I was employed, incidentally, as a manager for Fox West Coast Theaters, and the theater that I managed happened to be a theater that I now own, the Apollo on Hollywood Boulevard. (Incidentally, the site of the Vista is where many of the scenes for *Birth of a Nation* were filmed.) Had the theater belonged to me, I would have let them all demonstrate, I didn't care.

Censorship

I censor the Russian films myself occasionally, using just my own academic knowledge. I have eliminated certain sections of films and have been severely criticized for doing so. The reason I eliminated it was strictly from a commercial standpoint, for no other reason, strictly commercial. In other words, my theaters are operated

really primarily for profit and if they cannot be profitable then they cannot operate. Any other benefits that come from them, such as educational dissemination and what have you, come as a secondary item; they are primarily theaters of entertainment and if a censoring of a picture enhances its commercial value, then I am in favor of it. However, not if the censorship is strictly for censorship's sake.

Reviews

Occasionally we have critical reviews, say, on the exploitation pictures at the Apollo. They have no effect on box office. About critical reviews, for example, at the Europa, let me say this, if the review is bad, it will not hurt the picture any more than the picture will hurt itself. In other words, what I'm saying is there is usually a direct correlation between the amount of business a picture does and its wall-op. If a film is very good it will usually do a very good business. The only two reviewers that I read are Margaret Hartford and Kevin Thomas for the *L. A. Times*.

I'll tell you, the school newspapers are very important. Of course, the great mistake that is made with the school newspapers is that the students supposedly are interested in the better things. This is one of the jokes of the film societies in the various schools. It is not the students that support the films that are shown on campus, nor is it the students that support the so-called better films in the theaters, and they never did. They didn't do it ten years ago or twenty years ago or now. They support mostly trash. And it's only a hard-core group of students that will support anything worthwhile, and if they support more than that it's for one reason only and that is, they're curious. As far as the student newspapers go, they are important for advertising. As far as reading the review of Joe Doe, I don't think any of them care about it. Unfortunately, because some of the newspapers have fairly good reviewers.

Audiences

We have a motto in our company that is on every piece of letterhead; it has directly to do

with audiences and it says that better motion pictures create better audiences. Now as far as audiences go, of the people who go to the Europa, 50% of them are Russian-speaking and Polish-speaking. I would say that about 20% are students, and the other 30% are the mish-mash, the curious, and maybe if we have a ballet picture it's people interested in ballet and so forth. I think as far as the nudie theaters go most of the patrons are single men that are probably in a professional or salesmen or an upper-income bracket. It used to be that everyone thought we would get the bums from Main Street and that type of thing. But we charge the highest admission in Los Angeles for a motion picture, with the exception of the road shows—\$2.00, \$2.50. Admission has nothing to do with attendance of these theaters. People that come to them can afford those prices and twice that much. If you have a picture the public wants to see they will come to see it and it doesn't really make a difference how much it costs, as long as it's within reason. If it's a picture they're not interested in seeing you can run it free and they will not come to see the picture.

If we stay within the past 12 months the biggest grosser in the Europa theater was a picture called *Dimka*. The story of a little boy. A very charming Russian film. The biggest grosser at the Valley West was *Tom Jones*. And the biggest grosser at the Vista was a picture that we played a few weeks ago called . . . I can't think of it. It was one of the shows we put together over there and it had a rather bizarre advertising campaign. The biggest grossing picture we ever played in the Paris was a picture called *The Bellboy and the Playgirl* with June Wilkinson. She was then at the height of her so-called career. The biggest grossing film ever at the Vista was a film called . . . we called it a private collection of girlie photos that were made available throughout the world and we captioned it *Unusual Behavior* and it was sensational.

Seasons

Whenever we have three-day holidays men have to spend time with their families and they don't come to our nudie theaters. At the Europa, it's

pretty stable. At the commercial theaters, the pre-Christmas period is very bad. Between Easter Vacation and summer is bad. The period between Labor Day and Thanksgiving is sometimes kind of slow.

Business

Our greatest expense is our payroll, then film rental and advertising. They're absolutely necessary to operate our theaters and if we spend \$10,000 on an advertising campaign and only gross \$3,000 we're in a lot of trouble. It happens consistently on certain types of films and that's what determines what we can play profitably.

Concessions are very important. They vary in our theaters. With the new theaters we're building, all designed to be commercial Hollywood-type theaters, concessions will be very important. They have little impact at the nudies: men don't care about eating candy. I think they would like to have a bar or something like that, which I'm working on. Then we'd have to limit the admission to 21 (I don't know how they're going to enforce that) but we've already come up with the idea of beer and wine and I've expanded it to liquor.

We limit our advertising with the nudie houses. And some of the media limit the advertising. There are many college newspapers, for example, that will not accept our ads. I've asked them to publish the same ads that appear in the *Times* and they used to do it, and now they don't want to do it. The *UCLA Bruin* publishes almost everything. If you want to commend a newspaper, for running ads for pictures like that, the *Bruin* has certainly had a very open policy. Not that they haven't had a censorship, because they have to a very limited extent, but the main thing about the *Bruin* is that when they ever questioned an ad, which has been very seldom, they have always told me what to put in place of it to make it acceptable.

Unfortunately, the motion picture industry is continually the whipping-boy because it's so vulnerable. They always run whenever anything happens and within the last year the *L. A. Times* went through one of the worst censorship tactics of advertising that I think I have ever wit-

nessed in my short time in the motion picture business. Now they're easing up a little bit because, frankly, it just got to be a little ridiculous. They got to the point where they would not accept a girl in a bikini bathing suit. Frankly, some of the alternatives they've used are twice as bad and I can give you many, many examples. In fact, I have now taken the attitude that if they want to censor anything down there, all I ask them to do is put in what they want to put in because usually what they put in is much worse. So that has now backfired completely. Of course, the whole thing boils down to the fact that they claim that they have to censor these ads because of criticism from their readers and I often wonder how much criticism they got backing Goldwater. I mean this is just so silly it really doesn't warrant discussion.

Actually, it wouldn't matter if we didn't advertise for the nudie cuties, now that the theaters are established as definitive sources of unusual entertainment. However, people have a short memory; at least the public attending these films does, and I think that the only purpose that the ad serves is their reminder. I think we could cut our advertising budget and I don't think our business would suffer. However, why experiment?

I think the greatest plague that we have in theaters today is bad management. The reason for it is because the executive levels of the theater business are so poor. We do not have the right quality of people working in our theaters from a management standpoint; nor do we have it in the other categories. The amount of people that are working in our business with college educations is absolutely minimal and you just have to trace it back to the people who own the theaters. Now we are gradually getting out of that. The justification of having such a poor group of people is always based on "showmanship," that no matter how ignorant the man is and no matter what bad taste he has, if he is a "showman" he is okay. Now that's what nearly ruined our industry. We need people who have some brains and I think that we have a few production companies, distribution companies that have learned that and rather than making

pictures like *The Prodigal* and *Diane* and pictures like this, we now have a different kind of film being produced and it's because people with some brains are attempting to take over the industry. They can improve business in theaters by improving management and by, in many cases, improving the plants themselves.

The business has changed tremendously over the past ten years: people's habits are different, people have many more things to do, they have more money; therefore, instead of competing with television now we are competing against the backyard barbecues, swimming pools, automobiles—which, of course, are a much greater threat than television, in the sense that everyone has an automobile and they can go places and do things and they are not limited to non-participating entertainment. They can participate in many things. Whereas during the war, you know, everybody thought that the theaters did so well because there wasn't anything else to do. There were a lot of other things to do, but you couldn't get to them—there wasn't any gas and there wasn't any rubber, you see. The automobile is a great threat to us. And another big change is there does seem to be a change in public taste. People got a little smarter, they're not accepting a film just because it's a Cannes film festival award winner, that doesn't mean anything any more. I shouldn't say that people are getting smarter, they're becoming more aware, and certain groups of people are becoming more aware of certain things in motion pictures. I think the director and the producer and the writer are more important than they ever were in terms of the names. The public is becoming more selective in what they will buy.

If the nudie market did collapse, I would probably just remodel the theaters, change the names, give them a complete new face-job and go on and run whatever the commercial thing was of that day.

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