

The SHORT ROAD to HOLLYWOOD SUCCESS



Virginia Grey graduated from short films to important roles in full-length features.

Pete Smith, producer and commentator for some of Hollywood's best shorts, ponders his lines while a fair assistant makes up a canine actor.

WHEN Irene Hervey finished her part in a short called "A Thrill for Thelma," she didn't know that executives had been watching rushes on the film. Three hours later she was assigned the leading feminine role with Chester Morris in "Three Godfathers." She now is under contract to Columbia.

Edward Norris and Harvey Stephens won feature roles in major productions from their work in the "Crime Does Not Pay" dramaettes, each of which tells a complete detective story. Judy Garland and Deanna Durbin both came to attention in a miniature musical called "Every Sunday." They didn't come to the attention of M-G-M, though. Miss Garland was a hit in Twentieth Century-Fox's "Pigskin Parade," and Miss Durbin is being starred by Universal when she isn't performing on the radio.

Charles Chaplin, Harold Lloyd, Wallace Beery, Gloria Swanson and plenty of other elder stars started in one-reelers. So did Patsy Kelly and Joan Blondell. Bing Crosby's first screen work was in some shorts for Mack Sennett. Jean Harlow appeared in shorts—short pictures, that is.

Miss Harlow's early career also seems to have been the inspiration for a series of behind-the-scenes-in-Hollywood pictures which now are being filmed by Carey Wilson. They're about an ambitious extra who has every imaginable break of hard luck, but who finally becomes a star.

In the first episode she is shown studying hard, trying desperately for a chance. Then she gets what seems to be a big opportunity. She is rushed before the camera, and is all ready to turn on her charm and histrionics when she finds that all they want is a shot of her legs. That actually happened to Miss Harlow.

The series continues—a successful extra, then a bit player whose acting is left on the cutting-room floor. Next to featured roles and stardom. For the leading part in this series of shorts they actually chose a typical extra girl, one Jane Barnes. And they say she may reasonably aspire to the same progress she is enacting on the set.

When drama is present in a tabloid movie it's the celluloid equivalent of the magazine short-short story. In fact, there's a plan to buy short-shorts for Pete Smith's filming.

Smith didn't pioneer the novelty short, but he made it what it is today. The pictures which he produces and in which he acts as commentator are shown all over the world and have a profitable life of at least two years—longer than the average feature.

He isn't much to look at, but that's only one reason why you don't see him on the screen. The other reason is that he can't learn lines and never could learn lines.

By Paul Harrison

HOLLYWOOD.

IN case you haven't noticed, movie shorts are no longer the stepchildren of the show world.

Some of the one- and two-reelers are receiving billing, in lights, on the marquees of theaters. Some have been accorded more space than feature pictures in newspaper reviews. Many a well-known player, most notably Robert Taylor, has been brought to attention by the celluloid brevities.

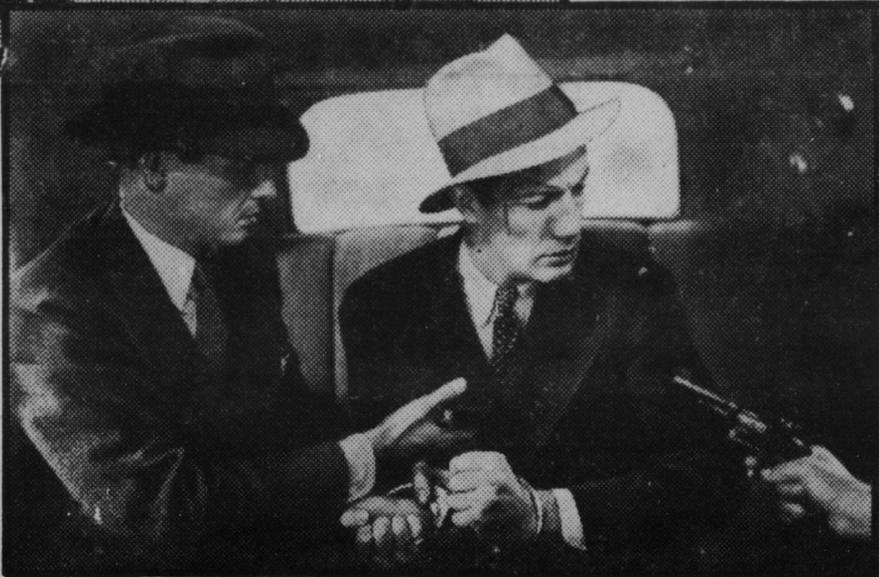
And shorts have developed stars of their own. Look at Robert Benchley struggling along for years in comparative anonymity as magazine editor, columnist and drama critic. Probably no more than 20,000,000 people knew about Mr. Benchley until he began delivering silly little discourses for the sound cameras on the love-life of the polyp, and how to sleep, and how to be a detective. Today he is known to almost everybody, everywhere in the world.

Then there's Peter Gridley Smith, called Pete for shorts. Mr. Smith is no actor, and only his hands, feet and the back of his neck ever have been seen on any screen. Yet he is one of Hollywood's most widely known celebrities, and he receives more fan mail than the average dramatic star. More, indeed, than Mr. Benchley.

Carey Wilson, for another example, is a distinguished scenarist with a record of top-notch screen plays ranging in time, from "Ben Hur" to "Mutiny on the Bounty." Yet the shorts which Mr. Wilson now is making have earned him vastly more public attention than all his strivings in the field of flicker dramaturgy.

And so on and on through the dozens of players and producers who have something to do with the 500 or more short subjects which are produced annually. The list ends with that grandest of all mimes, Mickey Mouse, and his mentor, Walt Disney. The shorts have their stars.

About three years ago the single and two-reel pictures seemed well on their way to extinction.



Yes, sir, it's Robert Taylor, performing in a "Crime Does Not Pay" short, which led to fame and fortune.

NEWSREELS and animated cartoons were doing all right, of course, but comedies and novelties were tottering. Mack Sennett already had gone out of business; RKO had suspended its brevities; and Educational had cut down its program to a fraction. The business had been literally smothered in custard pies.

About four years ago this correspondent happened to ask a movie-maker why short subjects were so uniformly bad. He answered frankly, "Because whenever anybody gets a good idea for a short it is expanded into a feature. Why, the first all-talking picture ever made, 'The Lights of New York,' started as a short and grew into a full-length film. I hate to think how many others have, too."

But the attitude of studios—most studios, anyway—has changed. Shorts have assumed importance for two reasons: they're the best natural enemy of the double-feature program that anybody has discovered to date. And they also serve as an excellent proving-ground for screen talent that is headed for big time.

A Mr. Jack Chertok, head of the shorts department at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, where about 80 screen brevities are made each season, said that at his studio these reels are considered important as show windows for new talent.

"One picture is worth a thousand tests. Take this comedian, Jerry Bergen, who incidentally used to be in a vaudeville act with Martha Raye. He has just finished a short here, and chances are he'll be built up for feature roles or stardom. He may be worth a million dollars to the studio.

"George Murphy is one of my graduates. Virginia Grey played opposite him in short subjects, and now Murphy has the lead in 'Top of the Town' at Universal, and Miss Grey is to make a picture with Richard Arlen at RKO."

Not bad, indeed. There was poor, discouraged Robert Taylor, kicking around and taking a test now and then, and wondering whether he ought to go back to Nebraska. Executives weren't sure either. But they put in some of the "Crime Does Not Pay" two-reelers and the theater customers made the decision.