

MOVIE MAKERS

Magazine of the Amateur Cinema League, Inc.



JANUARY 1929

PRICE 25c

MOVIE MAKERS

MAGAZINE OF THE AMATEUR CINEMA LEAGUE, INC.

VOLUME IV

JANUARY, 1929

NUMBER 1

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MOVIE MAKERS is published monthly in New York, N. Y., by the Amateur Cinema League, Inc.

Subscription Rate \$3.00 a year, postpaid (Canada \$3.25, Foreign \$3.50); to members of the Amateur Cinema League, Inc. \$2.00 a year, postpaid; single copies, 25c.
On sale at photographic dealers everywhere.

Entered as second-class matter August 3, 1927, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1929, by the Amateur Cinema League, Inc. Title registered at United States Patent Office.

Editorial and Publication Office: 105 West 40th Street, New York, N. Y. Telephone, Pennsylvania 3715.

Advertising rates on application. Forms close on 5th of preceding month.

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“ with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after dream of the reveler upon opium.”

—THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER

The AMATEUR Takes LEADERSHIP

How Experimenters, in Circumventing Production Difficulties, Have Achieved the Greatest Cinematic Advance Since "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari."

As Disclosed By
J. S. Watson, Jr.

A Note by the Editor.

IN this first issue of MOVIE MAKERS dedicated to the amateur photography, it is particularly fitting that there should be an account of the origin of the unique production technique employed by J. S. Watson, Jr., and Melville Webber of Rochester, N. Y., in the astounding amateur film, "The Fall of the House of Usher," which Mr. Wilton Barrett, Secretary of the National Board of Review, has declared to represent the greatest advance made in the progress of the motion picture as an independent art since that epochal film, "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari," barring no other photoplay produced by American or European professionals. Incidentally, when screened for the National Board of Review by the Amateur Cinema League it won major mention as an exceptional photoplay, an honor awarded only the world's finest cinematic achievements.

"The Fall of the House of Usher" not only represents a new cinema technique but it is also unique in that it does not attempt to tell Poe's story in detail, rather to invoke in its audiences the esthetic impressions and moods which the tale creates in its readers. This revolutionary approach to the cinema opens a fascinating field for further pioneering. Fortified

with the new scientific instruments which have recently been devised for the detection and recording of emotional reactions, the amateur producer may now truly be said to face a new world for cinematic experimentation in translating such reactions into film. Properly motivated by medical authority films of this nature may even prove to have a tremendous psychological significance. From any viewpoint "The Fall of the House of Usher" represents a forecast of possibilities which are amazing.

IN order to use the cinema as a means of expression the amateur must be able to exercise control over his pictures; and the more control the better. The amateur who tries to compete with the professional producer on his own ground is licked

from the start by lamps, scenery, and other expensive methods of control which will not be available in anything like the necessary profusion.

However, by freely giving up something which you probably cannot have anyway, it is often possible to gain an important advantage in another department. Thus the animated cartoon maker, who gives up nearly everything which we associate with photography, gains the only perfect control which the motion picture as an art medium has to offer.

The professional producer buys his much less intimate control over the much more complicated and ambitious studio photodrama at an average cost of \$100,000 a picture. He is faced, however, with a problem which is certainly not an artistic one and need not concern the amateur: namely, the problem of insuring returns on the investment. Fifteen years of happy experience have given the producers a number of fixed ideas on this subject.

the two most expensive being (a) that stars are indispensable, and (b) that the stars must act out a story in what we may call realistic surroundings.

I will not argue that story interest is unnecessary. It has been found to be so in music and poetry and vaudeville and in Mr. Griffith's pictures, and the chances are that it is unnecessary in the cinema. However, a story is easy enough to secure and the amateur can use one if it helps him to think.



GLIMPSES OF THE NEW TECHNIQUE

Above, A Kaleidoscope and Slow Motion Exterior Shot taken at $f-3.5$ with Sunlight and Reflectors. Left, Illustrating the Use of a Short Focus Lens for Perspective Distortion. Right, The Camera Has Revolved on Its Axis Until the Figures Are in Line Vertically Instead of Horizontally; Taken at a Lens Stop of $f-1.5$.

What he cannot manage are the realistic settings, the drawing rooms a hundred feet long, lighted with 4,000 kilowatts.

Lately, it is true, trick work has been used increasingly to produce at less cost many of the effects of size and richness which the public is supposed to demand. But here, too, the insistence on realism puts this sort of trick work out of the amateur's reach. Enormous patience and very intricate and high-priced machinery is used to blend a background of snow mountains into a foreground of action so that the scene will look real, or to show "Our Gang" riding through Paris on a bus. The pleasure of recognizing a place and saying to oneself, "It is just like being there," is put ahead of the simpler, more direct pleasures of which the cinema is pre-eminently capable. And so much energy is expended on this sterile labor, and so much footage is devoted to its results, that the real flow and impact of the cinema comes through only between irritating interruptions.

My point is that if the insistence on the mere actuality can once be given up, if a formula, a style, can be accepted in its place, the greatest cause of expense in making studio pictures and the greatest obstacle to the cinematic control of motion is immediately done away with. Backgrounds and properties can be of any convenient size or material and can be made to take part with the actors in the motion of the scene, accomplishment of which in the realistic style, requires trucking, and Akeley, and double printing shots at fabulous cost. Realness can be used, too, but as an element rather than a basic principle, and depth and perspective can be made even more striking than formerly. The trick work by which such stylized scenes are put together can be done without much expense by any camera which will run the film safely backward and forward and still keep in register. The free control over timing of events and over speed and

direction of movement offers the amateur a machine-art which should be capable of giving real pleasure.

The addition of sound synchronization can be regarded only as a potential multiplication of the force of the movies. It is not as though the silent drama had ever been silent! For years the theater patron has been deafened by organs, wind machines,



AN EXQUISITE CLOSEUP
Illustrating the Photographic Quality of the
Scenes Interpreted Realistically.

and imitation airplane motors. At best this noise has been merely an accompaniment rather than a real part of the performance. Now mechanical exactness begins to make possible a counterpoint, as the Russians would say, instead of a harmony. Talking pictures, conceived as reproductions of the stage, should not discourage anyone who can look forward to the time when the voices will be used against the action as well as with it.

PRISMATIC MAGIC

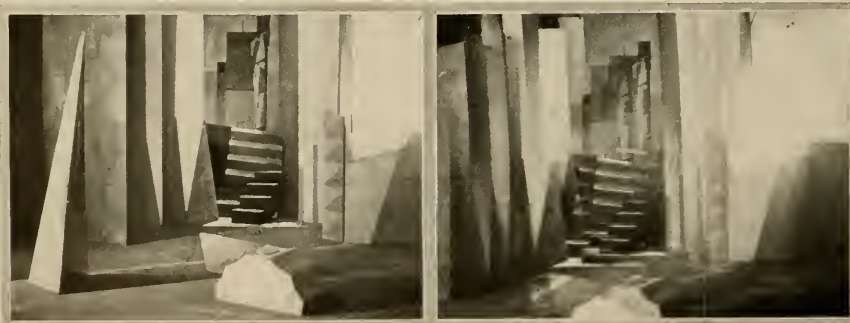
The Setting, left, Simple to the Verge of Crudity. Is
Envestured with Atmospheric Mysticism by the Use
of Prisms.

And the fact that already dance scenes no longer look ridiculous in the pictures, now that music keeps time for them, is a reason for congratulations.

These reflections on the movies grow out of two years of spare-time work which Mr. Melville Webber and I put in, trying to make a film version of Poe's story, *The Fall of the House of Usher*. We did our work mainly in an empty stable using only twelve kilowatts of direct current for lighting. At first we hoped to take the picture in a perfectly straight manner, using painted scenery, but we immediately ran into so much trouble that trick work had to be resorted to. After the first six months our motto became "hundreds (several) for film, and not one cent for settings."

Film was used up in large quantities because the only way to find out how a composite scene would look was to take it. Very few of the seventy scenes in our 1,200 foot film have been taken less than three times. The unfortunate actors had to do nearly all their acting on a count of seconds. Inevitably they made mistakes and so did the group of people operating the camera, shutter, masks, truck and optical mechanisms. When any component of a composite scene went wrong the whole scene had to be done over. In view of all this trouble I have since wondered if long composite scenes are not a luxury. The Germans use the long scene in which the camera travels from room to room. The Russians get almost as good an effect by very rapid cutting of stationary flashes. Recently a spare time film was released called, *The Life and Death of a Hollywood Extra* (discussed further elsewhere in this issue) which used a technique somewhat like the Russian and even more remote from professional practise than our own. This film was made for ninety-seven dollars with one 400-watt lamp. The actors were photographed entirely in semi-close-up and long shots were all made on very

(Continued on page 887)



Recognition

THE Technical Monthly Abstract Bulletin published by the Research Laboratories of the Eastman Kodak Company carried in its November issue a note describing Drem Exposure Meters manufactured by the Drem Products Corporation, New York, N. Y. The Eastman Kodak Stores in New York City recently featured the Cinophot exposure meter in a large window display. The Cinophot is the meter that gives a direct reading of the exposure with all Cine Kodak cameras.

Removal

CINE ART PRODUCTIONS, INC., announces the removal of their general offices to 6060 Sunset Boulevard, Hollywood, California. The corporation, in addition to its Hollywood offices, also has offices at 311 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y. It is anticipated that the company will in the near future be operating from Chicago as well.

Projector Price

THE new 16 mm. Victor Cine Projector, announced in these columns in December, is to be sold at a price of \$200.00.

THE AMATEUR TAKES LEADERSHIP

(Continued from page 848)

small miniature sets in which movement was introduced mainly by moving the lamp and casting shadows. Instead of trying to put the actor in these miniature backgrounds by trick work, the scenes were simply cut in successively so that you saw first the actor and then his mise en scène. The whole picture was cut in rapid staccato, very different from the rather suave, sluggish movement of *The House of Usher*. Anyway, it is a masterpiece.

In order to make pieces of cardboard against a black curtain look like anything at all, we adopted several types of image distortion which I have been asked to describe. The professional camera man tries to give his pictures depth and charm by spoiling the definition of his lens with gauze and other diffusing mediums. As our sets and lightings were less perfect than his, we had to use more vigorous methods. Among these were prisms, kaleidoscopes and cylinder lens systems.

To use these devices with any precision it is really necessary for the amateur to be able to see the image of his lens on the film or on a ground glass which takes the place of the film for focusing. A view finder of the usual type is not good enough. However, focusing ground glasses for

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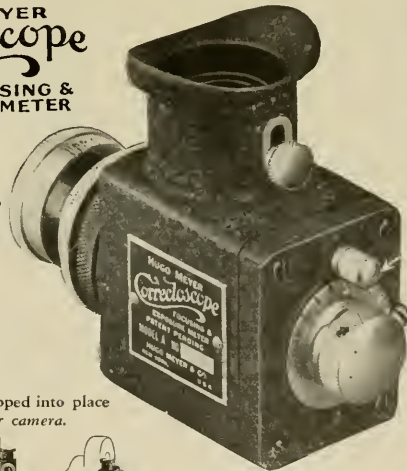


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the lenses of amateur cameras are on the market.

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They are held in front of the camera lens and moved about until



ILLUSTRATIONS I and II
VARIOUS PRISM SYSTEMS USED IN FILMING
THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER



the desired effect is obtained. Naturally they can be moved during the taking of the picture, thus moving the image.

Kaleidoscopes are either triangular glass columns (long prisms looked through from end to end) or mirror systems. Two mirrors held to form a steep-sided trough make a simple kaleidoscope. They are used like the prisms. Cylinder lens systems magnify the image in any diameter desired. One is now offered by a camera manufacturer and is called the "lens modifier." This can be rotated during taking.

Naturally none of these effects is worth much in itself. A really remarkable amateur studio picture could undoubtedly be taken without any tricks at all. In our case we found these devices very useful in covering up the defects of our settings and in giving the scenes the rhythms which we thought they required.

As no stills were taken, illustrations have been made by enlarging frames of negative. The paper prints were considerably softer than the movie print in order to avoid graininess. They show prism and kaleidoscope effects.



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