THE Hollywood REPORTER

June 6, 1955

Farrow Upped to Producer Plus Megger on '80 Days'

John Farrow has been upped by Mike Todd to produce as well as direct "Around the World in 80 Days," to be filmed in Todd-AO and color starting in mid-summer. Cantinflas and David Niven star.

June 10, 1955

Todd-AO Process For 30-Minute Picture

Washington. — The Rockefeller Foundation, which owns virtually the whole town of Williamsburg, Va., has contracted with Todd-AO for the process to photograph what will end up into a 30-minute picturization of the restoration of this historical landmark.

It will be shown to the tourist trade in specially built auditorium that has cost the foundation $1,200,000 to construct.

June 12, 1955

Hornblow Rejoins Magna As Consultive Producer

Arthur Hornblow, Jr., who left for New York yesterday enroute to Europe for several months after completing production of "Oklahoma!" for Rodgers & Hammerstein, rejoins Magna Theatre Corp. as consultive producer on his return. Before sailing July 1 on the New Amsterdam he also will meet with Edward Small regarding productions they plan to make together.

The R. & H. office at MGM remains open for several weeks under the general managership of Barnett Briskin for completion of administrative details relating to the picture, which now is being processed at the Consolidated Film lab in Fort Lee. Hornblow will see the answer prints there with Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein. Premiere of "Oklahoma!" hinges on final installation of Todd-AO equipment now being completed by American Optical Co.

June 2, 1955

TALKING SHOP

I saw about four and a half reels of "Oklahoma!" some weeks ago and was prevented from writing about it by a trip to the hospital. The purpose of the screening was to acquaint a few people in the trade with the new Todd-AO screen process which produces a cineramic proscenium almost as large as Cinerama's from a single 70mm strip of film and without the need of three cameras or projectors. It employs six sound tracks broadcast from seven horns (five behind the screen and two adjacent). The concave screen is 60 feet wide along the curve. Having reported these facts, I am afraid I must cease all pretense to be a screen engineer or a scientist.

I am a movie fan and, after the first half reel, I was so engrossed in the entertainment values of "Oklahoma!" that I didn't know or care whether it was coming from seven horns or from a ventriloquist riding around behind the screen on a bicycle. My first impression (based upon what I saw of it) is that the screen version of "Oklahoma!" is a hell of a good show and I can't wait to see the rest of it.

And there are very exciting new values. One of these is the possibility for the producer to maintain an overall visual editorial tone without resorting to long or obvious historical dialogue. The literary background of "Oklahoma!" is that of the transition of a cattle breeding territory (with its casual and thoroughly masculine range life) into a farm state (with a settled and therefore more feminine home life). The show always recognized this with its "Cowman and the Farmer Should Be Friends" number and the original author gave it an offbeat dramatization in which Jud, the farm hand, is the villain and Curly, the cowpoke, is the hero. The public would have it so, for despite "Shane" and many movies that have shed tears over the "nesters" the saddle tramp always will be a more romantic figure than the plow jockey. Yet the tide of history, economics and eugenics was against the cowboy.

On a really big screen you can say this without stopping to say it. Arthur Hornblow ingeniously makes use of this to show that Aunt Ella's farm is a little agricultural island (with corn patch and chicken hollow) completely surrounded by range land. Throughout much of the action, herds graze in the distance while the plot is unfolding on the farm. And, by making everything bigger and therefore easier to see, the new screen insists on stricter realism. The pathetic little border of flowers around the farm's foundation stones becomes an accurate symbol of woman's determination to stick it out in a man's land. I also noted with interest that the smokehouse in the screen version is a sod shanty — probably the original farm house. Such details may not mean much when the picture is discussed in New York's "21" but they'll mean a lot to audiences in the Midwest and Southwest who have a hereditary kinship for this story.

June 9, 1955

TALKING SHOP

In the last "Talking Shop" I discussed the added opportunities for a visual editorial style that are demonstrated by the Todd-AO process used in "Oklahoma!" This extends to the use of extras and stuntmen. It goes without saying that you can see a larger screen object much more clearly than you can see a small one and that a face that would "get by in a crowd" can be a disturbing incongruity when it is enlarged to the size larger than a star's closeup in the old medium.

Eugene O'Neill, Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appia all fretted over the vacuous, disinterested faces of the supernumeraries that seemed so chronically anachronistic to every conceivable climate and period. They tried putting masks on them and Appia did his best to stage theatre spectacles in which the spear carriers always kept their backs to the audience. On the screen neither device is advisable and, in a period musical, the problem is complicated by the fact that the extras must not only look indigenous to the locale but must be able to sing and dance as well.

Arthur Hornblow solves it in "Oklahoma!" by very careful casting. The cowboys loafing about the railroad station at Claremore looked so much like the real bronc riders and cowpokes I used to see when I went there as a boy with my father (who built many of the steel bridges in the territory) that I was surprised when they hauled off and went into the "Everything's Up to Date in Kansas City" number. Accuracy extends even to the type of chaps that were worn and the way hats were creased in Oklahoma.

This is not supposed to be a review but so many opinions concerning parts of the film are dribbling out in the columns and magazines that I feel I'm betraying no great secret when I say I thought this number was something in the nature of a homespun wow. Charlotte Greenwood is lovable and delightful as Aunt Ella (I can't bring myself to call her "Eller" since I have never heard that Down-East stage rube pronunciation used anywhere in the midwest or southwest) and it's a great joy to see her in a role that capitalizes her charm as a woman instead of caricaturing the length of her legs. Gene Nelson's nimble hoofing during this song takes him from the top of a crate of turkeys to the roof of a moving train and then to the back of a galloping horse.

It's all done with smooth dash and mounting crescendo which is a tribute to everyone, including the cameraman and cutter. The larger the screen, the more difficult it is to make stunts seem plausible. Not long ago I saw a costume melodrama in CinemaScope in which a swordsman, leaping from the top of a moving coach, hurled himself on a mounted dragoon and knocked the man from the saddle. The whole thing could have been managed in the old days of short fast cuts without much trouble. But on the wide screen it looked ridiculous, for the dragoon, simply by swerving his mount, could have thwarted the whole maneuver. There were no photographic boo-boos like that in what I saw of "Oklahoma!"

—Jack Moffitt.