

September 1, 1955

Oklahoma! At \$3.50 Top, May Cue Films' Finale As 'Poor Man's Entertainment'

New York, Aug. 31. — Decisions are to be made shortly on to what extent motion pictures will cease as the poor man's entertainment. Hipoff on how much the trade figures to swing its wares into the luxury class expectedly will be provided by public reaction to "Oklahoma" at NY's Rivoli Theatre. This Todd-AO big-screen version of the Richard Rodgers-Oscar Hammerstein II musical bows Oct. 13 with most seats to be peddled at \$3.50 for evening and all weekend performances.

Execs at a couple of major film companies have frankly stated they'll be looking for "free information" via "Oklahoma" on the entire matter of scales. Specifically, public acceptance of the record tariff for "Oklahoma" doubtless will mean similarly lofty prices for future entries, notably from 20th-Fox with its new 55m process, and Paramount.

Cinerama has done fine in selling "on a grand scale," meaning the \$3.30 top currently being raked in for "Cinerama Holiday" at NY's Strand Theatre. But this maximum price is rung up only on the loges on Saturday and Sunday evenings. The range is \$1.80 to \$2.80 at other times.

"Oklahoma" is to cost the ticket-buyer \$3.50 for orchestra and loge seats for all performances on Saturdays and Sundays and Monday-through-Friday evenings. The balcony locations will be \$2.25. Matinees during the week are set at \$2.75 for orchestra and loges and \$1.75 for balcony.

Special companies have played "Oklahoma" and other legiters at NY City Center at a \$3.60 peak price, contrasting with the \$6.60 and upwards top scale for the usual Broadway musicals.

Paramount, now readying "The Ten Commandments" for exhibition, is particularly interested in the outcome of the Rivoli's tall stakes. "Commandments" will be

Par's most expensive pic, figured to cost over \$10,000,000, and it's a cinch the company will be out for all the traffic will bear at the boxoffice.

"Oklahoma" will be a partial guidepost for Par in judging how much the public will pay and for what. However, Par may seek a \$3.50 price, or more, for "Commandments" even if the Rivoli's test proves unsuccessful. That is, if Par considers its pic warrants the "luxury" price more so than the picturized Rodgers-Hammerstein classic.

If the Rivoli's run is an all-out success, there can be no question that Par will try to lure the same kind of money and, in fact, every independent producer and major studio in Hollywood will be getting high-falutin' monetary ideas with their costlier productions.

But along with Par, 20th has the most immediate concern with the outcome of "Oklahoma" because of two giant-sized productions upcoming. These are "Carousel" and "King and I," being filmed in both 35m and 55m CinemaScope. A form of roadshowing these entries in the wider-gauge format, prior to regular runs in 35m, is being blueprinted and, like Par, decisions on admission price hinges at least partially on how the public responds to "Oklahoma" at those fancy prices.

September 7, 1955

London, Sept. 6. — Michael Todd has run into labor trouble at the Metro-British Elstree Studios, and may be forced to transfer the entire unit to the Continent. Producer hopped to Paris on Friday, presumably to see whether there were any available stages there. Trouble stems from a work-to-rule order by the Extras' Union in protest at the breakdown of their negotiations with the British Film Producers Assn., on overtime payment, and also affects production in other studios.

The overtime ban was ignored last Saturday, however, when Michael Anderson, director of the British sequences, had the unit on call to film with David Niven, who arrived that morning from Hollywood.

\$7,000,000 BUDGET ON 'BEN HUR'

Metro will shoot "Ben Hur" in its new 65m camera process if the system, still in the development stage, is ready for the April take-off of picture, producer Sam Zimbalist reported yesterday. The chances are that this will be the process utilized, he said, with Todd-AO as the alternative.

While the exact budget for film hasn't yet been finalized, it is expected to reach at least \$7,000,000, equal or surpassing that of "Quo Vadis," Zimbalist production which studio shot also in Rome. Costs in Italy have gone up since he filmed "Vadis" in the Italian capital several years ago, according to Zimbalist.

Commenting on the 65m system, Zimbalist said that it combines the best features of all the other wide-screen processes.

September 2, 1955

Gotham office of "Oklahoma" added to the cost when they omitted film editor Gene Ruggiero's name from the expensive programs. They'll be re-printed . . .

Zinnemann was due to direct Mike Todd's "War and Peace" in Todd-AO, but it appears that that production is in abeyance, if not off entirely.