

TODD CONTINUED

and Vistavision, both use standard-size film and wide but less curved screens.)

Todd rounded up a group of backers, who rounded up \$1 million, and early in 1953 the group formed the Magna Theater Corporation. For a while the directors of Magna considered calling the new process "Magnascope" or "Magnorama." Todd sensibly pointed out at a meeting that movie patrons were by this time confused and bored by the glut of "scopes," "ramas" and "visions" already on the market. After he had obtained solid agreement on this criticism, he proposed his choice for a name that would not only be catchy but would stick in the public's mind: "the Todd process." There was a stunned silence until an American Optical executive present proffered that whatever the name might turn out to be it would be only fair for it to contain some reference to the firm that had developed the process. Todd agreed to compromise on the name Todd-AO.

There are some who think that if justice were done the name should be "the O'Brien process," but nobody is less interested in this contention than Dr. O'Brien himself. "Mike," he says, "was the first to recognize the need to give the effects of Cinerama with a single camera and film. It's all due to his imagination. I am glad that the process has his name on it."

Magna's most pressing problem was finding an opening vehicle. Everybody agreed that the musical *Oklahoma!* would be a natural. The only trouble was that *Oklahoma!* had been performed as a stage musical somewhere on earth ever since the spring of 1943 and was so profitable that its authors, Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, were understandably indifferent to movie offers. When they saw the new process Rodgers and Hammerstein were excited enough to buy a substantial block of Magna stock, but when it came to relinquishing *Oklahoma!* they needed more convincing. Finally they were shown a test sequence in color involving two pretty girls and two youths on a picnic. "I found myself wanting to reach for a doughnut and then for both the girls," Rodgers said afterward. "That picnic sold us," *Oklahoma!* they sold for \$1,020,000.

The Todd-AO version of *Oklahoma!* is in color and runs two and a half hours. It cost \$4.5 million to make. Nearly all of the outdoor shots were taken in Arizona after Fred Zinnemann, the director, discovered that contemporary *Oklahoma!*'s vistas were all too frequently interrupted by oil derricks and teeming highways.

The built-in bankroll

If *Oklahoma!* coined money as a stage musical, as a Todd-AO road show it should end up as a kind of cinematic Fort Knox. Already Rodgers' and Hammerstein's *South Pacific* has been announced as one of *Oklahoma!*'s Todd-AO successors, and for the next five years Magna has its choice of any or all of the team's smashes except *The King and I*, which Fox owns. If *Oklahoma!* is the smash hit it is expected to be, other companies will no doubt want the process for their big spectacles. Since Magna will lease the process and equipment to companies using it, also collecting a percentage on each seat in the theaters screening the product, and since Todd's share of both Magna (31%) and Todd-AO (of which Magna owns almost two-thirds) is not only large but built right into the pilasters, he scarcely needs to fidget over where his next cigar is coming from.

This is not at all bad for a fellow who, as Broadway recalls it, went broke for \$1,105,616.78 just the other day. Only last June, Senator John Williams (R., Del.), who serves the U.S. Treasury both as watchdog and bloodhound, reminded the nation that Todd still owed the government \$271,642 in delinquent taxes.

The government and Todd's remaining creditors should soon be able to relax. Todd says he has already raised millions for future Todd-AO ventures, and that millions more are available. This assertion is probably perfectly accurate, for as a lightning promoter Todd is second to nobody in show business.

The dizzying history of Todd's promotions goes back to his early childhood. By the time he met Dr. O'Brien in 1952 he had been, among other things, a dice hustler, carnival roustabout, juvenile violator of the Prohibition statutes, trustee of a bricklaying academy, bankruptcy sale-impresario, building contractor, movie studio soundproof, plunger on horses and cards, dramatist, bankrupt and, of course, all-around switch-hitting showman. In all of these roles—including, and even particularly, that of bankrupt—he has maintained such unshakable self-confidence that his career is worth study as a classic example of that quality.

Todd was born in Minneapolis in a year that has never been positively fixed because the midwife who brought him into the



TODD AT 7 (left) stands outside family home in Minneapolis with his older brother, sister and mother during the years before they moved to Chicago.

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world forgot to write the date on his birth certificate. He himself claims that he is 45 and was born on June 22, 1909. His brother David knows that he was born in September 1910 and is pretty sure that his brother Mike is 21 months older than he is, which would place the latter's birth date in December 1908.

Todd's full name was originally Avrom Hirsch Goldbogen. The name he later adopted was evolved in a singular fashion. As a small child he pronounced the word "coat" as "toat," and "Toat" became his nickname in the family. In time, "Toat" developed first into "Toad," then into "Todd." When he was 17, Avrom Goldbogen married a Chicago girl named Bertha Freshman. When their son and only child was born in 1929 they named him Michael. At the age of about 19, the young husband decided to change Goldbogen to Todd, and as a substitute for Avrom he borrowed his son's first name—probably one of the few instances in the history of aut baptism in which a senior was named after a junior.

Todd's parents had come to this country from Poland in 1906. His father, Hyman Goldbogen, had been a rabbi, but for some years after his arrival in the U.S. he had to work at odd jobs and in small businesses to support his wife and eight children. "We had no governesses," Todd says.

At the age of 5 Todd was out helping a fruit peddler on his rounds and delivering packages for neighborhood tradesmen; at 7 he was contributing to the family income by selling newspapers and tooting a cornet in a boys' band. Whenever a carnival came to Minneapolis he would hustle a job in it. At the concession where the sucker would attempt to win a live duck by throwing three balls into a bucket, Todd was once employed to hide under the concession platform and, at a shouted signal from the concessionaire, work a spring that would make the third ball that landed in the bucket bounce out. The wages were 25¢ a night. On the fourth night he demanded a raise and was turned down. Next night he neglected the spring until a boy confederate of his had cleaned the concessionaire out of ducks. Todd was fired, but the hungry Goldbogens ate almost more duck than they could stand.

In 1918 Todd's father was appointed to a small synagogue in the Wicker Park section of Chicago's northwest side, then a pretty rugged area inhabited principally by poor Polish and Jewish families. When Todd reached the 8th grade at the Wicker Park grammar school he embraced the process that disciples of the late Professor John Dewey call "integrating with the group." At the school there was a crap-shooting group with which Todd integrated so well that the group ended up by integrating with him. He succeeded in getting a share (known in adult crap-shooting as "the pinch" or "the viggerish") of every pot rolled for. In return for this, he decided who should be allowed to play, when and where