



IN THE MOVIE VERSION OF RODGERS' AND HAMMERSTEIN'S MUSICAL "OKLAHOMA!" THE CURVED SCREENS USED WILL MEASURE UPWARDS OF 50 X 25 FEET

## FILM PROCESS CAPS HIS GAUDY UP-AND-DOWN CAREER

by JOEL SAYRE

PROBABLY one of the most unusual friendships in the annals of show business is that now flourishing between Mike Todd, producer, of Broadway, Hollywood and the wide world, and an eminent University of Rochester scientist named Brian O'Brien. The project that brought this unlikely pair together was the creation of a new cinematic process. The process is named Todd-AO and the first movie filmed in it, Rodgers' and Hammerstein's record-breaking musical, *Oklahoma!*, is now being completed. When it is released this spring Todd and O'Brien hope that with their wide-lensed "bug-eye" cameras and new type of curved screen they will end once and for all Hollywood's quest for a way of re-creating some of the magic that movies had for tremendous audiences in the '20s and '30s.

In appearance Dr. O'Brien is a stereotype of the American university professor: a slender man in his mid-50s with thinning gray locks, his mien benevolent, his spectacles steel-rimmed, his haberdashery sober. Todd, in his mid-40s, is brunet and hairy, with a bristling crew cut, piercing dark-blue eyes and a fighting jaw.

The speed of Todd's verbiage is fast, its beat staccato. He is generally taut to a degree just short of ague, unable to sit or stand still or stay away from the two telephones which, on long extension cords, are almost always with him. Asked about his feelings toward

Dr. O'Brien, Todd replies, "I got a terrific twitch for him." Todd signs off their phone conversations with, "Okay, pardner."

As befits a scientist, Dr. O'Brien is calm and deliberate in speech and gesture. "Mike Todd is a great guy," he said not long ago, shyly attempting what he considered Todd's idiom. He then cleared his throat and continued, "Contrary to general belief, he is a very stable citizen. He has never, ah, gone off the deep end, never been unreasonable. He has asked for the impossible, of course, but without being unreasonable about it."

The details of how these two got together are entangled with the history of Cinerama, the thriving wide-screen film process that is the immediate antecedent of the new and very different one pioneered by Todd and O'Brien for *Oklahoma!* Back in 1950 the promoters of Cinerama had almost given up hope of ever getting their invention before the public. That same year Todd was working with Lowell Thomas on the presentation of Thomas' film about Tibet, *Out of This World*. One day Thomas saw a demonstration of the then-experimental Cinerama, became interested, and sent Todd to have a look too. Todd promptly burst into flame. "It'll hit them and squeeze them!" he kept telling Thomas afterward. "It'll hit them and squeeze them!"

The upshot was the formation of Thomas-Todd Productions and the start of work on

the feature *This Is Cinerama*, for which Todd supervised the European sequences. Since its New York premiere in September 1952, *This Is Cinerama* has hit and squeezed them to the tune of well over \$20 million in 17 cities around the world. The second film using the process, *Cinerama Holiday*, is now playing to full houses.

### Todd gets up off the floor

WHEN Todd attended *This Is Cinerama's* triumphal opening, he was far from triumphant; a couple of months before, after some disagreements with his partners, he had agreed to sell out his interest in the venture. But one of his many talents is an ability to pick himself up off the floor fast without wound-licking or self-pity. For one thing, he knew that Cinerama could be substantially improved upon, especially from the exhibitor's viewpoint. Cinerama's effect is created by three strips of film simultaneously projected on a huge curved screen. To take this film, three cameras must be used and there are noticeable joining lines on the screen image. Projecting the film requires three booths on the theater's ground floor instead of the conventional single booth in the balcony. To install these booths and other Cinerama equipment costs as much as \$75,000.

Determined to discover a bugless process