

# Film Review

## Oklahoma!

(Musical-Todd-AO-Eastman Color)

MAGNA RELEASE of a Rodgers & Hammerstein Pictures, Inc., production. Producer, Arthur Hornblow, Jr.; director, Fred Zinnemann; screenplay, Sonya Levien, William Ludwig; adapted from Rodgers & Hammerstein's musical play, based upon a dramatic play by Lynn Riggs; music, Richard Rodgers; book and lyrics, Oscar Hammerstein 2d; music conducted by Jay Blackton; musical arrangements by Robert Russell Bennett; background music adapted and conducted by Adolph Deutsch; dances staged by Agnes de Mille; production designed by Oliver Smith; costumes, Orry-Kelly, Motley; camera, Robert Surtees; art direction, Joseph Wright; sound, Fred Hynes; film editor, Gene Ruggiero.

CAST: Stars, Gordon MacRae, Gloria Grahame, Gene Nelson, Charlotte Greenwood, Shirley Jones, Eddie Albert, James Whitmore. Features Rod Steiger, Barbara Lawrence, J. C. Flippen, Roy Barcroft, James Mitchell, Bambi Linn, with Jennie Workman, Kelly Brown, Lizanne Truex, Virginia Bosler, Evelyn Taylor, Jane Fischer, Marc Platt.

PREVIEWED at MGM Studios, Culver City, Calif., Aug. 16, 1955. Running time: 145 mins., plus 10-min. intermission.

The all-time champ stage musical, "Oklahoma!" is likewise a motion picture blockbuster. Coupled with the new Todd-AO process, a two-to-one gigantic screen dimension of Cinerama-like effect, and a new and terrific six-track sound system, the Dick Rodgers-Oscar Hammerstein 2d classic piece of Americana will undoubtedly be a financial mopup at road-show prices and an entertainment treat for many years to come.

The strength of the vehicle in this case actually overrides the process, since "Oklahoma!" unfortunately does not furnish the best audience-participation type of material for a showy Todd-AO debut. Also, the finished picture evidences in number of instances some photographic "bugs" inherent with any brand new camera and lens. But despite the blurriness of the photography in a few spots, and despite the fact that there are even fewer instances of the system's promised feeling of depth, this Arthur Hornblow Jr.-produced and Fred Zinnemann-directed production is a milestone in what will unquestionably be a much-used, and possibly much-abused, film art form. The bug-eye lens, mammoth screen and incredibly superb sound presage a new era in picture-making on huge canvasses.

"Oklahoma's" most valuable asset on the screen is the very same that cued its successful 10-year run on Broadway and enormous boxoffice on tour. That's the music—which listens as fresh as a spring shower at each hearing even though heard over and over again. And until the score is heard in the six-track Todd-AO sound, it seemingly has never been heard to best advantage.

Zinnemann did a terrific directorial job of transmuting to the screen the simple, bucolic boy-meets-girl story, originally adapted from Lynn Riggs' play, "Green Grow the Lilacs," by Hammerstein and then screenplayed by Sonya Levien and William Ludwig. Hammerstein actually improved on "Lilacs," which was never a Broadway success, and the Levien-Ludwig effort appears to be an even further improvement. Surely the screen version has considerably more to say, from a story point, than did "Oklahoma!" on the stage; the words are bright and the situations flow smoothly. Some may

## NY Pix Critics Sing Praises Of 'Oklahoma'

New York, Oct. 10. — "Oklahoma!" won high critical acclaim from NY's four morning newspapers, in their reviews of the first film in Todd-AO. Critics covered the pic at a preview here today in advance of its world preem tomorrow night (Tues.) at the Rivoli.

Capsules of the critiques, which appeared in the a.m. papers' bulldog editions tonight follow:

News: "Four stars . . . A bouncing bright musical film . . . Gordon MacRae makes an ideal Curley and Shirley Jones is simply delightful as Laurey . . . In for a good long run."

carp at the picture's length (two hours and 27 minutes not counting a 10-minute intermission), but it's hardly a serious point, all other good things considered.

Along with the score, another huge credit for this film is the choreography by Agnes De Mille, a big league job. For the original "Oklahoma!" Miss De Mille was the first to use the ballet to illustrate and heighten a story point. Since then the ballet gimmick has been an integral part of nearly every musical, but it's remarkable how favorably the parent compares with the children. Given the greater latitude of a motion picture stage, with a bug-eye lens encompassing everything and everybody in sight, the story's big ballet to illustrate Laurey's nightmare about Jud is one of the picture's many standouts. Rating a bow are the dancers: James Mitchell, Bambi Linn, Jennie Workman, Kelly Brown, Lizanne Truex, Marc Platt, Virginia Bosler, Evelyn Taylor, Jane Fischer and all the fine toe-workers behind them.

Zinnemann keeps the story flowing and gets terrific performances from every member of the cast, and some of his dramatic scenes are memorable. Three in particular are the smokehouse episode ("Pore Jud") involving Gordon MacRae and Rod Steiger; the runaway surrey scene, and the picnic basket auction, which he makes into a highly tense contest between MacRae and Steiger. Both of these actors raise their standing considerably with their performances in "Oklahoma!"

Film will also likely make a star of Shirley Jones, a blonde dish who is not only a perfect Laurey but has a large amount of sex appeal besides. Of no small exploitation value to the film is Miss Jones taking a nude swim, showing just enough to give plenty of men in the audience a severe case of eye strain. Also socko in the cast are Gene Nelson, as the naive cowboy in love with Ado Annie, played well if not bawdily enough

Mirror: "Most lustrous, ear-enchanting musical to cut a swath across Manhattan."

Herald Tribune: "Movie is true to the original . . . Good illusion of depth and (director Fred) Zinnemann has used it effectively . . . From loge and balcony earth bends even more than Columbus thought it did. From downstairs it straightens out almost evenly . . . Gloria Grahame steals acting honors."

Times: "Film magnifies and strengthens all the charm it had on the stage . . . Matches in vitality, eloquence and melody any musical . . . System has disconcerting flaws . . . Distortions of images striking from sides even from central locations . . . Third dimensional effect not insistent . . . Color variable . . . Some highly annoying scratches conspicuous . . . Still, superlative, solid screen entertainment."

by Gloria Grahame; Charlotte Greenwood, a very winning Aunt Eller, and Eddie Albert, whose adeptly done Ali Hakim furnishes nearly all of the film's laughs. James Whitmore, Jay C. Flippen, Barbara Lawrence and Roy Barcroft also score high in their roles.

From a singing and production standpoint, Rodgers and Hammerstein couldn't have asked better than they received here. From the very opening "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning," by MacRae and Miss Jones, down to their closing "People Will Say We're in Love," "Oklahoma!" is a feast for the ears and often for the eyes as well. This is particularly true of the staging of "Kansas City," where Gene Nelson's and Miss Greenwood's hoofing ability shine. "Surrey With the Fringe On Top" (MacRae-Jones-Greenwood); "I Can't Say No" (Miss Grahame); "Many a New Day" (Miss Jones); "Pore Jud," sung magnificently by MacRae and Steiger; "Out of My Dreams" (Miss Jones), which backgrounds the dream ballet; "The Farmer and the Cowman" (ensemble); "All er Nothin'" (Graham-Nelson), and "Oklahoma!" (ensemble) are the other numbers that will keep this picture running for a long time.

Every credit in "Oklahoma!" is one meriting great personal pride. Not only were the creators associated with a "first," but they all delivered in great fashion to enhance this teeff, i.e., Oliver Smith

(production design); Joseph Wright (art direction); Orry-Kelly and Motley (costumes); Jay Blackton and Adolph Deutsch (who shared the conducting of the music; Robert Russell Bennett (musical arrangements); Gene Ruggiero (editing); and Robert Surtees (camera). There were many others, too numerous to name, who were on this production team. All can boast of a job well done.

Not counting all the coin that went into developing Mike Todd's Todd-AO system, "Oklahoma!" cost around \$6,000,000. With the financing of the system, the Magna Corp. has around \$11,000,000 total in this initial film, but it now looks like a small investment in comparison to the likely huge return "Okla." will bring. *Scho.*