

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53RD STREET, NEW YORK

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 7-7470

FOR RELEASE: Saturday afternoon
or Sunday morning, May 2 or 3, 1936

The Museum of Modern Art Film Library announces the New York showing of its fifth program of motion pictures in a series entitled "A Short Survey of the Film in America", on Tuesday and Wednesday, May 5 and 6, at eight-thirty p.m. in the auditorium of the Dalton School, 108 East 89 Street. Admission will be by card only, issued to members of the Museum of Modern Art.

This fifth program, under the general title of The Talkies, will consist of early sound films including scenes from The Jazz Singer (1927), a 1927 Movietone interview with George Bernard Shaw, and Steamboat Willie (1928), the first Mickey Mouse released publicly. In addition, the short nine-reel version of All Quiet on the Western Front, produced in 1930, will be shown.

From the earliest days of cinematography, inventions had been put forward to record and reproduce sound together with motion pictures, though it was only after thirty years that silent films were to be supplanted by the talkies. One variety of the Edison kinetoscope, or peepshow, was equipped with a phonograph and earphones so that music could be heard by the individual watching the pictures through the peep-hole. There was small demand for these sound-equipped machines, while the silent ones sold by the thousand. Only a few years after motion pictures were first projected on a screen, talking films of a crude kind were given at the Paris Exposition of 1900. Here the voices of stage celebrities of the day, such as the great French actor, Coquelin, were reproduced from phonograph records while on the screen appeared moving pictures of the same man in the act of delivering the speech one heard. Then, in 1912, the Edison Company launched the kinetophone, which had a phonograph behind the screen kept running in rough synchronisation with the film by a fishline extending from the projector at the other end of the hall. But the kinetophone enjoyed no considerable success.

Only after the problem of amplifying sound had been overcome did talking films really loom permanently on the horizon, and then it was the numerous devices and improvements for sound recording and

reproduction worked out by the electrical engineers of the General Electric, Westinghouse and Bell Laboratories which finally brought about a revolution within the film industry. First among the film producers to be interested in the possibilities of the now prevalent sound-films were Sam and Harry Warner of Warner Brothers. After months of experiment, they gave their first public performance of talkies on August 6, 1926. It consisted of several short musical and dialogue pictures, including a speech by Will H. Hays, along with a silent feature, Don Juan with John Barrymore, which had a synchronized musical accompaniment. Then in May 1927, the Fox Film Corporation launched its Movietone Newsreel. Audiences and critics alike readily accepted the new development as particularly suited to the recording of current events and of interviews with public figures. It was not until the end of 1927, however, that the evolution from silence to sound was established when Warner Brothers released The Jazz Singer. On the historic night of its Broadway opening, none of the Warner Brothers were present to enjoy their triumph. The day before, on October 5, 1927, Sam Warner died, worn out by constant overwork during the critical period while the sound film was being carried from the laboratory into the practical realm of entertainment.

The Jazz Singer, acquired by the Museum of Modern Art Film Library through the courtesy of Warner Brothers Pictures, was directed by Alan Crosland. Al Jolson was starred with a cast including May McAvoy, Eugenie Besserer, Warner Oland and others. It was in the main a silent film with subtitles, but it included four dialogue-and-song sequences. The Film Library program will show one sequence in which Jolson sings for his mother and converses with her, and the scene at the end of the film in which Jolson sings the famous "Mammy" song.

The Movietone interview with George Bernard Shaw to be shown in this program has been acquired by the Film Library through the courtesy of Twentieth Century-Fox. It presents George Bernard Shaw in a characteristic monologue in which he chats directly to his movie audience.

Steamboat Willie, acquired through the courtesy of Mr. Walt Disney, was the public debut of Mickey Mouse and his girl friend

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Minnie. The Disneys, who had been creating animated cartoons since 1920, had produced an earlier Mickey Mouse without sound but it failed to secure exhibition, with the result that Mickey Mouse reached the heart of his public through ear and eye simultaneously. Iris Barry, Curator of the Film Library, writes in her program notes: "Mickey Mouse rushed in to success at a time when the human characters on the screen were still struggling under difficulties imposed by the new devices for recording speech and sound. His little figure had an immense advantage over them, for it kept moving - which was more than actors were able to do at that time of rigid microphones....The brilliant use of sounds and of music as an integral part of each Disney cartoon, rather than as a mere accompaniment, constituted in 1928 a definite advance in sound-film technique."

All Quiet on the Western Front, acquired through the courtesy of Universal Pictures, was produced by Universal in 1930. Directed by Lewis Milestone, it was one of the great early sound pictures. The adaptation, screen and dialogue play were by Maxwell Anderson, George Cukor and George Abbott from Erich Maria Remarque's powerful novel of the same name.. The leading parts were played by the late Louis Wolheim, Lewis Ayres and others.

All Quiet on the Western Front was awarded many medals and honors as the outstanding motion picture of the year. Of it Miss Barry writes in her program notes: "It is to the credit of Lewis Milestone, the director, and of Carl Laemmle, Sr. and his son, the producers, that this film utilized the new technical devices instead of being overwhelmed by them. The innate properties of cinematography here, though falteringly, once more reasserted themselves early in the new era of sound-recording."

With this fifth program the Museum of Modern Art Film Library brings to a close its first motion picture series: A Short Survey of the Film in America, 1895-1932. For its second season, starting next October, the Library expects to present a ten-program series which will include foreign as well as American motion pictures. Mr. John E. Abbott, Director of the Film Library, and Miss Iris Barry, its Curator, sail May 16 to obtain noteworthy films from several European countries.

The Museum of Modern Art

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May 2, 1936

TO MOTION PICTURE EDITORS
TO CITY EDITORS

Dear Sirs:

The PRESS VIEW of the initial showing of the fifth program, The Talkies, given by the Museum of Modern Art Film Library, will be held in the Dalton School Auditorium, 108 East 89 Street, TUESDAY, MAY 5, AT 8:00 P.M. The fifth program will consist of the following motion pictures:

The Jazz Singer (1927) Courtesy Warner Brothers Pictures. Two short scenes from this early feature motion picture with sound.

Movietone (1927) Monologue by George Bernard Shaw. Courtesy 20th Century-Fox.

Steamboat Willie (1928) Courtesy Walt Disney. This was the first Mickey Mouse released.

All Quiet on the Western Front (1930) Courtesy Universal Pictures. Nine reels of this famous early talkie which was originally shown in thirteen reels.

Still from these films may be obtained at the Museum or from me at any of the showings at the Dalton School.

This fifth program is of unusual interest because it shows early examples of the revolutionary change in motion pictures that occurred only a few years ago and was accepted with extraordinary rapidity. This program will bring to a close the first motion picture series presented by the Museum of Modern Art Film Library. A new series of ten programs will be given next season.

You are invited to attend or to send a representative. If Tuesday afternoon at 3:00 would be inconvenient, you may attend one of the showings for Museum members at the Dalton School Tuesday or Wednesday, May 5 or 6, at 8:30 p.m. Please use this letter as an admission card.

For further information please call me at Circle 7-7470.

Sincerely yours,

Sarah Newmeyer
Sarah Newmeyer
Publicity Director

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