

American MovieMakers

For Immediate Release
November 1989

FACT SHEET

EXHIBITION "American MovieMakers: The Dawn of Sound"

DATES November 17 - December 4, 1989

ORGANIZATION Mary Lea Bandy, Director, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art

SPONSOR AT&T

CONTENT This is the first major exhibition of films that use the Vitaphone sound process, developed in the 1920s by AT&T through its Western Electric and Bell Telephone Laboratories. These films were synchronized with Vitaphone disc recordings, creating one of the earliest sound-film systems. Warner Bros., the first studio to work with Western Electric on the Vitaphone process, changed motion picture history with Don Juan (1926) and The Jazz Singer (1927), included in the exhibition with other Warner Bros. and MGM films. The exhibition is part of the "American MovieMakers" series, which includes "Directed by Vincente Minnelli."

The exhibition presents fourteen features, many newly restored, and over twenty shorts, made between 1926 and 1931. The original Vitaphone program is recreated as it was presented in 1926 at the Warner Theatre, New York, with the opening address by the Honorable Will H. Hays and a musical program with, among others, The New York Philharmonic Orchestra and the tenor Giovanni Martinelli. Other films featured include Frank Lloyd's The Divine Lady (1929), starring Corinne Griffith; Clarence Brown's A Woman of Affairs (1928), starring Greta Garbo and John Gilbert; Michael Curtiz's Noah's Ark (1928), with Dolores Costello and George O'Brien; and Howard Hawks's The Dawn Patrol (1930), with Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. The short films include performances by vaudeville headliners Fred Allen, George Burns and Gracie Allen, and Edgar Bergen, and dramatic playlets with Spencer Tracy, Pat O'Brien, and Helen Morgan.

"The Dawn of Sound" represents a collaborative restoration project by The Museum of Modern Art, the UCLA Film and Television Archive, the George Eastman House, and the Library of Congress. The UCLA Archive has transferred onto film soundtracks the surviving Vitaphone discs, which were donated by The Burbank Studios Sound Department. Others cooperating on the project have been AT&T, the Turner Entertainment Co., Warner Bros., YCM Laboratories, and John Allen Inc.

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The Museum of Modern Art

- GALLERY
EXHIBITION The development of the Vitaphone process is illustrated in a display of photographs, text panels, and an interactive video program, assembled by Fred Blumlein Associates and Sheldon Hochheiser, AT&T Archives (October 13 - November 29, 1989). Also on view are film-still enlargements selected by Mary Corliss, assistant curator, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art.
- PUBLICATION An illustrated brochure includes texts by Robert Gitt, preservation officer, UCLA Film and Television Archive; Richard Koszarski, curator of film, American Museum of the Moving Image; Sheldon Hochheiser, research associate, AT&T Archives; Charles Wolfe, associate professor, UC Santa Barbara; and notes by Mary Lea Bandy. Published by The Museum of Modern Art.
- SYMPOSIUM A symposium, "Technology at the Movies: Vitaphone and Early Sound Systems," takes place at the Museum on November 21 at 6:30 p.m. Moderated by Richard Koszarski, with Robert Gitt, Richard Dayton of YCM Laboratories, Sheldon Hochheiser, Charles Wolfe, and Douglas Gomery, professor at the University of Maryland.
- TRAVEL Following its premiere in New York, "The Dawn of Sound" tours to the UCLA Film and Television Archive, Los Angeles (February 1990); the Pacific Film Archive, University Art Museum, UC Berkeley (March 1990); The Art Institute of Chicago (April - May 1990); the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (May 1990); the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Summer 1990); the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (October 1990); and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (dates to be announced).

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