

she is dealing with subjects that are almost a second nature to her. She takes the measure of every person, every costume, every house, and every piece of furniture that her eye comes into contact with, and the beauty of a stretch of landscape or a single flower impresses her immediately. All of these things are of the greatest value to the creator of a photodrama, and the knowledge of them must be extensive and exact. A woman's magic touch is immediately recognized in a real home. Is it not just as recognizable in the home of the characters of a photoplay?

That women make the theatre possible from the box-office standpoint is an acknowledged fact. Theatre managers know that their appeal must be to the woman if they would succeed, and all of their efforts are naturally in that direction. This being the case, what a rare opportunity is offered to women to use that inborn knowledge of just what does appeal to them to produce photodramas that will contain that inexplicable something which is necessary to the success of every stage or screen production.

There is nothing connected with the staging of a motion picture that a woman cannot do as easily as a man, and there is no reason why she cannot completely master every technicality of the art. The technique of the drama has been mastered by so many women that it is considered as much her field as a man's and its adaptation to picture work in no way removes it from her sphere. The technique of motion-picture photography, like the technique of the drama, is fitted to a woman's activities.

It is hard for me to imagine how I could have obtained my knowledge of photography, for instance, without the months of study spent in the laboratory of the Gaumont Company in Paris at a time when motion picture photography was in the experimental stage, and carefully continued since [in] my own laboratory in the Solax Studios in this country. It is also necessary to study stage direction by actual participation in the work, in addition to burning the midnight oil in your library, but both are as suitable, as fascinating, and as remunerative to a woman as to a man.

[Madame Alice Blaché, "Woman's Place in Photoplay Production,"
Moving Picture World (New York), 11 July 1914, p. 195.]

How I Became a Motion Picture Director (1915)

Lois Weber

The opportunity to enter the director's field came through my ability to write photoplays. I had abandoned the legitimate stage for the shadowy drama, and was appearing in leading parts on the Gaumont films. Mr. Smalley played opposite to me, and Mr. Herbert Blaché was the director.¹ This was six years ago, and I was dissatisfied with the quality of many of the scenarios submitted. They lacked the force—the "punch," as the expression goes—and were sadly deficient in technique

and construction. The general idea seemed to consider a jumble of melodrama and stage tricks, hastily thrown together, quite adequate to meet the demands of the public. Little thought was accorded to the boundless art essential to a real photodrama. The writers were satisfied to keep the characters moving through a thin plot, insipid in conception, and pathetic in sentiment. It occurred to me that the public would welcome something better. The many undeserved criticisms of the work of screen folks were an indication of this desire; for no amount of clever acting can redeem a character poorly drawn, or a play that is hopelessly deficient in plot and execution. So I began to write scenarios around the personalities of Mr. Smalley and myself.

It was not such a difficult matter for one with my experience in legitimate and motion picture drama to improve on the scenarios of that period. I submitted my efforts to Mr. Smalley and Mr. Blaché, who gave me every encouragement.

When they came up for production I learned a lot of things. No one knows more about a scenario worthy of the name than the originator of it; and yet, few scenario writers have the faculty to visualize a scene with every detail polished to a sparkling brilliancy. Many vague ideas away back in the mind struggle for expression, but can not work into the concrete mental picture. So they are sketched in roughly, and may suggest nothing at all in the way of elaboration to the director, who has little time to puzzle over a writer's unrecorded conceptions. Therefore, as we came to each scene, and the mental pictures were acted out by real characters, I discovered little defects here and there; a chance to improve the action occasionally; a new line to etch in that strengthened a character, and a hundred and one other things that enlarged the scene and gave it a finish.

I was fortunate in being associated with broad-minded men. Both Mr. Smalley and Mr. Blaché listened to my suggestions. They approved or disapproved as the suggestions were good or bad, and I did the same with the ones they offered. The work became a real pleasure when we brought our individual talents into an effective combination, and we were enabled to turn out many original and successful photoplays.

That is the way I acquired my first experience in arranging the drama for the screen. Our combination worked in perfect harmony, and would have continued to the present day but for the natural growth of the organization. I know that each of us shared the same regret when the change was made, even though it gave us separate directorships in the larger company.

Since then I have been associated in a business way with Mr. Edwin Porter, of the old Rex Company; Mr. Carl Laemmle, of the big Universal concern; with Mr. Frank A. Garbutt and Mr. Hobart Bosworth, of Bosworth, Inc., and now I have again joined the big Universal organization with Mr. Smalley. In all my dealings with these men the quality of my work alone has counted.

There may be some truth in the opinion that a good director, like other artists, is born and not made. The position seems to require certain talents that it is impossible to acquire. There is that infinite capacity for detail; an apparent sixth sense that intuitively recoils from the inartistic, and the faculty to visualize, from

the artificial workings of the studio, how a play will appear on the screen. But given all the natural talent in the world, one must develop it by persistent study, or complete failure will result. The illusions that are possible of creation with the camera must be learned; the little tricks of light and shadows; the limitations of photography; and then the assistance that may be rendered by skilful mechanical devices which enlarge the scope of the pictures. One may possess natural good taste in harmonious effects, and may be able to produce them without much effort in the studio; but the matter of how to convey them to the screen is a matter of deep study.

A director cannot afford to slight a detail of the groupings, the acting, the lighting—anything; for upon the details depend the atmosphere so necessary to bring an audience *en rapport* with the play on the screen. The "feel" that they are in the plot, and undergoing the emotional suspense of the characters as the story develops, does not lie entirely in the skill of the scenario writer. The director must act as the medium between his work and the audience, to transmit the subtle influence from the studio to the screen. There is no royal road to this knowledge. It is acquired only by a diligent study of the many intricate details of cause and effect that makes the conscientious director an artist to the finger tips.

It then becomes a labor of love; and the spur to greater effort is the promise that the future motion picture will develop into a source of universal knowledge and influence. The discovery of new marvels that come within the scope of reproduction endows the film with endless possibilities for doing good; and to know that one is benefiting others is the supreme pleasure of work.

The feature films alone have added to the amusement and education of millions of people. The range of literature and drama had its limitations until the motion picture came along; but now the boundary lines of ignorance and poverty are taken down, and the intellectual reservations of centuries are thrown open to millions of new settlers.

It is good to be a director.

[Mrs Phillips Smalley, How I Became a Motion Picture Director,"
Static Flashes (Los Angeles) 1:14, 24 April 1915, p. 8.]

Motion-Picture Work: The Motion-Picture Director (1920)

Ida May Park

Description of occupation and qualifications necessary

The vocation of the motion-picture director is one that commands so comprehensive a knowledge of the arts and sciences, economics and human nature, that it is particularly difficult to describe. To the almost unlimited mental demands on the director is added the necessity of an invulnerable physique. Perhaps that is why the number of consistently successful directors, both male and female, is relatively so small. But

having these things there is no one, man or woman, who might not take up the profession with a certain degree of confidence in his or her ultimate success.

Because it is so obvious, I have not mentioned the necessity for a well-developed dramatic instinct. Perhaps more than anything else that instinct is the deciding factor of the success or the failure of the motion-picture director. Like acting, this ability to direct is an inborn talent, but it can be cultivated to a certain degree through the mediums of training, proper reading, and environment. But again, as it is with acting, the cultivated art can never equal the natural; it will always lack the fire of genius. From the beginning of the production, when the story is being moulded to scenario requirements, the director is the supervisor, the dominant note of the production, and (I am now writing to women alone) it is her sense of dramatic value that imparts to, or withholds from, the picture that indefinable something which can raise it to the ultimate peak of picture perfection or relegate it to the vast scrapheap of "rubber-stamp" productions.

Second to this in importance is the artistic eye, for at all times the picture must be perfect in its angles, composition, and grouping. Our chief aim is to please, first and foremost, through the vision.

Preparation necessary

Preparation, since the demands on knowledge of all kinds is boundless, must necessarily be very general. A college education is a great help if it has not been concentrated on any particular subject to the detriment of others. The whole motion-picture industry is so young and the recognition of the value of good direction so recent that, so far as I know, there is yet no school established which teaches the strictly technical side. Knowledge of camera operation, of lightning effects, and of all the hundred and one less important mechanical details must be gained through work in the studio itself. The difficulty of obtaining a position as apprentice or assistant is unfortunately very great.

Opportunity for advancement

Once in the game the aspirant to a directorship will find the opportunities limitless. Such a statement is not half so extreme as it sounds. The perfect picture is still a thing of dreams. An industry can develop only as the intelligence which directs it develops. The interest of big minds is a thing that until recently has been glaringly absent from the motion picture. But now converts, intelligent converts, are flocking to the banner and results are bound to come in the form of better pictures.

Financial returns

The financial return is likewise unlimited. A thousand dollars a week is a small income for a successful director. It might well be called a minimum. There is no maximum.

Advantages and disadvantages

While production is on there is no rest. No eight-hour day is known to the director. Often work extends far into the night, many times through it, and the next day