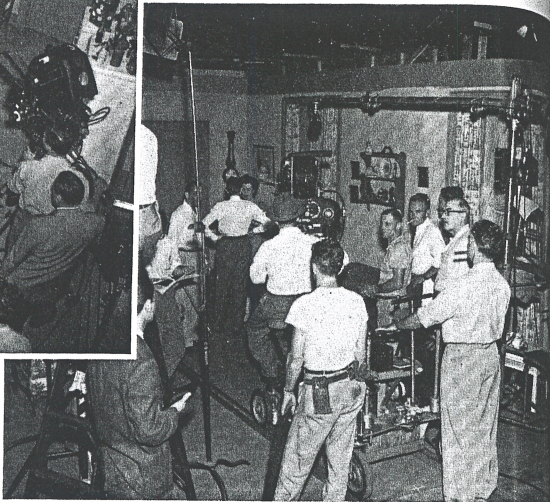


ABOVE SCENE in Jerry Fairbanks videofilm studios shows popular trend of TV film producers toward use of three cameras. Economies are effected by shooting a scene simultaneously from three angles, thereby reducing number of camera setups.

FOR ECONOMY of time and budget, TV film scripts should provide for fairly long takes, with variety achieved through careful dollying in and out as well as panning with the action, as in scene at right for Frank Wisbar's "Fireside Theatre" TV series.



Filming The TV Dramatic Featurette

Videofilms must have all the technical quality the public has come to expect in theatrical films.

By HERB A. LIGHTMAN

A SURVEY of TV network programming for the past six months reveals the startling fact that while dramatic film series amount to just 10 per cent of total network viewing time, these programs hold the lead in viewer popularity by a wide margin. Among those at the top of the list are Fireside Theatre, Dragnet, Big Town, Gangbusters, Gruen Theatre, I Love Lucy, The Lone Ranger, Mystery Theatre, Racket Squall, the Roy Rogers show, Sky King, and the Stu Erwin Show.

It has now been proved to many who were watching and waiting that a live TV show can never have the technical quality and finish of a well-made film, especially when it comes to a dramatic show. The director is at the mercy of too many mechanical failures. Poor

camera handling, badly timed "editing" by the Technical Director, and fluffs by the actors—all go out over the air with no possibility for retakes. As a result, there is a rapidly developing trend toward putting dramatic shows on film. The latest top dramatic show to switch from live to film is the Schlitz Playhouse, and several others are planning to follow.

It is a fact, also, that viewing audiences are becoming more critical, not only of program content, but of technique as well. Audiences now demand quality comparable to that which they are used to viewing on their theatre screens. The burden of developing the mechanical techniques necessary to achieve such quality has naturally fallen on Hollywood, and specifically upon the

cameramen of A.S.C. and other technicians who have adapted the know-how of forty years of filming to meet the demand of the new medium.

After several years of trial and error on the part of the producers who pioneered the filming of the dramatic featurette for television, certain techniques can now be considered standard operating procedure for achieving the best results in this type of production. We can now set these down as guideposts for producers currently entering the field, and for those who will do so at a later date to satisfy the ever-growing audience demand for well-made TV dramatic shows.

The production of dramatic featurettes for television requires a special approach. We must remember that with

only a relatively small number of stations now operating, budgets must be kept low. Production must be rapid in order to fulfill contracts of 13 to 52 weeks, and certain technical concessions must be made to the mechanics of the television medium.

As in any other motion picture, the dramatic featurette filmed for television has its basis in the script. Generally speaking, one should avoid plots which are too complicated, since time limits will not permit full development of complex sub-plots. Actually, in the average film scaled to fill a half-hour time slot, there is just about time enough to fully develop and resolve one central plot line. While minor digressions from the main series of events will add variety, any major tangent will only detract from the force of the program.

By the same token, it is unwise to use too many characters in the short dramatic film. Not only is a large cast expensive in terms of salary, but it is also harder to get really finished performances from a large cast on a light shooting schedule. From the audience's point of view, it is confusing in a short running time to have to identify and keep straight in one's mind a whole hatful of characters. A small cast, limited to two or three main players, will permit the director to work more carefully with each actor, and will keep the plot pattern clear for the audience.

A bit of fantasy in the television featurette is sometimes valuable for variety, but it should be used with caution—always bearing in mind the fact that there are those who tune in late on a program and who would be at a complete loss to understand a subject or technique that is too far-fetched.

Because action in the TV dramatic film cannot have quite the scope of that which we are used to seeing on theatre screens, a greater load is placed on dialogue. For this reason dialogue should be especially well written, using a generous amount of imagery to add to the actual picture which the audience sees.

There should, however, be sufficient action so that the plot does not become "talky." Rules of dramatic construction characteristic of the one-act play also apply to the dramatic featurette, but with one major difference: since television is a commercial advertising medium, most shows are slanted for commercial sponsorship. In most half-hour shows there is a commercial spot at the beginning, one in the middle, and one at the end. For this reason the dramatic featurette filmed for television should reach a definite sub-climax near the middle, so that a commercial can be inserted, and so that the thread of the

(Continued on Page 410)

Television Film Production

By LEIGH ALLEN

Dan Jenkins, radio-television editor for the industry tradepaper, Hollywood Reporter, revealed some interesting statistics about TV film producers in a recent column. Jenkins started a card file back in January, 1951, which contains a listing of every Hollywood TV film producing company announced since then, complete with titles of announced series, etc. Thumbing through it one day last month, Jenkins found the following rather frightening facts: 55 companies no longer in existence; 106 series which never got beyond the pilot stage, if indeed they ever got that far. He contrasts this with his current data which shows today's best possible estimate of the situation: 36 companies with a total of 44 TV series either completed, shooting or definitely in preparation; some 21 additional companies involving 25 "announced" series whose present status is, to say the least, doubtful.

"A year ago," says Jenkins, "it used to be the custom to announce that four different series would get under way at Pretzel Productions starting early next month (it was always 'early next month,' and still is 'early next month')." But even those outfits which have made a go of it have tended to cut their series down to one for the most part, with only four existing companies having as many as three different series actively in production or in preparation. . . . We have a hunch that by this time next year . . . only a handful of hopeful amateurs will be hanging around the fringes and new entries will be solidly backed by money, experience and material."

James Van Trees, A.S.C., has been signed for his third straight year as director of photography for Filmcraft Productions, producers of the Groucho Marx TV show on film.

The major broadcasting chains (CBS and NBC) last month announced they will not enter TV film production, but will leave that production to others.

Screen Producers Guild Journal, last month predicted that the steady gobbling up of film production manpower by television may soon create a serious shortage of such talent in the major studios. Already, Local 659 of the International

Photographers, Hollywood, is frequently hard pressed to supply camera operators and assistants.

Fred Jackman, Jr., A.S.C., and his Jackman Productions Organization photograph coming Red Skelton TV shows film. Show will be produced by Key Productions subsidiary of Russell Seeds advertising agency. Key Productions



Fred Jackman, Jr.

has acquired lease on one entire on Eagle Lion lot, and has completed \$400,000 remodeling job on the which includes accommodations for spectators.

Jackman has designed a special remote control board for his camera there will be three shooting the show by which he can turn cameras on or off individually, put a cue mark on sound tape as an aid to cutting.

Fred Jackman last year photographed the commercials for the Skelton show. His deal with Key Productions runs for period of seven years.

Gil Warrenton, A.S.C., has been signed by United World Films as director of photography on all TV film commercials.

John Boyle, A.S.C., is first cameraman to use the recently introduced Kinetoscope Scene Slater, which automatically loads miniature slate before camera lens records clap-stick cue mark. Boyle used device on "Big Town" TV

AUGUST TV FILM PRODUCTION following cinematographers were actively engaged in Hollywood last month directing the photography of TV film Lucien Andriot, A.S.C., Bing C. Enterprises, RKO-Pathé Studio.

Joseph Biroc, A.S.C., Marion Parsons Prods.

John Boyle, A.S.C., Gross-Krasne RKO-Pathé Studio.

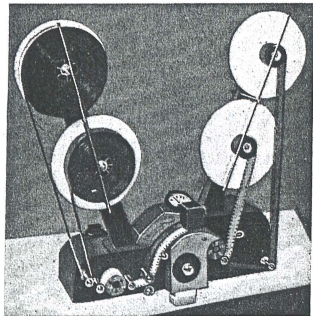
William Bradford, A.S.C., Flying Prods.

Norbert Brodine, A.S.C., Show Prods., Hal Roach Studios.

Ellis Carter, A.S.C., Federal TV

(Continued on Page 411)

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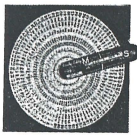
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improved type of viewfinder, discovers during rehearsal that the wheels of his vehicles are behaving in some improper fashion, what can he do about it?

The most obvious thing is to alter the speed of the vehicle. In all probability, if the vehicle is photographed at an angle, the effect, although present, will be unnoticed. But if these remedies should prove impossible—and, after all, the director is entitled to demand that elementary technical matters such as this should be subordinate to his ideas of the action—two remedies are left.

The first—rarely practicable—is to run the camera at a faster or slower rate. The second—which I seem to remember was once adopted by Sir Alex-

ander Korda—is to fit the vehicle with wheels having a different number of spokes; in order to avoid guesswork the mathematics given above can be usefully employed.

The persistence of this elementary fault is due, perhaps, to the fact that we technicians have become so accustomed to it that we do not notice it, or perhaps in some cases think it is unpredictable. But the patron—especially the younger generation—notices the fault, and is curious as to its cause, which I have more than once had to explain to a technically-minded boy. It is high time it was eliminated, along with other faults of the early kinema.

FILMING THE TV DRAMATIC FEATURETTE

(Continued from Page 393)

story can easily be recaptured for the continuation of the film.

The principal physical problem of producing short dramatic films has to do with settings. Here again the problem is a two-fold one: that of budget and of suitability to the television medium. Generally speaking, the budget will allow one fairly ambitious set, or three to give rather sketchy sets. A setting which is conceived realistically must be fairly ambitious and the detail must be authentic enough to simulate the desired background. Therefore the realistic setting is the most expensive and time-consuming type of arrangement.

There is a growing preference for stylized or impressionistic sets which do not pretend to be realistic but which contain just enough line and form to convey the feeling of the desired setting. Such sets can be constructed very cheaply and easily—but they should be designed by someone who knows his business or they will look amateurish. Sets for TV dramatic films should be constructed in such a way as to permit reverse camera angles, thus giving a three-dimensional feeling to the production. Very often this result can be achieved through the use of a "wild wall," which is nothing more than a movable flat that can be placed as needed and dressed to form backings for various reverse angle scenes. Such "wild walls" should be of sufficient size to permit a fair depth of composition.

Where the budget is unusually low, where time is of the essence, or where one desires a simple but forceful background without having to build extra sets, it is often possible to use shadow patterns to excellent advantage. For example—a church can be suggested by projecting a cut-out of a Gothic window

against a neutral-colored flat. A prison is suggested by projecting bars on the wall, etc. In order to achieve this effect, it is necessary to use a focus-spot lamp by means of which small cardboard cut-outs can be sharply projected against the background.

In designing sets for films to be shown on television, large areas of black and white must be avoided, since they tend to produce an unpleasant "bleeding" effect on the TV receiver tube. It is better to use tones of grey ranging from very light to quite dark. In place of black a very deep blue will give better picture results. Similarly, costumes should be designed to contrast properly with the background, as well as to help create authentic characterizations.

Camera technique as developed for the theatre photoplay must undergo certain adaptations in order to give the best results in television filming. Extreme long shots should be used very sparingly, since detail in this type of shot tends to blur out on the television tube. Television is a close-up medium, and that applies to films which are created for the medium as well as to live shows. Compositions should be tight, but centered in such a way as to allow for the cut-off of tube aperture which is characteristic of certain receivers.

For economy of time and budget, the script should provide for fairly long takes, with variety being achieved through careful dollying in and out as well as panning with the action. This implies that your actors will have to be good studies—that is to say, capable of memorizing lines rapidly and retaining them. The horizontal pan shot should be used only when needed to follow action, since it creates an annoying distortion at the edges of most television

tubes. Dolly shots in and out are much to be desired, but they should be kept simple in order not to unduly increase shooting time.

From the dramatic standpoint, a variety of camera angles is very desirable, but each new camera setup means more time and consequently more expense—so it is wise to gauge your camera treatment to the budget and shooting schedule. Similarly, intricate special effects should be avoided, due to the time involved in achieving them and also to the fact that many subtleties apparent on the theatre screen become lost on the television tube.

When undertaking the photography of a series of TV films, in which certain basic situations will be repeated in each film, careful pre-planning with an eye to shooting all takes in one locale at one time will result in considerable economy of production. This is especially true when panoramic establishing shots involving many players are required. Then it is wise to film all such shots at one time for use in the entire series, filing the extra footage for future use as needed. Further economy is possible through use of stock-shots which are available from the various commercial stock-shot libraries. These can be used to establish unusual locales, which otherwise might require long travel by a camera crew to film. Skillful editing or dissolves by the laboratory will give the illusion such scenes are a part of the original photography.

In the final analysis, the viewing public expects the same quality in television film productions it has come to expect in theatrical films. While certain limitations in present video systems preclude the possibility of rendering this quality in full measure at the present time, great progress is continually being made in this direction.

TELEVISION FILM PRODUCTION

(Continued from Page 393)

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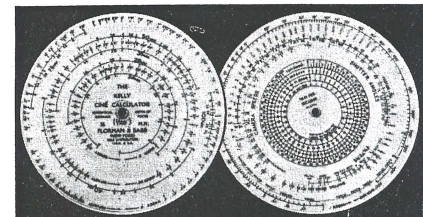
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