

## The Cinema

I remember once being asked to write an essay entitled, "The Cinema or the Theatre". It was a useless intellectual exercise, but one which helped to crystallise the essential difference between the two. Each has its own intrinsic freedoms and limitations. People who say, "The film didn't keep to the book", miss the point. A play is more than just an acting out of a story; a film is more than just a photographed record of a play. Each is an art form in its own right.

"The Sound of Music" was originally a book, called, "The Van Trapp Family Singers". It was made into a stage musical, and subsequently a film; financially the most successful film ever made. It is legitimate for one to say, "I preferred the film" or "I preferred the book", but at the same time it is irrelevant. What is important, is whether each medium was used to its best advantage, and whether the material suited the medium chosen.

It is true however, that early films could in some sense could be compared to the theatre. The very first films, apart from the straightforward factual records of movement, were simply plays capture on celluloid. The camera was set up in front of the stage like a member of the audience. Also film was non-reversal, that is, only one print could be made, it could not be copied. With the advent of reversal film, and the possibility of unlimited copies, vast distribution networks were set up. The public was only permitted to see what the distributors wanted them to see. Hence tastes and fashions in the cinema have been a form of conditioning since its inception.

Most "artists" have at some time worked for a patron, be it the Church or a fashionable court, but fundamentally each was prepared to *create*, even if there was no money involved. Hence many died in poverty, some of their work unseen or unheard. With a film, this is impossible. A film requires a potential audience, before its sponsors will back it. When 276 technicians are involved, before the actors are taken into account, the cost is formidable. In this Country each producer vies for selection by the two main distributors, ABC and Rank. If not selected, his film is doomed to financial failure, and no-one will back his next venture. The crippling distribution system operates in this Country and in the United States, but not on the Continent.

Hollywood's motto has always been, "Entertain and Make Money". In the 20s and 30s they churned out dozens of gangster films and musicals, each made to the same formula. In the 50s it was the sex comedy. In this Country, Hammer turns out a stream of Technicolor horror films. Each comes out of the same mould. And we all know the "Carry On" series.

The stultifying climate under which the "art" of the film has grown in Britain and the United States, has served to ensure that the cinema remains essentially an entertainment medium,

