

Misunderstood Men



EVERETT RISKIN ...
top picture producer.

By Dee Lowrance

HOLLYWOOD

HERE'S a poser for you—how can one be "most-insulted" and "most-forgotten" at one and the same moment?

Sounds utterly, extravagantly impossible, doesn't it?

Yet, according to experts on Hollywood matters, there is nothing strange, out-of-the-way or fabulous about such a condition.

"Producers of pictures," says an authority on the subject, being one himself, "are the butt of more bad jokes, more jibes, more unkind remarks than any other one class of human beings struggling to make a living in Hollywood."

"And at the same time, more people know less about them than about any other group in town. And I wonder why?"

The whys are numerous. They should be explored by anyone interested in the making of pictures.

In the first place, a producer is the backbone of movie-making. But when his name flashes on the screen in the credits, great sighs of boredom usually greet it—except in filmville itself where the name, through personal experience, has a face and body to it.

But there's nothing flashy about producing. No producer ever impressed himself on the bobble sock brigade, for example. No producer was ever voted "the guy I would like to spend the last day of my life with." No producer ever got his face and figure on billboards.

SO producers are forgotten men—except in Hollywood. And there they make jokes about producers. You've even heard some of them. The jokes leak out once in a while—jokes about producers who can't talk English, who can't write English, who don't know their noses from Webster's Unabridged.

Just to get to the root of the matter, come with us and meet one of Hollywood's top producers. His name is Everett Riskin. He's got the extreme twinkle in his eye ever seen. And he's fun to know. (Which is more than can be said of some of his brother producers, who have a sort of Divine-Being complex and make themselves tiresome with same.)

Everett Riskin has just finished two top films, one of which is already cleaning up across the country. "A Guy Named Joe" brings Spencer Tracy back to the screen after a bit of an absence. It brings Irene Dunne back, too, and together they have been cleaning up on rave notices.

Just a little while ago Riskin completed the very last shots of a colorful (truly because of Technicolor) new picture with a fanciful basis, called "Kismet." The leading stars of this film are Ronald Colman and Marlene Dietrich—and wait until you see those Dietrich limbs decked out in gold paint!

Many have remarked to Everett Riskin that he seems to have a penchant for the shall-we-say "less youthful" stars. He's the first to agree.

"I never have found 'teensters interesting," said Riskin, "and I have had reason to feel that I am right in that. The very young have an appeal, to be sure. If you get them young enough, even with actors, there is something of the quality of puppies or kittens. But where cuteness is the only appeal, it soon becomes boring."

"I like the more mature actresses," explained Riskin, "and I am certain that audiences like them better, too. After all, a youngster is lovely to look at, certainly, but her face holds no character as yet, none of the marks of experience. Audiences can see in one of the older stars a bit of their wife, their mother, or any other feminine being of whom they are very fond."

"Beauty," pontificated one of Hollywood's established authorities upon the subject, "must be matured to reach its fullest power."



MARLENE DIETRICH sports golden gams in the film, "Kismet." Producer behind this paint job was Everett Riskin.



RONALD COLMAN ...
perennial favorite

land. Then we found we could get Ronald Colman—well, what could be better?

"We both hit on Marlene Dietrich at the same moment, and there couldn't be a more beautiful woman, especially in the costumes she wears in 'Kismet.' Playing a fairy tale Arabian dancer, she has a dreamlike quality which is new and almost startling."

"While the casting was going on, plans for the sets were being designed and checked carefully by both Dieterle and me. So, too, with the costumes. Then the testing began—testing for the actors, for the costumes, for the sets."

"Music is a very difficult problem in films. When you choose the musical numbers, you have to try to discover new tunes which may become popular, will still stay in the mood of your story and make listeners enjoy it. That's a ticklish problem in itself."

"And all the time you, as the producer, are busy with all these complex matters, you have to keep an eye on that budget you have been given—and stay under it if you value your producing berth!"

FINALLY, the shooting begins and the producer's trials and tribulations continue apace. He must check every detail—from the size of a minaret to whether scissors were invented at the period of the film. It keeps a man out of mischief, anyway.

Eventually, the film is finished and then there is still more work in store for our friend, the harassed producer. First there is the scoring, the matching of the musical score with the sound track. Next come the sneak previews—and some films have had as many as 12 of these. Revisions follow each sneak—with new cuttings worked out for each different test of audience reaction.

Taking Everett Riskin as our illustration of a producer is really taking a top example. For Riskin has made his name known, during the time he has been here, as the originator of many a cycle. He started by bringing opera to films, with Grace Moore in "One Night of Love." Then he instigated the screwy comedy cycle, with Irene Dunne in "Theodora Goes Wild." And, with his "Here Comes Mr. Jordan," he brought heaven to the screen—and he repeats with the airmen's heaven in "A Guy Named Joe."

"A producer," said Riskin, winding up the subject, "is judged more harshly, overlooked more often, than any other one person connected with the making of pictures. But it's great fun while it lasts!"

THERE must be something to Mr. Riskin's contention because he has rung the bell at the box office often enough to be considered one of the prime film creators now in operation.

What knowledge there is of Hollywood's forgotten men, the producers, in the minds of the general public, is usually wrong, according to Riskin.

For example, producers are the cruel money-men, to the world by and large. They hold the purse-strings and grind down the underlings.

"But that is anything but true," insisted Riskin. "Most producers are just as much in a state of salaried bondage as any secretary. A producer has to go to get his weekly check, just as any grip or prop man gets his. True, it is larger than the checks of the grips and props—but then his headaches are greater, his responsibility more tremendous, his ulcers more in evidence."

"Very few of Hollywood's producers, taken numerically as a class, are in charge of the monetary reins of the films they produce. In most cases, the studio head has the last word."

There's an old Hollywood saying which rings true in this case: "A producer is just as good as his last picture." It is almost as true with stars, too. But the producer's head is the first to roll when a film is a flop. And the town's memory is so tragically short. There have

been countless producers, with fine records behind them, who made one bad guess and were ruined in movie-making.

Don't get out the handkerchiefs to weep for the poor producer. That's not necessary, really. They have their fun, too—and their moments of glory.

Motion pictures are probably the only art that is almost completely the expression of a combination of many, many talents. But of all talents contributed to the finished picture, the only single one to make its strong mark is that of the producer.

HERE is the reason, in Riskin's own words.

"A producer, to add any shine to his profession, must be first of all creative. In many cases it is the producer who has the original idea for the story. He then hires writers to express the idea in script form."

And so the producer busily nurses the script until it is in a form from which more definite plans can be laid for production. The first step now is to hire a director and work with him from then on.

"A director is the producer's right hand," explained Riskin. "Together, they cast the film. For instance, with 'Kismet' I had William Dieterle to work with me as the director. Our original idea was to have either Fredric March or Robert Donat as the star. March was not available and Donat was in Eng-



BIG FOUR in a huddle on set are: Everett Riskin, Spencer Tracy, Irene Dunne and Victor Fleming.

(Every Week Magazine—Printed in U. S. A.)