




WALTER BURRELL

Hollywood Happenings


WHEN I FIRST walked onto sound stage 22 at Universal Studios recently, I didn't notice anything unusual--at first. Then I saw the 90-piece orchestra which director Ralph Nelson (he also did Pottier's "Lilies of the Field") had assembled for this particularly impressive scene in "The Battle Horns." And who should be conducting the orchestra but Charlton Heston, decked out in a full-dress tuxedo and waving his baton in a manner that would make Leonard Bernstein envious.

"The Battle Horns" is a very different type of war movie about a symphony orchestra caught up on the wrong side of World War II. Held prisoners by the Germans, they're forced to perform a concert for German officers and Heston stars as the group's conductor. "But I've never had a music lesson in my life," Heston told me later. "In fact, I couldn't even read music before I started rehearsing for this film. But I spent 12 weeks in a crash program learning to conduct and read musical scores." I found his admitted lack of know-how hard to believe as I watched him guide the musicians through a particularly difficult passage earlier.

It wasn't long before the conversation drifted from music to acting and finally to the Negro in motion pictures. "It's a funny thing," Heston noted, "but the whole civil rights movement has affected the movie industry in a way that few people realize. When the NAACP, the Urban League and other such groups began to push hard for training programs which would give Negroes an equal chance in this business, the doors were also opened to many whites who otherwise wouldn't have had an opportunity either. After all, until recent years only relatives and friends of those already in the various crafts and unions ever got a chance to get in. There's a huge wave of employment reform surging through the movie industry these days, especially behind the camera, and the civil rights push deserves much of the credit for making the situation better for both races."

THE NEXT question was obvious and I couldn't help but ask it. What about the Negro in front of the camera? Heston must have been expecting it, because his answer was immediate and unequivocal: "Even the most naive person active in show business today would have to admit we've got a long way to go before the Negro image on the screen catches up with reality. But that's not to say things aren't moving forward. And though credit must go to boys like Cosby and Pottier, you can't forget producers like Sheldon Leonard ("I Spy") who have the guts to try something different--and make it work. On the other hand, I think it's a mistake for producers to stick a Negro in a scene just to please a certain group. If we're going to portray them realistically, let's keep it authentic. Take this movie, for instance. We have a Negro playing a jeep driver because that's probably what he would've been doing with a group like this in World War II. There certainly weren't any Negro officers with white units at that time and it would be ridiculous to play it that way in a movie. Of course, this holds true only with period films and there's certainly no reason why a Negro couldn't be cast as just about anything in a contemporary movie. It's just that behind-the-scenes executives are sometimes worried about the public 'being ready'. Well, Sidney has blasted that myth."

VERY WELL said, but what does Heston plan to do personally to help improve the Negro's image on the Silver Screen? "For one thing," he answered, "I'm negotiating to do a picture about a professional football team and the girl who'll play opposite me will be a Negro. I don't claim for a minute that this is going to make a shattering impression on the movie industry, but



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roles like this are certainly a step in the right direction. If you want me to be more specific than that, I can say that I've been active in several groups striving toward improving the Negro actor's lot both here in Hollywood and in New York."

By now time had run out for conversation, no matter how stimulating, and Heston went back before the color cameras to assume his role as a remarkably believable conductor.

I had an interesting talk with Ossie Davis (actor-husband of actress Ruby Dee) recently on the set of NBC's "Run For Your Life." It seems that Ossie spends more time in the air than on the ground these days. One of live theatre's truly great actors, Davis has been much in demand for films, which means a lot of com-

(TRIMBLE, from page 1)

target area by the federal government in 1963 with specific boundaries defined. When the Anti-Poverty Bill was passed, and federal funds were made available, because Operation Independence was already established and, based on two studies and the groups own knowledge of the needs of the area, had written and submitted an acceptable program, it naturally became the delegate agency for the Office of Economic Opportunity. Other areas had the same prerogative.

But nay, all others allowed the sacrifices to be made, the spade work to be done, and cold-bloodedly moved in for attempted take over. And an editorial in Tuesday's Review-Journal has the unmitigated gall to opine "The Negroes of Las Vegas have assumed that all federal projects are to be aimed solely at their community, with Negroes holding the reins or power".

THAT, HOWEVER, is not the aching, shattering part of this whole melee. There is no sense or substance to the suit filed against board members of Operation Independence. Neither Morgan nor Edwards had ever been hired. But, as the VOICE publisher oft reminds "Every Caesar has his Brutus, every Messiah, his Judas, and every campaign, a Benedict Arnold", so have Las Vegas Negroes in the person of one Robert Trimble.

Bob Trimble has been the "star" witness for the plaintiffs against Operation Independence. As Chairman of the O.I. Board, he headed a committee selected by the Board to recruit and screen applicants for the Manpower Director Post and to bring before the Board the committee's recommendation of the most qualified candidate. When the Board met to hear the recommendation of the committee, not only had a Director already been 'hired', but he had sat in on interviews to select the Coordinator for the program.

THE ONLY PART of Trimble's testimony that is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth is that "Mrs. Key had strong opinions"--period. And they were all evoked by Trimble's arbitrary action before the fact, and his bellicose (near hysteria) ravings when told he had exceeded his authority in hiring anyone, black, white, green, or yellow.

This case is going to be tried in court, and it is not my intention to try it here. However, I do wish it to be clearly understood that, although it is not the point at issue, I, nor any Negro, need feel defensive about preferring to see a Negro hired for a job, nor do I. What's the difference in Negroes wanting to have a Negro as Manpower Director and the Catholics wanting to have a Catholic in the position? Despite the completely contrary to the fact accusation recently made that the Editor of the VOICE and Lamarr McDaniel were "White's Foes", I am not anti-white, but I sure am in the hell pro-Negro, and if I were anti-white, I'd have sufficient reasons to make my prejudices both excusable and understandable as does every living American Negro.

muting between Hollywood and New York. He'll be seen in two straight episodes of the popular series. He guest stars in each and turns in performances not to be missed.

Bernie Hamilton tells me he really digs his current role in "Death Dance At Banner," in which he stars with Henry Fonda and Sal Mineo. Far from the 'good guy' type of portrayal, Bernie plays a cowboy who helps Fonda evade the law. One really amusing line is turned in by Rudolpho Acosta, Mexican-American actor who plays a railroad deputy in the same film. When one of his fellow deputies asks him why he chose the law as a career, Acosta replies: "Where else can you kill gringos (whites) and get paid for it?" It never would've happened in Hopalong Cassidy's day.