The Big House
LIGHT EFFECTS ATTAINED BY INKIES

Technical information in this article was furnished by Len Korb, mechanical superintendent, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios

By F. A. LAWRENCE

ONE of the most outstanding pictures of the year is "The Big House," produced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, directed by George Hill, starring Chester Morris, Wallace Beery, Leila Hyams and Robert Montgomery. Credit for the unusual photography goes to Harold Wernstrom, M.G.M. cameraman.

The mechanical or technical phases of this film install a new level of perfection for the sound era of motion pictures. Camera angles, lighting effects, set construction, mass movement and various other elements seldom found in one picture are all combined in "The Big House."

Undoubtedly one of the finest, most impressionable features of "The Big House" is the extraordinary lighting accomplishments displayed. Those who have witnessed the picture will remember with what accuracy lights and shadows served to portray the grim atmosphere within prison walls.

One scene in particular which transfers the sickening reality, the numbing shock of prison to audiences, discloses the guard conducting the new convict, Kent, played by Robert Montgomery, across the inner yard to the cell house.

This scene, appearing early in the film, by its tremendous force literally places its impact within the prison walls-brings to them with all fidelity kindled sensations of the prisoner condemned to serve his sentence. Here is an effect achieved by contrasting lights and shadows-shadows, cruel, cold, hard, overpowering in their intensity: shadows that seem to breathe the gnawing of prison. This scene clearly indicates what can be accomplished in sound lighting.

Of the seven hundred or more scenes taken in "The Big House," all were illuminated with Mole-Richardson incandescent equipment.

LIGHT UNITS Employed

In recalling several other impressive shots where lighting gave reality it is of interest to know just what light units were employed to achieve the effects. In the scene where Kent's finger prints are taken, one rifle and one dolly, twenty-seven amps combined, were used.

This shot was closely followed by a scene showing the prisoner's arm length being recorded on a measuring rack. Two 5 k.w. inkies, one fished out and one pulled down to cover the torso, lighted the set.

The effects of these shots are highly impressive, due to the lighting treatment, which seems to bring forth more clearly and powerfully than could otherwise be obtained the relentless efficiency, the everlasting constriction of Law wrapping its coils about the criminal.

As the film progresses a scene portrays the interior of the cell occupied by the three prisoners, principal characters in the picture. Chester Morris, as Morgan, lies in his bunk smoking a cigarette. Lights have been subdued yet you discern Morgan in the semi-gloom weeding saladly. The lighting effect here makes one almost feel the darkness, the torturing, stifling confinement. Only one rifle was used, placed overhead in the middle of the set—a straight down shot.

MOUNT RIFLES WITH CAMERA

The panoramic view of the riot in the messhall, a tense, highly dramatic semi-drama, was lighted by overheads and frontlights, sharply focused. The total amount of amps used here was approximately 8000.

Particularly interesting and effective was the close-up shot in the messhall showing Satch's knife being passed under the long table from hand to hand. Machine Gun Satch was played by Wallace Beery. Two incandescent rifles mounted with the camera on a moving perambulator about three feet high furnished the light. This unique shot with the ingenious lighting effect more than volumes tells the craftiness of prisoners, how they defy contrive to "fox" the guards.

The cell tier sequence, where Morgan accuses Kent of planting the knife in his coat, was illuminated with general foreground light, two duces, two rifles and a 5 k.w. The killer fury that writhes in Morgan's face, the ghastly mocking play of shadows in the background, all skillfully held together in one remarkable composition, attest the competence and artistry of those responsible for the lighting effects and the wide range of adaptability of the lighting equipment used.

DRAMATIC LIGHT EFFECTS

Perhaps the most powerful sequences from the standpoint of punishment meted out to convicts are the
dungeon shots, particularly the duma
ge corridor, lighted from overhead by four incandescent
lamps. There is an element of hopelessness and de-
spair in this scene that is quickly felt but presently dissipated by dia-
logue.

Such vividness, such feeling imparted by this shot must be attrib-
uted entirely to the lighting of the set, simple yet tremendous in its ef-
f ect. One sees the vacant, steel cor-
ridor—steady, white illumination, suddenly dimmed to a weird, unnatu-
ral gloom. There are no actors in the scene, no charac-
ters, without movement, without sound—only ef-
f ect, with incandescent light.

“The Big House” carries one along; there is no let-down. The observer is
whirled into the mad, human chaos within the cell-house at the height of
the prison break. Four thousand
amps lit the scene, this masterful scene.

During one day four of the large
panoramic shots were taken, 1500
characters in each shot. Over 15,000
amps were used to light these sets.

Multicolor Lab to Cost
Half Million

THE erection of a Class A struc-
ture for Multicolor, Ltd., is now
under way between Orange, Ro-
maine and Sycamore Streets in Hol-
lywood. It will cost $500,000, to be two
stories in height, containing approxi-
mately 50,000 square feet of floor
space, and will have a completely
equipped laboratory for the manufac-
ture of Multicolor Film.

General and executive offices of the
company also will be in the building.
Every known feature for the produc-
tion of Multicolor film will be incor-
porated in the structure. The labora-
tory is to be air conditioned.

Necessity for the erection of the
plant is due to the increasing demand
for Multicolor Film and the future
program of the company, which calls
for extensive production and expan-
sion, according to H. B. Lewis, gen-
eral manager.

Because of its simplicity and adapt-
ability to standard camera equipment,
Multicolor is to be manufactured ex-
tensively not only for major motion
picture companies but also for use in
industrial, educational and amateur
fields.

Commenting further regarding the
technical features of Multicolor film,
Mr. Lewis says it obviates the use of
special cameras or additional light-
ing. The prints may be projected in
any standard projector.

The claimed feature of the process
is its double negative, which serves
at once as a film and filter. The feat
of making slow-motion pictures in full
color has been achieved with the
Multicolor process. Present sound
systems may be used, the sound track
being colored by either one of the
basic colors used in coloring film.

The Multicolor structure is sched-
uled to be ready for occupancy within
ninety days.

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