

# Progress

by **JOHN ARNOLD**

President, American Society of Cinematographers

THE statement is frequently made, of late, that the progress of cinematography has far outstripped that of the other artistic and technical phases of motion pictures. This statement is not made alone by technical or semi-technical writers, but by the writers of the lay press. Coming from such a source, and at a time when all of the other phases of film-making are admittedly reaching such high levels of perfection, this is a compliment of which every member of the camera profession may well be proud.

It is a source of great gratification to this writer that the American Society of Cinematographers and its individual members have been able to do so much in bringing about this progress. Cinematography itself is unique in that it is both an art and a science and cinematographers are likewise unique in that they are at once artists, technicians, and researchers. For they not only utilize the developments which constantly emerge from the laboratories of the film and equipment manufacturers (laboratories which are, incidentally, in many cases directed by A.S.C. members), but they carry on a greater or lesser degree of independent practical research themselves. This experimentation often entails considerable expenditures of money, time, and labor. These expenditures are willingly made by the various cinematographers concerned, despite the pressure of their work, and the prevailing world-wide depression. I do not know of a single cinematographer who does not constantly carry out such research, not only when he is employed, but between pictures. Many of them maintain considerable equipment solely for this purpose; some of them even have complete miniature studios and laboratories.

In addition, the American Society of Cinematographers, through its various research, educational and production committees, as well as through special committees and through collective experiments by the membership as a whole, is constantly engaged in research on the various practical problems affecting cinematography. Not only does it experiment with new materials and equipment, but it constantly strives toward the general betterment of the industry.

During the past half-decade, there have been innumerable examples of this. Some of them have received international publicity, others have been known to only those directly affected. One of the Society's earliest achievements was in connection with the introduction of panchromatic film and incandescent lighting. It was, it will be recalled, an A.S.C. member, Ned van Buren, who first dared to photograph an important production entirely upon the then new and untried panchromatic film. Following this came many individual and collective experiments which resulted in the universal adoption of that type of emulsion. Not long after, it was again the A.S.C. which pioneered the use of incandescent illumination, both individually, and in the famous Mazda-Marathon which was conducted by the A.S.C. with the cooperation of Warner Brothers Studios and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. As a result, practically every studio is today on a 1100 per cent incandescent basis.

Again, with the introduction of sound, it was again A.S.C. men who photographed the first talking pictures, and A.S.C. members, especially Douglas Shearer and Roy Pomeroy, who made outstanding contributions to the new science of sound-film recording. It was, too, largely through the individual and collective efforts of the Society and its members that the camera regained its mobility, which had been lost through the use of booths. And the contributions of other members to the

development of practical portable recording outfits is too well known to need repetition.

The research conducted by the Society during the short-lived wide-film craze, though less publicized, was no less exhaustive and valuable, as it was practically the sole complete, industry-wide survey of the problem ever made. When and if the wide film idea is revived, as it undoubtedly will be, the work of that committee will undoubtedly furnish a basis for the industry's final action on the problem.

More recently, the Society's experiments with the new super panchromatic emulsions generically termed "Fast Film," hastened the industry's complete adoption of these films, and are too well known to need detailed repetition.

Since then, the Society's study of the problem of obtaining better quality in release-prints, though it is even yet far from complete, has materially bettered the industry's release-prints, and awakened the producers, distributors and exhibitors of the country to the vital need of better and more uniform release-prints.

Most recently, the society's consideration of the grave economic crisis confronting the industry today, as embodied in this writer's recent message to the industry, has aided in bringing about a more thoughtful and disinterested consideration of the problem by all concerned.

But these things tell only half of the story. They do not begin to cover the vast deal of patient individual research and experimentation conducted by individual cinematographers. This work, though unheralded, extends to every phase of cinematography. Despite the fact that it is so little known, it has been the foundation for much of the astounding progress of cinematography. It has touched the artistic and the technical sides of camerawork, and ranged from the intricate problems of lens and camera design and trick cinematography to simpler questions of lighting, filtering and even camera-maintenance.

The results, however, are vividly apparent upon the screens of countless theatres. Practically every picture released contains action which could not have been photographed even a short two years ago. Two outstanding examples of this come to mind: "Hell Divers" and "Strangers in Love." Neither of these productions could have been made in its present form even a year ago. Today, we accept them without question, and without thought for the achievements of the cinematographers whose researches into process photography made them possible.

But, great as it is, the progress made thus far in the art and technique of cinematography is but a small thing compared with what is to come. Cinematography is going to outstrip even its previous amazing progress; and the American Society of Cinematographers and its individual members will inevitably be in the forefront of this development. We have done much already, and established glorious traditions; but we are bound now not only to live up to these traditions, but to establish newer and more glorious ones.

