

## **Moving Pictures**

### **The History of Cinema**

This special report is in two parts. The first looks at cinema's early development. Where did it come from and who invented it? Our journey begins in the Far East.

Moving images have always been popular. In China, for example, there were shadow plays 5000 years ago. These used firelight to project images of puppets onto the screens. So projection is a very old idea. But cinema only became possible when this old ancient idea met a new European one – photography.

The two came together in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. That's when photos were first used in "magic lanterns". Before then, these early projectors had used glass slides. The pictures on these slides were painted by hand and very expensive. In comparison, photos were cheap and easy to produce.

So – by 1850 projection and photography had come together. But the result still wasn't "cinema". How could it be when the pictures didn't move? The solution to that problem came in several stages.

The first, in 1877 came via English inventor Eadweard Muybridge. He discovered a way to take photos very quickly, one after the other.

Eleven years later, an American called George Eastman produced the first celluloid film on a roll.

By 1890 it was possible to take up to 40 photos per second.

Next, in 1893, came another invention – Thomas Edison's "Kinetoscope". The kinetoscope projected moving pictures, but it had three problems, (a) it was noisy; (b) the pictures it produced were very low quality; (c) only one person could watch a kinetoscope at a time.

Before cinema could be born one last invention was necessary – a quiet machine able to project high quality pictures onto a large screen. And the men who produced that were two French brothers from the city of Lyons.

#### Louis and Auguste Lumiere

"The Lumiere Cinematograph" allowed large audiences to watch "moving pictures". Its debut took place on 28 December 1895 in a Paris café. That day the Lumieres showed several short films. They were all documentaries and one of them was called "Arrival of Train at the Station". Afterwards, Auguste Lumiere talked to reporters about his invention. "It can be exploited for a certain time," he said, "but it has no commercial value at all."

Well, he was completely wrong. In less than a year cinemas had started to open in Europe and America. The public's appetite for films was instant and enormous – which meant that more and more had to be made. By 1905 movie making wasn't just an interesting idea – it was a successful new industry. And by 1915 it was an industry with a capital – Hollywood, USA.

#### The Silent Era

Hollywood was established in 1912. That's when a group of New York film producers decided to open a new studio on California. Why California? Because climate was good, labour was cheap and there were lots of beautiful locations nearby.

As a result of their decision, Hollywood soon attracted film actors and technicians from all over the country. While World War One was fought in Europe, and for several years after

these cinema pioneers made thousands of black and white films – comedies, tragedies, fantasies, romances and historical dramas. This was the silent era – the era of Charlie Chaplin, Rudolf Valentine, Clara Bow, Douglas Fairbanks and Busier Keaton. It was called “silent” because there was no recorded sound. Instead, the actors’ dialogue appeared on cards shown every 15 or 20 seconds. At the time it seemed perfectly normal. That’s simply how films were.

In fact, even as late as 1924, director D.W. Griffith declared “There will never be speaking pictures”. But Griffith, like Auguste Lumiere 29 years before, was wrong. A revolution was coming and its name was...

### The Talkies

Recorded sound ended the silent era in 1927. That’s when Al Jolson both spoke and sang in “The Jazz Singer”. (His first words were “Wait a minute, wait a minute folks. You ain’t heard nothing yet!”) The impact on cinemagoers was enormous. They loved “The Jazz Singer” and demanded more and more talking pictures. The studios quickly obliged and by 1930 audiences were up from 57 million a week (1926) to 110 million a week. Only 31 years after the Lumieres’ First film-show, modern movies had arrived.

In 1932 Technicolour arrived. Coming only five years after the sound revolution it made cinema more popular than ever. So popular, in fact, that the next 20 years are often called Hollywood’s “golden age”. In the 30s and 40s millions queued every week to see films produced by the top studios. These included Paramount, RKO, Warner Brothers and – most successful of all – Metro Goldwyn Mayer.

Run by Louis B.Mayer, MGM’s motto was more stars than there are in heaven. This referred to the “family” of film stars who had contract with the studio. (In those years actors only worked for one company.). During the 30s and 40s MGM’s family included the Marx brothers, Greta Garbo, Jean Harlow, Clark Gable, Joan Crawford, Spencer Tracy, Judy Garland, Gene Kelly.

It was an impressive list, but only one of several. All the other “dream factories” had stable of box-office names too. In fact, competition was an important part of Hollywood’s success. The reason was simple. Each studio wanted to make bigger, better films than its rivals. After 1948, though, movie tycoons like Louis B.Mayer began to face another kind of competition. And this time it wasn’t from inside the cinema industry – it was from outside.

America’s TV revolution began in the years following World War Two. At first Hollywood didn’t worry. After all what was there to worry about? John Logie Baird’s invention only produced small, black and white pictures. It was a gimmick. It wouldn’t last. But as more and more people bought sets cinema queues began to get shorter. And not just 5 % or 10 % shorter. By the early 50’s, weekly audiences had been cut in half to 50 million. Clearly the movie industry had a serious problem on its hands.

Studio bosses tried to solve the problem in several different ways. These included: CINEMASCOPE – This technique made it possible to show films on a wider screen than ever before. Several action-packed CinemaScope films were made. The first, a Biblical epic, was called “The Robe”.

3D – To watch 3D or “three-dimensional” films, audiences had to wear special glasses. These gave images on the screen extra height, width and depth. The idea was used in several 50s horror films, but never really caught on.

CINERAMA – Three projectors were needed to show Cinerama film. Each one filled a third of a huge, curved screen. Again the idea didn't catch on – this time because it was too expensive.

SMELL-O-VISION – Another Hollywood scheme for winning back TV audiences was Smell-O-Vision. This was an electronic system, which sent the smell of roses, gun smoke, coffee, etc. (whatever was showing on the screen) over movie-goers during a film.

70MM FILM – Before the 50s, movie cameras and projectors used film which was 35 mm wide. The arrival of 70mm film produced a much bigger, clearer image. 70mm is still used for some films today.

Basically, then, the Hollywood studios competed with television by making films bigger, better and more realistic. Some of their ideas succeeded – others failed. But what really saved the cinema industry wasn't technical development at all – it was another 50s invention – teenagers.

Movies and youth culture discovered each other in the mid-50s with two key films – “Rebel without a Cause” (1955), starring James Dean, and “Rock around the Clock” (1956), starring early pop idol Bill Haley. For Hollywood it was a turning point. Before then, the average cinema-goer had been over 30. Suddenly, all that began to change. And it's a change that's continued ever since. Today 75% of all box-office tickets are sold to people between the ages of 15 and 25.

These days, cinema and television live side-by-side. The movie industry didn't collapse (as some people predicted) in the 50s and 60s. But cinema audience-figures are still low compared to 50 years ago. In Britain, for example, most people only see one or two films per year. In Europe it's three or four and in America six or seven. Because of this, modern movie making has become very different from how it was in Louis B. Mayor's time. For example:

- Hollywood has more competition from international film-makers now than ever before;
- Enormous picture palaces with one screen are being replaced by “multi-screen” cinemas;
- There are still large studios, but the old “studio system” (with groups of stars working for one company) has disappeared;
- Modern films have three lives instead of one. First, they appear in the cinema, then on video, and finally they're shown on TV.

1. What attracted such audiences to watch films at the cinema?
2. Why did the age of cinema-goers change?
3. Why do people prefer to watch films at the cinema instead of relaxing on the couch in front of their TV sets?

Questions:

1. Where did the idea of projection appear?
2. When did the cinema become possible?
3. When and how did pictures become moving?
4. Disadvantages of kinoscope.
5. What invention was necessary for the cinema to be born?
6. Did Lumiere's words that "cinematograph has no commercial value at all" come true?
7. Speak about the beginning of Hollywood and silent era.
8. When and how did moving pictures arrive?
9. Speak about the "golden age" of Hollywood.
10. What was the motto of MGM? Express your attitude to it.
11. Prove that competition was an important part of Hollywood's success.
12. Speak about the influence of TV on cinema. How did Hollywood bosses try to solve the problem?
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