

THEY LAUGHED AT HAMLET!

With \$40, four players and a fixed focus 8mm. camera, a quartet of college cutups have done in the Great Dane

DONNA LINDBECK

USING a minimum of photographic equipment and a maximum of ingenuity, a group of Eugene, Oregon, amateur filmers have gone a long way toward proving that "Home Movies Are Better Than Ever," with their \$40 version of *Hamlet*. No epic, their movie nevertheless is an effective parody of the Shakespearian drama. And it has rolled nearly 2000 spectators in the aisles since it was finished.

The 40 minute 8mm. movie is the product of three months of weekend work by three University of Oregon students, Jim Blue, Al Barzman and Bob Chambers and several of their friends. They decided upon *Hamlet* because they were well acquainted with the play. Blue, who directed the movie, had seen Olivier's version five times. They decided upon a parody, rather than a more serious play, because they wanted to relax after school hours. And besides, didos are easier than drama, any day.

Blue owned an 8mm. Bell & Howell Sportster movie camera, which had a custom built rewind. The lens he used was an *f*/2.5 fixed focus. And the 13 rolls of Super X black and white film accounted for almost all of the \$40 which he spent. He estimated that 50 feet of film would run about four minutes of screen time. This meant consuming only 10 rolls of film for the 40 minute show; the rest of the footage was cut to improve the tempo of the movie.

After he began work on the production, Blue purchased three 350 watt medium-beam reflector-flood lamps, the only major addition to his equipment. Because there were no properties or scenery to get in the way, three "grips" carried the flood lights and followed the actors about.

Blue did not own a titler, especially of the scroll variety. So in order to save money he constructed one out of a round oatmeal box and turned it by hand. "The jerky motion of the title just helps set the mood for the movie to follow," says Blue good humoredly.

To announce the name of the picture, Blue made a



JIM BLUE, right, outlines his ideas for the next scene, as Bob Chambers, Al Barzman and Martha Stapleton listen.

paper gong patterned after the J. Arthur Rank type of movie opening. Horace Robinson, director of the University of Oregon Theatre, consented to play the slave who strikes the gong. For the first few blows he was to pretend to strike the gong; then, on the last stroke, he actually was to hit this paper gadget—which was supposed to tear down the middle. However, because the paper had been stiffened with sizing, it completely shattered as he struck it.

Surprised and a bit shocked, Robinson turned toward the camera and put his finger in his mouth—like a small boy who is afraid he is going to be scolded. This unexpected turn of events was one of the most humorous scenes in the movie.

Robinson also helped the students solve one of their most important problems, the need for costumes and a stage. For he let them use costumes from the theatre's wardrobe and the bare stage of the theatre. From these stock materials, the actors selected costumes that were as representative as possible of the type usually worn in *Hamlet*. But an occasional anachronism, such as the saddle shoes that Bob Chambers wore, just added to the comic effect which was desired.

An open grave was required in one of the scenes of the play, as you well remember. Digging a hole in the ground six feet long, six feet deep and three feet wide is a big job, and when the time came for this work to be done, all of the actors claimed they had to put on costumes and apply makeup. So director-producer-cameraman and technical-adviser Jim Blue also became a grave digger.

Properties for the movie were relatively inexpensive. Small items such as 20 cents for popcorn, 10 cents for dry ice, one smoked mackerel and a tube of toothpaste were all that were required. The dry ice was used very cleverly to simulate poison. A paper cone, containing the ice and sealed at the bottom, was placed in the ear of one of the actors. Into it another [Continued on page 78]



CHAMBERS, in one of his many roles, lays to rest the body of Ophelia, nee Lois Williams.



THE QUEEN, as played by Martha Stapleton, mimes her role with force if not subtleness.

side of the screen looked normal to an observer in a side seat; but the group at the near side looked thin as matchsticks.

8. The peripheral vision advantage claimed for Cinerama applies most effectively to those seated up front; and becomes progressively less toward the rear of the theatre. The Broadway Theatre, New York, in which these first commercial showings are held, is an old legitimate house essentially square in shape; in a longer and narrower auditorium only a relatively small percentage of the audience would be exposed to the full effect of Cinerama.

And technically unskilled reviewers, reporting the premiere in the New York daily press, though apparently they did not note all the mechanical flaws, did comment on some; and also noted that the presentation offered only spectacular scenes, no dramatic or emotional ones.

Beginner's luck

[Continued from page 65]

may be accomplished by various methods from training a spotlight through the blades of a slowly turning fan to actually using a projector as a spotlight and running it slow enough to create the flicker.)

47. M.S. Looking towards the screen and above the heads of the guests as title is seen. (Title can be painted on a sheet of white or colored showcard and taped to screen to represent the projected image.)

48. C.U. Representing Father's screen as the action begins. As for Father's movie, it hardly seems necessary to give a scene by scene breakdown of his cinematic attempts. Most movie makers of any experience will, I am sure, be able to recall the pattern of mistakes made by the beginner. Let's assume that our hero has tripped over every commonly-known stumbling block in the book, from a mishmash of badly underexposed scenes to a series of glaring overexposures that cause one of the viewers to don sunglasses. Cut often to reaction shots of the guests. For instance, a screen view that is sharply slanted might be followed by a shot of everyone unconsciously leaning their heads in the same direction.

Later, a scene or two of outrageous panning causes one nauseous guest to excuse himself quickly from the others. This begins the exodus of the audience who one by one leave for the kitchen where Mother is awaiting each new arrival with food and drink.

49. M.S. Guests gathered in the kitchen. They are enjoying themselves as they gesture their dissatisfaction with the movie.

50. S.C.U. Truck driver alone on divan and asleep.

51. S.C.U. Father beside running projector. He too is asleep.

52. C.U. Junior looking through kitchen door as he watches screen in the other room.

53. C.U. Father's screening showing title "The End." Cut quickly to

54. Same as 52. Junior turning to say:

Title. "*Hurry. It's over.*"

55. M.S. Everyone hurrying out of kitchen to return to their seats.

56. M.S. Sister turning on room lights just as everyone gets seated.

57. Same as 51. Father still asleep, projector still running.

58. M.S. Mother placing finger to her lips for silence as she almost bursts into laughter. She starts to clap her hands, and the others also begin applauding as they turn toward Father.

59. Same as 57. Father awakening with a start. He blinks, smiles sleepily and reaches over to turn off the projector.

60. S.C.U. Truck driver awakens, starts to applaud and then rises from his seat. As he does so, an envelope falls from his coat pocket.

61. C.U. Envelope on the floor, as feet move past it.

62. M.S. Junior sees envelope on floor, picks it up and looks at it before he speaks.

Title. "*Hey, Pop. Here's a letter addressed to you.*"

63. M.S. Father, all smiles, turns away from guests to answer Junior, as the youngster comes into the scene and hands Father the envelope.

64. S.C.U. Truck driver looking hastily in his coat pocket for something. He moves closer to father, looks briefly at the envelope, snaps his fingers and says:

Title. "*I knew there was something I forgot. My boss asked me to deliver that to you.*"

65. Same as 64. Truck driver finishes speaking. Father looks again at envelope and they go through a bit of pantomime regarding its contents until Father is urged to open it up and see. This he finally begins and starts reading.

66. C.U. Letter in Father's hands informs him that the package left by their driver was "delivered in error." Spotlight this line if possible.

67. M.S. Father collapsing into someone's arms. They fan him and try to revive him as we fade out.

Title. Normally this should be

THE END

But it is only . . .

68. M.S. Camera store entrance, as Father loaded with camera equipment exits happily. Camera follows for awhile as a double exposed title fades on, reading

"THE BEGINNING"

Fade out slowly as Father walks away.

They laughed at Hamlet!

[Continued from page 66]

actor poured water from a bottle which was supposed to be filled with poison. The vapor that arose from the cone made it appear that a very vicious liquid had been poured into the actor's ear.

As those who had seen *Hamlet* know, quite a few characters are involved in the play and in the last scene many of them are killed. In Blue's version only four persons are used in the cast, because Bob Chambers plays ten characters, ranging from the grave digger to (in an emergency) Hamlet's mother. Chambers's versatility brought many a laugh from later audiences; but it also presented a problem in production. In the final scene, all of the characters come together for the duel between Hamlet and Laertes. Because Chambers's many roles meant several costume changes, it would have been almost impossible to shoot chronologically.

Blue worked out a planned sequence of 135 shots to solve this problem. Each take was planned out in advance, including the different characters' positions and gestures. Then Blue gave each take a number. This enabled him to shoot consecutively all of the scenes in which Chambers played one role and wore one costume, thus eliminating innumerable changes and the loss of time that would have resulted.

A local camera shop, Dot Dotson's, which had loaned Blue the tripod he used, now loaned him its splicer. He spliced the film together, making the final sequence appear to be one of continuous action.

The parody was clever enough to produce laughs without dialog, but Blue and company weren't satisfied. Background music was provided easily with a record player and amplifier. Added to this a few comments spoken into a microphone connected to the same amplifier pointed up high spots.

Blue used the rheostat on the 8mm. projector to speed up the action occasionally when showing the film. "If audience reaction was lagging, we found that it improved if the projection speed was slightly increased," he said. "It went over best when we hit them with a funny situation before they had time to recover from the last one."

The movie was presented first at about the time *Quo Vadis* was showing theatrically in Eugene. Thus it was only natural that the slogans for the Blue production should be a parody on the Hollywood film. "A Cast of Four," began the billing, and went on with: "Stupendous, Colossal, Big." "Filmed in Glorious Black and White."

And so far nearly 2000 persons have loved it! Did they want, all these years, to laugh at *Hamlet*?