

Shakespeare In 8mm

With an 8mm camera and \$40.00 to spend, a college group filmed "Hamlet," giving it a comic twist.

By ZENDA SANDERS
OPL Photos By Phil Sanders

AN HILARIOUS parody of the Shakespearean tragedy, "Hamlet," which Jim Blue, speech major at the University of Oregon in Eugene, suddenly dreamed up and then filmed in 8mm, is the talk of the town.

This slapstick amateur movie was produced with the aid of a small group of University students, who really put the "ham" in "Hamlet." Four people handled the major roles, and it took three months of weekend filming for a total cost of approximately \$40. It was shown to an estimated 2,000 people, and aptly described by one teen-ager as "the craziest thing I have ever seen."

The decision to make the parody was the result of one member of the cast having seen Olivier's movie version of

"Hamlet" no less than five times. Why not, Blue thought, substitute comicality for sadness and make a real show?

Four campus comedians who also had seen the tragic version made up the cast. Bob Chambers portrayed ten parts—the ghost of Hamlet's father, Polonius, the King, the grave-digger, Laertes, Horatio, Osric, the Bugler, the Player King, and the Player Queen. Al Barzman took the part of the melancholy Hamlet; Martha Stapleton was Queen Gertrude, Hamlet's mother; while the fair Ophelia was played by Lois Williams. Phil Sanders assisted with the lighting and shot stills for local publicity.

The movie itself was filmed with a Bell & Howell 8mm Sportster camera, having a custom-built back-wind and an f/2.5 fixed-focus lens. A tripod and splicer were borrowed from a camera shop in Eugene. To this equipment, Producer Blue added 13 rolls of Super-X black-and-white film, and three 350-watt medium beam reflector flood-lamps. He was now "in business," and the operation began. With no scenery and no props, Jim put all the materials into three hand satchels and pursued his actors. Photographer Sanders did the same. Scenes were taken on the University Theater stage, in a gravel pit along the Willamette River, and on the campus.

The publicity stills advertised the pro-

duction in Eugene papers, and billboards carried blurbs like, *Stupendous, Colossal, Filmed in Glorious Black-and-White*. Blue's satire was perhaps inspired by the billing of the popular movie, "Quo Vadis," which was playing locally at the time.

For lack of a title, the ingenious Blue made one from a round oatmeal box. It was painted black, with a spindle inserted through the center ends so that the gimmick could be turned by hand. The jerky motions which resulted later delighted the audiences, and put them in the proper spirit for the scenes which followed.

The dramatic opening bore a striking resemblance to the introductions of J.

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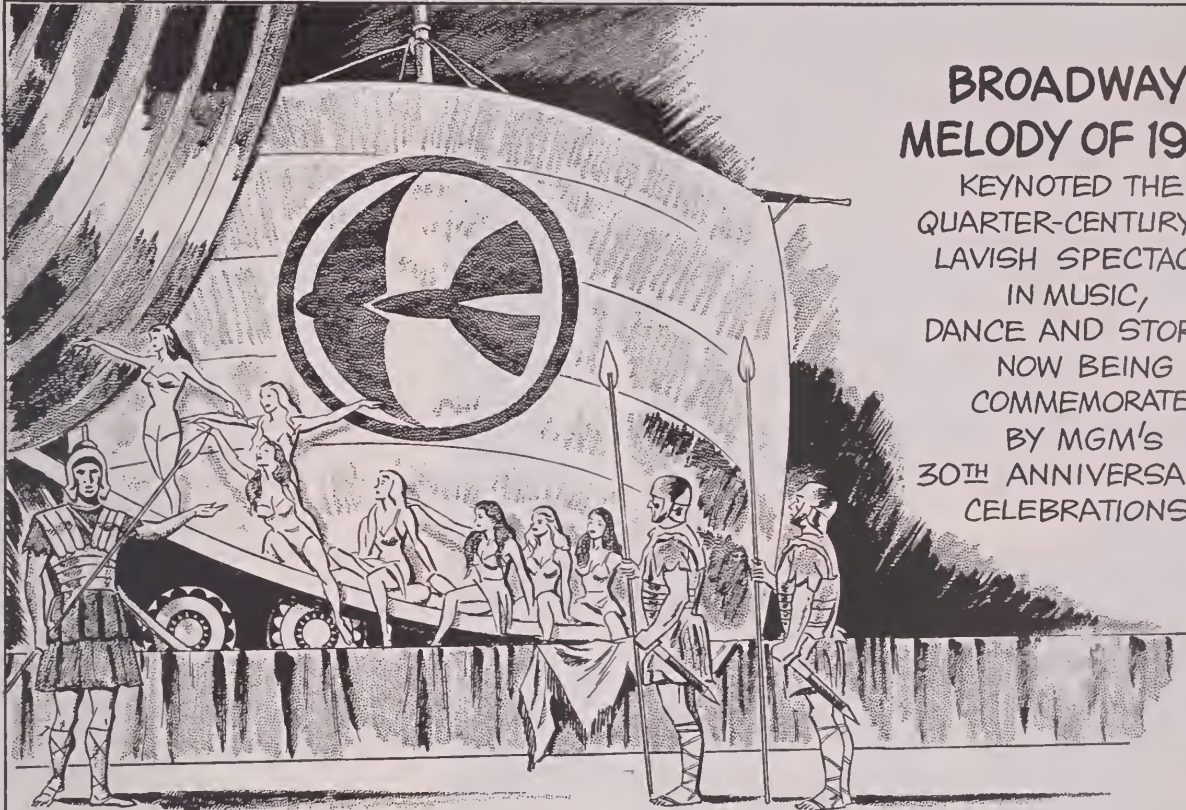


PRODUCER-Director-Cinematographer Jim Blue photographed the comic version of "Hamlet" with a Bell & Howell 8mm Sportster camera.

ONE OF the touching scenes in the production, showing Queen Gertrude imploring with Hamlet. Makeup played an effective part in success of the production.

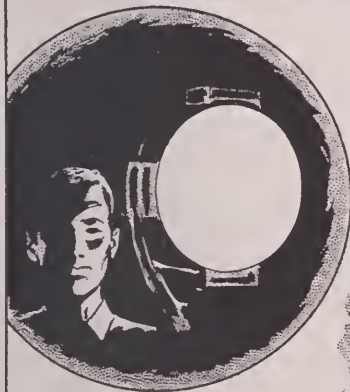


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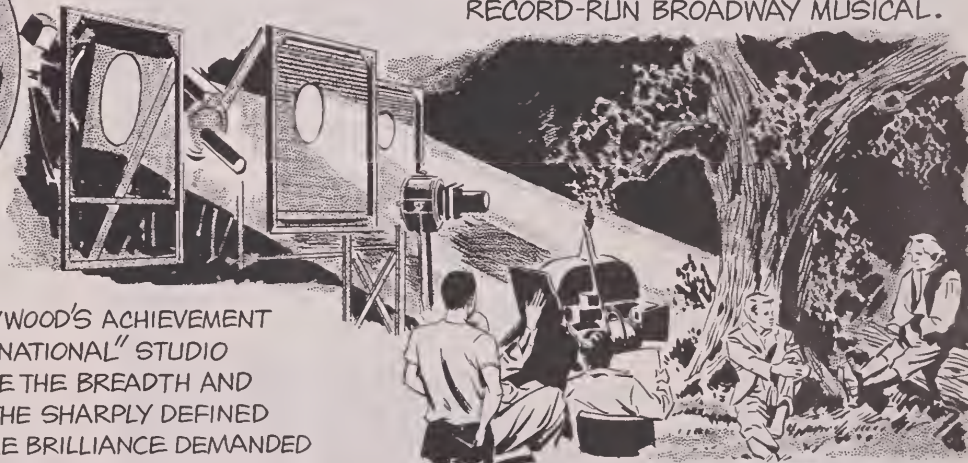


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SHAKESPEARE IN 8MM

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Arthur Rank. The bronze gong, however, was made of paper, on which was boldly lettered the title, *A Blue Production*.

The role of the slave, who was assigned to strike the gong, was played by Horace Robinson, the University's Director of the Theater. The old trick of pretending to strike was used at first, with the final blow tearing the paper through the middle. The glutinous preparations used in making the gong had so stiffened the paper, however, that when the gong actually struck, the entire hoop burst in the middle. Taken completely unawares by this unexpected occurrence, the actor spontaneously faced the camera, with finger in mouth, to give the movie one of its best humor punches.

Costumes were chosen from the University Wardrobe and players were permitted to use the unfurnished stage at the theater. While the costumes were selected to dress the character for the role intended, they were also picked to make them look ridiculous. For instance, Laertes, appearing in his anachronous attire, also wore a pair of saddle shoes.

While the names of some 23 persons appear under the Dramatis Personae in the original cast of the Tragedy of "Hamlet," Blue's cast numbered only four, which presented some filming problems. This is how he worked out his scenes in proper sequence with his limited talent.

Each of the 135 shots was assigned a number. When Actor Bob Chambers played Laertes, for instance, all scenes were shot at one setting. The same was done when Bob appeared as Polonius, and so on. This was especially important in the scene showing the duel between Laertes and Hamlet. Horatio as a weeping instructor was also Bob's role. When all shooting was finished, the numbers were arranged in progression and the film spliced together.

In the first scenes, Hamlet appears musing over his sordid environment. This is followed closely by the entrance of the ghost of Hamlet's father, and a bit of burlesque is injected in these initial appearances.

Several silly gadgets, symbolic and otherwise, were used in the comic production. In one scene the real King sits munching popcorn, watching the re-enactment of his own foul deed. The Player King pulls the bottle of poison from under his cloak. To achieve this, Blue took a wine bottle and filled it with water and small bits of dry ice. When the actor removes the cork, the carbon dioxide gas escapes, giving the illusion of a deadly poison. The Player

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King also takes a funnel from under his clothes, inserts it into the ear of the unsuspecting sleeper, and pours out this violent concoction. Of course, a sealed paper container was fitted into the funnel to prevent any liquid from passing through. Simultaneously, the prone man releases water from his mouth, making it appear that there is no success in the poisoning. After two attempts to poison his victim, the Player King finally produces a cork which he puts into the harassed man, stops the flow, and the murder is committed.

In preparing material for pantomime, these fantastic situations had to be worked out in complete detail. Each subterfuge seemed strangely real, but gloriously funny.

The grave dug for poor Ophelia, who had gone mad, was prepared in a gravel pit on the banks of the Willamette River. The grave-digger, whose business it was to prepare the land, finally begged off, so Producer Blue became even more versatile as Digger Blue, excavating a cavity large enough to hold the twitching corpse of Ophelia, as well as the real grave-digger. Just in case the audience was unaware of Ophelia's drowning, Blue subtly brought it to attention by placing a dried, salted bloater in her hand.

In the final scene, Laertes wounds Hamlet with the fatal foil, made from a

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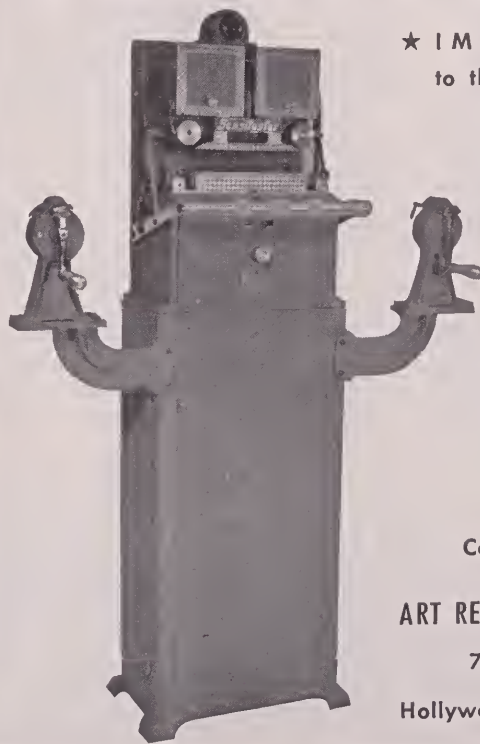
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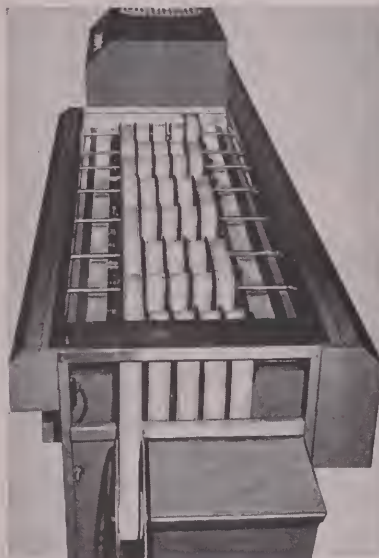


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large tube of toothpaste, labeled poison. As the men struggle, Laertes is knocked down and the tube falls out. Hamlet, realizing the evil doings and the dirty work afoot, seizes the toothpaste poison and squeezes it over the face of the prostrate Laertes. Meanwhile, Queen Gertrude, who has been watching the duel, feels a twinge of thirst, sips the poison wine—which is harmless stage water—and dies. Hamlet then throws the remaining poison into the face of King Claudius.

The movie shows him throughout the duel with the sword of Laertes through his body. Of course, he is mortally wounded and dies. The imaginative

Blue borrowed a broken fencing foil, secured the ragged ends to wooden blocks, then fastened them to Hamlet's body to give the illusion. This presented a realistic, whimsical touch to the death of his characters, and the finish of his parody.

No actual dialog was used, but scattered bits of narration were given during the showing, and the narrator discovered that acceleration of the projection speed added to the entertainment. Musical accompaniment during the screening was furnished by a record turntable playing through speakers located near the screen.

FILMING THE "DRAGNET" TV SHOW

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how little to light to get the results desired."

As for day-in and day-out set illumination, Colman works at around 200 foot candles at f/4, which enables him to stop down for the added depth he needs in most scenes.

Colman is one of the first TV film cameramen to utilize latensification as a means of circumventing lighting deficiencies in both studio and location shooting. "I am a firm believer in latensification," says Colman. "In fact, I now shoot all my main night exteriors, whether on the sound stage or outdoors, with latensification in mind. The exposed negative is then given this treatment. Thus I am able to get more naturalness in night scenes than I would otherwise get by pouring a lot of light into the set, then stopping down and using filters."

An example how Colman used latensification to advantage is a recent instance where a night scene called for one of the players to carry a lighted flashlight. Instead of shooting the scene with a powerful lamp set in the flashlight reflector, with the attendant need for 110-volt cables dangling after the player as he moved about the set, Colman shot the scene with the player carrying a normal 2-cell flashlight, then had the negative latensified. The result was more natural—more convincing.

"The first time we tried latensification," said Colman, "we had a sequence of scenes to shoot of action staged within the sound stage itself. A crime suspect was being tracked down there; the action involved the suspect dodging in and out between the sets, then scrambling up a ladder and continuing his flight overhead on the catwalks. Because the area of action was vast, there was not enough equipment at the studio to

illuminate it. So we shot with the light we had and ordered the negative latensified to bring it up to normal contrast. We latensified not only all the long shots, but the two-shots and the closeups, so that uniform contrast was maintained from one shot to the next throughout the sequence.

"I also feel we get better TV quality with latensification. Utilizing it is something we dreamed up ourselves. First it was a matter of production economy; finally, it turned out to be a better method photographically."

About the unusual angle shots, which invariably mark every "Dragnet" show. Colman firmly believes this technique greatly enhances the story. Because he is limited in the use of long shots, his technique of shooting through props, such as a chair, a bed frame, etc., gives weight to the scene, otherwise the whole thing appears to be in mid-air. "I feel that by putting a prop before the camera—something to shoot through—it provides a frame for the picture, a sort of setting which ties the locale, the action and the players together, adding interest to the scene and maintaining orientation for the viewer."

With very few exceptions, every shot that Colman makes the Mitchell studio camera is mounted on a mobile crane. While moving camera shots are always held to a minimum, having the camera on the crane not only provides quick mobility between setups, but also quick up or down positioning of the camera when composing the scene prior to shooting. Colman makes a great many high and low shots. Here the crane proves extremely helpful. "With it we can quickly move into position with little trouble and begin shooting."

For low-angle shots Colman uses an Arriflex 35mm camera, hand held or