

The Big House

LIGHT EFFECTS
ATTAINED BY
INKIES

Technical information in this article was furnished by Lew Kolb, 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 Westrom, 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.

GRIM SCENE

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 shot, appearing early in the film, by its tremendous force literally places its audience within the prison walls—brings to them with all fidelity kindred 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 grimness of prison. This shot clearly indicates what can be accomplished in set 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 duce, 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



Stills showing lighting effects from "The Big House."

rack. Two 5 k.w. inkies, one flooded 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 forcefully 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 tossing restlessly. 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-climax, was lighted by overheads and frontlights, sharply focused. The total amount of amps used here was approximately 3500.

Particularly interesting and effective was the close-up shot in the messhall showing Butch's knife being passed under the long table from hand to hand. Machine Gun Butch 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 deftly 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

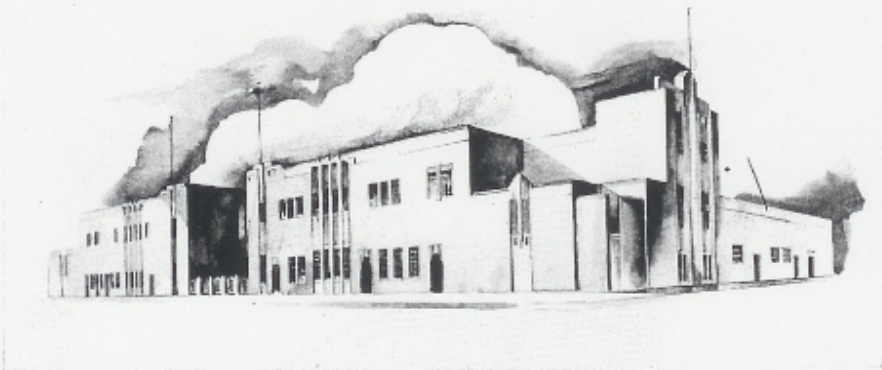
dungeon shots, particularly the dungeon corridor, lighted from overhead by four incandescent rifles. There is an element of hopelessness and despair in this scene that is quickly felt but presently dissipated by dialogue.

Such vividness, such feeling imparted by this shot must be attributed entirely to the lighting of the set, simple yet tremendous in its effect. One sees the vacant, steel corridor—steady, white illumination, suddenly dimmed to a weird, unnatu-

ral gloom. There stark drama is achieved, without characters, without movement, without sound—only effect, 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 cellhouse at the height of the prison break. Four thousand amps lighted 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 structure for Multicolor, Ltd. is now under way between Orange, Romaine and Sycamore Streets in Hollywood. It will cost \$500,000, be two stories in height, containing approximately 50,000 square feet of floor space, and will have a completely equipped laboratory for the manufacture of Multicolor Film.

General and executive offices of the company also will be in the building. Every known feature for the production of Multicolor film will be incorporated in the structure. The laboratory 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 expansion, according to H. B. Lewis, general manager.

Because of its simplicity and adaptability to standard camera equipment, Multicolor is to be manufactured extensively 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 lighting. 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 scheduled to be ready for occupancy within ninety days.

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