

THE FORMS OF ACTING IN SILENT MOVIES, THE DISCOVERY OF AUDIO RECORDING IN MOVIES



Creative and Performing Arts

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Abstract

Silent movies did not have any talking or music in them but they left indelible traces to this day, primarily because they possessed undisputed artistic values. The themes that were discussed by the artists of the silent movies, are the main focus of my work. The silent movie provided entertainment to people for decades and provided the industry with a springboard to talking pictures, and the movies we know today. The technological developments that lead to the first sound movies, hardships, difficulties and challenges in acting in front of the camera, would certainly give another direction to the artistic film. All these factors had a massive contribution to its development, but at the same time banal obstacles appeared that created a collision between the actors of theater and actors of silent movies.

Introduction

The movie industry as we know it today originated in the early 19th century through a series of technological developments: the creation of photography, the discovery of the illusion of motion by combining individual still images, and the study of human and animal locomotion. The most creative invention of the time and technological possibilities of that time, obviously was the emergence of these films, through the mechanical projector, in various improvised halls. Gradually, the movie industry developed further with individuals and later with groups of artists who invested and organized filming sketches that were very much liked by the audience of that time.

Movies, also known as films, are visual communications which use moving pictures and sound to tell stories, inform or help people learn. If we considered film a science, we would rightly state that it is a construction on all sciences, without overlooking the artistic side which undoubtedly holds the throne over all the arts.

The Role in the First Movies

Acting in silent movies had no synchronized recorded sound and in particular, no audible dialogue. The treatment of acting methods was mainly of a melodramatic style, which was transmitted as a result of the earlier activity of the creators of that time, such as their background as a dancer, circus actor etc. The first movies that were filmed faced many challenges as a result of lack of advanced technology.

The silent movies provided entertainment to people for decades and provided the industry with a springboard to talking pictures, and the movies we know today. In silent movies the dialogue was pantomimed with hand gestures and body language, through the dynamic game, through the conflict that occurs between the character and their relationship, but without overlooking the

relationship with the objects, the requisites and the parts of the scenography.

Silent movie implies fluency, gaming, situation, conflict, relationship, and everything else that is reflected inside the film and where all of these are not synchronized as a voice-figure ratio and other accompanying sound effects. Silent movies usually were accompanied with music. The music in the silent movies was mostly live.

Before the design of the film, instrumentalists were the first to appear and together with them is shown the film. The rhythm of music dictates the rhythm of the scene and vice versa, the genre of music dictates or follows the genre that is dealt with in that scene or film.

Silent movies and modern movies have one obvious difference: the presence or absence of the sound. But if we compare the form of the game in the silent movies with the today's movies, there is no doubt that there is a big distance between the natural and the exaggeration of the actor's actions, we realize that people of that time have greatly enjoyed the art of that time, especially the game, in particular the game, which has served as fun and as a form of awareness. We see this in the best way of dealing with topics that the authors of the time did, topics that mainly had to do with everyday life, with the reality that reigned the world, with the drawbacks of the systems of that time, which only art can reach to show off.

The artists have researched and then dealt with such topics must have had the courage and the skill to find a good author, so those themes turning them into skits that would bring laughter to the audience and of course the basic message will be subconscious, always aiming at the comic element that best and most easily hits and penetrates the viewer's mind.

The Perfection of the Role

The silent movies, in the absence of sound for the actors of that time was a very tough task having to act in front of the camera, and organizing such scenes with the help of the screenwriter or the director, even though there was no scriptwriter or director as scenes mostly were directed or written by the actor himself, who was a director, a producer and everything else in that project (such as Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Griffith, and many others until the late stage of cinema development).

During the study of the creation of silent movies and analysis of the actor's game in particular, not to overlook the whole process of creating a movie, with all the stages of production, we rightly find that the kind of treatment of the game of actors of that time in the silent movies, has obviously been more difficult.

The entire process of scenic parts, sketches, be it instantaneous or prepared for filming, with the technical sound barrier, the actor of that time faced the most fundamental difficulties. Nowadays, even with such an advanced technology, I would say that every contemporary actor would hesitate, or be afraid of such a challenge.

Imagination was a powerful weapon in the role of the actor in the silent films, who through body movements and mimicry aimed to bring to the perfection the information of the event that appeared in that film piece.

Anyone who was gifted to use the body language more familiar in the theater with the playful, was the wanted actor and liked in the public of that time.

In the usual cases, for the goodwill or for the study, critical, if we are given the opportunity to watch the movies without sound, we will certainly encounter and learn that the film dialogue is also displayed through the body language, even through physical expression, mimics, through realizing real situations with social identification problems. Even the writers who carried the dialogue or scriptwriters were not even needed, since these works were performed by the attendees, who were orchestrating themselves through movements.

The best cases to describe the actress of that time, we find them in the silent films of the big cinema artists, to watch the films of Ch. Chaplin, who liked that time and created the first movie audience.

Charlie Chaplin, at a very young age, began his career and became a ballet dancer, then at the age of 14 he started his activities on the stage as an actor. Later he went on lunacy at the show as a comedian, with crust given the chance to travel to America with Fred Karno Repertoire Company.¹ He immediately was accepted by the American audience of that time, even with his character in "A Night in an English Music Hall". In 1912, Chaplin was awarded with a contract by Motion Picture. Initially, he worked for Mack Sennet and Keystone Film Company and signed a \$150-per-week contract. Step by step, Charlie Chaplin began filming sketches that were very well accepted by the audience. He became one of the most influential personalities of the Silent-Film era.

Whenever we remind Charlie Chaplin, Character with Broad Pent, Tight Coat, Small Hat, Big Boots and Small Moustache comes in front of our eyes. He became a famous man with his timing of Comedy. Many artists in every country of this world tried to copy him. Charlie Chaplin was called a Mine of Intelligence.

His themes were a wonderful blend of comedy and social drama. His comedy provided a look into the world of the great depression by people who lived it. Different elements of his silent movies portrayed the different difficulties of life in that era. Between bursts of comedy a grand picture of a society in turmoil is produced. Through work shortages, factory closings, labor strikes and political unrest Chaplin's world shows us another side that people like to forget about the past.

Charlie Chaplin has been a major contributor to America's advancement in the film industry from his innovative beginnings, and perseverance to improve and succeed, to his overall achievements in history.

¹ Karno, Fred, *Repertoire of the Company* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fred_Karno

Charlie Chaplin created United Artist Film Distribution Company with the partnership of D. W. Griffith, Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford.

Keaton was an actor known best for his silent movies. In which his trademark was physical comedy with a consistently stoic, deadpan expression which earned him the nickname "The Great Stone Face". A great and complete movie of that era was *The General*. This movie is considered his favourite, and was Keaton's last independently produced film and in many ways presents the apotheosis of his style. *The General* tells the story of Johnnie Gray (Keaton), a Tennessean railroad engineer who was in love with a woman Annabelle Lee (Marion Mack). He is deeply disappointed when he is not allowed to enlist as the South values his skills on the railway more highly than his potential as a soldier.

Gorgeously filmed in the mountains of Oregon, the film frames Keaton's amazing tricks with a predominance of long traveling shots using the steam engine and tracks as the guiding elements of the film's visual and comic style. A cannon's trajectory is foiled by the curves of railway.

Difficulties that Appeared in the Sound Movies

We all know that first there was silent film and then there was sound. But that's not the whole story. Before films talked they still made themselves heard through intertitles and musical accompaniment. Everybody knows that when the first sound movies appeared, they destroyed the careers of many silent film actors.

Many actors with foreign accents found their fortunes changed. In the silent era no one knew that cowboy actually spoke with a thick German accent, but once the movies started talking opportunities for actors like Reginald Denny changed. Denny's career was based on playing corn-fed American boys, something the British actor found harder to do when he was required to speak. The microphone was, in many ways, their enemy.

Once the movies started talking came opportunities for actors like Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor, Jeanette MacDonald, Edward G. Robinson, Humphrey Bogart, Paul Muni, Melvyn Douglas, Leslie Howard and Katharine Hepburn.

The first Academy Awards ceremony was held in Hollywood on May 16, 1929. No broadcast. A mere 270 guests. The name Oscar was not used for another few years. Emil Jannings was the first Best Actor and Janet Gaynor Best Actress. The second Academy Awards took place at the Cocoanut Grove of the Ambassador Hotel Thursday, April 3, 1930, and honored movies released from August 1, 1928 to July 31, 1929.

In 1930, we have two different categories. In the category of sound movies, Mary Pickford won the award for the Best Actress in the movies "*Coquette*" and Warner Baxter won the award for the Best Actor in the movie "*In Old Arizona*". The film industry went through a very tough time in the next two decades.

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