The Exhibitor as Producer

Stage Prologues in American Movie Theatres, 1917–1926

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ISBN 978-3-031-71780-2 ISBN 978-3-031-71781-9 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-71781-9

Cover illustration: Motion Picture News, 15 October 1921

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Acknowledgements

This book surprised me. Two years ago, if someone had asked if I would write a book or even an essay on stage prologues, I would have looked blank and hardly had anything to say. Frankly, my knowledge about the subject was scant. What piqued my interest was a doctoral dissertation at the University of Michigan on the continuation of vaudeville acts as a popular form of theatrical presentation in American movie theaters from the initial years of sound cinema through the 1940s. That led to months of research addressing this question: were theatrical performances other than discrete single acts an important component of movie programs during the last decade or more of the silent cinema? Indeed, they were. The unexpected result was the discovery of an extensive body of information about stage prologues that served to introduce and set the mood for feature films. I realized that stage prologues were so popular with audiences that they deserved to be rewritten into early cinema history.

I am greatly indebted to the author of that dissertation, Vincent Longo, for the knowledge and insights he shared during our frequent conversations about stage prologues. He raised dozens of pertinent questions, suggested productive research sources, and posed invaluable ideas, all of which helped shape the evolving manuscript. His close reading of certain sections of the text also prompted me to clarify certain ideas, make significant revisions, and extend my analyses. I am also very grateful to the generous report of the anonymous reviewer, who recommended several

new research sources, suggested expanding certain points, and asked for contextual information of various kinds.

Other friends and colleagues also shared valuable advice. Norman Hirschy, acquisitions editor for Oxford University Press, first suggested that Palgrave Pivot could be the best publisher for what was always envisioned as a short book. Paul Moore brought to my attention the unique photographic collection of Fanchon and Marco prologue stage sets on the Huntington Library's website. He also predicted that other photographs and documents might be housed in the Billy Rose Theater Division of the New York Public Library of Performing Arts, and Jeremy Megraw found half a dozen boxes for me to examine on a visit to the archive. After confirming the contact with Megraw, Ross Melnick suggested that the Theater History Society archive could also be a source of prologue photographs, and Gary Parks led me to request that researcher Patrick Seymour look through boxes of photographs and other material devoted to the Balaban and Katz theaters in Chicago. After an unexpected contact, Luciana Corrêa de Araújo shared her research on prologues during a short period in Rio Janeiro, Brazil, and pointed me to a recent essay on prologues and other theatrical presentations in England. Amy Rodgers corrected a reference to one dance number and offered some context for the popularity of "national" dances, while Brinni Gentry shared ideas about the cultural appropriation of Hawaiian dances and songs. Miriam Gilbert and Peter Holland, both with long experience of Shakespeare performances, gave me good tips to clarify certain parts of the text in Chapter 1. Especially invaluable, of course, were the trade press pages searchable for scanning in the Media History Digital Library, as were the newspaper articles and ads found at newspapers.com and occasional information on Wikipedia.

At Palgrave Macmillan/SpringerNature, Erin Wiegand expressed crucial interest in this project and gracefully handled the initial steps in getting the Editorial Board's approval for a contract. Returning as Responsibility Editor, Lina Aboujieba skillfully monitored the overall production process involving the manuscript, including the peer review and the revised Open Access contract. As Production Editor, Agila Muruganandam, with the very efficient assistance of Production Supervisor Preetha Kuttiappan, expertly managed the manuscript's submission, its book cover design, and its production schedule of copyediting, and page proof.

No other manuscript of mine would have benefited more from the expertise and elegant, intelligent writing of Barbara Hodgdon, scholar par excellence of Shakespeare in performance. With such a keen eye and ear for stage performances, had she viewed the photographs of stage prologue sets and read the descriptions of performances, especially the acting, singing, and dancing, she would have sharpened my own sense of the prologues and deepened my analyses. She was such an amazing partner for decades, and is deeply missed.

10 December 2024 Richard Abel

Illustrations

Unless otherwise referenced, all illustrations come from the trade press, specifically *Exhibitors Herald, Exhibitors Trade Review, Motion Picture News*, or *Moving Picture World*.

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CHAPTER 1

Prelude

> It always began with a discovery originating on the fringe of a wholly different investigation […] On each occasion I felt the sudden sensation that I had come upon something, perhaps even something important; at the same time I felt an acute awareness of ignorance. Carlo Ginzburg, *No Island Is an Island* (2000)

In June 1917, *Motography* took note of an "innovation" at the Broadway theater in New York City.[1] What caught the trade journal's attention? "An elaborately staged prologue which plunges the audience deep into the atmosphere" of *The Bar Sinister*.[2] The feature film's story was "laid somewhere below the Mason-Dixon line," centered "the action about a turpentine still," and "introduced characters unusual to southern dramas."[3] In constructing his prologue's stage setting, the manager created "a beautiful scenic reproduction of a turpentine forest," with the home of the still's owner in the background and "a typical southern negro cabin" in the foreground.[4] Around the cabin door, performers, costumed as the film's characters, gathered to sing "southern melodies."[5] The "warm, red glow of the setting sun" initially suffused this theatrical performance and faded to "silvery moonlight" for the transition to the film's opening scene.

Was the Broadway's staging really an innovation? The next chapter reveals that there were others. But *Motography*'s notice helpfully raises questions about the prologue as a unique theatrical practice that usually

R. Abel, *The Exhibitor as Producer*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-71781-9_1

preceded a feature film in movie theater programming from the late 1920s to the late 1950s. The first question to address is the difference between the terms *prologue* and *presentation*, for the latter was quite fluid in the discourse of the period. As the following pages attest, a presentation sometimes meant a prologue, but just as often it did not. When the term appears most precisely, it means a theatrical act "complete in itself" that does not relate, as the prologue usually does, "directly to the feature film."[6] Beyond that quandary, there are more specific questions. How did prologues emerge out of prior practices? Was it just coincidence that they first appeared soon after the United States entered the Great War? Who were the exhibitors most involved? Who were the performers? What characteristics came to define prologues, and how might those have changed over time? How widespread did prologues become as attractions, not only in metropolitan palace cinemas but also in movie theaters in mid-sized cities and even small towns? Did they always create an atmosphere that complemented or harmonized with the feature films?

Given cinema studies' long interest in specific films and filmmakers, film aesthetics, genre and star studies, and film industry developments, comparatively little research has taken up the subject of stage prologues. An early exception was Henry B. Aldridge's essay, "The Role of the Stage Show in Film Exhibition: The Case of Detroit's Capitol Theatre."[7] Despite the difficulties of doing research more than forty years ago and the focus on a single metropolitan palace cinema, Aldridge did engage with issues such as what exactly were prologues and how did exhibitors find them economically feasible. A few historians followed his lead by looking at a wider range of theaters.[8] One was Richard Koszarski, who said "it was obligatory for any large theater to offer a major production number, somewhat in the style of a lavish Broadway revue."[9] His examples of the "prologue idea" included stage acts that complemented feature films in theaters from the Rialto in New York to the Eastman Theatre in Rochester.[10] Another was Phil Wagner, who studied a single company, Fanchon and Marco that produced prologues for the West Coast Theatre chain in the 1920s.[11] Unlike "atmospheric" prologues that "sought a thematic harmony with the feature film," theirs were "deliberately discordant," Wagner found, and they "resisted theatrical unity and spectacularized social distraction."[12] A third was Ross Melnick who argued in a biography of S. L. "Roxy" Rothapfel that his live and filmic programming created an *unitary text* in which the prologue and stage setting had a big influence on the feature film's success.[13] Confirming

this influence were elaborate prologues, not only at the Rialto, Rivoli, and Capitol theaters in New York, but also at the California theater in Los Angeles.[14] A fourth was William Paul, who added that "picture settings," especially in large metropolitan theaters, could serve as a kind of distinctive brand, showcase a feature film, and enclose a stage space for live performances.[15] Examples of such prologue performances included First National's idea (an earlier melodrama theater stunt) to stage a horse race using a mechanical treadmill for showings of *In Old Kentucky* (1920) and the "magical *trompe l'oeil* effects" of the jungle stage set for *The Lost World* (1925) in Boston.[16]

Several other cinema historians have also been especially interested in the musical component of stage prologues or theatrical presentations. Most notable is Mary Simonson's recent essay in *American Music*.[17] She closely examines a series of prologues and interludes as "distinct musical, theatrical, and cinematic" works and singles out two types, defined as "atmospheric" and "action," each of which established a different sonic landscape or aural scene.[18] Excellent as her analyses of these sites of "creative activity and artistry" are, they are relatively limited to "large, first-run theaters in major cities" such as New York and Chicago and to only a few years in the early 1920s. Another, equally significant analysis, is Vincent Longo's recent doctoral dissertation, which signaled a path forward for my own project.[19] Although his research is largely devoted to charting the continuation of vaudeville and non-prologue presentations in movie theaters from the 1920s to the 1950s, Longo contests the widespread assumptions about the industry's efforts to rationalize and standardize distribution and exhibition.[20] The variety format of movie theater programs, including theatrical presentations as a major component, he argues, was controlled less by "centralized studio offices" than by movie theater managers and their sense of an audience's tastes. If so, I wondered, when exactly did managers begin to produce theatrical presentations? That question led to the surprising discovery that, by the late 1910s, stage prologues were playing an important role in movie theater programs and continued to do so throughout most of the 1920s.[21] How then, I further wondered, did they become such a crucial attraction in movie theaters—and why?

As others have found, looking for information on stage prologues, however, proves difficult because the source material is so limited, which may explain why the subject has resulted in little study. That said, the results are eye-opening. Most of the data underlying this

book comes from the trade press, invaluably compiled by the Media History Digital Library. Although some also comes from daily newspapers, their digital research findings can depend on the reliability of website search algorithms. With one exception, even less material survives in a handful of archives and libraries.[22] Surprisingly, although chiefly intent on promoting motion pictures, the trade press regularly printed a great number of articles accompanied by photographs and descriptions of prologue scenes. Supplementing those hundreds of photographs are others in the Fanchon and Marco Collection at the Huntington Library (available on its website). Because many feature films screened during this period no longer survive, however, assessing their relationship to prologues, which were even more ephemeral, must often rely on trade press synopses.

These limitations prompt even further questions. The lack of audio recordings curtails some of what can be said about singers and actors, but at least the prologue descriptions often include the titles of songs that marked many performances. If popular tunes in particular were familiar to movie-theater audiences, what might they have meant to them? The surprising wealth of stage-set photographs is another matter. What did exhibitors choose to represent in their prologues, whether or not a staged scene was closely related to a feature film? To what degree could prologues rework established conventions, practices, and even specific moments from theatrical and musical productions? Based on trade-press descriptions, how did exhibitors design their stage sets and organize their prologues into parts? How did they use backdrops, scrims, transparencies, and lighting effects to create one or more visual frames for performers? Still, the photographs vary widely in what they represent. If accompanied by textual description, some show performers at a moment of action within a full stage set. Others include two or three images that, again with textual description, suggest movement from one moment to another within a prologue. Yet, many photographs, accompanied by little or no description, depict a stage set either without figures or with figures in seemingly static poses. The latter obviously make it difficult to make sense of all that was going on in the surviving prologue photographs. What follows, consequently, are often liminal re-performances of "left-over" images and words tracing ephemeral moments in the distant past that still have a fascinating allure.[23]

This book is organized into five chapters, following this "Prelude," and closes with an "Epilogue." Numerous illustrations, most of them

rare photographs of prologue stage settings, offer visual evidence. The first chapter focuses on the emergence of stage prologues, introduced by several possible precedents. Two exhibitors are often credited for promoting those early prologues: S. L. "Roxy" Rothapfel in New York and Sid Grauman in Los Angeles. But four others are just as, and perhaps even more, important: Harold B. Franklin in Buffalo, S. Barret McCormick in Indianapolis, John Wenger in New York, and Flossie A. Jones in Waukesha, Wisconsin.[24] By the end of 1918, they had established a menu of the practices, forms, and functions that characterized prologues. As more and more managers, among them Joseph Plunkett and Edward Hyman in New York, mounted prologues as special theatrical acts during the next two years, the second chapter builds up a set of typologies that defined these theatrical performances, as well as the ways in which they could be staged and organized in parts.[25] The third chapter analyzes a wide range of exhibitors and their prologues during what first became a peak period of popularity in the early 1920s. The fourth chapter surveys the changes in the trade press's reporting on the continuing popularity of prologues in the mid-1920s, singling out especially important exhibitors in both metropolitan and small-town theaters, especially in relation to big features and stars. The final chapter takes up a series of practices and issues throughout the 1920s: the efforts to set up circuits that might systematize prologue production, parallel efforts to create blueprints for their construction by exhibitors, and trade-press debates about the function and value of prologues. The "Epilogue" sketches several paths for further research, among them the continuation of stage prologues in the transition to sound cinema and their appearance in other countries.

In short, the variety format of combined stage and screen performance in movie theaters has a longer and unexpectedly more revealing history than usually assumed. During the last decade of the so-called silent cinema, as Franklin claimed, a theater manager could be a producer with a certain degree of creativity, ingenuity, and even playfulness.[26] No wonder that the attraction of a prologue in a theater's programming, in turn, could strongly impact an audience's movie-going experience.

Notes

1. "Stage Prologue for Lewis Feature," *Motography* (9 June 1917): 1214.

2. Frank Hall Productions Advertisement, *Moving Picture World* (26 May 1917): 1234.
3. This melodrama condemns race hatred in a story about a young woman who believes, falsely, that she has "negro blood," which her fiancé has to disprove. Edward Weitzel, "The Bar Sinister," *Moving Picture World* (5 May 1917): 808; George W. Graves, "The Bar Sinister," *Motography* (5 May 1917): 964–965.
4. "Stage Prologue for Lewis Feature," 1214.
5. Although several of these singers may have been African American, it's more likely they were whites in blackface. After the United States entered the war in Europe, Black musicians played in military bands, entertained troops in training, and continued to tour in Black shows, but it is unclear whether they performed on movie theater stages—see Thomas L. Riis, *Just Before Jazz: Black Musical Theater in New York, 1890–1915* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 184.
6. For a precise sense of this difference in terms, see Colby Harriman, "An Analysis of the Prologue and Presentation," *Exhibitors Herald* (31 January 1925): 8.
7. Henry B. Aldridge, "The Role of the Stage Show in Film Exhibition: The Case of Detroit's Capitol Theatre," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 10.2 (1982): 66–71.
8. Some histories that cover this period of American cinema do mention prologues and other live performances in passing.
9. Richard Koszarski, *An Evening's Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915–1928* (New York: Scribner's, 1990), 50.
10. Koszarski, *An Evening's Entertainment*, 51–54.
11. Phil Wagner, "'An America Not Quite Mechanized': Famchon and Marco, Inc. Perform Modernity," *Film History* 23 (2011): 251–267.
12. Wagner, "'An America Not Quite Mechanized'", 251.
13. Ross Melnick, *American Showman: Samuel 'Roxy' Rothafel and the Birth of the Entertainment Industry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 11–13.
14. Melnick, *American Showman,* 152–153, 179, 180–190.
15. William Paul, *When Movies Were Theater: Architecture, Exhibition, and the Evolution of American Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 200–212.

16. Paul, *When Movies Were Theater*, 221–225. The reference to First National's recommendation comes from "Exhibitors Advertising," *Exhibitors Herald* (26 June 1920): 69. The description of *The Lost World* stage set comes from "Novel 'Lost World' Prologue," *Motion Picture News* (28 March 1925): 1328.
17. Mary Simonson, "'Adding to the Picture': American Film Prologues in the 1920s," *American Music* 37.1 (2019): 1–28. I thank the anonymous reviewer who referenced this essay as I was writing the final version of the manuscript.
18. Op. cit., 6.
19. Vincent Longo, "A Hard Act to Follow: Live Performance in the Age of the Hollywood Studio System (1920–1950)," Doctoral Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2022. I served as a member of Longo's dissertation committee.
20. Longo also counters the excellent work of Jocelyn Szczepaniak-Gillece, which recovers Benjamin Schlanger's writings and architectural designs to argue that, beginning in the early 1930s, exhibitors and investors sought to create "neutralized" theater spaces that focused the attention of spectators specifically on viewing the films—Szczepaniak-Gillece, *The Optical Vacuum: Spectatorship and Modernized American Theater Architecture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).
21. Whenever possible, I have tried to gather minimal information on a theater's seating capacity, location, affiliation, and sometimes the size of its stage. For many theaters, however, that data is difficult to find.
22. This was a problem for Melnick, who confronts it head on in *American Showman*, 7–8.
23. These words draw on Barbara Hodgdon's "Introduction: The Lure of Leftovers," in *Shakespeare, Performance, and the Archive* (New York: Routledge, 2016): 5–6.
24. Melnick does mention Franklin as an exhibitor with ideas similar to Rothapfel's, in *American Showman*, 12. Only Grauman, Rothapfel, and Wenger were Jewish, as were Fanchon and Marco. The other three, along with most of the theater managers singled out by the trade press in the following chapters, were not. This suggests that, as a group at the local level, exhibitors often differed from their counterparts, the Hollywood producers.

25. In 1927, Philip K. Scheuer claimed only two kinds of prologues: the atmospheric kind or "a live thematic anticipation of the feature film" and "the varieties format (a stage show that shared no thematic relation to the feature film)"—"Prologue Rivalry is Keen," *Los Angeles Times* (20 November 1927): C15. Cited in Wagner, FN 1. See also *The Fundamentals of Balaban & Katz Theatre Management*, Chicago: Balaban & Katz Corporation, 1926.
26. Harold B. Franklin, "How Exhibitor Can Become 'Producer'," *Motion Picture News* (28 December 1918): 3873. It's important to distinguish this unique form of creativity from that where exhibitors would arrange the components of their overall programs and even edit the film prints they rented. Rothapfel, for instance, often edited his own versions of a film—Melnick, *American Showman*, 16–18.

CHAPTER 2

Premiering the Prologue

This chapter seeks answers to some of the specific questions posed in the "Prelude" (Chapter 1) by exploring the initial appearances of stage prologues. Live performances were a staple of nearly all theaters showing films, from music accompanying the screenings to commentaries on early films without intertitles and lectures for early long films like Pathé's four-reel *Passion Play* (1907).[1] However, several precedents for prologues made them different. Perhaps the earliest attempt to summarize their emergence comes from Harold B. Franklin in 1927.[2] One precedent he cites was vaudeville, an intermedial venue whose variety programs of discrete live performances soon included short films. Besides the well-known song and dance acts, acrobatic stunts, and comic routines, another was the dramatic sketch, a short playlet, either silent or with limited dialogue.[3] Not only did sketches offer narrative material for an early D. W. Griffith film such as *Ostler Joe* (1908), but they also created a potential template for later stage prologues.[4] And at least two movie theater exhibitors, Rothapfel and Grauman, first managed vaudeville houses.[5] Another uncited precedent was the nickelodeon, whose variety show usually comprised a stage act of one or more illustrated songs along with short films.[6] Here, one or more performers sang popular tunes, accompanied by projected, brightly colored lantern slides often depicting stories related to the songs. As in the later prologue, this stage act already closely linked a foreground musical performance to the spectacle of a visual background.

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https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-71781-9_2

As larger purpose-built theaters were erected, they began to include what William Paul called "picture settings," an elaborate stage set that framed the movie screen.[7] In 1914, the Strand in downtown Newark featured a fragrant Japanese fairy garden, "the sparkling colors of an electric fountain," and the porticoes of French chateaus on each side of the stage.[8] Also that year, the Majestic in Cleveland framed its screen within the leafy environs of a park, and the Willis Wood in Kansas City set an electric fountain among ferns and flowers before a balustrade and classical portico.[9] The Victoria in Buffalo later created an even more verdant stage frame that must have entranced audiences, particularly during the winter months.[10] After managing large theaters in the Midwest, in early 1913 Rothapfel was hired to direct the 1,900-seat Regent, in the Harlem entertainment district of New York City.[11] Months later he agreed to manage the 3,500-seat Strand on Broadway and 47th street, which boasted its own "miniature garden and triple fountain on stage."[12] When the 1,960-seat Rialto opened on Times Square in 1916, Rothapfel had a bigger stage to play with.[13] Now he could produce programs composed of not only short films (i.e., newsreels, travelogues, comedies) but also a variety of stage acts with soloists, dancers, or even a chorus, backed by a triptych of painted landscape panels, and accompanied by a symphony orchestra and special lighting effects.[14] *Motion Picture News* described such acts as "weaving in" among the shorts preceding the feature film[15] (Figs. 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3).

Another unsurprising precedent was the fashion show. For some time, an industry strategy was to have actresses display the latest fashions in fiction films so as to lure women into movie theaters.[16] In 1916, World Films hired Lady Duff Gordon, who dressed the elite women of Manhattan, to design gowns for its films.[17] A year later, other examples ranged from Valeska Surratt, "the Empress of Fashion," in Fox's *The Slave* to "the Keystone beauties" in *Pearls and Perils*.[18] The trade press began advising exhibitors, like the Coliseum in Seattle, to get a local department store to help stage a full-fledged fashion show.[19] Even a small-town theater like the Majestic in Jackson (Michigan) could get a local "clothing house, a milliner, and a shoe store" to hire New York models to "put on a style show."[20] Paramount got into the act, suggesting that an exhibitor could "induce several of the prettiest and most popular girls of the city to wear gowns of great interest" for their friends and "make the fashion show a society event."[21] By 1918, T. L. Tally's Kinema in Los Angeles was turning the fashion show into a prologue.[22] As the orchestra played

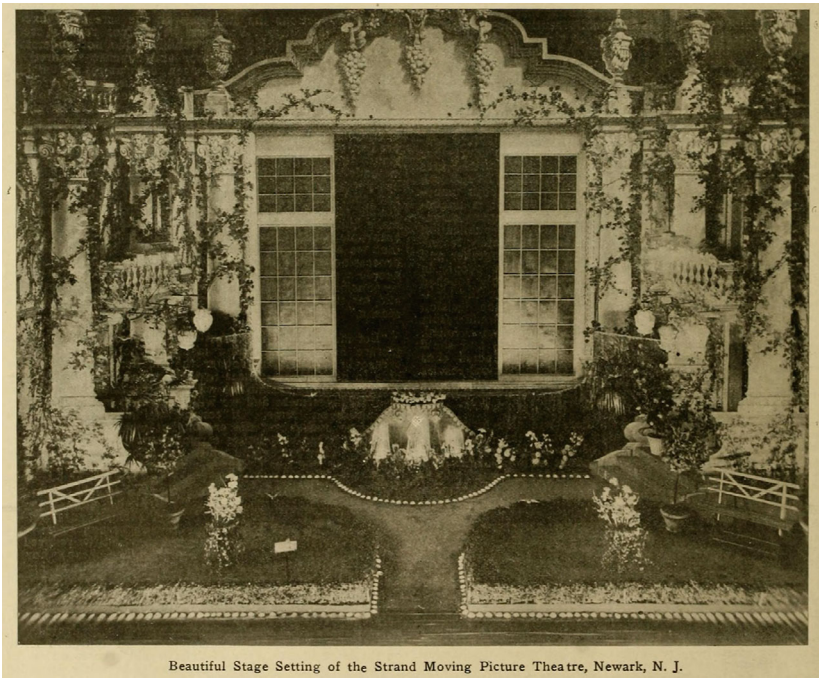


Fig. 2.1 Strand theater stage setting, Newark, New Jersey

"Splash Me," "ten living models" paraded on stage in bathing suits" to introduce Goldwyn's *The Venus Model*, starring Mabel Normand. All danced, and one model sang "There Must Be Little Cupids in the Briny." As a finale, "a tiny bather, a wee girl of five," sang the verse and chorus in "Splash Me" again.

Early Prologues in Buffalo, Indianapolis, and Waukesha

From 1917 through 1918, the trade press often praised Harold B. Franklin for the painted tableaux he had his studio workmen construct to open his programs at the 2,800-seat Shea's Hippodrome in Buffalo. Early examples included an Alpine scene (framed within a stage set of vine-covered classical buildings), a Venetian scene (with a gondola on a

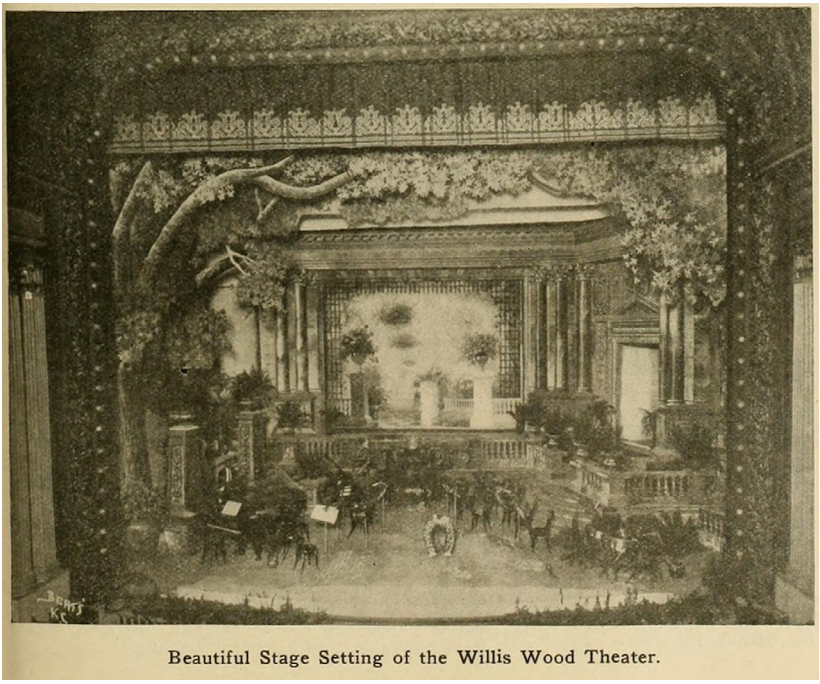


Fig. 2.2 Willis Wood theater stage setting, Kansas City, Missouri

foreground canal and an unexpected mountain in the background), as well as "a battleship coming bow-on."[23] While some tableaux displayed stereotypical vistas, most depicted patriotic subjects, evidence of how exhibitors, whatever films were on their screens, could show support on stage for US soldiers serving in the Great War. To mark "America's active participation," Franklin designed a rocky landscape for a soldier bearing a furling flag, with sleeves rolled up and an insistent stare directed at an audience.[24] For Washington's and Lincoln's birthdays, he reproduced familiar paintings of "Washington Crossing the Delaware" and "Lincoln in a heroic pose."[25] Another patriotic tableau showed "Pershing's doughboys going over the top, with exploding shells [and] an American silk flag waving" in the breeze from an offstage fan.[26] For the fourth Liberty Loan campaign, he reproduced a "famous Howard Christy Chandler poster showing the figure of Democracy leading the Doughboys to victory,

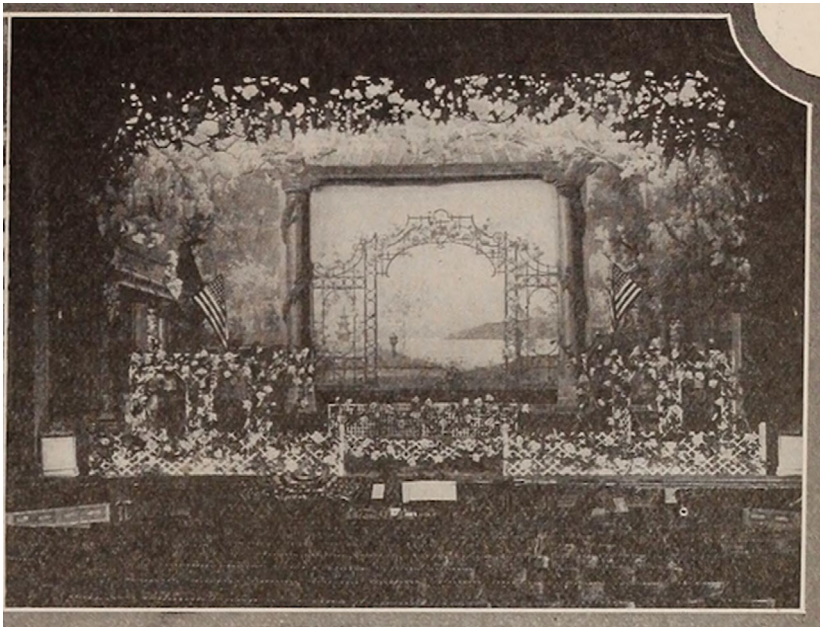


Fig. 2.3 Victoria theater stage setting, Buffalo, New York

gigantic figures against a blue sky," with "electrically operated bursting shells."[27] Finally, to mark the Armistice, he designed the backdrop of a barbed wire battlefield and a centered cluster of large flags to set off a horizontal line of Allied officers who stare down at a kneeling, black-robed, helmeted German officer bearing a flag of surrender.[28] According to *Moving Picture World*, Franklin's showmanship and "distinctive stage sets have found imitators all over the country"[29] (Fig. 2.4).

In parallel with Franklin, S. Barret McCormick was putting on some of the earliest full-fledged prologues as manager of the 3,000-seat Circle Theater in downtown Indianapolis. In June 1917, shortly after the USA entered the war, he created a patriotic "All-American" stage spectacle, "The Top of the U.S.A.," to counter an adaptation of George M. Cohan's *Broadway Jones*, the story of a disruptive romantic triangle resolved by a woman's love for her baby.[30] A huge cyclorama drop represents a vista of the New York skyline at night as seen from a lofty roof garden that fills the stage with "columns draped in flags," [a bank] of red, white,

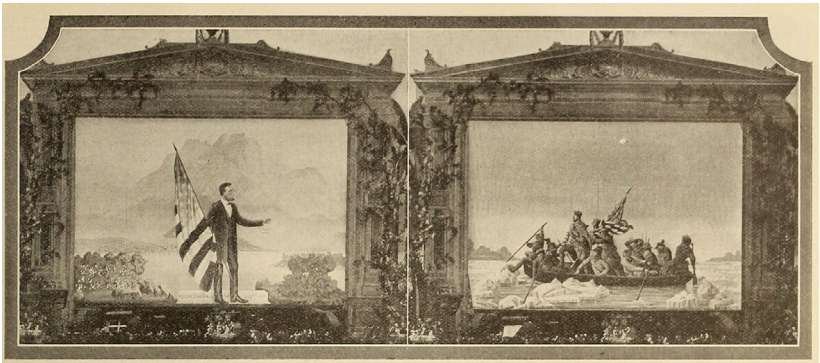


Fig. 2.4 Patriotic tableaux, Shea's Hippodrome theater, Buffalo, New York

and blue flowers, and small café tables nestled on each side.[31] As diners gather, Ada Lee Chase, costumed as "The American Maid" in a gown of stars and stripes, sings "It's Time for Every Boy to Be a Soldier," a young man in the audience stands to answer her call, and a company of soldiers (from the state's National Guard) march in "bearing the colors and guidons of their respective branch of the army." After the soldiers march out, the backdrop descends, revealing the sea stretching out from a New York harbor, where, in a miniature battle, American ships defend the city against an enemy fleet. Several months later, McCormick had his scene studio prepare a complicated prologue for *Polly of the Circus* to celebrate the theater's anniversary.[32] Another huge drop, with a painted rider astride a white horse, frames a dance performed by Mlle. Theo Hewes's ballet school. As trumpets and a calliope blare, the drop rises to reveal the exterior of a circus tent framed by sideshows, as parading performers and animals crowd the stage. At the end, all file through the entrance to the circus tent. The Circle was unusual in operating its own scene studio, enlisting a well-known local singer and actual training soldiers, and acquiring rights to the performances of that ballet school (Figs. 2.5 and 2.6).

In June 1918, Epes W. Sargent surveyed a number of McCormick's recent prologues in *Moving Picture World*.[33] One depicted "The Primeval Forest" introducing *Tarzan of the Apes*: a blue cyclorama sets off "the vivid coloring" of a vine-draped tropical forest and the allegorical dance

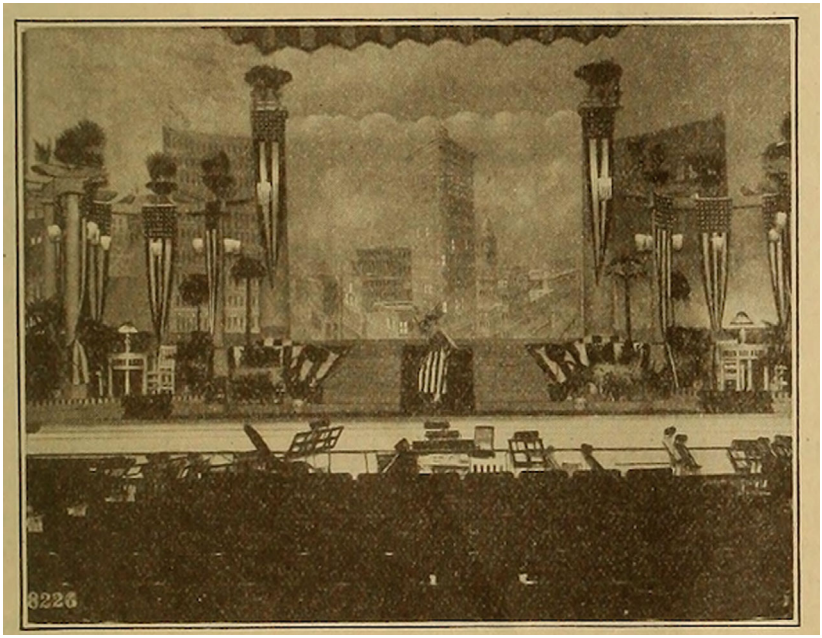


Fig. 2.5 *Broadway Jones* stage prologue, Circle theater, Indianapolis, Indiana

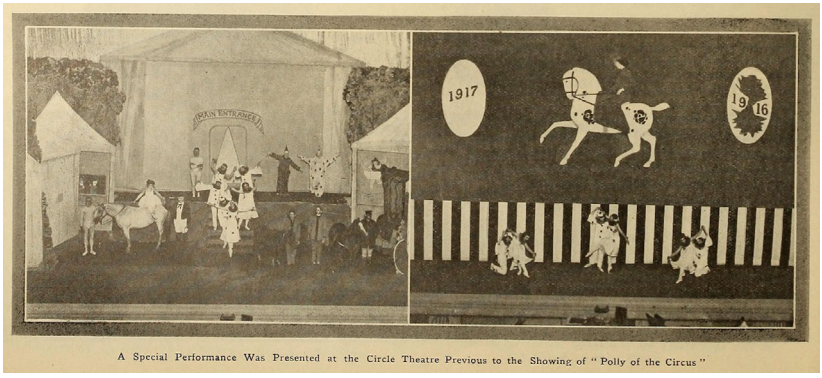
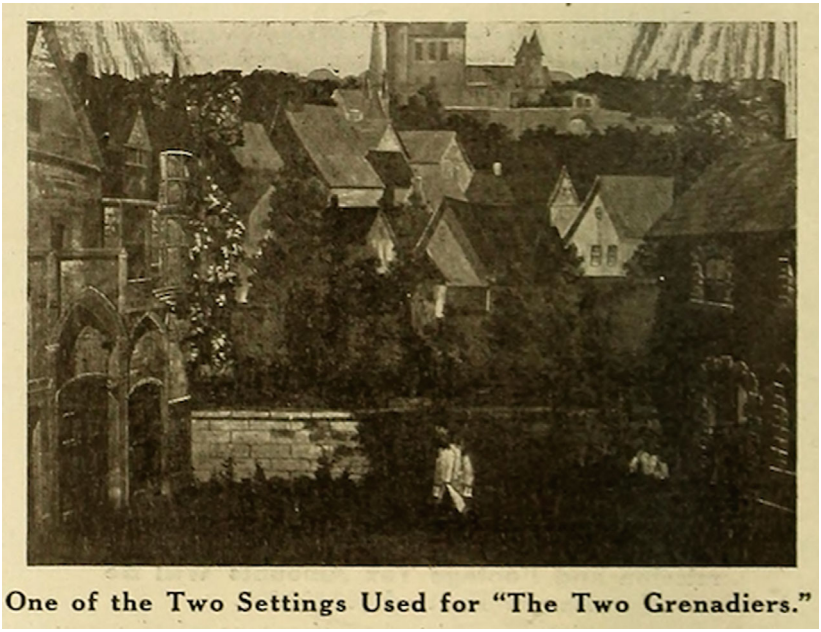


Fig. 2.6 *Polly of the Circus* stage prologue, Circle theater, Indianapolis, Indiana

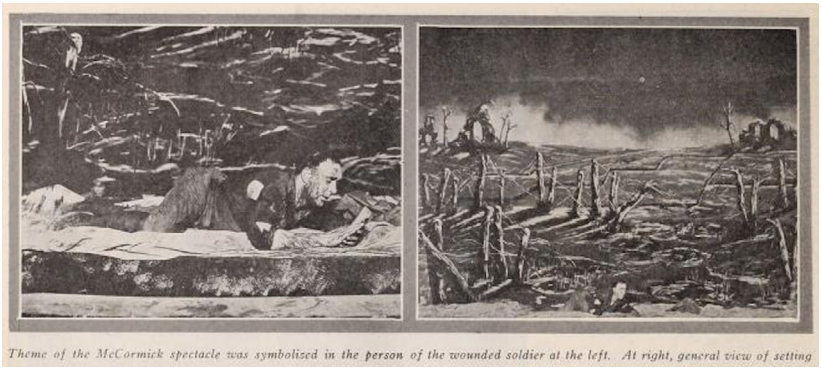
of ballet school pupils. A second begins with the painted drop curtain of a distant hillside village behind a low wall, in front of which a basso performs the "The Two Grenadiers" for *My Four Years in Germany*.[34] The drop rises, revealing a truck covered with a hundred fluttering French flags moving slowly across a background battlefield and explosions sending up fire and smoke "to give the effect of an assault." A third created an Alaskan setting for *The Barrier*: against the backdrop of steep mountains framing a deep valley "with a 'real' waterfall," the same basso, dressed as the film's Poleon and standing by a canoe, sings "The Call of the North." A month later, the stage set for *Carmen of the Klondike* was starker. Against peaks of canvas ice and a blizzard of paper snow, basso Gerald Gardner drives a five-team dog sledge up an incline to halt center stage. There he sings "There's a Long, Long Trail"; as the sledge moves off, his song becomes "Just a Wearin' for You ," and, as the storm subsides, "the bright stars of a Northern night twinkled against the soft blue of the horizon drop."[35] Perhaps the most spectacular, in sharp contrast to Franklin's Armistice tableau, was "The Pageant of the Allies" that preceded the screening of *Under Four Flags*.[36] The huge drop curtain of a "bleak, shell-torn battlefield" sets off a dying soldier (Gerald Gardner) in a shell crater with patches of red poppies at his feet. Lifting his head, he roughly recites "On Flanders Field the Poppies Bloom" and falls back clutching a tattered picture of his mother. Aroused again, he sings "Mother Machree" in the voice of a child and, when a bugle sounds, cries out "They Come—I Die in Peace—The Hosts of Freedom." One by one, young girls bearing the flags of Serbia, Russia, France, Belgium, England, and Italy steal in to stand around the soldier and pledge allegiance to the war's cause (Figs. 2.7 and 2.8).

In early February 1918, Grauman opened his 2,350-seat Million Dollar theater in the Broadway district of Los Angeles, with its unusually large stage, 35 feet deep and 100 feet across.[37] One of the earliest prologues to use this space appeared for the war film, *The Claws of the Hun*, in which the son of a munitions manufacturer thwarts the blackmail plot of a German spy.[38] The prologue seems to have anticipated the end, when the heroic son departs for Europe to join the Allies: within a stage set duplicating the deck of an oncoming battleship, the USS *Cheyenne*, a uniformed male chorus of six voices belt out a series of war songs.[39] Several weeks later, a very different prologue introduced *The City of Dim Faces*, in which a Chinese silk merchant falls in love with an American girl but is rejected, and he has to rescue her from a marriage broker in



One of the Two Settings Used for "The Two Grenadiers."

Fig. 2.7 *Four Years in Germany* stage prologue, Circle theater, Indianapolis, Indiana



Theme of the McCormick spectacle was symbolized in the person of the wounded soldier at the left. At right, general view of setting

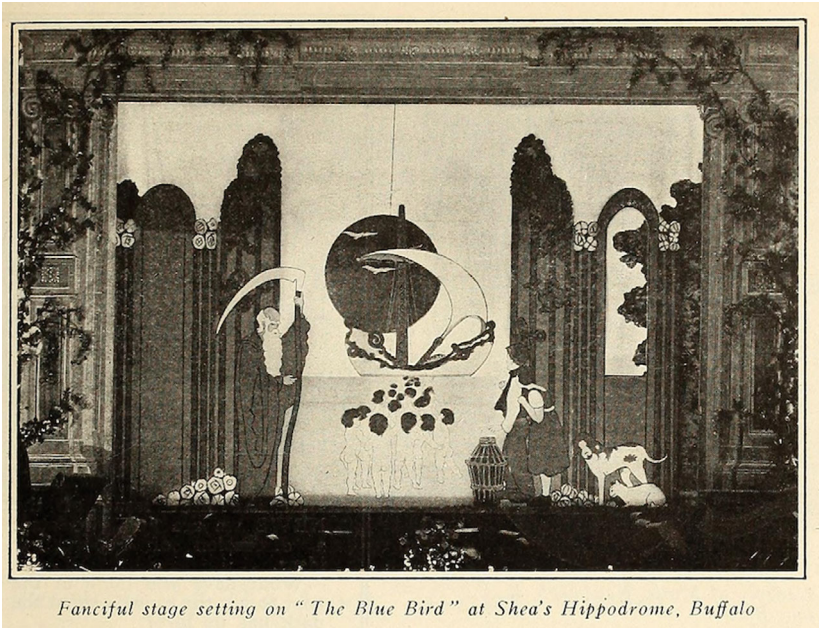
Fig. 2.8 *Under Four Flags* stage prologue, Circle theater, Indianapolis, Indiana

San Francisco's Chinatown.[40] This prologue depicts a Chinatown scene within a triptych stage set where twenty Chinese men engage in some kind of pantomime until a drum calls them into a temple in the central panel. Could this scene depict the stereotypical view of a Chinatown so disreputable as to disgust the American girl?[41] A more pleasurable prologue led into *My Cousin*, starring Enrico Caruso, who plays a poor artist enduring his lover's rejection until a famous tenor proves that he really is his cousin.[42] In the stage set of a street scene in Little Italy, among the typical entourage of an organ grinder and vegetable carts, a chorus of twenty mixed voices prefaces the reunion of the two lovers. One singer, dressed as the cousin, lip syncs an off-stage recording of a favorite Caruso song that carries "the golden voice with remarkable clarity throughout the theater"[43].

One invaluable result of this trade press attention is the discovery of distinctive prologues for the same film at different movie theaters in 1918. Perfect examples come in screenings of *The Blue Bird*, in which a fairy leads two children through a series of adventures as they seek the "bluebird of happiness."[44] During Easter Week at Rothapfel's 2,200-seat Rivoli, art director John Wenger created a blue-lit scene of "a mysterious fairyland," with two tall candles at either side of the stage, burning with tiny blue lights, and a "red flaring cross in the center, symbolic of the soul, the motif of the feature."[45] Special lighting soon reveals "one girl, symbolic of dreaming," downstage left; then another girl, "symbolic of life," crosses to down stage right; and both pose before the cross "with their arms outstretched in worship."[46] Shortly thereafter, at his Strand theater in downtown Washington, D.C., Tom Moore also devised a special prologue for the film.[47] Beginning with the stage dimly lit in blue, slowly expanding daylight reveals a bank of flowers, a spot-lit "toe dance," and a flower ballet performed by "twenty coryphees." Against a background tableau, the figures of Father Time and Tyltyl and Mytyl then set sail toward Memoryland. Two months later, Franklin designed a strikingly stylized prologue matching the symbolist character of Maeterlinck's original play. Framed by columns of trees and a tall gate, the painted figures of Father Time and the two children evoke "the moment when the little souls are waiting to be born." Before the backdrop of tiny bluebirds against a centered golden sun in a blue sky, a finely curved boat begins to move off, the line of its sail echoing the circular sun. About the same time, Flossie A. Jones put on her own prologue for *The Blue Bird* at the Colonial in Waukesha, Wisconsin.[48] Several fairies (local dancers)

are sleeping in the moonlight when two little girls tiptoe in; a professional dancer follows, joined by the awakened fairies, as day breaks for their dance performance. After one girl sings the song "Bluebird," a fairy tells the children "not to look for happiness in fairyland" (anticipating the film's ending) but to find it "right at home" (Fig. 2.9).

With its 1,000 seats, the Colonial was Jones's flagship among the three theaters she managed in Waukesha, a town of fewer than 10,000 people, sixteen miles west of Milwaukee, whose theaters could lure her patrons to the larger city by trolly.[49] In order to maintain her clientele, her strategy, unique for a small town, was to commandeer the Colonial's large stage not only to create prologues that introduced feature films but also to host touring stage productions and concerts.[50] The first prologue that won trade press praise was a Parisian cabaret scene that reproduced the opening scene of *Revelation*, where Nazimova performed an Apache dance.[51] For this novelty, Jones arranged some tables and chairs, a player



Fanciful stage setting on "The Blue Bird" at Shea's Hippodrome, Buffalo

Fig. 2.9 *The Blue Bird* stage prologue, Shea's Hippodrome, Buffalo, New York

piano, and sketches on the stage walls, costumed her stagehands and a dozen high-school boys in French student outfits, and hired a barefoot dancer to perform an Apache solo. For *The Blue Bird* several weeks later, she designed an elaborate backdrop of a distant landscape framed by columns of trees and a stone building for her dancing and singing performers.[52] Later that summer, Jones staged a more detailed gypsy camp scene introducing *Toys of Fate*, also starring Nazimova.[53] A tableau of trees and a misty distant landscape form the background for a group of ragged urchins sitting around a small campfire (stage right) and several basket weavers (stage left); a girl sings a gypsy love song to her lover who answers from off stage; finally, a professional dancer performs the "Gypsy Fire Dance," the lights dim, and the film begins. For one of the Liberty Loan campaigns, she even constructed a double-sided tableau, with a darkened battlefield backing a group of soldiers about to attack over a trench (stage right) and a well-lit family interior (stage left), with an absent son apparently in the war.[54] At the end, "a young lady stepped forward and sang 'When the Boys Come Marching Home'." The trade press promoted all of her prologues, surprising evidence that even small-town theater managers like Jones could be as creative as those in much larger cities[55] (Figs. 2.10, 2.11, and 2.12).

Based on the work of these theater managers, what appears to have characterized the practices and typologies of early prologues? Exhibitors such as McCormick established their own scene studios to design and build elaborate stage sets. Most of them, from Franklin and Wenger to Jones, relied on large single sets as backgrounds for their performers. Some, like McCormick, could combine a painted drop curtain that rose

Fig. 2.10 *Revelation* stage prologue, Colonial theater, Waukesha, Wisconsin

Fig. 2.11 *Toys of Fate* stage prologue, Colonial theater, Waukesha, Wisconsin

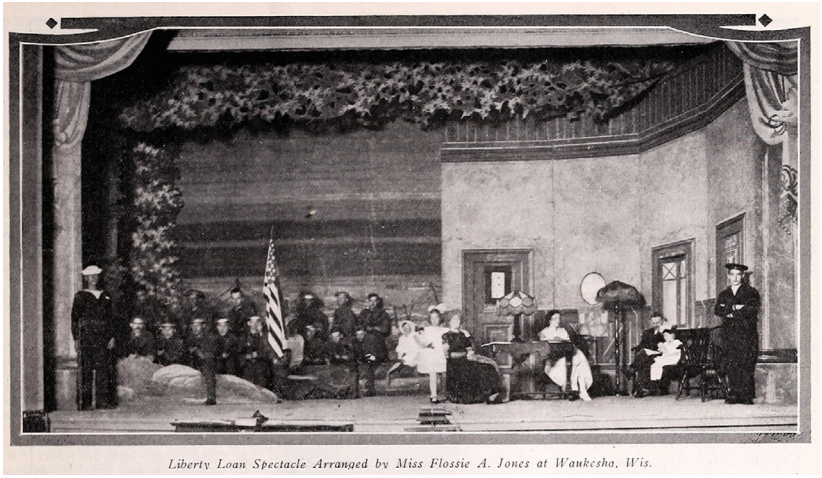


Fig. 2.12 Liberty Loan theatrical presentation, Colonial theater, Waukesha, Wisconsin

to reveal the illusion of a deep space vista in a second scene or, like Jones, could design a double-sided stage set to contrast exterior and interior scenes. During these few years, stage settings and prologues were unusually topical, creating scenes that evoked events and actions in the Great

War. Following the example of Rothapfel, many prologues also developed special lighting effects to create an alluring atmosphere and mark transitions in the performances. As for the performers, typically they were local singers, dancers, and actors, whether amateurs or semi-professionals well-known to the theater audience. Less often they were professional singers and dancers from vaudeville or from disbanded touring theatrical companies.[56] Theater managers also could arrange with local stores to sponsor female models, sometimes hired from out of town, to perform in fashion shows. In using local talent, exhibitors could not only attract audiences, but also promote local businesses. All of these early prologues, whether evoking a film's opening or a later scene, were meant to complement or harmonize with the feature film and so lure an audience into the atmosphere of the film's story.

Finally, there was the rare exception. Instead of a prologue, a theatrical presentation was interpolated at a crucial moment early in the film. Grauman may have first come up with the idea for this kind of interpolation. The occasion occurred in April 1918 during the screening of *Flare Up Sal*, a western in which Sal leaves a wagon of prospectors to search for her wastrel father in a settlement and eventually becomes "the queen of the dance hall."[57] Replacing the film's initial dance hall scene (at a reel break) was the triptych set of the large, hewn log walls of a frontier dance hall, in which the actors themselves (specially hired) "grouped around the gambling tables, [leaned at] the great oaken bar, [or whirled] around the floor [...] the girls in glittering costumes."[58] In playing Goldwyn's *The Auction Block*, McCormick also experimented with this practice by stopping the film (again at a reel break) as "the ancient slave scene" was to begin, creating his own tableau of an architectural ruin and a deep-space landscape within which a woman in white is being sold on a distant raised platform—and then resuming the film.[59] As successful as this experiment seemed to Sargent, he admitted that most theater managers would find such an interpolation difficult to pull off—and the practice would only occasionally recur.[60]

Notes

1. W. Stephen Bush, for instance, was a noted performer, beginning with his lectures that accompanied the *Passion Play*—Advertisement, *Motion Picture World* (27 June 1908): 547; and "Notes," *Billboard* (10 October 1908): 9.

2. Harold B. Franklin, "Stage Presentations," *Motion Picture Theater Management* (New York: George H. Doran, 1927), 297.
3. David Mayer, *Stagestruck Filmmaker: D. W. Griffith & the American Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009), 29.
4. Mayer, *Stagestruck Filmmaker*, 94.
5. In Forest City (PA) in 1908, Rothapfel renovated a roller-skating rink into the Family Theater, playing vaudeville and movies—Ross Melnick, *American Showman: Samuel "Roxy" Rothafel and the Birth of the Entertainment Industry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 43. About the same time, in San Francisco, Grauman began managing his father's vaudeville theater, the Empress—"D. J. Grauman Early in the Game," *Moving Picture World* (15 July 1916): 400. See also *Charles Beardsley, Hollywood's Master Showman: The Legendary Sid Grauman* (New York: Cornwall Books, 1983), 29–30.
6. See, for instance, Richard Abel, "That Most American of Attractions, the Illustrated Song," in Richard Abel and Rick Altman, eds., *The Sounds of Early Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 143–155.
7. William Paul, *When Movies Were Theater: Architecture, Exhibition, and the Evolution of American Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 208–213.
8. "Fine Stage Set at the Strand, Newark," *Moving Picture World* (29 August 1914): 1228. Paul briefly describes the Newark Strand's picture setting in *When Movies Were Theater*, 211.
9. "Unique Stage Setting," *Moving Picture World* (25 July 1914): 591; and "Among the Picture Theaters," *Moving Picture World* (5 December 1914): 1367. The Majestic was located on the city's west side, near a mixed-class suburb. Initially built as a legitimate theater seating 2,000, the Willis Wood was extensively remodeled to include a permanent stage setting.
10. "Buffalo Neighborhood House Manager Tells Some Secrets of His Success," *Motion Picture News (*15 December 1917): 4163.
11. Melnick, *American Showman*, 83–84. The Regent was ten blocks south of the Alhambra, a declining vaudeville house. See also his strategy for introducing *Quo Vadis?* at the Regent in 1913: spotlit in a theater box, a young boy asks an elderly man what "Quo Vadis?" means, and his reply informed the audience as an antique

Roman stage set was revealed—Rick Altman, *Silent Film Sound* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 385.

12. "Strand Theater Opens," *Motography* (2 May 1914): 315. Even earlier, Rothapfel had constructed an elaborate stage setting for the Alhambra in Milwaukee—see Fig. 2 in Melnick, *American Showman*, insert.
13. "New York's Rialto Opens," *Motography* (6 May 1916): 1019–1020. Hugo Riesenfeld was hired to conduct the 36-piece orchestra—Melnick, *American Showman*, 113–115.
14. "Rialto and Rivoli," *Motion Picture News* (22 June 1918): 3699. In one instance, all three panels (the central one hid the screen) depict first an Indian river scene for a performer in costume to sing "The Land of Sky Blue Waters" and later a deep blue scene of "the minarets of Jerusalem" for a cellist to play the ancient Hebrew ritual melody, "Kol Nedrei."
15. "Seeing the Rialto with Rothapfel," *Motion Picture News* (24 November 1917): 3609.
16. See, for instance, "In the Dressing-Room," *The Picture Show* (26 July 1915): 16.
17. "Brady Contracts with Fashionable Modiste for World Gowns," *Motion Picture News* (23 September 1916): 1845.
18. Fox ad, *Moving Picture World* (9 June 1917): 1548; and "Keystone Comedies for October," *Motography* (22 September 1917): 626.
19. "Live Wire Exhibitors," *Motion Picture News* (20 June 1917): 496.
20. Epes Wintrhrop Sargent, "Advertising for Exhibitors," *Moving Picture World* (10 November 1917): 855.
21. "Make the Fashion Show a Society Event," *Paramount Press Book* (7 January 1918): 4.
22. "10 Bathing Girls Used with 'The Venus Model'," *Motion Picture News* (10 August 1918): 889. The Kinema was located in the Broadway entertainment district of downtown Los Angeles. For a good sketch of Tally's early career, see Jan Olsson, *Los Angeles Before Hollywood: Journalism and American Film Culture, 1905–1915* (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2008), 119–123.
23. "Shea's Hippodrome Sets Very High Mark in Stage Settings with Each Picture," *Motion Picture News* (20 September 1917): 2710. Shea's Hippodrome opened in 1914 in downtown Buffalo.
24. "Shea's Hippodrome Links Close with War Conditions," *Motion Picture News* (15 December 1917): 4167.

25. "Franklin Sets Mark in Patriotic Settings for His Stage," *Motion Picture News* (16 Marcy 1918): 1577.
26. Harold B. Franklin, "How Stage Settings Provide Atmosphere," *Motion Picture News* (27 July 1918): 587.
27. Harold B. Franklin, "Your Theatre and the Fourth Liberty Loan," *Motion Picture News* (21 September 1918): 1852.
28. Harold B. Franklin, "How Exhibitor Can Become a 'Producer'," *Motion Picture News* (28 December 1918): 3873.
29. "Shea's Hippodrome Is Famous," *Moving Picture World* (8 June 1918): 1439.
30. Peter Milne, "Broadway Jones," *Motion Picture News* (7 April 1917): 2190.
31. "What Theater Men Are Doing," *Motography* (23 June 1917): 1307.
32. "Circle Theatre Stages Spectacle with Big Ballet in Showing 'Polly of the Circus'," *Motion Picture News* (6 October 1917): 2338.
33. Epes W. Sargent, "Adding to the Pictures," *Moving Picture World* (8 June 1918): 1406–1407.
34. "How McCormick Put Over 'My Four Years in Germany' for Two Weeks," *Motion Picture News* (11 May 1918): 2826; and Epes W. Sargent, "Adding to the Pictures," *Moving Picture World* (8 June 1918): 1406.
35. "'Atmosphere' Cools Patrons of Circle as Mercury Reaches the 90 Degree Mark Outside," *Motion Picture News* (6 July 1918): 81.
36. Davis Hampton, "McCormick Stages a Wonderful Pageant for Circle Theatre Showing of 'Under Four Flags'," *Motion Picture News* (21 December 1918): 3692.
37. "Theatres Worth While," *Motion Picture News* (2 February 1918): 759; and Beardsley, *Hollywood's Master Showman*, 35–42.
38. "Cast and Story of 'The Claws of the Hun'," *Paramount Press Books* (June–August 1918): 3; and Peter Milne, "The Claws of the Hun," *Motion Picture News* (13 July 1918): 252.
39. Beardsley, *Hollywood's Master Showman*, 45.
40. Peter Milne, "The City of Dim Faces," *Motion Picture News* (17 July 1918): 641.
41. Beardsley, *Hollywood's Master Showman*, 45.
42. "My Cousin—Artcraft," *Motion Picture News* (7 December 1918): 3423.

43. The quote apparently comes from the *New York Times*, according to Beardsley, *Hollywood's Master Showman*, 47.
44. Genevieve Harris, "The Bluebird," *Motography* (13 April 1918): 723.
45. "Seeing the Rialto and the Rivoli with Rothapfel," *Motion Picture News* (13 April 1918): 2216. The Rivoli opened in December 1917, two blocks north of the Rialto. A Russian immigrant, John Wenger also became known for creating stage sets for the Metropolitan Opera.
46. See also Wenger's later prologue for *Under the Greenwood Tree* at the Rivoli—"Seeing the Rialto and the Rivoli with Rothapfel," *Motion Picture News* (21 December 1918): 3690.
47. "'Bluebird' Spurs Exhibitors to Unusual Advertising and Presentation Methods," *Motion Picture News* (27 April 1918): 2521.
48. "Gives 'The Bluebird' a Beautiful Setting," *Motography* (29 June 1918): 1208.
49. Jones also was general manager of the Waukesha Amusement Company. Of her other two theaters, the Unique played vaudeville and movies; the Auditorium, only movies. See Miss Flossie A. Jones, "Miss Jones, Waukesha, Wis., Exhibitor, Wins Against Odds," *Exhibitors Herald* (18 August 1917): 29.
50. "This Woman Exhibitor Tells You How," *Motion Picture News* (6 July 1918): 76–77, 85.
51. Genevieve Harris, "Woman Manager Packs Three Houses," *Motography* (1 June 1918): 1043.
52. "Gives 'The Bluebird' a Beautiful Setting," *Motography* (29 June 1918): 1208.
53. "Atmosphere Achieved by Woman Exhibitor Who Uses Local Talent in Her Prologues," *Motion Picture News* (24 August 1918): 1231.
54. "Theatre Puts Over Big Liberty Loan Spectacle and Citizens Join in to Make It Great Success," *Motion Picture News* (12 October 1918): 2363.
55. Jones was a strong advocate of small-town exhibitors, which led her to become influential at motion picture conventions—"Aids Needed by Small City Exhibitors, *Motion Picture News* (3 August 1918): 726–727. Tragically, while attending a motion picture convention in New York City, Jones contracted influenza and died

of pneumonia—"Flossie A. Jones Influenza Victim," *Exhibitors Herald and Motography* (2 November 1918): 24.

56. Touring theater companies steeply declined in number, beginning around 1910, and reached a low point by 1918—see Graph 1 in Jack Poggi's *Theater in America: The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870–1967* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), 32.
57. Joseph L. Kelley, "Flare Up Sal," *Motion Picture News* (16 February 1918): 1036.
58. "2,000 Spent for Setting Lasting Only a Minute at Grauman's," *Motion Picture News* (6 April 1918): 2051.
59. Sargent, "Adding to the Pictures," 1407.
60. As the rare example of a different experiment, see the showing of *Ramona* (1915) as a "Cinema-Theatric Entertainment" (Los Angles and New York), in which stage scenes with the same characters served as transitions between film sequences (probably marked by the breaks in film reels)—Paul, *When Movies Were Theater*, 214.

CHAPTER 3

Surveying the Landscape of Prologues, 1919–1920

In late 1918, Genevieve Harris devoted a daily column in the *Chicago Post* to Rothapfel and producer Samuel Goldwyn, then touring several cities as luncheon speakers for exhibitors and other businessmen.[1] Their topic: was the "picture itself," as Goldwyn claimed, or its "artistic presentation," as Rothapfel argued, the "most important element" of a movie theater program? Rothapfel was not alone in promoting such presentations that, with sets designed by Wenger at the Rialto and Rivoli, were making him famous. When Rothapfel replaced Major Edward Bowes as manager of the new 5,300-seat Capitol in June 1920, Wenger was also serving as art director, with stage settings already lauded as gems of artistry.[2] At Shea's Hippodrome, Franklin also claimed that the "arrangement of the program, and the proper staging of the picture" was the thing that most satisfied his audiences.[3] Similarly, the trade press and local newspapers began lauding Grauman for mounting prologues that "accentuated the [audience's] interest in pictures" at his Million Dollar Theater in Los Angeles (Fig. 3.1).[4]

However well-known and admired such theater managers were, they could not function without assistance. *Motion Picture News* had already printed photographs of McCormick's scene studio at the Circle theater.[5] A crucial member of that studio was Frank J. Zimmer, an art director most responsible for creating "the stage settings and decorative effects" for the theater's prologues and other performances.[6] One of those was a lavish spectacle, "The Palace of Diversions, an elaborate Arabian Nights

R. Abel, *The Exhibitor as Producer*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-71781-9_3

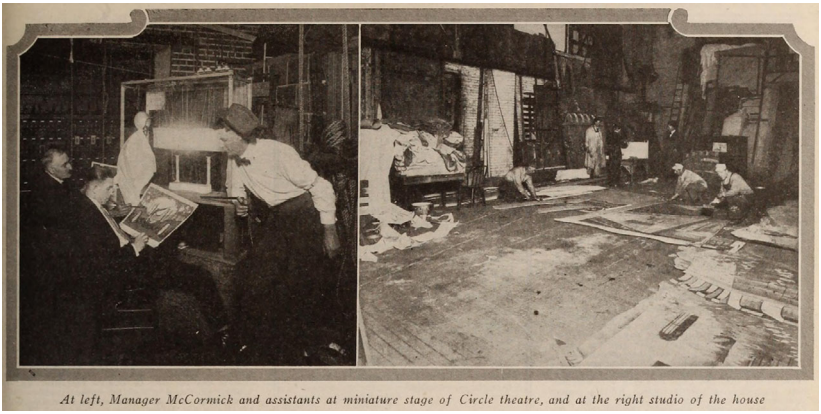


Fig. 3.1 Scene studio, Circle theater, Indianapolis, Indiana

episode with ballet, song, whirling Arabs, Bagdad fashion, and other novelties."[7] With "scenic work and costumes designed by Zimmer," this "spectaclorama" was as pretentious and popular as anything that Ziegfeld put on at the "Follies."[8] Following McCormick's lead, according to *Moving Picture World*, Grauman also set up a production department for putting on prologues at his Los Angeles theater.[9] Frank Costello, manager of the Tivoli in downtown San Francisco, devised a different strategy.[10] In the morning he would run a booked film, so "his entire house staff, including the ushers, ticket-takers, and box office people" could take notes on the scenes and intertitles that most impressed them. From those notes he then composed his prologue.[11] If other exhibitors had scenic studio departments, perhaps they were so widespread, at least in large theaters, that the trade press felt no need to report them.

The following pages offer salient examples of the prologue practices well established by not only the previous exhibitors, but also others newly hired, such as Joseph Plunkett at the New York Strand, Edward Hyman at the Brooklyn Stand, and Jack Callicott at the Los Angeles Kinema.[12] Moreover, the spectrum of typologies defining prologues kept expanding—and in all kinds of movie theaters throughout the country.[13]

Single, Double, and Triptych Stage Sets

Standard in exhibitors' repertoire were single stage sets, whether relatively simple or elaborate. In January 1919, as if following the example of Flossie A. Jones, the Colonial theater in the small town of Rochester, New Hampshire mounted a special prologue for *The Romance of Tarzan*.[14] The complicated story of the villain's repeated deceptions and Tarzan's rescues of Jane seem reduced to an early moment in the film.[15] Before the backdrop of a distant lake and mountain, framed by vines, figures costumed like several of the film's characters and animals pose on a beach, as if awaiting a ship. At the same time, Plunkett devised a topical prologue for *The Fighting Roosevelts*, which highlighted major events in the life of Theodore Roosevelt.[16] Anticipating the end of the Spanish-American War, the stage set features a navy ship "plowing through the seas" with "foam breaking against the prow."[17] A male quartet standing in the bow sings "When You Come Back," and a replica of the Statue of Liberty appears stage left. Two months later, he mounted a prologue far more serious than *The Better'Ole* , a humorous live action version of the popular cartoons of Old Bill and his comrades in the Great War.[18] This was a stunningly realistic war zone "trench at night with blue clouds moving overhead."[19] After gunfire and a rocket startle the audience, a single light burning in the trench reveals "Old BilI" singing "Up from Somerset." In Los Angeles, Grauman likewise imagined another prologue in sharp contrast to *Luck in Pawn*, a romantic comedy of "trifling scandals" in a "fashionable summer resort."[20] In a two-sided stage set titled "Anvil Chorus of 1920," similar to Jones's Liberty Bond spectacle, "tawny red lighting" reveals a pair of blacksmith shop interiors, in which one man works a bellows and three others strike anvils, with sparks flying, in time to the familiar song from *Il Trovatore*.[21] At one point, the men step forward to boom out the popular hit, "The Vamp," return to the shops, and sing another, "'Golden Gate,' in a very subdued tone." "A big hit with the fans," these singing workmen likely made the feature seem even more trifling (Fig. 3.2).

In late November 1919, Rothapfel briefly rivaled Grauman in Los Angeles when he took over management of the 2,000-seat Beaux-Art California Theatre.[22] Heralding his first "artistic presentation," Grace Kingsley described the "exquisitely staged and really impressive prologue" that introduced *Flame of the Desert*, a familiar story of an aristocratic British woman, an Arab chieftain, and Egyptians rebelling against colonial

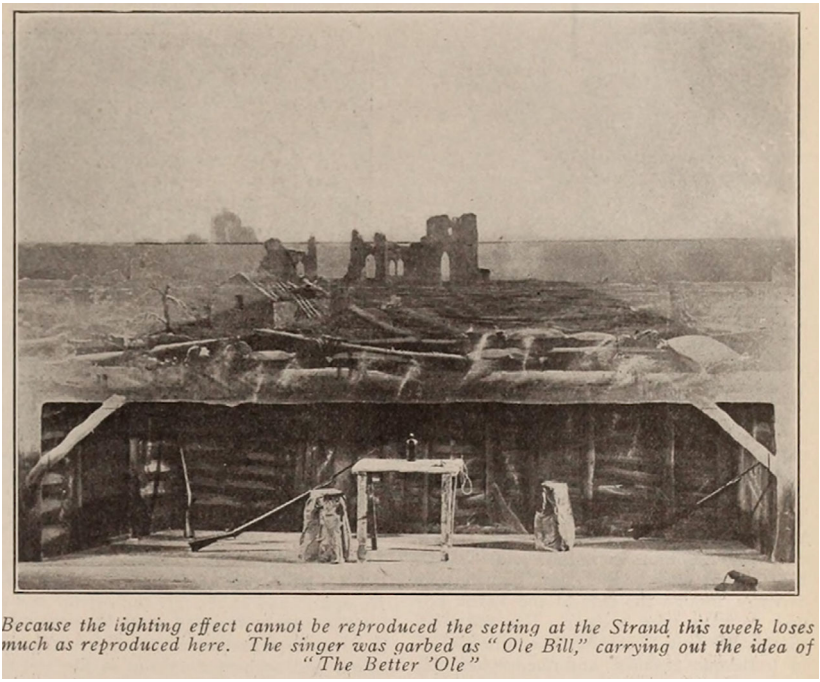


Fig. 3.2 *Better'Ole* stage prologue, Strand theater, New York

rule.[23] Backing the performance of popular tunes such as the "Bedouin Love Song," which represses any sense of the film's political and sexual threats, is a spectacular vision of "the Nile and the Sphynx." In December, Rothapfel produced "an atmospheric prelude" for *Soldiers of Fortune* that starred "Senor and Senora Espinosa in Spanish dances," joined by Manuel V. Budrow, "the Spanish Prima Dona."[24] But then, as if following Grauman and McCormick, he came up with a surprising interlude. As the first reel ends, after the characters have been introduced in the Arizona desert or in a New York millionaire's ballroom, the film "fades out and the stage is flooded with the glow of amber and gold [...] Out of the shadows come human beings, singing and dancing, and blending with the flood of color we hear dreamy melodies of South American music."[25] Specifically, "a Spanish chorus of eight sings 'Las Golodrinas'," followed by a dancer performing "Espagne" center stage and the chorus again singing

"La Paloma."[26] As this stage illusion fades, the film's second reel resumes with the "panorama of a South American city" into which the singers and dancers seem to return. This theatrical scene, a reviewer wrote, rather than interrupting the story accelerated the action: "the South American atmosphere […] prepares us better than any subtitle for our entrance […] into that land of jealousies and revolutions" in the foothills of the Andes[27] (Figs. 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5).

Elaborate prologues proliferated. At the New York Capitol, where he had been hired as art director in late 1919, Wenger created an "elastic" prologue for *April Folly* that could serve as a model for smaller theaters.[28] It begins with a "futuristic curtain full of fantastic bubbles" that rises to reveal, through a scrim drop suggesting a dream, a "gorgeous ballroom, with masked figures in costume throwing serpentines and toy balloons in wild abandon." Backlighting of varied colors "served to heighten the dream effect." At the same time, the 1,950-seat Madison at Detroit's Grand Circle Park constructed a mission set of twin towers framing a low gated wall for a showing of *For the Soul of Rafael*, "a tale of old California," in which a convent girl has a *vacquero* lover but is forced to marry a wastrel, who in the end is killed in a duel.[29] Sketching the early parts of the film, a well-staged choreography has four monks sing "Te Deum," the lovers perform a duet before parting and, when they return, enact a "Romeo and Juliet" balcony scene, as a deep off-stage voice recites the play's famous love poem.[30] The New Lyric in Minneapolis designed

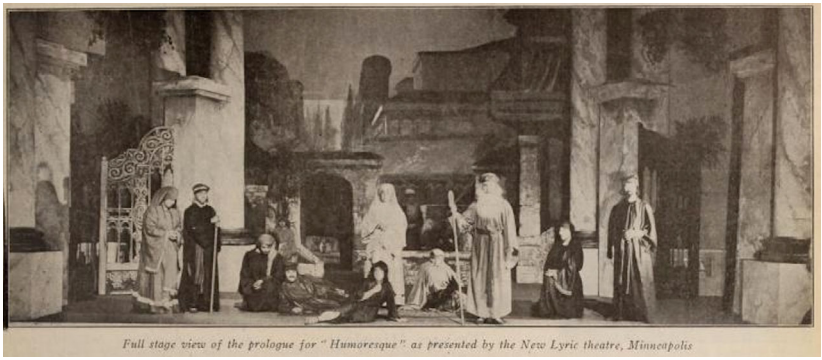


Fig. 3.3 *Humoresque* stage prologue, New Lyric theater, Minneapolis, Minnesota

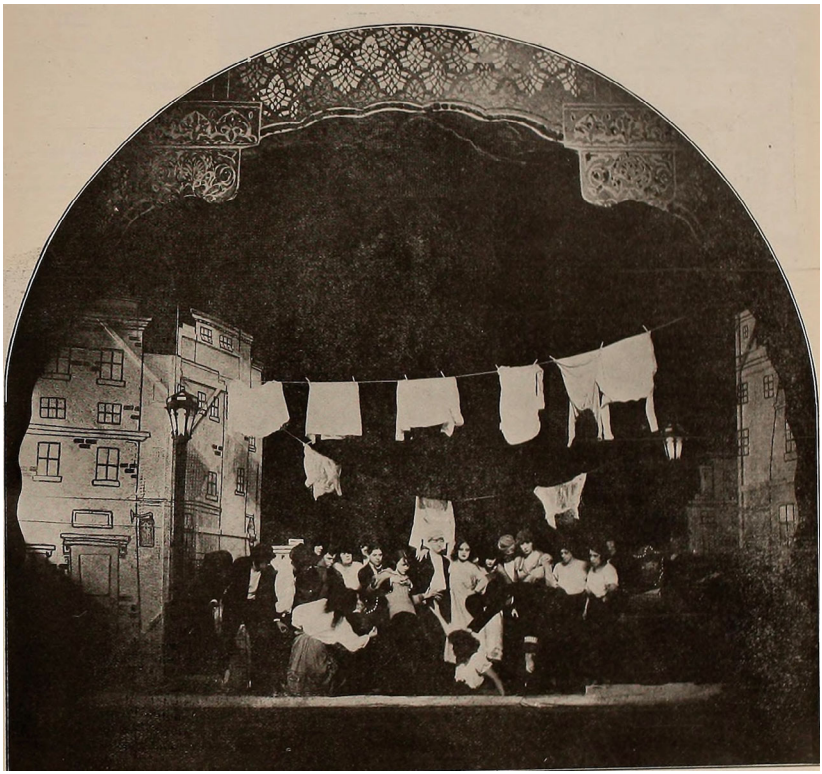


Fig. 3.4 *The Heart of a Child* stage prologue, Capitol theater, New York

an atmospheric setting for *Humoresque*, in which the son of a New York ghetto family becomes a celebrated violinist, only to have his arm injured in the Great War.[31] As historical background for the story, this single stage set depicts the ways of the Jews in old Palestine, where, backed by the drop of an alleyway between buildings, a pair of male singers perform the aptly plaintive "Eli, Eli" ("The Wrath of the Gods"), linking a past and present suffering, relatable to any audience.[32] At the Capitol again, Wenger erected his most massive stage set to introduce *The Heart of a Child*, a melodrama in which a cockney girl (Nazimova) becomes a model and actress and marries a lord.[33] This "atmospheric prologue" reenacts the film's opening scenes of the London slums at night, with

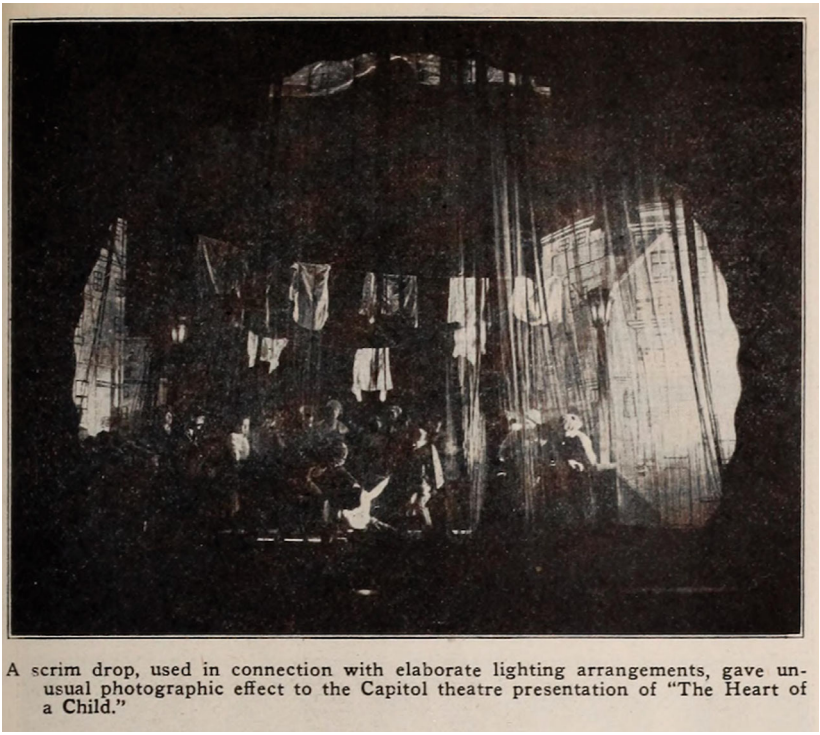


Fig. 3.5 *The Heart of a Child* stage prologue, Capitol theater, New York

huge white sheets hung high up to dry between a backdrop of two tall buildings, while below a cockney girl dances to a hurdy-gurdy before a large crowd of local people.[34] After a policeman joins the festivities, a scrim drop obscures the stage, as if fog is enveloping the city (Figs. 3.6 and 3.7).

In Los Angeles, Grauman put on a stunning "Choo Choo" prologue for *Easy to Get*, in which a honeymooning couple break up, endure surprising situations in the mountains, and reunite.[35] This involved constructing the façade of a Pullman car on stage, with one side open to the audience, "wheels revolving and sparks flying."[36] A variety of characters—a conductor, a porter, a vendor, several youngsters with instruments, and four young poker players—perform a medley of songs, finishing with

Fig. 3.6 "Choo Choo" stage prologue, Million Dollar theater, Los Angeles

a small girl ironically warbling "The Vamp" in "a sweet little voice." In the end, with the Pullman stopped and empty, "a hobo came from beneath the car and limped away." When the film opens, the honeymoon couple are seated at the window of a similar Pullman car. In late 1920, Grauman staged a simpler, yet evocative "North Woods" prologue for *Behold My Wife*, in which a jilted businessman marries an "Indian princess," takes to drink after he sends her to his family in England, and later finds she is "an honored figure of society."[37] As dawn breaks over a backdrop of tall trees and a rough cabin (stage left), a woodsman courts an Indian maiden in a small clearing, while two others sit in front of the cabin and a third stands near the couple—all four women as singers in native costume.[38] As a prelude to the film's narrative, their first song, "From the Land of the Sky-blue Water," matches the film's beginning, but the second, "Tripoli," suggests a longing for home and anticipates the ending in England. Theater managers for the same film in smaller cities designed prologues singling out a lone "Indian princess," described in overtly

Fig. 3.7 *Behold My Wife* stage prologue, Million Dollar theater, Los Angeles

stereotypical language. The Avon in Utica, New York, created a multiple-paneled forest backdrop with a centered white tepee. "An Indian girl" emerges from the tepee and "crooning redskin melodies over her breakfast, folded up the tepee and wandered off for another day's travel."[39] Months later, the Majestic in Louisville, Kentucky, built a log cabin interior, with a large blanket hung on a wall and a glowing fireplace, where "a local singer, dressed as a squaw, sang a few Indian songs."[40] (Fig. 3.8).

For some theater managers a single stage was not enough. Besides the two-sided set for *Luck in Pawn*, Grauman produced another triptych stage setting to establish a complementary mood for the "documentary" feature, *Cannibals of the South Seas*.[41] Simulating daybreak, lights come up gradually on all three panels, the center one depicting a jungle with palm trees and huts and a monkey seated on a tree stump. Within an opening in the central panel, "a native canoe, manned by two savages" appears, and "other savages run to meet them" at the shore. Then all (allegedly "real South Pacific natives") gather to perform a stereotypical "cannibal dance." So "distinctive" was this prologue that it became the highlight of the theater's program for the entire week.[42] Months

Fig. 3.8 *Cannibals of the South Seas* stage prologue, Million Dollar theater, Los Angeles

later, Grauman mounted an equally elaborate presentation in a campaign to raise relief work funds after the war.[43] "The interior of a Salvation Army headquarters supposedly in France" takes up the center of a triptych stage setting, while on each side soldiers gather at the headquarters' entrance doors. Within the interior set, "forty people" engage in a lengthy musical sketch, in which "soloists, trios, and quartets" perform several songs and others perform, "some clever jig dancing." Another triptych prologue introduced *The Life Line*, a story of inheritance ending in a theater fire and then a bigger ship fire at sea.[44] Against three "Oriental" drops, a dancing troupe performs "a wonderful interpretation" that some showmen claimed rivaled the Ziegfeld Follies.[45] They even wondered, echoing Goldwyn and Rothapfel, "whether the photoplay or the dancing number was instrumental for the phenomenal business the house enjoyed for the full week" (Fig. 3.9).

Like McCormick, Grauman also began to complicate his prologues by interrelating scenes that required two stage sets. "The Dream of a Flower Girl" served as a "spectacular" prelude to *Widow by Proxy*, the story of a young woman's amusing deception that ends in the marriage of her dreams.[46] The prologue opens with the backdrop of a Bohemian café, before which a flower girl dances to the tune of a violinist (who has emerged from a café "door") and falls asleep. The scene changes (the means is unclear) to a royal palace garden, where the girl awakens in a "soft white raiment" to find the violinist a prince; she dances impassioned to his playing and approaches him, before awaking from her dream.

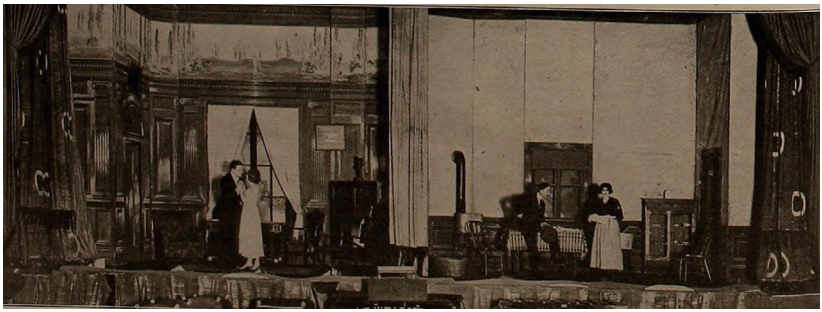


Fig. 3.9 *Yes or No?* stage prologue, Kinema theater, Los Angeles

Outperforming the film, according to the trade press, the "sheer sublimity" of the stage set and atmosphere "positively swept audiences off their feet."[47] To complement *The Prince Chap*, Grauman staged adjacent sets, divided by a thin wall.[48] Both establish rooms in London's Latin Quarter: one an empty garret; the other a poor sculptor's studio where he lives with an adopted little girl. In the film, years later, now successful, he would fall in love with her as a grown woman.[49] Also at the Kinema in Los Angeles, Callicott created similar adjacent sets for *Yes or No?*, where, in parallel stories, a rich woman and a poor woman (both played by Norma Talmadge) are tempted to leave their husbands.[50] The lighting pointedly oscillates between one scene and the other as two couples enact Callicott's five-minute script that summarizes the film, ending with a YES! in one scene and a NO! in the other.[51] The 2,700-seat Alhambra in Milwaukee contrived a novel variant on such double sets for *Twin Beds*, a classic farce in which a married man drunkenly enters the wrong apartment and gets into a bed while his neighbor's wife sleeps nearby.[52] In the prologue's luxurious room, the two characters sit up in far apart beds, and the orchestra plays a "souse song" that crescendos as the beds "magically" move closer and closer together downstage.[53] Ever so simply, the music and "dancing beds" anticipate the film's hilarious "morning after" scenes.

Rural, Exotic, and Fashion Show Prologues

A good number of prologues put on rural stage sets that, unlike those for *Behold My Wife,* traded on Americana nostalgia for a seemingly lost past, and without Native Americans. In Los Angeles, Grauman created an unusually realistic setting for *Hay Foot—Straw Foot*, in which a country boy enlists in the army to fight Germans and finds love after a guardhouse tour.[54] A seed store front dominates the stage, flanked by tree branches, with hay bales, bags of grain, and a couple of cats supposedly trying to catch mice. In the glow of summer twilight, two barefoot kids stomp out the titled dance.[55] Another rustic prologue introduced the "quaint comedy," *Almost a Husband*, in which Will Rogers plays a "Vermont school teacher" who settles awkwardly in "a small Arkansas town, drowsing on the banks of the Mississippi."[56] Perfectly capturing that atmosphere of drowsiness, a stage levee setting, with moonlight effects on the backdrop of a river, has a "chorus of twelve men singing 'Flow On' and 'Old Black Joe'."[57] A similar atmospheric prologue at Plunkett's New York Strand led into *The Jack-Knife Man,* "a homely little tale of plain people" also next the Mississippi, in which an old man saves a "friendless waif."[58] Evoking the old man's initial loneliness, a single rough-clad figure sits before the backdrop of a long wharf stacked with cotton bales that extends toward a distant river.[59] For the 2,600-seat Auditorium in Los Angeles, W.H. Clune designed a small village complementing the initial Ozark Mountain scenes of *Pollyanna*, in which an orphan (Mary Pickford) is partly paralyzed in an auto accident, but recovers, and becomes engaged to another orphan, now a street car conductor.[60] As "shadows fall, lights appear in the windows of the background village, one by one," and three men and two women, quaintly dressed like the film's characters, close their medley of songs with "In the Gloaming."[61] In late 1920, Grauman also mounted an elaborate prologue for *Burglar Proof*, the story of a country tightwad who is tempted by a dance hall floozie, finds an unspoiled city girl, and "gives up his spendthrift habits."[62] Reproducing an early scene, a cluttered country grocery store fills the stage, with wares stuffed on shelves and hanging from the ceiling.[63] Customers sit and chat, while clerks work behind wooden counters. All together they perform a medley of songs; then, as in vaudeville turns, one youngster gives "a laughable burlesque of an Egyptian dancer," and "an aged, decrepit gent" gets up creakily to shimmy and shake all over the stage (Figs. 3.10, 3.11, 3.12 and 3.13).

Fig. 3.10 *The Jack-Knife Man* stage prologue, Strand theater, New York

Fig. 3.11 *Burglar Proof* stage prologue, Million Dollar theater, Los Angeles

No less than four theaters, in big cities as well as small towns, staged relatively similar prologues for *Down on the Farm*, a farce comedy about a tomboy (Louise Fazenda), her rustic sweetheart, a villainous landlord, and an unexpected inheritance.[64] For the Kinema, Callicott constructed a farmyard set, with a large barn and small cabin framing a fenced-in space for nine appropriately costumed characters.[65] The stage set for the Majestic theater in Jackson had a farmhouse and barn framing a similar space for half a dozen farm characters, with a meandering river in the backdrop of an open landscape.[66] The reduced setting for the State

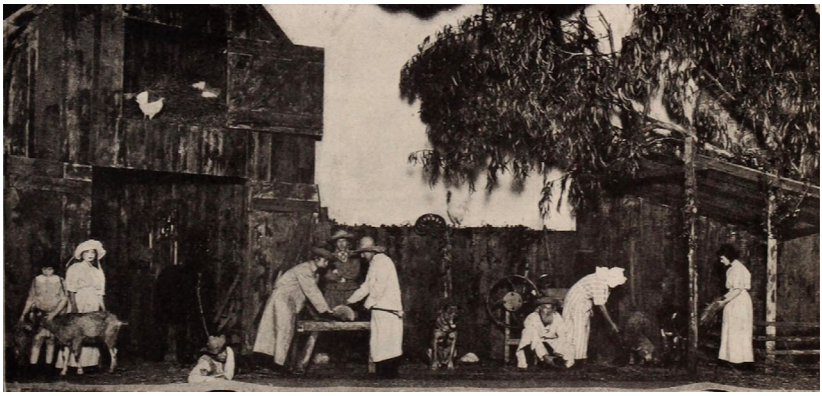


Fig. 3.12 *Down on the Farm* stage prologue, Kinema theater, Los Angeles

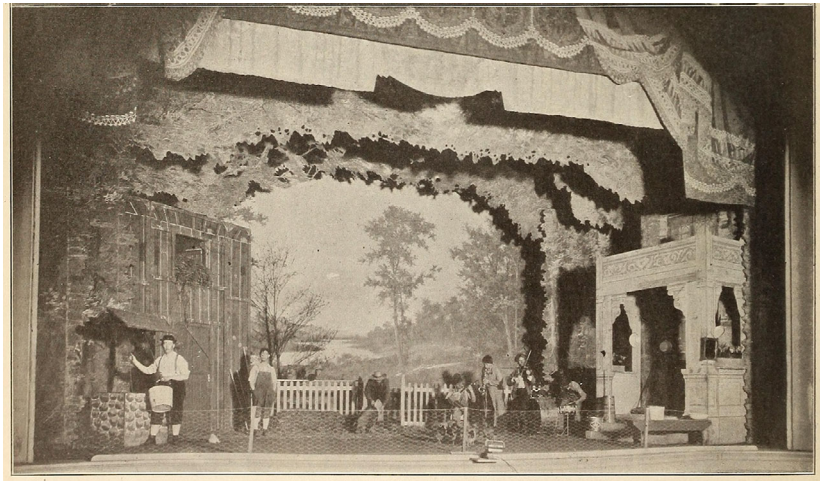
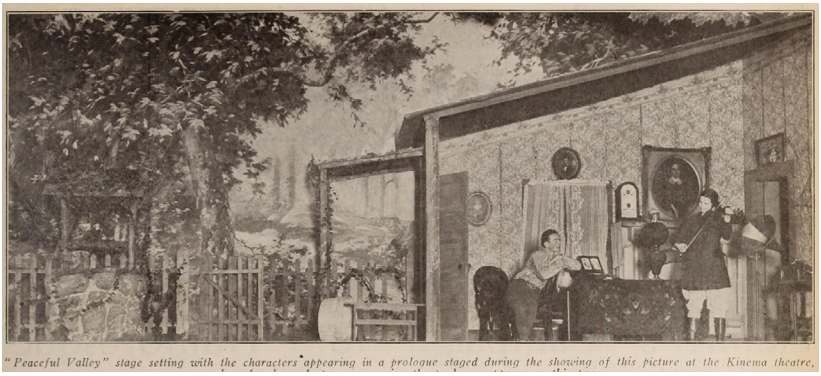


Fig. 3.13 *Down on the Farm* stage prologue, Majestic theater, Jackson, Michigan

theater in Trenton, New Jersey, had only three farm men, one building stage left, and a fence fronting the drop of a distant wooded hillside.[67] The Valentine in Toledo (Ohio) featured six farm women rather than men, a short fence, a well, and a small building fronting layers of flats

depicting an extensive country scene, with farm buildings in the far background.[68] That fall at the Kinema, Callicott built an interior set within a larger exterior backdrop for *Peaceful Valley*, in which a brother and sister thwart the attempts of two city villains to take over their farm.[69] The stage set evokes the film's initial atmosphere as a young man, singing "The Old Oaken Bucket," strolls past a well and fence, enters a back porch, and passes into the cross section of a farmhouse parlor stage left. From offstage comes a whistling young woman to join him, turn on an old horn phonograph, and pick up a violin to play along with the music.[70] The slow, nostalgic rhythm of the action and music immediately creates empathy for the film's brother and sister (Fig. 3.14).

The very opposite of these rural prologues could be characterized as "exotic," whether Hawaiian, "Oriental," or Arabic, and featured popular musicians and dancers. Especially notable were those caught up in "Hawaiian fever," an obsession at the time with the island as an Edenic, sexualized site of Yankee imperialism.[71] In April 1920, the Detroit Madison staged a "special musical-scenic prologue" for Griffith's *The Idol Dancer*, the story of an island girl whose dying father persuades her to toss aside the wooden god she had worshipped and prompts a "shiftless beachcomber" to abandon his besotted ways.[72] On a stage set with large grass huts and palm trees framing the drop of a distant island, the "Samoan Hula Dancer" Lily Houkelani performs to the "soft sensuous airs" of "5 dusky Samoan knights."[73] Patrons



"Peaceful Valley" stage setting with the characters appearing in a prologue staged during the showing of this picture at the Kinema theatre,

Fig. 3.14 *Peaceful Valley* stage prologue, Kinema theater, Los Angeles

could not be seated, warned an ad, during either the "hula dancing" of the actress, "clad only in […] a wisp of tropical leaves" or "the native dance numbers" on stage. For the same film, the San Francisco Tivoli had "Hawaii's most famous prima donna and a clever hula-hula dancer" perform in front of palm trees framing a distant volcano in the sea.[74] One month later, the 1,500-seat Des Moines theater, in Des Moines, presented a special prologue, "A Night in the South Island Seas," with a "Hula Hula dancing girl, singers, and steel guitar players."[75] Similarly, for *What Women Love*, starring Annette Kellerman, the Tivoli featured Prince Lei Lani, the Hawaiian tenor, who created an original prologue that proved more popular than the feature film.[76] His "song and dance playlet," "The Legend of Aloha," told of a "wanderer's return to his island home and to the girl waiting there," within a backdrop "illusion of an erupting volcano" and "soft, seductive lights" caressing the palm trees.[77] In August, the 2,400-seat New Garrick in St. Paul, in the throes of "Orientalism," staged an apt prelude to *The Red Lantern*, the tale of a young Eurasian woman (Nazimova) torn between East and West, who has to die tragically in the end.[78] In a rather cluttered stage set, a large Buddha sits in the background of a Chinese ceremonial hall, as musicians introduce "Rita Cassillis, a danseuse, who makes a novel entrance from a large cauldron," seeming to emerge, as in an early Georges Méliès trick film, out of its flames[79] (Fig. 3.15).

Catering to more contemporary tastes were fashion shows that, despite the economic recession following the war, continued to serve as "good business makers" for theaters in both cities and towns.[80] Grauman staged several revues in the summer of 1919: one with twenty-four models in bathing suits, each representing a different Hollywood studio; the other with twenty-five models, a male soloist, and four musicians in a stunt promoting the popular "Sassy Jane" dress.[81] The 776-seat Queen theater in Dallas devised a variant of the fashion show on its small stage for both afternoon and evening screenings of *The Beauty Market*, a society picture in which a young woman very frankly uses her looks to marry well.[82] Sponsored by a specialty women's store, the theater hired ten models to wear the latest fashions matching those in the film and to depict, in ten tableaux, the daily routine of "a society belle," with pajamas and nighties evoking the most applause.[83] The 1,800-seat Omaha Strand also arranged with a local store to mount fashion shows for DeMille's *Why Change Your Wife?* While its shows were for "mixed audiences in the evening," "ladies' matinees [were reserved] for a display of undies."[84]

Fig. 3.15 *The Idol Dancer* stage prologue, Tivoli theater, San Francisco

When competitors complained about the special advertising, the store backed down; but the theater found another to stage a new show before the end of the week's run. Not all fashion shows, however, were without controversy. The Rialto in Pueblo, Colorado, ran into stiff opposition when it proposed a fashion show to introduce *Why Change Your Wife?* Newspaper coverage prompted several ministers, their congregations, and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) to fulminate against what they believed a "lewd and obscene display of femininity"—strangely ignoring the risqué subject of the film.[85] When the show was cancelled, one paper revealed that, ironically, the young women hired to be models were members of the second largest church in nearby Denver. All the publicity only swelled the theater's audiences. "In proportion to the cost," *Moving Picture World* concluded, "we know of nothing better calculated to bring returns than a fashion show well staged."[86]

Multiple Prologues for the Same Film in Different Cities

As further evidence of exhibitors' creativity, even in small towns, other theaters again presented very different prologues for the same feature film. In January, the Minneapolis Lyric staged a minimalist scene to complement the ending of *Broken Blossoms*.[87] After a revolver shot offstage, light comes up on a bare room (with Japanese screen walls) where a young woman sits up in bed and reaches out to a Chinese man who bows and, "realizing the racial chasm that separated them," turns away. The stark, uncluttered scene sets the characters' pantomime in high relief. By contrast, the Strand in Salinas, Kansas, constructed a stage stuffed with décor (also "Japanese"), where a "Yellow Man" recites a monologue on the film's theme of peace.[88] Here, the "Yellow Man" can hardly be distinguished from that cluttered décor. Yet both theaters easily conflated the Chinese and Japanese into an "Oriental" stereotype. In June, the Kinema mounted a prologue that imitated the opening of *The Restless Sex*, a story of the adopted daughter of a wealthy man, compromised into a loveless marriage with a dissolute sculptor, whose death finally frees her to love the son of her "father."[89] The overtly symbolic stage set snares a woman in a full-scale spider's web of ropes hung in a backdrop of trees.[90] Months later, the New York Criterion on Times Square produced a deluxe art nouveau prologue for the same film.[91] This stage set features a large circular glass, shaped like a mirror with low steps leading up to it, that frames the drop of a single flowering tree spreading over a garden.[92] Downstage left, together with a large painted flamingo and peacock, a lone woman stands forlorn. This composite image may highlight the trappings of the wealthy man's world, but it also seems to exclude the compromised heroine. If the figure is singing, as is often the case, what is the song? (Figs. 3.16, 3.17, 3.18, and 3.19).

The different prologues designed for *45 Minutes from Broadway* were exemplary as well. In the film, the boxer Kid Burns falls in love with Mary, the maid of a New Rochelle estate, who unexpectedly inherits the property.[93] At the New York Strand, Joseph Plunkett devised successive stage sets evoking the film.[94] The first has a finely detailed backdrop of the new town's rail station, with tracks and telephone poles running into the distance.[95] In the foreground is a stand-in for Mary, dressed in white, as she waits to board a train and meet her beau in New York, with four former suitors, also in white, doffing their straw boaters.[96] The second

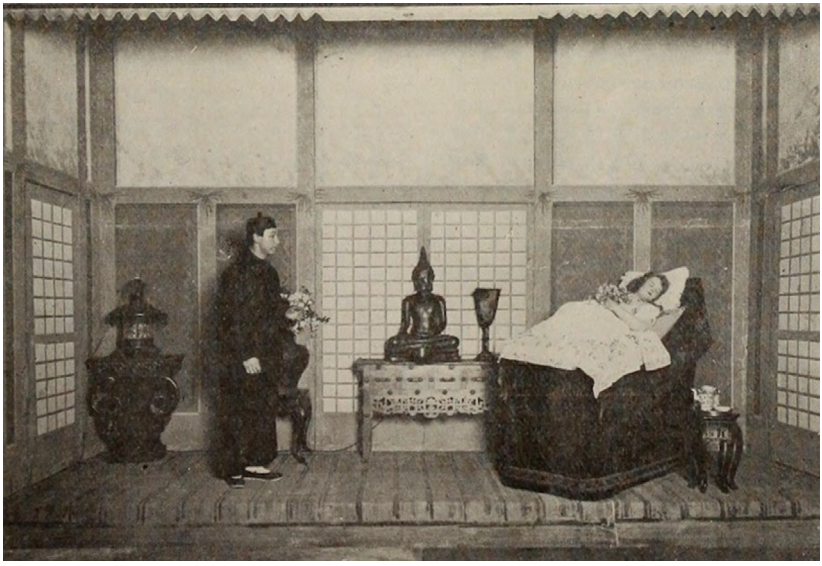


Fig. 3.16 *Broken Blossoms* stage prologue, Lyric theater, Minneapolis, Minnesota

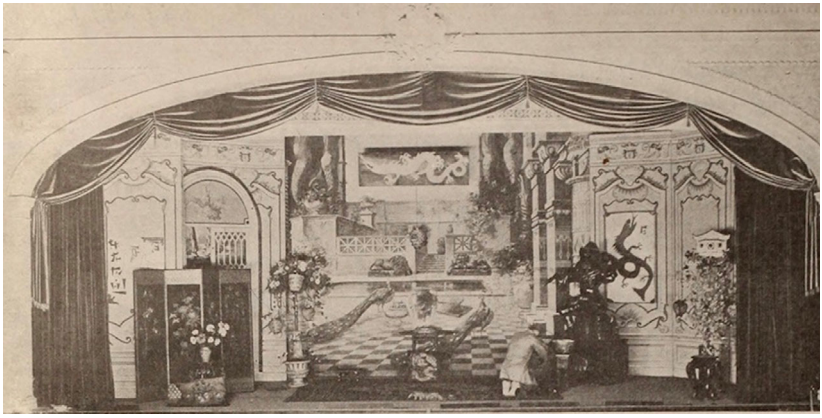


Fig. 3.17 *Broken Blossoms* stage prologue, Strand theater, Salinas, Kansas

Fig. 3.18 *The Restless Sex* stage prologue, Criterion theater, New York

shows Mary standing at the back end of a train, waving to the suitors as they sing "So Long Mary." So popular was Plunkett's prologue that Callicott imitated these two scenes at the Kinema, in a reduced format, and the Liberty theater in Seattle did likewise.[97] Intriguingly, all of these prologues highlight Mary and her story rather than the boxer's. In late 1920, theaters on opposite sides of the country staged very different prologues for *Harriet and the Piper*, an updating of the "Pied Piper of Hamelin," in which Harriet, through melodramatic plot twists, marries into wealth.[98] The Kinema's prologue has Harriet and others acting out the film's "*bal masqué*" in a large Greenwich Village studio, serenaded by the fable's piper stage right.[99] At the Brooklyn Strand, Edward Hyman designed a stripped down version of the same "*bal masqué*," in which "The Girl" and "The Fool" dance to the tune of "Orpheus" played by the "Pied Piper" stage right.[100] Suddenly, in a flash of flame, a Faustian Mephistopheles sweeps through the black velour backdrop and carries her

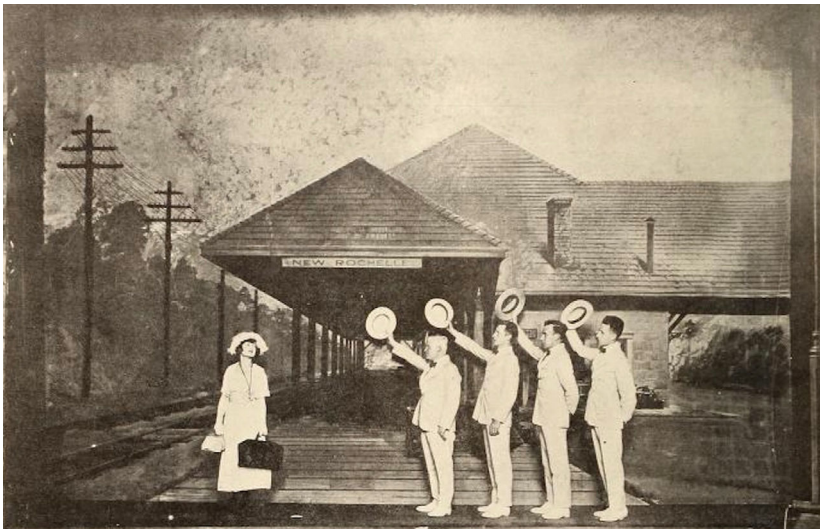


Fig. 3.19 45 *Minutes from Broadway* stage prologue, Strand theater, New York

off, while the piper continues his plaintive melody. If this abduction imagines what the film's villain will threaten, it does so with a touch of musical irony—and perhaps with an echo of Méliès's earlier magical sleights of hand (Figs. 3.20 and 3.21).

Fig. 3.20 *Something to Think About* stage prologue, Strand theater, Omaha, Nebraska

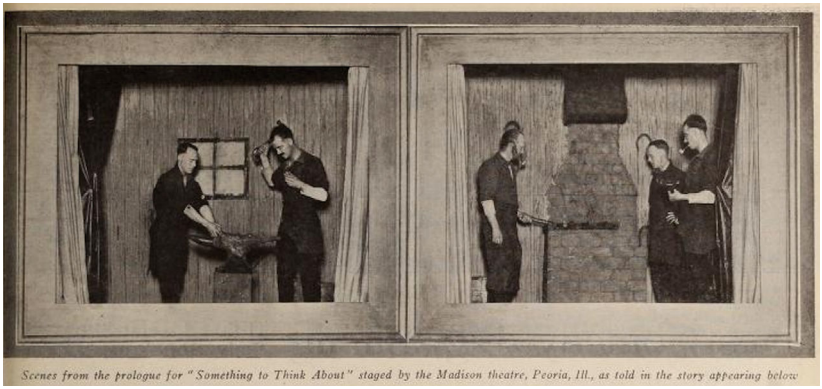


Fig. 3.21 *Something to Think About* stage prologue, Madison theater, Peoria, Illinois

Strikingly, at least two theaters in small cities or towns mounted very different prologues for DeMille's *Something to Think About*, a complicated love story involving a village blacksmith's daughter (Gloria Swanson) who eventually marries a wealthy crippled neighbor—and her love miraculously cures him.[101] The Omaha Strand staged a surprisingly detailed "rustic setting […] of a country roadside at noontime in midsummer."[102] Within a backdrop of distant fields, a line of wooden fences, and a tall elm tree, two roads converge at the blacksmith's shop stage right, with a broken-down flivver stage left. Field hands slowly wander in past the wreck to sing country tunes, ending with "Love's Old Sweet Song." Much like that of *Behold My Wife*, this prologue anticipates the film's narrative arc and the moral of "right thinking." For the same film, months later, the 2,000-seat Madison in Peoria, Illinois, constructed a far simpler stage set of two small blacksmith shop interiors (easily reproducible), where one blacksmith strikes an anvil emitting sparks and another works before a glowing forge, while the orchestra plays the familiar "Anvil Chorus."[103] In each case, these prologues evoke a strong sense of nostalgia.

Not All Prologues Harmonize

A surprising number of theaters were designing "contrastive" prologues that, like those for *The Better'Ole* and *Luck for Pawn*, created an atmosphere far different from anything in their feature films.[104] For its screening of *The 13th Chair*, the Strand in Lowell, Massachusetts, convinced the largest store in town to mount a "Fashion Week" show in which the modeled fashions had little to do with the film's cleverly complicated murder mystery.[105] Even Rothapfel countered the Rivoli's screening of *Counterfeit*, in which a young woman "joins the Secret Service" to win a reward "for rounding up a band of counterfeiters."[106] His prologue featured a soprano and harpist performing "The Last Rose of Summer," within an early nineteenth-century stage set, "when the song was new."[107] Also at the New York Capitol, Wenger staged song and dance numbers much at odds with *The Untamed*, in which Whistling Dan (Tom Mix) pursues a bandit who has beaten him badly and finally kills him in a duel.[108] Bookending the film are "tame" performances: first a "dancing specialty" and then song and dance "gems from 'The Firefly'." But prologues could contrast with all kinds of genre films. Grauman featured an "atmospheric prologue" quite at odds with the "frisky comedy bill" of *Get Out and Get Under*, starring Harold Lloyd.[109] The highlight is some "exhilarating" Spanish dancing in the "fiesta scene" from the play, *In an Old California Mission*. Franklin, too, could contradict his stated policy of "harmonizing" at Shea's Hippodrome. For the historical drama, *If I Were King*, in which the poet François Villon foils a plot against King Louis XI, he put on "Flying Shadows," a "striking western scene."[110] Similarly, for *The Right to Love*, in which an unhappily married English woman is rescued by an attaché at the American embassy in Constantinople, the newly opened Capitol in St. Paul staged a prologue that could not be more "contrastive": a "Fantasia depicting the gradual evolution of 'Dixie'."[111] Such prologues seemed to whipsaw movie goers across time and space.

Undoubtedly the most unusual and unexpected of these contrastive prologues resulted from what the Los Angeles Kinema had to face when, in mid-November 1919, the theater's musicians walked out on strike.[112] To replace them, Tally hired Miguel Lerdo's Grand Mexican Orchestra, with its twenty-five musicians, singers, and dancers.[113] For nearly four weeks, not only did this orchestra of "unusual" instruments accompany the screenings, but the orchestra leader produced a new program

for each new feature. Whether they were called prologues or presentations, the programs introducing the films hardly created an atmosphere conducive to *Eyes of Youth*, *Her Kingdom of Dreams*, and especially *Back to God's Country*, starring Nell Shipman and her animal friends in "the snowy regions of Canada."[114] Taking advantage of a different situation, Grauman enhanced the *variety* of his film programs in another way.[115] Learning of an Arabian orchestra about to leave San Francisco, he hired its members to perform at his Million-Dollar Theater in Los Angeles. The resulting programs recalled those months earlier at the Kinema. Backed by a large flat depicting an arch in a stereotypical Middle Eastern building, eight musicians' "stringed guitars of modern design," with a "huge cello-like guitar" acting as bass, served as a prelude for a series of three unlikely films. When they moved to Grauman's Rialto, the orchestra's "programme of classic and popular musical numbers" served as a prelude for the long-running *Why Change Your Wife?*[116] The likely effect must have been a far cry from the harmony that Rothapfel, Grauman, Franklin, and others all allegedly sought to model[117] (Fig. 3.22).

And what about the following anomalies or novelties? That prologue promoting "Dixie" might have complemented *In Old Kentucky*, but several theaters showing that film chose something perhaps unexpected. For the Kinema, Callicott created a nighttime stage setting, with a flat depicting the Ohio River in the background, in front of which "was the shanty home of a colored 'family'."[118] Surprisingly, the performers making up that "family," unlike those earlier at the Broadway, were all Black: two men playing banjos, accompanied by three adults and five children as singers. Unexpected as well was a similar rustic stage setting at the Strand in Salinas that featured "a colored quartet rendering several selections from the good old darky melodies."[119] In each case, the Black performers serve as background locals for a story about a mountain woman who not only rescues each of two feuding men but also wins a horse race.[120] Less surprising was the simple prologue that C. W. Diebel devised for the anniversary of his 1,800-seat Liberty theater in downtown Youngstown, Ohio.[121] To introduce *Cannibals of the South Seas*, a large drop curtain depicts an island bay with palms arching overhead as "two cannibals" crouch in the foreground "looking out over the waters at the coming explorer." Disguised as the cannibals, "local negroes" have their backs to the audience—making their faces much less visible.

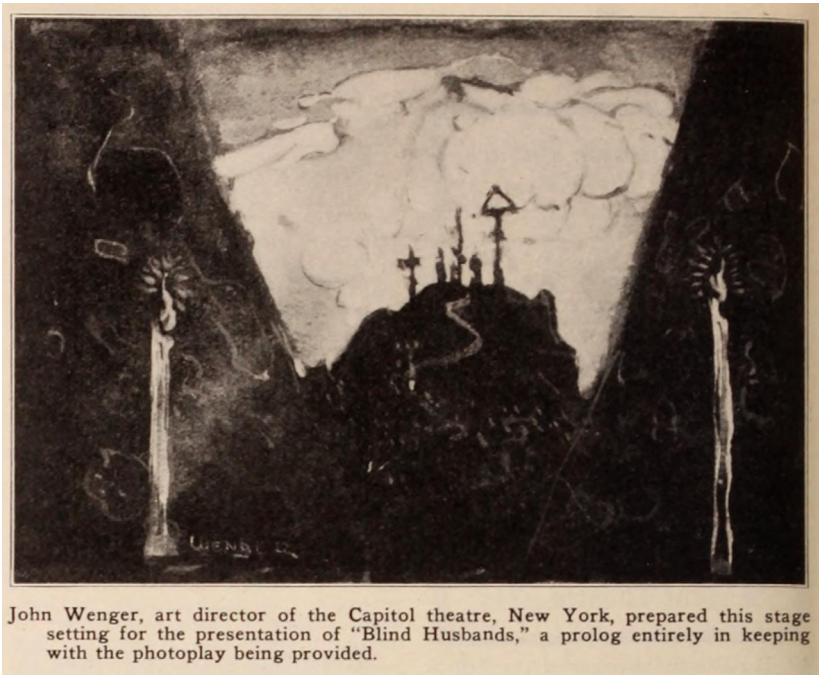
At least several very different exhibitors inserted theatrical presentations within their feature films, again most likely at reel breaks. In early

Fig. 3.22 *Old Kentucky* stage prologue, Kinema theater, Los Angeles

1920, Grauman again created such an interlude for *Behind the Door*, a grim story, set in the Great War, of a German-American whose wife follows him onto a US Navy ship that is sunk by a U-boat; while his wife is seized, he is rescued and later confronts the U-boat captain, learns of his wife's fate, and takes revenge.[122] This stage set reproduces the climactic scene of the ship's interior in which the Navy man tells two of his mates to "LOOK BEHIND THE DOOR!" where "the shadow of the fated Hun captain was there—in all its terrible significance."[123] The 1,000-seat Cameraphone in the East Liberty district of Pittsburgh likewise created a "fade in"—similar to the earlier one for *Soldiers of Fortune*—between the first two reels of *Out Yonder*, in which a lighthouse keeper's adopted daughter saves a yacht owner from drowning and eventually marries her son.[124] Here, in a coastal stage setting at dawn, a young woman, like

Aphrodite, "rose out of the sea, climbed over a prop rock and donned the overalls and shirt that Olive Thomas wears" in the film.[125] Amazingly, the Fox theater in Aurora, Illinois, also staged an interlude for the first of five episodic stories in *Woman*. Just as the film's Eve is "reaching for the forbidden fruit," a "Garden of Eden" scene appears on stage, in which a woman in the same pose unexpectedly breaks into a dance—to "great applause."[126] In one sense, of course, the theatrical interludes at the Strand, Liberty, Cameraphone, and Fox were far from anomalies for they offered more strong evidence of how even small-town exhibitors could put on big stage shows as major program attractions (Fig. 3.23).

Finally, to honor those designing stage sets for prologues, the deluxe monthly, *Shadowland*, interviewed John Wenger, described elsewhere as one of half a dozen leaders of a "new School of Scenic Art."[127] If its attention was narrow, the interview certainly was fascinating. Rather than



John Wenger, art director of the Capitol theatre, New York, prepared this stage setting for the presentation of "Blind Husbands," a prolog entirely in keeping with the photoplay being provided.

Fig. 3.23 *Blind Husbands* stage prologue, Capitol theater, New York

mention the cost of putting on a prologue, the size of a theater stage, the required technical equipment and staff, or the performers to hire (as did Franklin earlier), Wenger focuses on the characteristics of his own stage settings and their function for audiences. Although he hopes that artistic set designs would grow more prominent in the production of films, such as Griffith's *Broken Blossoms*, Wenger spends much of the interview talking about the stage sets he designed for the Rialto and Rivoli theaters. Whatever the chosen prologue, "I use my canvas to create musical atmosphere," he says, "to start the audiences thinking." Most intriguingly, he describes the canvas he most prefers: "I never try to create a concrete setting idea but to deal with the abstract." And, as "Any stage reproduction of nature is artificial," he adds, "then why not be wholly artificial—and be fanciful and fantastic?" The result: "Something simple like moons and stars, the drift of smoke, a strong variety of color," touches an audience directly. The article includes five drawings apparently drafted for stage settings, each made more "fanciful" by a wash of soft green, which marks many of the images in this issue of *Shadowland*. Several clearly confirm his insistence on making a stage setting more abstract than representational. Yet, perhaps the best example of what Wenger was after is a drawing of the stage set he created for *Blind Husbands* when he first moved to the Capitol.[128] In the foreground a pair of tall candles flank the stage, while in the distance the backdrop of a rocky hill rises up between steep mountain sides, before a billowing bank of clouds. Winding up the hill, a path reaches the crest, topped by three barely visible figures—representing "the husband, the wife, and the other man"—and several abstract symbols. Instead of portraying the film's opening, an exemplary scene, or a moment of dramatic suspense, this setting conveys "bleak despair, stern resolution, inevitability," which perfectly matches the tone of the film.

Dropping the Curtain on 1920

Up through much of 1920, then, one could argue that Rothapfel and Goldwyn were equally right about the "most important element" of many theaters' programs. In support of Rothapfel's claim, however, audiences reportedly were enthusiastic in their responses to prologues and other stage performances. That was the case whether a prologue adopted the principle of "harmonizing" with a feature film or whether it was "contrastive" and confirmed the desire for *variety* in a theater's programming.

Yet, a few things are certain. First, in arranging the various components in their programs, theater managers could exert a high degree of creativity. That was especially important as the motion picture industry was beginning, in Kia Afra's words, to look like "a limited oligarchy," in which companies sought to engage in film production, distribution, and exhibition.[129] One example was the First National Exhibitors Circuit that, by 1919, controlled 190 first-run theaters, along with others, and soon after merging with Associated Producers began to produce films.[130] A rival was Paramount, which, between 1919 and 1920, acquired controlling interests in the Million Dollar Theatre, Rialto, and Rivoli, as well as the New Garrick in St. Paul, the Stanley circuit in Philadelphia, and the Saenger theaters in the South.[131] In the face of this emerging studio system, there still was plenty of freedom at the local level, Franklin argued, for "the successful exhibitor [to] become as much a 'producer' of pictures as a manufacturer."[132] Creating effective prologues often meant drawing on the stagecraft long established in theater productions. Art directors such as Wenger already had extensive experience in designing stage sets for opera houses and legitimate theaters. Whatever the venue and experience of an exhibitor, stage sets, playlets, and musical numbers could be simple or elaborate, singular or multiple, any of which could evoke a film's opening or a later scene. Moreover, exhibitors could be ingenious in crafting stage sets and performances, especially in prologues that simulated a film's narrative arc. Second, if fashion shows prompted mutually beneficial relations between movie theaters and department stores or specialty stores, prologues offered special opportunities for local talent, whatever their usual venues, to display their skills as performers—from pantomime actors to dancers, reciters, soloists, duos, and other singing groups as well as choreographers, set and lighting effects designers, and craftsmen. Movie theaters, consequently, could offer audiences two kinds of shows for the price of one, which made them very competitive with touring plays, vaudeville acts, and amateur theatricals.

At least two final points are especially significant. First, prologues were notable because they involved "diegetic sound," in Mary Simonson's words: that is, vocal performances by real human bodies on stage, from songs to dialogues and recitations.[133] For those performances allowed audiences to experience something lacking in silent features, which were forced to rely on intertitles for written explanations and dialogue. That is, prologues were marked by the presence of the human voice, whether

or not the words delivered in familiar speeches or popular songs harmonized with the feature films that followed. That so many songs—from arias, duets, and choruses—came from operas and musicals also served to make movie-going respectable, especially for middle-class and upper-class audiences. Second, the width and depth of some theater stages, and not only those backed by triptych panels, permitted an exhibitor to mount a visual spectacle that could dwarf a feature film's images, even on a large screen. For early examples, see Grauman's triptych prologue for *Cannibals of the South Seas*, Wenger's massive stage set of the London slums for *The Heart of a Child*, or the Omaha Strand's detailed rustic stage set for *Something to Think About*. Many others will appear in the following chapters. The impressive expanse of such prologue spectacles would not be possible to create on movie screens until the development of Cinemascope and Cinerama decades in the future.

Given the "rich, multisensory experience" of a full-stage visual spectacle and the voices of well-known local performers, it's no wonder that a prologue, even more than a popular star or story, could serve as the "main attraction" to lure and entrance a movie theater audience.[134]

Notes

1. Genevieve Harris, "Two Views on Film Problems," *Chicago Post* (7 December 1918): 9.
2. "Russian Artist Is Art Director of Capitol," *Motion Picture News* (27 September 1919): 2574: "Rothapfel in Charge of Capitol Presentations," *Motion Picture News* (5 June 1920): 4608. For the late 1919 opening of the Capitol (north of Times Square), Bowes had staged "an eleven-act revue" preceding the feature film on a four-hour program; more extravagant revues followed and, along with high ticket prices, created financial disaster for the theater's box office—Richard Koszarski, *An Evening's Entertainment: The Age of the Silent Feature Picture, 1915–1928* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990), 50–51; and Ross Melnick, *American Showman*, 185–188.
3. Harold B. Franklin, "How Exhibitor Can Become 'Producer'," *Motion Picture News* (28 December 1918): 3873.
4. "Los Angeles Papers Praise Grauman's Showing of Cannibal Pictures," *Motion Picture News* (15 February 1919): 1009.

5. "McCormick Uses the Nature Stage in Designing All Spectacles at the Circle," *Motion Picture News* (20 July 1918): 381.
6. "McCormick Hires Zimmer as Art Director of Circle," *Moving Picture World* (7 February 1920): 923.
7. "Artistic Presentation at the Circle," *Exhibitors Herald* (3 April 1920): 55.
8. "The Circle's 'Palace of Diversion' Is Best of McCormick's Spectacles," *Exhibitors Herald* (3 April 1920): 54.
9. "Grauman specializes in Odd Offerings to Give Variety to His Film Programs," *Moving Picture World* (20 March 1920): 1961.
10. "Atmosphere More Important Than Music," *Motion Picture News* (22 May 1920): 4307.
11. For *Hoodlum*, starring Mary Pickford, the prologue had a variety of characters perform within the three-sided backdrop of a tenement street of two-story buildings—"Exploitation Which Added to the Entertainment Value of the Show," *Motion Picture News* (28 November 1919): 3744,3745. For *Shore Acres* (1920), the prologue reenacted the climactic scene of a dramatic shipwreck—Mary Simonson, "'Adding to the Pictures': The American Film Prologue in the 1920s," *American Music* 37.1 (2019): 12.
12. After successfully managing the Victoria in Buffalo, the Liberty in St. Louis, and then the Rivoli and Isis in Denver, Hyman was hired to manage the 3,500-seat Brooklyn Strand (Fulton Street and Rockway Place)—"Victoria Theater, Buffalo, N.Y." *Moving Picture World* (15 July 1915): 422; "How Hyman Got Boosts of Women," *Motion Picture News* (3 May 1919): 2815; "Real Showmen—and Why," *Wid's Daily* (5 October 1919): 12–13); and "Hyman Made Manager of Strand Theatre, Brooklyn," *Moving Picture World* (13 December 1919): 794.
13. By contrast, in her analysis of stage prologues in British theaters, Julie Brown distinguishes only two kinds: musical prologues (with songs and dances) and dramatic prologues (featuring dialogue without music)—Julie Brown, "Framing the Atmospheric Film Prologue in Britain, 1919–1926," in Julie Brown and Annette Davison, *The Sounds of the Silents in Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 202.
14. "Here's a Big City Smash in a Little One," *Motion Picture News* (11 January 1919): 243.

15. "The Romance of Tarzan—First National," *Motion Picture News* (2 November 1918): 2794.
16. "The Fighting Roosevelts—First National," *Motion Picture News* (1 February 1919): 757.
17. "Plunkett New Strand Manager," *Wid's Daily* (28 December 1918): 1; and "Strand Theatre," *Motion Picture News* (1 February 1919): 699. For several years prior, Plunkett had managed a smaller theater and produced some short comedies and one recent feature, *The Woman the Germans Shot*. "Hollywood Hokum," *Motion Picture News* (14 June 1919): 4037.
18. "The Better'Ole—World," *Motion Picture News* (8 March 1919): 1541.
19. "Strand Theatre," *Motion Picture News* (8 March 1919): 1475.
20. "Fine Comedy Idea Developed into Only Fairly Good Picture," *Wid's Daily* (21 December 1919): 11.
21. "Another Illustration of Grauman's Superior Showmanship Ideas," *Motion Picture News* (29 November 1919)" 3921.
22. Melnick, *American Showman,* 181–183.
23. Grace Kingsley, "California Reopens," *Los Angeles Times* (7 November 1919): 2.7; "Geraldine Farrar in 'Flame of the Desert'," *Motion Picture News* (13 December 1919): 4297.
24. Henry E. Dougherty, "California's Big Bill," *Los Angeles Evening Express* (8 December 1919): 17. The "national" dances (Spanish, French, and Russian) in these and later prologues were very much in vogue from the late nineteenth century into the early twentieth century.
25. Dougherty, "California's Big Bill," 17. See also Paul, *When Movies Were Theatre*, 216–217, and Simonson, "'Adding to the Picture': The American Film Prologue in the 1920s," 10–11.
26. "With First-Run Theatres," *Motion Picture News* (20 December 1919): 4465.
27. Dougherty, "California's Big Bill," 17.
28. "Elaborate Stage Setting and Prologue Arranged at Capitol for 'April Folly'," *Moving Picture World* (10 April 1920): 279.
29. "Artistic Production Efforts Offer Compromise for Feeble Story," *Wid's Daily* (30 May 1920): 6. Epes W. Sargent suggests such a stage set and music for a "Spanish" prologue in "Plan Your Campaign Carefully to Sell 'For the Soul of Rafael' to Advantage," *Moving Picture World* (12 June 1920): 1453.

30. "This Week in Detroit Screenland," *Detroit Free Press* (22 August 1920): 3.12; "'It Pays to Prologue' at the Madison," *Motion Picture News* (4 September 1920): 1866.
31. "Nothing Short of a Pictorial Triumph," *Wid's Daily* (9 May 1920): 3; "Humoresque," *Motion Picture News* (15 May 1920): 4231.
32. "With First Run Theatres," *Motion Picture News* (6 November 1920): 3533.
33. "Nazimova in Vehicle Molded to Display Her Lighter Moods," *Wid's Daily* (11 April 1920): 12; "The Heart of a Child," *Motion Picture News* (17 April 1920): 3555; and "Capitol Staging Prologue for Nazimova Picture," *Motion Picture News* (24 April 1924): 3643.
34. "Scrim Drop Gives Screen Effect to Interpretative Introduction," *Exhibitors Herald* (22 May 1920): 57. This prologue is reproduced on a full page in *Motion Picture News* (8 May 1920): 3985.
35. "The Best Marguerite Clark Comedy in a Long Time," *Wid's Daily* (29 February 1920): 11.
36. "Grauman's Pullman Act Is High Class Feature," *Exhibitors Herald* (17 April 1920): 56. See also Simonson, "'Adding to the Pictures': The American Film Prologue in the 1920s," 9.
37. "Unusual Story Twist to Squaw Man Plot Makes Entertaining Picture," *Wid's Daily* (17 October 1920): 7.
38. "Grauman's North Woods Prologue Effective for 'Behold My Wife'," *Exhibitors Herald* (6 November 1920): 64.
39. "Utica Theatre Presents Prologue," *Motion Picture News* (19 April 1921): 2061). A singer from New York enacted the role of the "Indian girl.".
40. "Firnkoess' Prologue for 'Behold My Wife'," *Motion Picture News* (20 August 1921): 950.
41. "Los Angeles Papers Praise Grauman's Showing of Cannibal Pictures," *Motion Picture News* (15 February 1919): 1009. A similar stage vision accompanied the same film at Grauman's theater in San Francisco.
42. "How Grauman Put on "Cannibals" Film," *Moving Picture World* (22 February 1919): 1055.
43. "Music Hints for Entire Programs," *Motion Picture News* (5 April 1919): 2114.

44. "The Life Line," *Motion Picture News* (11 October 1919): 2897.
45. "Going the Top Notchers One Better is Grauman's Motto," *Motion Picture News* (1 November 1919): 3283.
46. Grauman's ad., *Los Angeles Times* (24 September 1919): 3.4; Edward Weitzel, "Reviews and Advertising Aids," *Moving Picture World* (4 October 1919): 157.
47. "Grauman's 'The Dream of the Flower Girl'," *Motion Picture News* (25 October 1919): 3142.
48. "Atmospheric Prologues Win for Los Angeles Theatres," *Motion Picture News* (7 August 1920): 1106.
49. "The Prince Chap," *Exhibitors Herald* (12 June 1920): 74.
50. "Fine Characterizations by Star Succeed in Substituting for Situations," *Wid's Daily* (11 July 1920): 2; "Yes or No," *Motion Picture News* (17 July 1920): 667.
51. "Los Angeles Theatre Uses Original Script as Prologue Basis," *Motion Picture News* (7 August 1920): 1122; and "'Double Exposure' Presentation Strikes Keynote of 'Yes or No'," *Exhibitors Herald* (28 August 1920): 58. See also "Callicott Manager of Kinema Theatre," *Exhibitors Herald* (21 February 1920): 41. Callicott had been Grauman's "first assistant" at his Million Dollar Theater.
52. Louis Reeves Harrison, "Twin Beds," *Moving Picture World* (13 November 1920): 248.
53. "Alhambra's Dancing Bed Prologue Provides Precedent for 'Twin Beds' Presentation," *Exhibitors Herald* (4 December 1920): 55. See also "Milwaukee Papers 'News-less'," *Motion Picture News* (4 May 1918): 2664.
54. "Hay Foot-Straw-Foot," *Motion Picture News* (5 July 1919): 389.
55. "Artistic Stage Setting at Grauman's," *Motion Picture News* (23 August 1919): 1618.
56. "Almost a Husband," *Motion Picture News* (25 October 1919): 3198.
57. "Current Week's Bills Throughout Country," *Motion Picture News* (29 November 1919): 3924.
58. "The Jack-Knife Man," *Motion Picture News* (14 August 1920):1 407.
59. A photograph of this stage set is reproduced in *Exhibitors Herald* (28 August 1920): 56.

60. Louis Reeves Harrison, "Pollyanna," *Moving Picture World* (24 January 1920): 636–637. In 1914, W.H. Clune took over the Grand Opera House in downtown Los Angeles and renovated it as Clune's Auditorium—Jan Olsson, *Los Angeles Before Hollywood: Journalism and American Film Culture, 1905–1915* (Stockholm: National Library of Sweden, 2008), 127–129.
61. "'Pollyanna' Given Artistic Presentation at Los Angeles," *Motion Picture News* (24 February 1920): 1669.
62. "Burglar Proof (Paramount)," *Motion Picture News* (4 December 1920): 1392.
63. "Grauman's Prologue for 'Burglar Proof'," *Motion Picture News* (4 December 1920): 4243.
64. Louis Reeves Harrison, "Down on the Farm," *Moving Picture World* (8 May 1920): 862.
65. "Kinema's 'Down on the Farm' Parade Breaks Theatre's Attendance Record," *Exhibitors Herald* (22 May 1920): 55.
66. "Some Good Stunts for 'Down on the Farm' Film," *Motion Picture News* (2 October 1920): 2616.
67. "And still some visual examples of good exploitation for 'Down on the Farm' continue to arrive," *Motion Picture News* (27 November 1920): 4077.
68. Ibid. The Valentine was part of the small circuit controlled by Loew's Inc.—Koszaski, *An Evening's Entertainment*, 80.
69. "Peaceful Valley," *Exhibitors Herald* (30 October 1920): 88.
70. "Kinema Theatre Stages Novel Prologue," *Motion Picture News* (18 December 1920): 4587. The Adams in Detroit staged a more conventional barnyard scene with half a dozen figures positioned between a farmhouse (stage right) and a well and barn (stage left)—a photo of this scene appears in *Motion Picture News* (13 November 1920): 3705.
71. Brinni Gentry, "Girl from Frisco or Wild Woman?: Simulated Authenticity, Adjusted Sensitivity, and the Contours of Industrial Imperialism in Doraldina's *Hula*," Society of Cinema and Media Studies Conference, Denver (12 April 2023).
72. Louis Reeves Harrison, "The Idol Dancer," *Moving Picture World* (3 April 1920): 137.
73. Madison ad, *Detroit Sunday Free Press* (4 April 1920): 3.17; "'The Idol Dancer' at John H. Kunsky's Madison Theatre, Detroit, Michigan," *Exhibitors Herald* (12 June 1920): 67. Hula

dancers became known as "hula girls" in the United States, a gendered and sexualized term that emerged from missionary and tourist discourse in Hawai'i and during American tours of hula performers in the late nineteenth century—see Adria L. Imada, *Aloha America: Hula Circuits Through the U.S. Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 295. Thanks to Brinnie Gentry, a doctoral student at the University of Michigan, for this reference.

74. "Artistic Settings Particular Forte of Tivoli Theatre," *Motion Picture News* (19 May 1920): 4478.
75. Des Moines theater ad, *Des Moines Tribune* (11 May 1920): 13; and "Stolte's Presentation of 'Idol Dancer' Deserves Praise," *Motion Picture News* (12 June 1920): 4774. See also "Des Moines Theatre Is Blank's Best," *Moving Picture World* (30 August 1919): 1267–1268.
76. "Hawaiian Songs in Tivoli Prologue," *San Francisco Examiner* (22 October 1920): 16.
77. "Hawaiian Song Drama Tivoli Feature," *San Francisco Examiner* (25 October 1920): 6; "Effective Prologue Staged at Tivoli, San Francisco," *Motion Picture News* (4 December 1920): 4246.
78. "The Red Lantern—Nazimova Production," *Motion Picture News* (10 May 1919): 3093.
79. "Atmosphere for the Production 'De Luxe'," *Motion Picture News* (16 August 1919): 1417. The New Garrick had triptych panels framing a stage 60 feet wide and 35 feet deep—"'Shortest Bill' Makes Big Hit and Runs Full Week, Due to Method of Presentation," *Motion Picture News* (7 September 1918): 1530. See also the New Orleans Strand's prologue, which had a "mandarin girl" sing "East Is West" before a drop showing "the east coast of China, with a thatched house [stage left] amidst a palm grove," with towering mountains in the background—Foster Olroyd, "Without a Billboard, Strand, New Orleans, Puts 'The Red Lantern' Over to Record Business," *Motion Picture News* (21 June 1919): 4137.
80. "Another Angle to the Fashion Show," *Moving Picture World* (8 May 1920): 826.
81. "Grauman's 'Sassy Jane' Revue Strikes a Blow at Living Cost," *Exhibitors Herald* (22 May 1920): 54; and "The Exploitation Stunt of the Week: Grauman's Girls Outrival Sennett," *Motion*

Picture News (16 August 1920): 1427. Little Jackie Coogan's shimmying burlesque dance in the "Bathing Girls Revue" led Charlie Chaplin to put him on contract for *The Kid*.

82. "The Beauty Market," *Motion Picture News* (31 January 1920): 1321.
83. "Plenty of Girls In and Out of Films Liven Things Up in Dallas," *Moving Picture World* (7 February 1920): 889. See also "Queen Theatre Delights Dallas," *Motion Picture News* (13 April 1918): 2277–2278.
84. "Lost One Fashion Show but Put on a Second Edition," *Moving Picture World* (5 June 1920): 1332. See also the Nicholas Power ad, *Motion Picture News* (3 August 1918): 800.
85. "Reformers Put Crimp in Fashion Show but Result Is Beneficial," *Motion Picture News* (3 July 1920): 214.
86. "Another Angle to the Fashion Show," *Moving Picture World* (8 May 1920): 826.
87. "Prologues to Point Up Plays," *Moving Picture World* (24 January 1920): 621; "Abelson's Exploitation Makes New Patrons," *Motion Picture News* (31 January 1920): 1251. In Des Moines, Iowa, even earlier, the Garden Theater produced its first stage prologue for *Broken Blossoms* —Dorothy Day, "News of the Movies," *Des Moines Tribune* (24 October 1919): 9.
88. "Kansas Exhibitor His Own Artist Makes Success with Exploitation Stunts," *Motion Picture News* (28 February 1920): 2112; "Exhibitor Genius," *Exhibitors Herald* (29 February 1920): 86. See also the first London stage prologue put on by the Alhambra Theatre, in which "a Chinese singer chanted a litany" before a Buddhist temple as "red lamps gave a mysterious glow to the auditorium" and incense floated over the audience—Robb Lawson, "Presenting a Masterpiece," *Bioscope* (10 June 1920): 26, quoted in Brown, "Framing the Atmospheric Film Prologue in Britain," 200.
89. Edward Weitzel, "Latest Reviews and Comments," *Moving Picture World* (26 June 1920): 1789.
90. "'Sex' Prologue Provides Material for Staging Introductory Feature," *Exhibitors Herald* (5 June 1920): 53.
91. "How Criterion Exploited 'The Restless Sex'," *Motion Picture News* (16 October 1920): 2996. The Criterion (for a short

time earlier, the Vitagraph Theatre) was an early movie theater controlled by Loew's Inc.

92. A similar circular glass frames several scenes from the film in two Paramount ads, *Moving Picture World* (17 July 1920): 352–353.
93. "45 Minutes from Broadway," *Motion Picture News* (11 September 1920): 2129.
94. "Plunkett's Prologue for '45 Minutes from Broadway'," *Motion Picture News* (25 September 1920): 2418; "Stage Play and Feature Make Up Basis of Plunkett's Strand Theatre Prologue," Exhibitors Herald (9 October 1920): 77.
95. "45 Minutes from Broadway," *Motion Picture News* (11 September 1920): 2129.
96. Although the film stars Charles Ray, the prologue calls more attention to a figure representing Mary Jenkins, played by Dorothy Devore.
97. Kinema Theater ad, *Los Angeles Times* (26 September 1920): 3.14; "Kinema Falls in Line with Duplication of Plunkett's Prologue for Ray Feature," *Exhibitors Herald* (13 November 1920): 63; "A Practical Prologue," *Exhibitors Herald* (25 December 1920): 161.
98. "Harriet and the Piper," *Exhibitors Herald* (9 October 1920): 103.
99. "Modern 'Pied Piper of Hamelin' Kinema Prologue for Stewart Film," *Exhibitors Herald* (27 November 1920): 56.
100. "'Faust' Joins 'Pied Piper of Hamelin' In Introducing 'Harriet and the Piper'," *Exhibitors Herald* (4 December 1920): 63.
101. M. A. Malanny, "Something to Think About," *Moving Picture World* (9 October 1920): 836.
102. "Watts Presents Another Fine Prologue," *Motion Picture News* (18 October 1920): 4584.
103. The Madison opened in late 1920—"Robinson Opens 2000-Seat House in Peoria," *Moving Picture World* (6 November 1920): 41. "Robinson's Prologue Proves Fine Investment," *Motion Picture News* (15 January 1921): 681.
104. By 1923, Fanchon and Marco also were staging deliberately contrastive or what they called "discordant" prologues in the West Coast Theatre circuit—Wagner, "An America Not Quite Mechanized," 251, 255.

105. "The Thirteenth Chair," *Motion Picture News* (16 August 1919): 1464; "Another 'Fashion Week' Which Proved Successful," *Motion Picture News* (25 October 1919): 3139.
106. "The Counterfeit," *Motion Picture News* (29 November 1919): 3972.
107. "With First Run Theatres," *Motion Picture News* (29 November 1919): 3923.
108. "A Decidedly Different Type of Western—Splendid Suspense," *Wid's Daily* (29 August 1920): 27.
109. Edwin Schallert, "Frisky Comedy Bill," *Los Angeles Times* (21 September 1920): 3.4.
110. "With First Run Theatres," *Motion Picture News* (11 September 1920): 2051, and (16 October 1920): 2977.
111. "With First-Run Theatres," *Motion Picture News* (16 October 1920): 297. See also "Capitol Opens in St. Paul," *Motion Picture News* (18 September 1920): 2290.
112. "Mexican Orchestra Delighting Patrons," *Los Angeles Times* (13 November 1919): 2.8.
113. Tally's Kinema ad, *Los Angeles Times* (12 November 1919): 3.4.
114. Tally's Kinema ads, *Los Angeles Times* (12 November 1919): 3.4, (19 November 1919): 3.4, (23 November 1919): 3.4, and (28 November 1919): 3.4.
115. "Grauman Specializes in Odd Offerings to Give Variety to His Film Program," *Moving Picture World* (20 March 1920): 1961.
116. "Grauman's Rialto," *Los Angeles Times* (7 March 1920): 3.26. Initially a nickelodeon, the Rialto was renovated by Grauman, who planned to run only eight features there a year—"Long Runs at Grauman's Rialto," *Wid's Daily* (5 November 1919): 3.
117. A more sustained practice characterized some movie theaters in the "Stroll" on South State Street in Chicago, where blues and jazz musicians often played tunes that sharply contrasted with the Hollywood films typically screened and were the main attraction for Black audiences—Mary Carbine, "'The Finest Outside the Loop': Motion Picture Exhibition in Chicago's Black Metropolis, 1905–1928, *camera obscura* 23 (May 1990): 9–41.
118. "Novelty Prologue Feature of Kinema Bill," *Motion Picture News* (7 February 1920): 1442.
119. "Kansas Exhibitor His Own Artist Makes Success with Exploitation Stunts," *Motion Picture News* (28 February 1920): 2112.

120. Edward Weitzel, "Latest Reviews and Comments," *Moving Picture World* (3 January 1920): 145.
121. "Youngstown Theatre's Anniversary Proved That Best Pays Even outside of the Very Largest Cities," *Motion Picture News* (5 April 1919): 2116.
122. "Behind the Door," *Moving Picture World* (10 January 1920): 300.
123. "Stage Scene from Picture as Interlude," *Motion Picture News* (21 February 1920): 1884. The article suggests that Bosworth and two other actors in the film performed in this interlude. See also the interlude prologue for *Once to Every Woman* at the Stratford theater in New York City, in which a woman costumed as the heroine seemed to step out of the screen to sing Marguerite's "Jewel Song" from Gounod's *Faust*—Simonson, "'Adding to the Pictures': The American Film Prologue in the 1920s," 18–19.
124. Edward Weitzel, "Out Yonder," *Moving Picture* World (3 January 1920): 150.
125. "'Fade-In' Replaces Prologue in Cameraphone Presentation," *Exhibitors Herald* (24 April 1920): 59. See also "Ad Smoke Light in Pittsburg," *Motion Picture News* (18 January 1919): 372.
126. "Aurora Theatre Gives Dance in 'Garden of Eden' During 'Woman' Showing," *Motion Picture News* (24 May 1919): 3392.
127. Jameson Sewell, "Putting the New Stage Art into Motion Pictures," *Shadowland* (October 1919): 1–17, 75; and Park-Whiteside Productions ad, *Wid's Daily* (15 February 1920): 13.
128. "'Blind Husbands' Inspires Praise," *Moving Picture Weekly* (9 January 1920): 15; and "Capitol Stage Setting Echoes Spirit of Play," *Exhibitors Herald* (10 January 1920): 72.
129. Kia Afra, *The Hollywood Trust* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2016), 123,130.
130. Koszarski, *An Evening's Entertainment*, 72–74, 77.
131. Op. cit., 75, 77. See also "Minneapolis News," *Motography* (11 August 1917): 326. Beginning in 1916, Paramount-Artcraft mounted a weekly ad campaign in selected major cities that targeted middle-class and upper-class families and couples—see, for instance, the ads in the *Detroit Sunday News*, from late July to mid-October 1918. In 1919, the company launched a national campaign, "National Paramount-Artcraft Week," that assumed

a larger mass audience—see, for instance, the initial ad in the *Detroit Sunday Free Press* (31 August 1919): 4.26.

132. Franklin, "How Exhibitor Can Become a 'Producer'," 3873. See also "Prologue Manuscripts a Part of Press Book," *Motion Picture News* (21 August 1920): 1503–1504.
133. Simonson, "'Adding to the Picture': The American Film Prologue in the 1920s," 14.
134. Op. cit. 22.

CHAPTER 4

Prologues in Profusion, 1921–1922

By early 1921, according to the trade press, most exhibitors and their patrons who once might have asked "why the prologue?" were convinced to say, "why not?" The ranks of notable managers and art directors swelled. In New York, Rothapfel, Plunkett, and Hyman were joined by Josef Urban at the Criterion.[1] In Los Angeles, Grauman had a competitor in Paul Wilkerson at the California. Also in Los Angeles, the new Ambassador and then the Kinema lured McCormick away from the Indianapolis Circle, but he soon returned to the Midwest, namely to the Allen in Cleveland. A few managers in other cities gained recognition, notably Lowell V. Calvert at the Capitol in St. Paul, Minnesota, E. R. Rogers at the Tivoli in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Howard Kingmore at the Howard in Atlanta, Georgia. The trade press even singled out worthy prologues in small town theaters from the Saenger in Monroe, Alabama, and the Bleich in Owensboro, Kentucky, to the Strand in Waterloo, Iowa, and the Liberty in Rosewell, New Mexico. The practice initiated by Flossie A. Jones in Waukesha persisted. The number of prologues reported by the trade press, perhaps as expected, rose proportionately. They appeared in such profusion as to seem overwhelming, so much so that choosing which ones to discuss and analyze must be more selective than in previous chapters. The choices depend on familiar questions and how best to address them. Do exhibitors continue to deploy the prologue typologies already established and do they invent new ones? What do exhibitors choose to represent on stage that leads into and complements

R. Abel, *The Exhibitor as Producer*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-71781-9_4

specific parts of the feature film that follows? How do they design and organize the settings and performances? Are there any notable changes in their creative staging designs? How do the prologues introducing a single film continue to differ from one city or town to another?

Prologue Types in Multiples

First up, what could be called a historical prologue, already evidenced in connection to such different films as *Humoresque*, *For the Soul of Rafael*, *Behold My Wife*, and *Prince Chap*. For an excellent example, see the spectacular German import, Ernst Lubitsch's *Passion*, starring Pola Negri in the story of Madame DuBarry, King Louis XV's mistress, who was put to death by the guillotine during the French Revolution.[2] Audiences in New York could experience two very different theatrical presentations. At the Capitol, Rothapfel's prologue climaxes with a mob of ragged townspeople with raised scythes breaking through background palace doors to confront a small group of frightened royals and a kneeling DuBarry.[3] At the Brooklyn Strand, Hyman sketched the narrative arc of DuBarry's life using a single stage set and only four characters.[4] In a crimson costume, "Passion" (a well-known dancer) tempts "DuBarry" with a vision of her future as the "Spirit of Royalty" posed against a door in a background wall. "Passion" disappears; cannons sound, and a guillotine becomes visible behind the doorway against a red sky with flashes of green. The blade falls; "DuBarry" collapses; and a baritone steps forward to sing "Le Marseillaise." In sharp contrast, for both the Ambassador and the Kinema in Los Angeles, McCormick staged "Clay," a symbolic prologue that showed "how the basic human instincts are controlled by Passion."[5] Within a fantastical set, "male dancers representing Lust, Vice, and Wealth" engage female dancers as Virtues (all vaudeville performers in "contortionable masques") until a devil figure joins them in "a weird dance," and projected castle walls in the background crumble. Then, "the symbols of Sin drag the Virtues to the Altar of Passion" (Figs. 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3).

At least two other large movie theaters in other cities in the Midwest produced *Passion* prologues that seemed derivative of Rothapfel's. In Milwaukee, for the 1,400-seat New Strand, E. J. Weisfeldt designed a palace interior setting for a large group of lounging aristocrats before the revolutionaries break in through the centered background doors.[6] In Indianapolis, for the Circle, manager Ralph Lieder, assisted by George

Fig. 4.1 *Passion* stage prologue, Capitol theater, New York

Sommers of the Little Theatre Society, chose a similar palace interior for the mob of peasants to burst through the background doors and attack cowering patricians.[7] In St. Paul, for the Capitol, however, Calvert created a prologue with a narrative arc somewhat like Hyman's. Before lit candles in three candelabra and a "futuristic drop," a New York dancer performs three different episodes from DuBarry's life.[8] First, in scarlet light she whirls through the "Dance of Passion," suggesting her infatuation for King Louis XV. Second, in deep blue light she interprets the "Dance of Love," symbolizing her love for Armand. Third, shrouded in black, she performs the "Dance of Death," with a tiny white light playing on her face from one side and a deep scarlet light from the other. As all light fades, "she drops dead at the foot of the last candelabra," whose candle is snuffed out. Finally, in the small town of Owensboro, Kentucky, the Bleich theater staged an equally impressive prologue with far simpler means. A backdrop depicts a square and cluster of buildings in old Paris. In a halo of soft light, a single woman, shoeless and in rags, stands before a small replica of the guillotine to sing forlornly and collapse as the screen is lowered.[9] This series of prologues not only suggests the influence of Rothapfel and Hyman, but also others' inventiveness in devising stage sets and choreographing dances and songs by professional, semi-professional, and amateur performers (Fig 4.4).

By contrast, see the very different historical prologues for the melodramatic western, *Bob Hampton of Placer*, the 1876 story of a US army

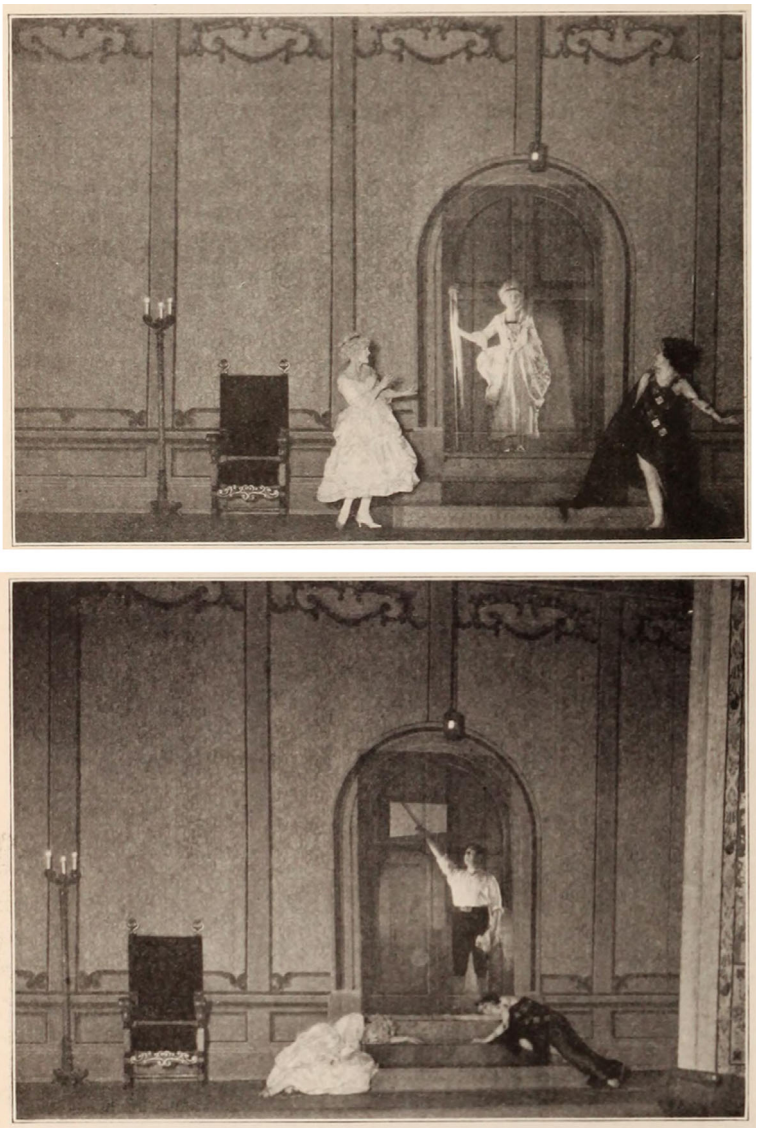


Fig. 4.2 *Passion* stage prologue, Strand theater, Brooklyn

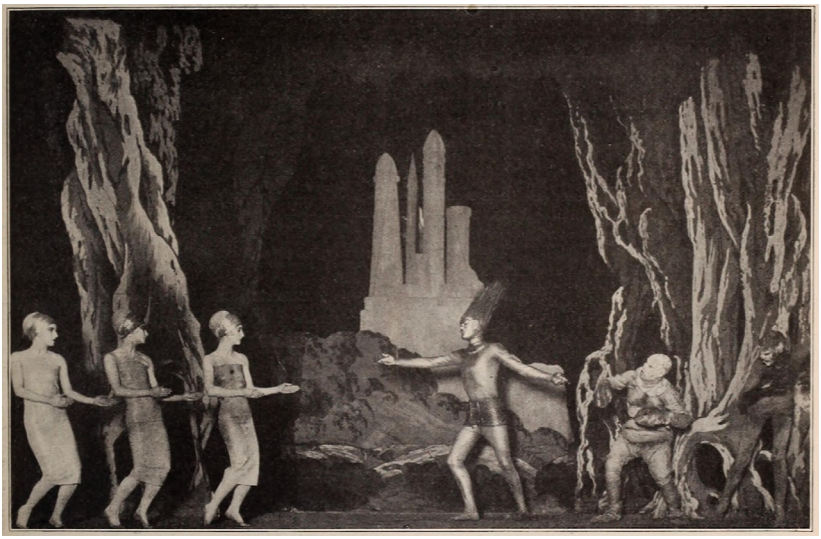
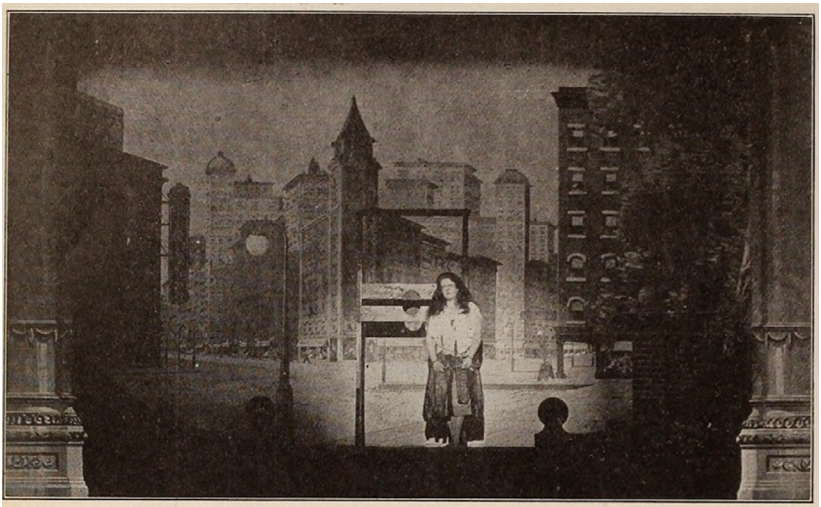


Fig. 4.3 *Passion* stage prologue, Ambassador theater, Los Angeles



Illustrating the accompanying story of the prologue number presented for "Passion" by the Bleich theatre, Owensboro, Ky.

Fig. 4.4 *Passion* stage prologue, Bleich theater, Owensboro, Kentucky

captain who, after a few plot twists, joins Custer's ill-fated company at Little Big Horn.[10] In an unusual arrangement with the US government, five troupes of Indians from the Blackfoot reservation were hired to perform in many prologues for the film.[11] Early on, the 2,700-seat Rialto in Omaha, Nebraska, promoted these "genuine 'Blackfeet' Indians" in an "atmospheric prologue" that featured stereotypical performances of a "Medicine Dance, Grass Dance, Chief Dance, and War Dance."[12] At the St. Paul Capitol, Calvert used a triptych stage set to center Indian chiefs around a campfire in a stand of birches, backed by a distant snowy mountain range, with several women in front of a large tepee stage left. One chief recites "The Legend of the Last Battle," followed by several songs and "a native tribal dance."[13] At the New York Strand, Plunkett constructed an impressive stage set of layered backdrop vistas of mountains in front of which a troupe of Indians gather to perform "characteristic dances."[14] A quartet in the uniforms of Custer's soldiers enters and confronts the Indians who depart, then sings "The Little Girl Who's Waiting," an allusion to the film's ending—the wedding of Hampton's grown daughter. Intriguingly, this narrative arc ignores Hampton's death in the film's climactic battle and signals his daughter's "happy ending." No troupe of Indians appeared at the 1,760-seat Tivoli in downtown Chattanooga; instead, E. R. Rogers staged a scene in which a preacher seems to unite the daughter and her cowboy lover in front of the backdrop depicting a covered wagon and distant snow-capped peaks.[15] This prologue, like Plunkett's, seems to turn the film's story into one of white settler survivors (Figs. 4.5 and 4.6).

For exotic or stereotypical "Oriental" prologues, see another Lubitsch import, *One Arabian Night*, a story of multiple romances tragically involving a Sheik, his son, a desert dancer (Pola Negri), and a hunchback clown.[16] For the New York Strand, Plunkett constructed a street scene in front of a low wall and gate, with a backdrop of light-colored buildings in a Middle Eastern city. Suggesting the film's crucial conflict, strolling players and other travelers with goats first enter the scene, the Sheik's son pleads with the dancer, and the Sheik himself kneels to cradle her.[17] At the same time, at the Brooklyn Strand, Hyman devised a palace interior of "high vaulted pillars lit in a bizarre red with a sky blue garden backdrop" for "A Harem Interlude," which condensed even more of the film's narrative.[18] A Sheik figure sings "The Song of India"; a ballet corps performs the "Danse de Salammbo"; the Sheik's former harem favorite

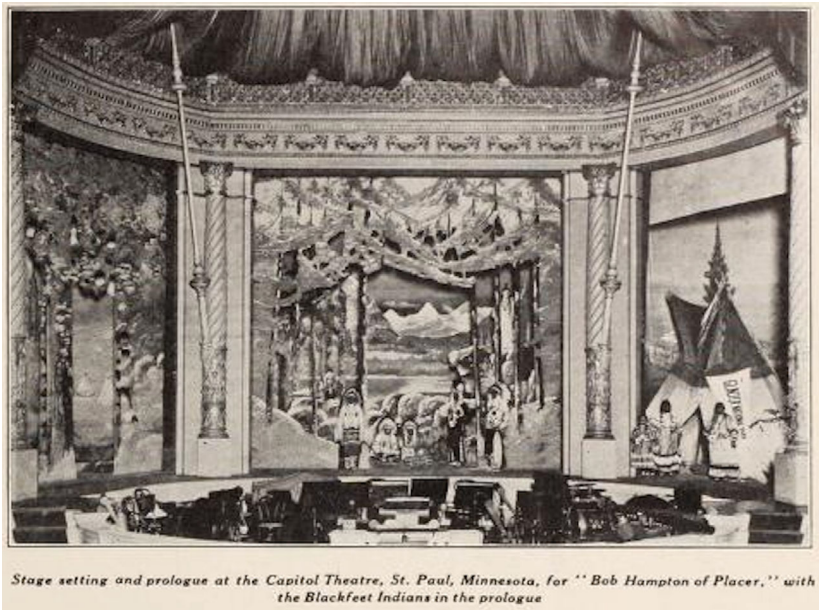


Fig. 4.5 *Bob Hampton of Placer*, stage prologue, Capitol theater, St. Paul, Minnesota

sings "Plus Grand dans Son Obscurito"; the Sheik takes the royal necklace from her and bestows it on the desert dancer; the son enters to sing "The Bedouin Love Song" and clasp the dancer in his arms. At the Circle in Indianapolis, art director W. Hurley Ashby designed "a picturesque Oriental villa with protruding balcony" (stage left), backed by "clouds moving dreamily across" the sky and a "moon throwing rays of light."[19] A hunchback appears before the villa, singing "The Bedouin Love Song" to a beautiful girl, in "Oriental" costume, on the balcony, who answers with "Less Than Dust." Before the fade out, clouds eclipse the moon, foretelling the film's tragic finale[20] (Figs. 4.7 and 4.8).

Prologues for the same film also caught the attention of the trade press in smaller cities and towns. At the Metropolitan in Atlanta, a backdrop of "midnight blue velour drapery" frames a local dancer in a harem costume performing "an Arabian dance."[21] As the dance ends, the screen descends, and the film's title "with its crescent motif melts into the

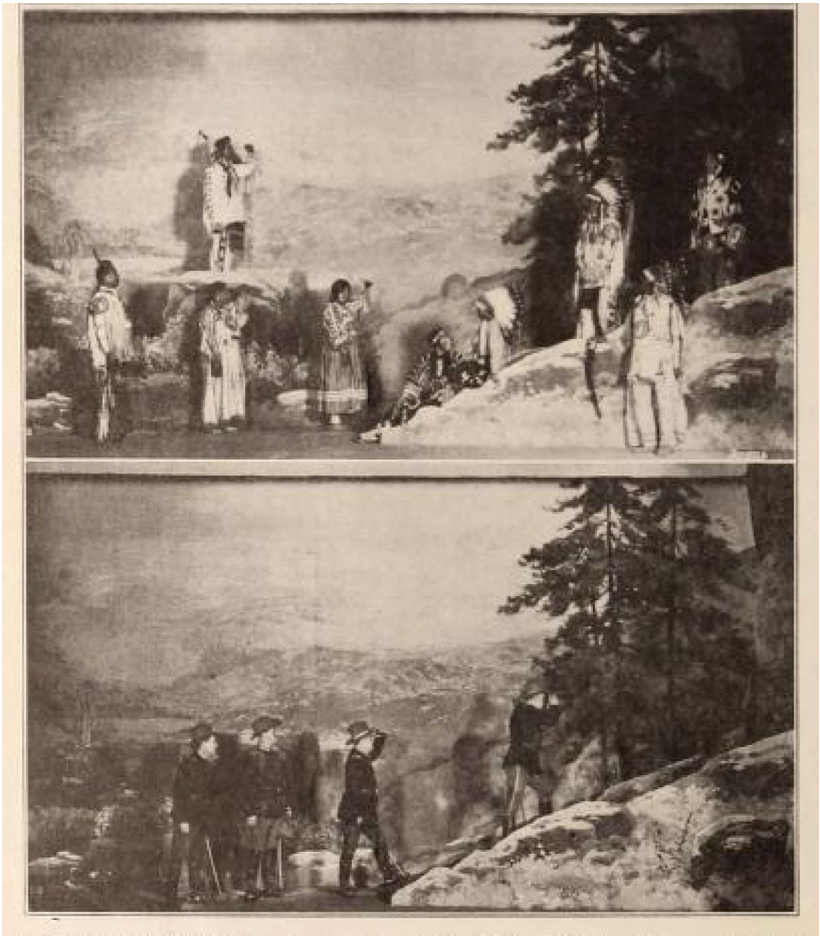


Fig. 4.6 *Bob Hampton of Placer* stage prologue, Strand theater, New York

living figure, giving a peculiarly dramatic effect." At the 2,500-seat Rialto in downtown Omaha, the stage set was also minimal: "two beautiful drops, showing the interior of an Arabian palace."[22] A soloist sings the old favorite, "Till the Sands of the Desert Grow Cold," followed by a local dancer performing "The Dance of the Egyptian Maidens." For the opening day of *One Arabian Night* at the Princess in Sioux City, Iowa,

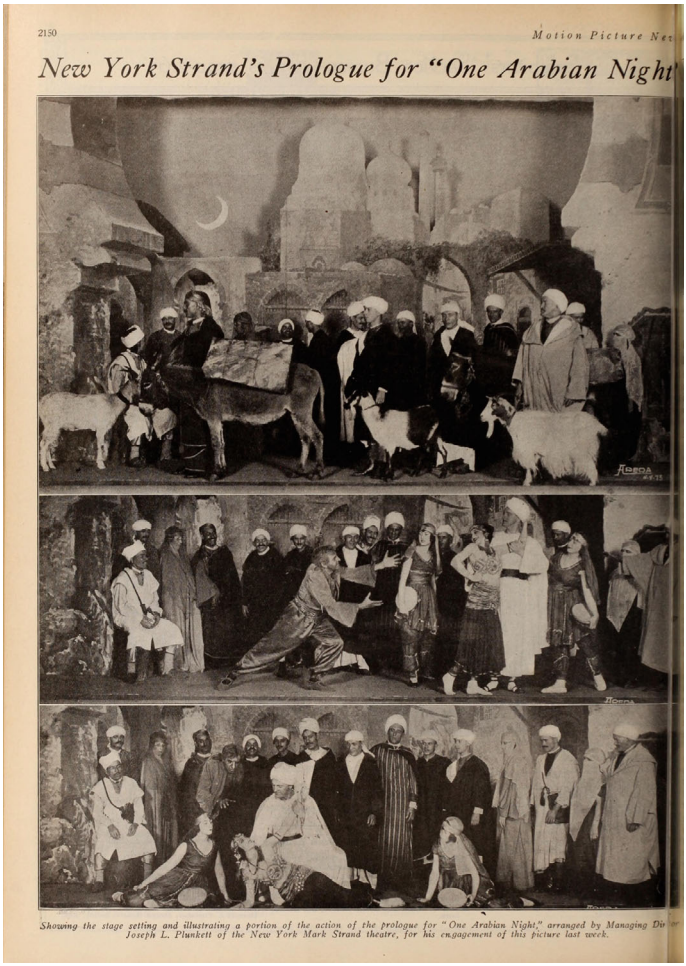


Fig. 4.7 *One Arabian Night* stage prologue, Strand theater, New York

the theater manager created the "false front" of a palace interior on stage, with "burning incense, weird music, and Oriental dances" by four young women in costume.[23] Twice daily for the film's five-day run, a separate prologue begins with a baritone, after which "the stage gradually lighted, bringing into view a harem scene," with "eight classic dancers in artistic

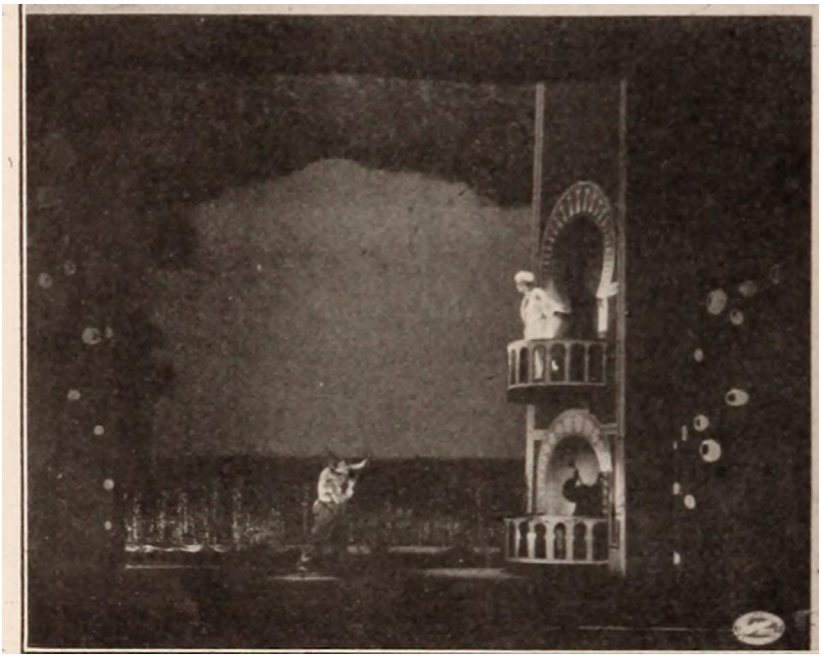


Fig. 4.8 *One Arabian Night* stage prologue, Circle theater, Indianapolis, Indiana

pose." The dancers then perform "three company and two solo dances." Instead of hula dancers featured in prologues during the previous year or two, now local dancers, likely all young white women, pretend to perform as "Oriental" (Figs. 4.9, 4.10, and 4.11).

The nostalgia for rustic Americana, in the face of a growing consumer society, continued to define the rural prologue, as it did many feature films. Good examples appeared in both cities and towns as preludes to Griffith's *Way Down East*, adapted from the popular stage play. For the Brooklyn Strand, Hyman designed an aptly simple stage set with a white picket fence in front of a backdrop of distant tree-covered hills.[24] Anticipating the film's ending, the country girl and the Squire's son pose as a couple in the foreground, while the Squire and three others stand behind the fence; all join in singing another old favorite, "Love's Sweet Song."[25] In sharp contrast, for the Chattanooga Tivoli, Rogers created

Fig. 4.9 *Way Down East* stage prologue, Tivoli theater, Chattanooga, Tennessee

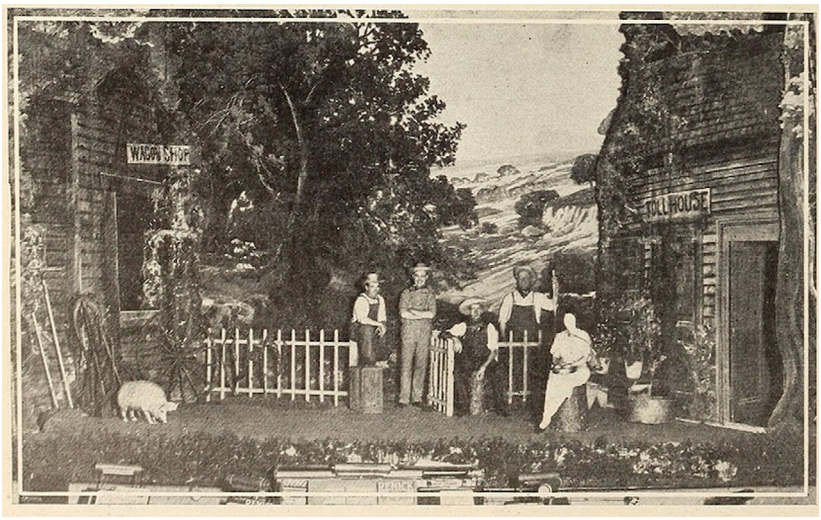


Fig. 4.10 *Way Down East* stage prologue, Halsey theater, Newark, New Jersey

an atmospheric prologue featuring the three-walled stage set of a country store interior almost as elaborate as Grauman's earlier one for *Hay Foot—Straw Foot*.[26] There, four men sit, talk, and sing among a clutter of farm tools, wooden barrels, and other items. The 1,250-seat Halsey theater in Newark, New Jersey, created a different atmosphere with the stage setting

Fig. 4.11 *Way Down East* stage prologue, Saenger theater, Monroe, Alabama

of a "typical village street, the old wagon shop on one side and the toll-house on the other," backed by the flat of a river with timbered banks.[27] While a white pig roots in the dirt stage right, a soloist and quartet of farm folks stand before a picket fence, singing "Way Down East" songs. The Saenger theater in Monroe, Alabama, surprisingly constructed an equally elaborate stage set of a village scene, with a straw-strewn cabin stage right and a stone building stage left, against the huge backdrop of a bridge over a river, a farmhouse on a distant hill, and a big sky.[28] Nearly twenty performers, mostly sitting musicians, watch a well-dressed man with a saxophone serenade a young woman. This prologue seemed to combine elements of the film's country and city scenes into a single condensed tableau (Fig. 4.12).

Three theaters mounted very different prologues for *The Old Nest*, which traced the fortunes of a country family as, one by one, five children leave their mother lonely and forgotten until the "punch" of a dramatic climax.[29] At the 2,700-seat Howard theater in Atlanta, a great window nearly fills the stage set, looking out on a distant railroad bridge over a chasm and storm clouds above.[30] A mother figure sits in the foreground stage right, and a cut-out mother bird and four fledglings nestle close to the window. As the mother sings "Dear Little Boy of Mine," suddenly "two little trains, run by electricity," crash head on in "a flame of light"—anticipating the "punch" of the climax. "The mother sinks to the floor singing the last three or four strains of the song." At the 3,000-seat Allen in downtown Cleveland, McCormick staged a complicated symbolic prologue, in which each of four characters, in turn, is transformed by a

Fig. 4.12 *The Old Nest* stage prologue, Howard theater, Atlanta, Georgia

mother's lullaby emanating from a tiny cottage stage right.[31] At the end, the cottage door is flooded with light, revealing a mother figure with a new-born baby, and in the illuminated background heavens a celestial choir sings "a hymn in praise to motherhood." The stories told in this prologue, ending with an overtly Christian vision, may well have recast the film as a religious parable. By contrast, at Shea's Hippodrome in Buffalo, Franklin drew on the film's mother bird and fledglings to turn his stage into the facade of a bird store decorated with many parrots and canaries in cages. Bird song accompanies the orchestra's novel overture,

"In a Bird Store," until Whistler's painting "Mother" is unveiled, and a soloist sings Dvorak's "The Old Mother." The manager of the Princess in Ames, Iowa, chose to do an interlude.[32] He stopped the film briefly as the mother sees a nesting bird and her young through a window, so that a spotlit violinist can play Schubert's "Serenade"; then during the film's last scene he positions a soloist stage right and the violinist stage left to play "Mother of Mine" as a duet. However diverse these stage settings, all deploy sentimental music praising mothers that explicitly harmonize with the film (Figs. 4.13 and 4.14).

At least half a dozen theaters, from big cities to small towns, staged rural prologues instead of urban ones for *School Days*, the story of a poor boy (Wesley Barry) in a rural town who goes to New York where he finds danger in the city's underworld. All of these prologues created a schoolroom more or less matching the film's opening scenes, but what ensued there could vary greatly. The Milwaukee Strand placed a large slate center stage on which was written "Next Week. Wesley Barry in 'School Days'."[33] A little girl, with books under her arm, bursts through the slate to sing the popular tune of the title. Shea's Hippodrome in Buffalo imitated the girl's eruption, then followed it with local youngsters

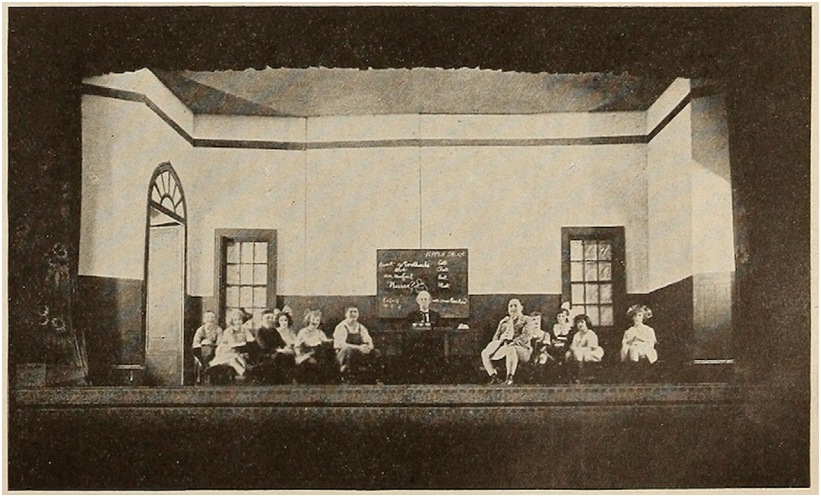


Fig. 4.13 *School Days* stage prologue, Stanley theater, Philadelphia

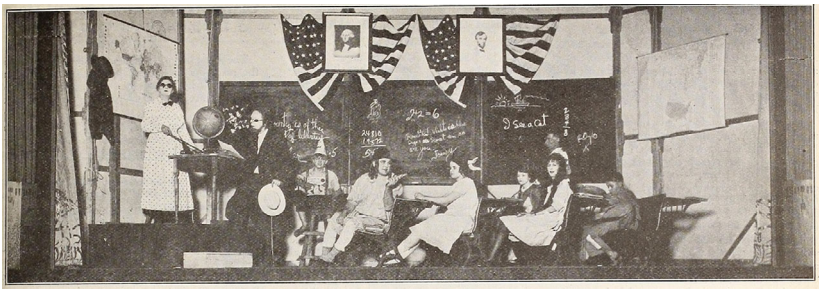


Fig. 4.14 *School Days* stage prologue, Tivoli theater, Chattanooga, Tennessee

performing a "school days revue."[34] By contrast, the Stanley in downtown. Philadelphia constructed a high-ceilinged schoolroom within three austere walls, with a male teacher at a desk in front of a slate and ten students sitting at desks to his right and left.[35] For the Tivoli in Chattanooga, Rogers built a schoolroom with three background blackboards and a clutter of flags, Presidential portraits, and maps on its three walls.[36] A female teacher wearing dark glasses stands at a raised table stage right, while half a dozen pupils—three girls, an older "retard," a dunce, and a black boy—slouch in a line of desks. The Avondale theater in North Tonawanda, New York, staged a schoolroom grouping similar to Rogers's against a simple curtain.[37] But the teacher is a stereotypical spinster type, and the pupils are a motley crew, from a bruiser with a black eye to a milktoast boy and a girl in blackface. Finally, the Wichita theater in Kansas designed another simple stage set with a long blackboard on the far wall, a male teacher at a centered desk and eight "talented juveniles" as pupils, three of them girls.[38] The only description of the program, unfortunately, mentions a hodgepodge of "dialogue, comedy, dance and music, both song and instrumental and recitation" (Figs. 4.15, 4.16, and 4.17).

Contemporary urban prologues seemed less frequent, as those for *School Days* suggest, even as evidenced by two radically different types. One involved the lower classes, but the prologues for a single film could differ from one venue to another. At the Brooklyn Strand, Hyman created a rather simple prologue for *The Kid*. "The stage set was of a futuristic design," perhaps to better show off "a girl dancer attired à la Chaplin interpreting the comedian and his mannerisms in a most

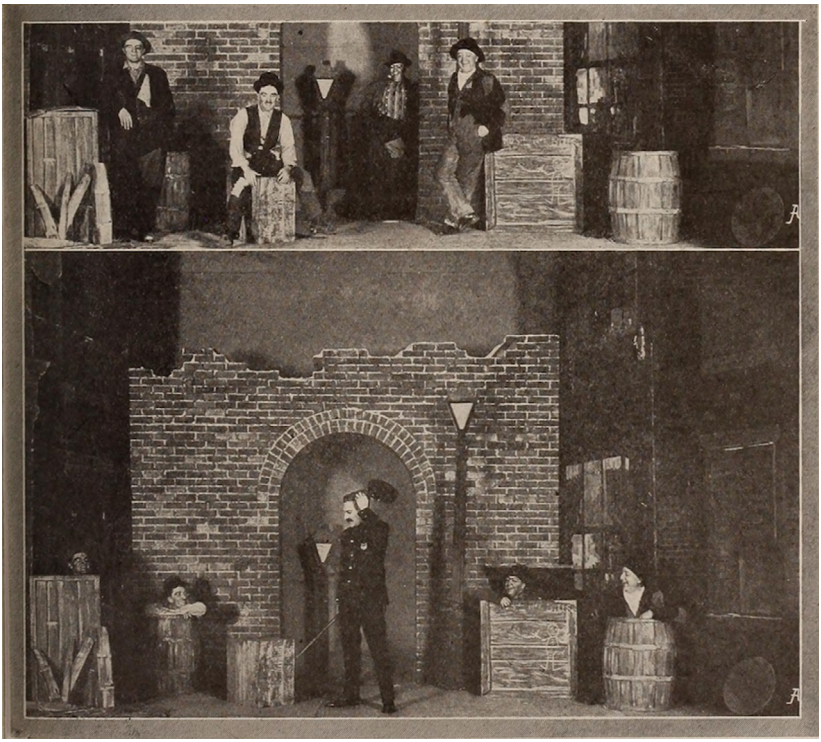
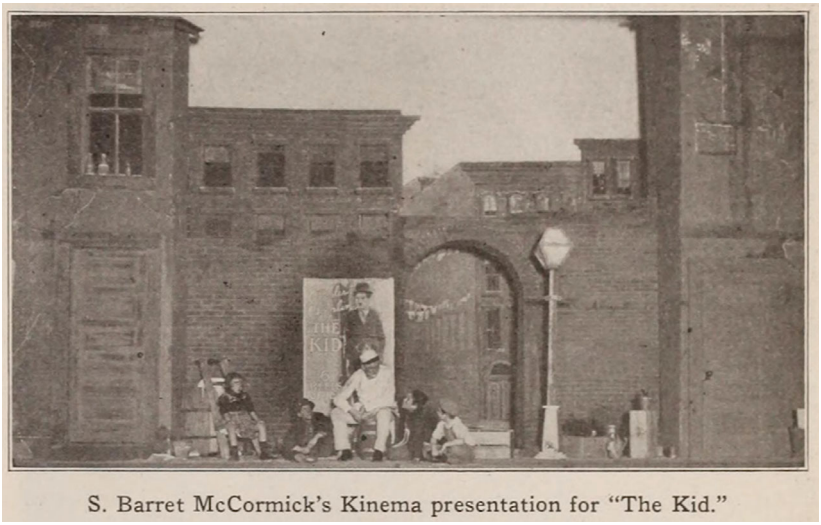


Fig. 4.15 *The Kid* stage prologue, Strand theater, New York

graceful dance."[39] At the New York Strand, Plunkett's stage set "represented the rear court of a tenement alley," with a lamp post, several boxes and barrels, and a centered opening in a brick wall drop. A tramp quartet squats within the boxes and barrels, only their heads and shoulders visible, but they duck down when a policeman wanders in. After he leaves, "swinging his club easily," they pop back up and sing "For She Lives Down in Our Alley." At the Kinema in Los Angles, McCormick erected a similar backdrop of brick buildings in a tenement area, but the action served as a double promotion.[40] After a man in a white smock puts up a poster advertising *The Kid* on a back wall, he sits and regals four urchin boys. Lacking a description in the trade press, one wonders what he says or sings. Hyman and Plunkett also devised contrasting prologues



S. Barret McCormick's Kinema presentation for "The Kid."

Fig. 4.16 *The Kid* stage prologue, Allen theater, Cleveland

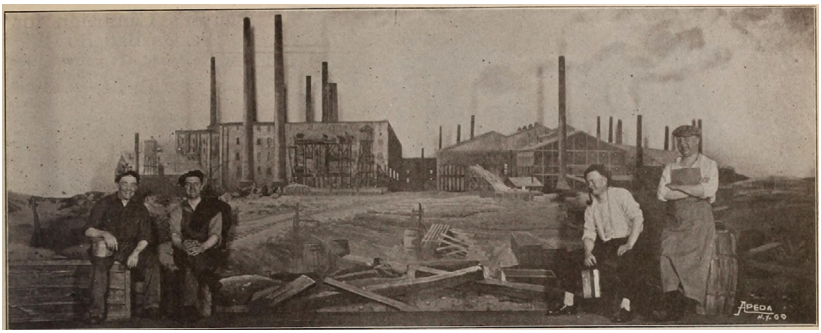


Fig. 4.17 *Scrap Iron* stage prologue, Strand theater, New York

for *Scrap Iron*, in which Charles Ray plays a laborer who gives up boxing, loses his girl and job, returns to the ring and wins enough money to take his mother away from the city to regain her health.[41] The Brooklyn Strand uses the backdrop of a distant country vista to set off a "roadside blacksmith shop," with two big tree trunks, a well, two workmen

striking anvils, and two women (perhaps helpers?) on each side of the stage.[42] Resembling a rural prologue, the effect seems strangely nostalgic. The New York Strand, by contrast, foregoes any nostalgia to use the huge backdrop of a large distant factory to foreground a male quartet dressed as workmen with dinner pails.[43] The red glow from the factory blast furnaces rises and falls; the smokestacks bellow; as dusk seems to fall, an automobile travels toward the factory across a trolley track in the distance, and the men sing "Sally in Our Alley." Does the song anticipate the woman who throws over Ray's character and to whom he doesn't return? (Figs. 4.18 and 4.19).

The other contemporary prologue type involved the upper classes, where figures could be dressed in fashionable costumes. Good examples served as preludes to DeMille's *The Affairs of Anatol*, in which a wealthy young man tries to help a series of young women, angering his wife, then abandons his "philanthropic work and seeks peace at his own fireside."[44] Circulating at different times at the Rialto, Rivoli, and Criterion in New York, Hugo Reisenfeld produced a lavish prologue, "Extravagance," with "four solo dancers, a baritone singer, a chorus of ten, and a balalaika orchestra" in a light operetta suggesting the young man's milieu.[45] Before a glossy stage curtain, a dozen society people toast one another and sing;

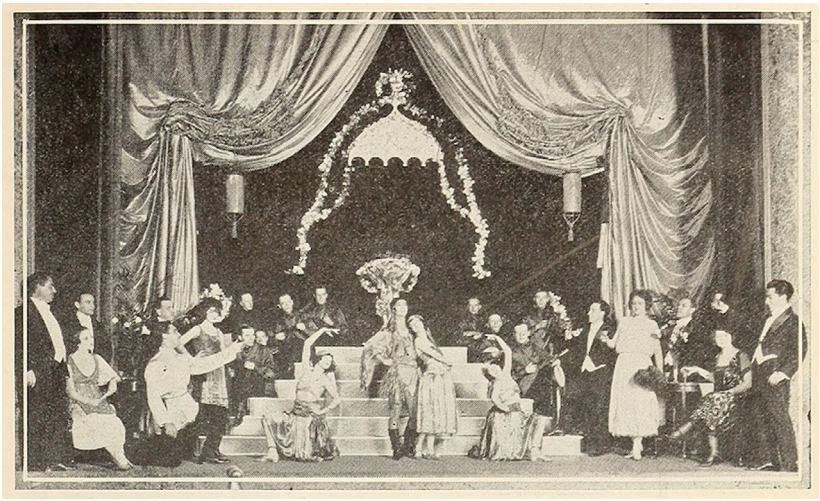


Fig. 4.18 *The Affairs of Anatol* stage prologue, Rivoli theater, New York

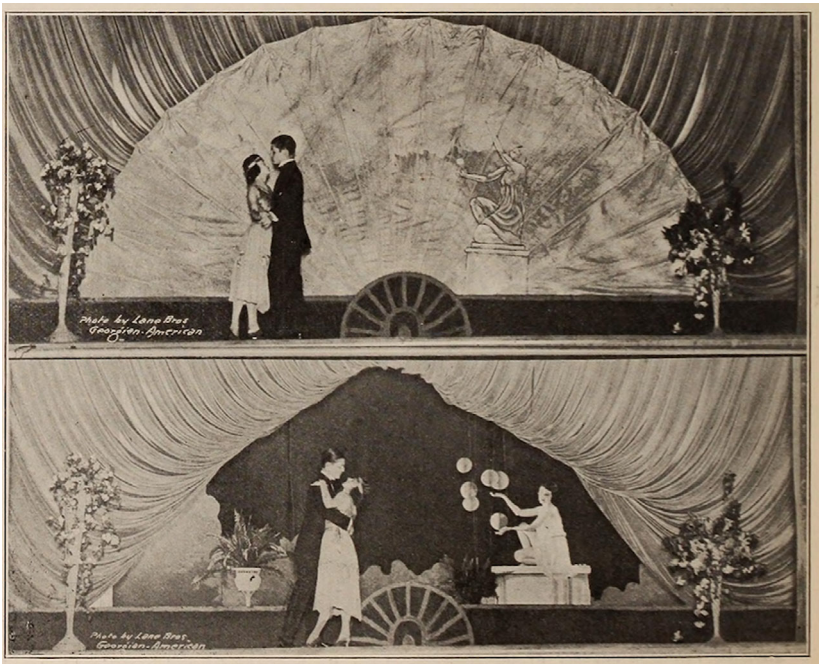


Fig. 4.19 *The Affairs of Anatol* stage prologue, Howard theater, Atlanta, Georgia

the curtain parts to reveal steps leading up to a large floral-ringed gateway for the dancers to perform as the society people watch from each side.[46] The Howard in Atlanta staged a prologue based on the film's Café of the Green Fan, that shows a café setting with a dance floor and tables, backed by a huge green fan. Two women popular in the city, along with dance school pupils, perform an original number to the music of the "Merry Widow Waltz."[47] A couple embraces in front of the fan that parts to reveal a young woman in a white "Follies" costume blowing bubbles—that is, playing with half a dozen balloons "painted in pastel colors."[48] The 600-seat Majestic in Madison, Wisconsin, devised a more condensed prologue in which a big green fan opens to reveal a dark blue drop, with a dancer emerging from a crown-shaped opening in a cascade of soap bubbles blown in through a pipe.[49] Flats of large multi-colored bubbles frame the dancer, enhancing the atmosphere of pleasure. As if beguiled by

the extravagant ways of the upper classes, all of these prologues indulge in the gaudy milieu of night life that the film itself seems to eschew in the end.

Similarly catering to contemporary tastes, and much more prominent now that the economic recession was receding, were fashion show prologues that initially avoided extreme extravagance. The trade press continued to praise Grauman for his effective prologues in Los Angeles, which included fashion shows.[50] In September 1921, to complement the final day's screening of *Footlights*, Grauman staged "20 Minutes at Venice," a "Bathing-Girl Revue."[51] Twenty "prize-winning bathing girls" from the city's beaches, along with twenty "other beauties" paraded and gamboled before each of five film showings. For Thanksgiving week, months later, he mounted a fashion show, related to *Enchantment*, in which Max Fisher and his Ziegfeld Follies ensemble open the act with popular selections within the stage set of a local hotel ballroom. "Clad in modish furs [...] a dozen players from the Famous Players-Lasky studios" walk across the stage balcony, descend a set of stairs, parade around the floor, disappear into the wings, and reappear posed for an encore finale.[52] The novelty of a mid-winter "fashion show devoted exclusively to furs" in southern California proved to "attract large crowds." Even small towns got into the act. Also in September, the main theater in Marion, Ohio, introduced *Scrambled Wives*, starring Marguerite Clark, with a fashion show sponsored by local shoe and garment stores.[53] For *Straight from Paris*, starring Clara Kimball Young, the Colonial in Reading, Pennsylvania, put on a different fashion show every night of the film's run.[54] Each one was sponsored by a different department store, and the competition led to lots of repeat business (Fig. 4.20).

Fashion shows hardly slacked off in 1922. Metro recommended that theater managers produce style shows for *Peacock Alley*, in which Mae Murray performed in gorgeous gowns and revealing dance costumes.[55] The Palace theater in Dallas had a leading department store present a spring fashion promenade with models parading back and forth before a circular backdrop showing two large peacocks in bright colors.[56] For the Strand in Binghamton, New York, local merchants also sponsored a revue with six young women sporting the latest modes in feminine attire and matched that with store window displays.[57] About the same time, for the Imperial theater in Columbia, South Carolina, six leading merchants put on a fashion show in conjunction with DeMille's *Saturday Night*. "Nine local society girls took part, displaying frequent changes of frocks and

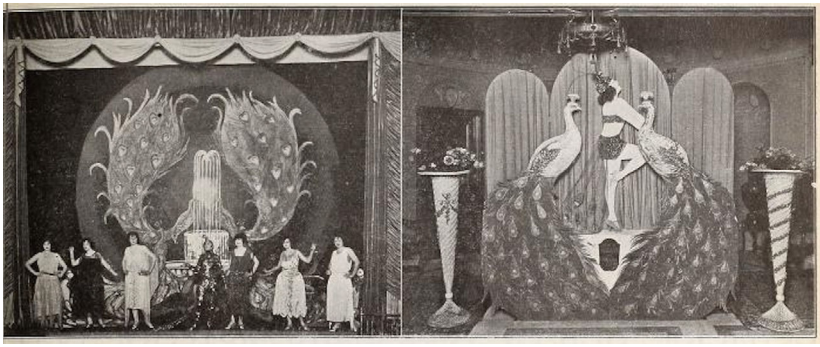


Fig. 4.20 *Peacock Alley* fashion show, Palace theater, Dallas, Texas

gowns."[58] The following fall, to promote *Slim Shoulders*, the Hodkinson Company arranged for multiple companies to tour the Irene Castle Fashion Promenade in conjunction with screenings of the film in which she starred. Each company had an advance publicist, six mannequins in gowns, and "a couple interpreting the new ballroom dances."[59] Among the many shows introducing features from Cleveland to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, one of the more interesting was at the Queen Theatre in Houston, in which a local shop displayed clothes, not for women but for men, worn by Harold Lloyd in *A Tailor-Made Man*.[60] By the end of the year, even *Variety* was reporting "an epidemic of fashion shows among the downtown first-run picture theatres" in San Francisco.[61] While the Granada put on one in conjunction with *Brothers Under the Skin*, a "really original, unexpectedly elaborate" fashion show mounted by the 2,300-seat Warfield won more praise than its feature, *If I Were Queen*. A few in the trade press complained that the fashion show was "an old gag," but many more theater managers instead were convinced they were surefire money-makers, especially when they outperformed ordinary features[62] (Figs. 4.21 and 4.22).

Notable Exhibitors and a Miscellany of Others

The trade press kept promoting at least six big city exhibitors and the new or reworked ideas they came up with for their prologues. One was Grauman, especially known for his triptych stage sets. A good example is the rural prologue for *Chickens*, the comic story of a "city chap," whose

Fig. 4.21 *At the End of the World* stage prologue, Million Dollar theater, Los Angeles

Fig. 4.22 *The Case of Becky* stage prologue, Million Dollar theater, Los Angeles

uncle's will makes him take up farming and, in a nightmare, bloodied chickens wreak vengeance.[63] A farmyard garage framed by a picket fence in front of a backdrop of trees fills the center stage, with farm machinery and other implements scattered about.[64] While in a side panel, a woman feeds chickens, half a dozen lounging farmhands turn into performers: a girl plays "Way Down on the Farm" on a banjo; a youngster dances; the others sing "old fashioned melodies." Reenacting a scene in the film, the prologue ends with a car smashing into the yard through the garage door. Another was the exotic prologue that introduced *At the End of the World*, in which a saloon-keeper's daughter in Shanghai somehow ends up on a desert island with three men, two of whom fall fighting from a lighthouse.[65] All three stage sets together reproduce an early scene of the "Paper Lantern Café" in Shanghai.[66] A complicated series

of acts involving a mandolinist, acrobat, Chinese dancer, and mandarins climaxes with "a procession of beautiful Chinese maidens." An interpolated scene highlights *The Case of Becky*, in which Becky, a peasant girl, is hypnotized at a circus, revealing an "evil personality" that, after many bad experiences, is vanquished by a young physician.[67] At the first reel break, Grauman staged a theatrical scene of the side shows lining a circus midway.[68] A ballyhoo man introduces a series of performers, ending with "Balzamo" who hypnotizes a girl in the stage audience, compelling her not to do evil but to simply sing a naughty tune. Grauman could also devise something unusual with single stage sets. For *The Great Impersonation*, he had a jungle hut and "real" dense foliage fill the stage, with three white hunters in white costumes posed behind eight sitting "jungle natives."[69] A photo caption explains (to allay any supposed fears?) that the natives are "colored musical students" recruited from the Los Angeles area (Figs. 4.23 and 4.24).

The second exhibitor was Plunkett, who continued to stage impressive prologues at the New York Strand. One introduced *The Devil*, a satirical story of the "arch enemy" disguised as a fashionable physician who poisons several couples' minds, until one sweetheart finally defeats him.[70] In the stage set of a marble interior surrounding a large barred window in the background, a baritone impersonating the devil stands atop a staircase, and his "Mephistofele Aria" draws half a dozen dancers from the Sergastchinko Ballet who implore him until they are rejected.[71] In a trick of lighting effects, flames seem to break out around them as they retreat in despair. More unusual lighting created a transformation prologue for *The Great Adventure*, a comically complicated story in which an English artist keeps eluding an adoring aristocratic lady.[72] Within a studio interior with a tall background window, a painter stands before the large painting of a woman in a royal gown and tiara.[73] As front lights dim on the painting, others from behind what has become a transparency reveal a cabinet in which, to the stunned painter, a real woman stands in the same position. Reminiscent of *Passion*, a climactic mob scene marked *All for a Woman*, the Revolutionary story of Danton's fatal love for an aristocratic woman.[74] The stage set, designed by Wenger, features a raised guillotine within a stone arch; as his death proclamation is read, a mob escorts the figure of Danton to the platform.[75] An unexpected prologue introduced *Penrod*, an episodic story of Freckles and his pals, including "a little pup" and "two little negro kids from Hal Roach productions."[76] The stage set is a miniature show of four sitting puppets—Penrod, Verman,

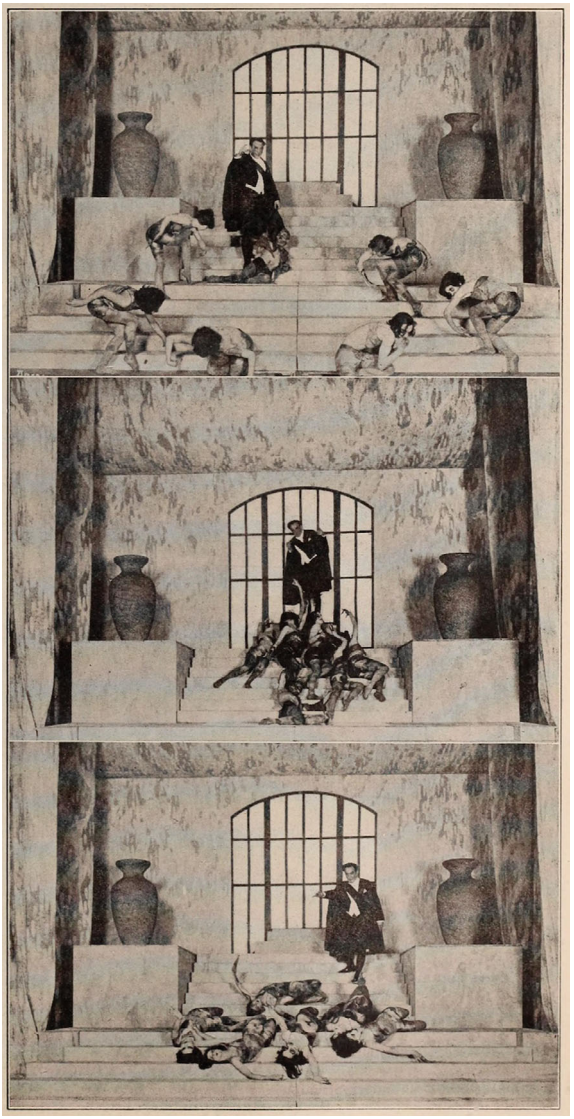


Fig. 4.23 *The Devil* stage prologue, Strand theater, New York

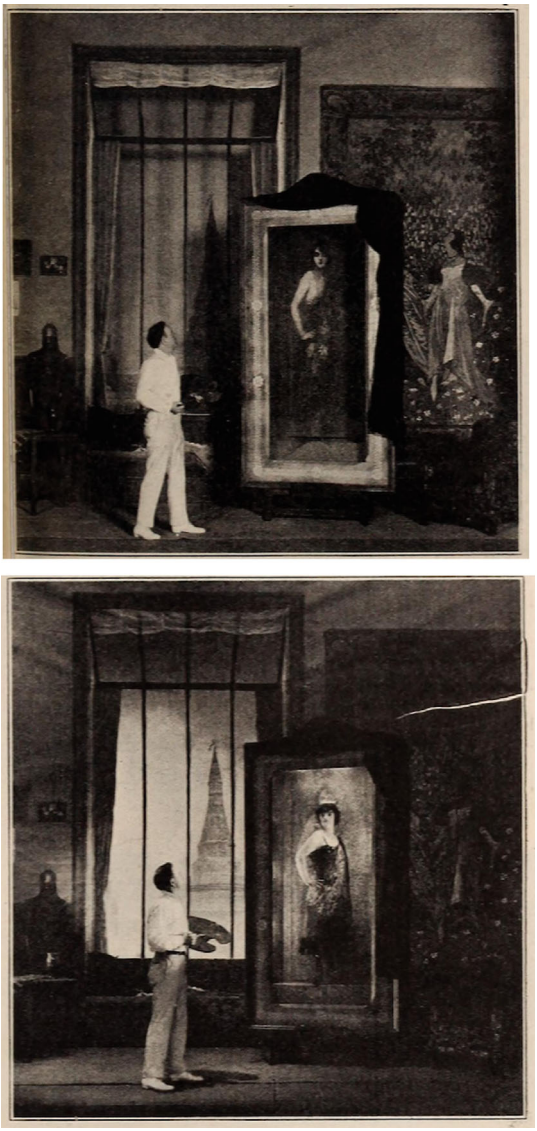


Fig. 4.24 *The Great Adventure* stage prologue, Strand theater, New York

Herman, and Sam—costumed only up to the neck.[77] For behind the curtain, male quartet members stick their heads and forearms through slits to sing "Under the Copper Moon" and "Jungle Joe." Unlike Verman and Herman in the film, the singers are in blackface (Figs. 4.25 and 4.26).

Equally versatile was Hyman at the Brooklyn Strand. He created a Chinatown stage set for *The First Born*, the strange story of a poor Chinese immigrant in San Francisco who loses his real love and then his son to a rich Chinaman, exacts his revenge, and returns to China.[78] Against the backdrop of a Chinatown alley's illusory deep space, a "Chinese soprano" sings "The Chinese Lullaby," joined in the end by a quartet.[79] A "genuine Chinese orchestra" accompanies "a characteristic

Fig. 4.25 *Smilin' Through* stage prologue, Strand theater, Brooklyn

Fig. 4.26 *Bits of Life* stage prologue, Strand theater, Brooklyn

dance," and, as the lullaby returns, a little Chinese boy appears in the guise of the film's first-born son. A simpler prologue introduced *Smilin' Through* (Norma Talmadge in two roles), the story of two generations of broken romance: in one, a young woman is killed by a jealous suitor; in the other, an uncle finally permits his niece to marry the suitor's son, crippled in the Great War.[80] Within a walled garden, an old man rejects a young woman fully clothed in white, who appeals to a small framed image, apparently the ghost of the dead woman.[81] One of Hyman's specialties was designing more than one prologue for a feature film. Good examples accompanied *Bits of Life*, a medley of four stories: the first has a crook outwitted and arrested for a past crime when he plays a Samaritan; the last one is a "Far East romance."[82] Against the backdrop of a steep, narrow alleyway, the "Bad Samaritan" prologue features four low-life couples as performers; by contrast, the other prologue stages a lengthy satire of "The Mikado," whose elaborate backdrop of a Japanese garden and distant arching bridge gives the theater's operatic stars and ballet dancers opportunities to shine.[83] Hyman also produced both a prologue and an epilogue for *Not Guilty*, in which one brother shoots a gambling den owner, and the other, to protect him, takes his name and flees to India, where he surprisingly meets his former sweetheart and returns with her after his brother's deathbed confession.[84] The prologue reproduces the film's opening with a couple posed before the backdrop of a wide path through a leafy park; the epilogue recapitulates the lovers' encounter in "an East Indian street scene," within a backdrop of gates, houses (some windows lit from behind), bazaars, and a sky of blinking stars[85] (Figs. 4.27 and 4.28).

Much like Wenger, Josef Urban was a widely recognized scenic artist who created movie theater stage sets as a kind of sideline. As art director for the New York Criterion, his five years of experience producing sets for the Ziegfeld Follies and his recent work for Cosmopolitan Pictures were invaluable.[86] In January 1921, Urban designed a magnificent stage setting for *The Inside of the Cup*, in which a tyrannical banker rejects his son and daughter and dismisses his cashier; "learning of the dregs inside the ecclesiastical cup," a minister invites the common people into his church, and among them the ruined cashier shoots the unscrupulous villain.[87] An immense cathedral interior fills the stage, with stained glass windows on the two side walls and a large background window depicting "Christ driving the moneychangers from the temple."[88] On a stone platform, a soprano clothed in nun's white sings Gounod's "Ave

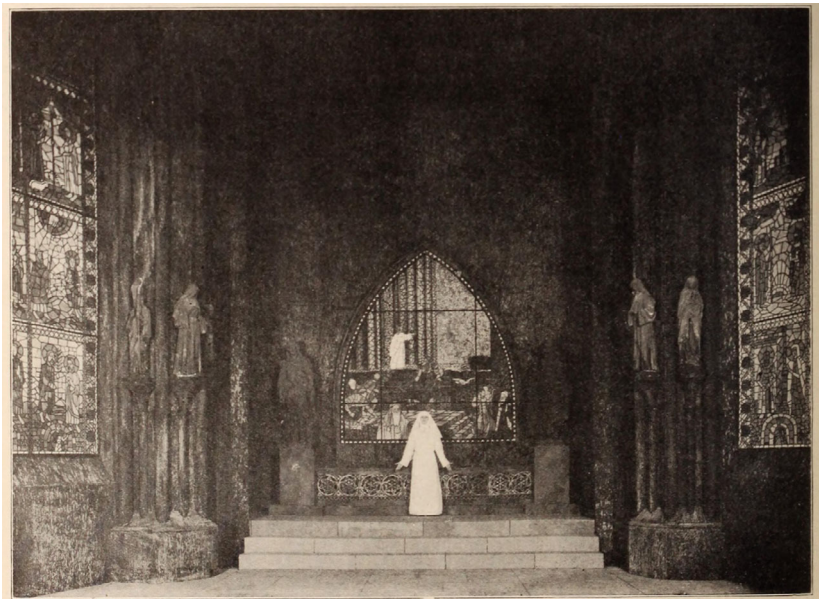


Fig. 4.27 *The Inside of the Cup* stage prologue, Capitol theater, New York

Fig. 4.28 *The Golem* stage prologue, Capitol theater, New York

Maria."[89] An equally impressive prologue led into *Buried Treasure*, an improbable story of the daughter of a wealthy father who, in a South Sea adventure, turns into the reincarnated spirit of a Spanish senorita, leading her to buried treasure.[90] Creating the atmosphere of "Old Spain," this stage set features a garden wall shaded by a huge tree and backed by a distant hilly landscape.[91] A dozen dancers, singers, and musicians from the New School of Opera and Ensemble, costumed like the characters in the film's opening masquerade ball, perform to "The March of the Toreadors" and "Serenade de Murica." Two different scenes make up Urban's prologue that complemented the German import, *The Golem*, the legendary medieval Jewish tale of a huge clay statue that a rabbi magically brings to life to save his people from a plague; the Golem, in turn, saves the king who wanted to banish the Jews; but the giant becomes threatening until a child destroys him.[92] The first stage set has a massive menorah on a long table where nine sitting men entreat a rabbi seated stage right; the second has townspeople kneel before a backdrop of hazy ghetto buildings, praying for deliverance from the king, who fears they are responsible for the plague.[93] That most of the townspeople are women and children would likely appeal even to a non-Jewish audience (Figs. 4.29 and 4.30).

In Los Angeles, Wilkerson designed prologues for the triptych panels of the California theater's unusually wide stage.[94] A good example was the atmospheric prologue for *Bunty Pulls the Strings*, a Scottish tale of an excessively thrifty father, a village woman who blackmails him, and his daughter Bunty who exposes the woman and her trickery in

Fig. 4.29 *Bunty Pulls the Strings* stage prologue, California theater, Los Angeles

Fig. 4.30 *Dear Old New York* stage prologue, California theater, Los Angeles

cheating her own nephew.[95] "A special backdrop representing a typical Scottish village" in the distance occupies the center panel, with a "practicable house" stage right and a garden wall stage left.[96] Four performers "dressed as Bunty, her father and brother and the village woman" sing solos, duets, and quartets. In the end, clouds drifting across the background turn dark, and—how this is managed is unclear —rain begins to fall, "increasing to a drenching downpour." Again, Wilkerson used three sections of the stage to create a prologue for *Boys Will Be Boys*, in which Peep, "a small town nobody" (Will Rogers), inherits a fortune, enjoys a boyhood he never had with a band of youngsters, and thwarts "a shyster lawyer" with the help of Judge Priest.[97] The stage's central section depicts a distant boat landing; on stage right is an old barn; on stage left, a Southern mansion.[98] Beside the barn, a quartet of one white character and three in blackface sings old plantation songs, and in front of the mansion a quintet sings a medley, including "Oh, Come to Me, Mavourneen." "A clever Southern clog dancer" was said to "stop the show."[99] In an unusual move, Wilkerson also designed an elaborate prologue for the scenic short, *Dear Old New York*. In "A Block Party on Hester Street," small groups of characters, probably Jewish immigrants—a family, several couples, and a peddler—congregate in front of a backdrop of brick buildings with shops on the ground floors and apartment windows above.[100] According to one short description, the prologue features "twelve children singing and dancing"[101] (Figs. 4.31 and 4.32).

After his symbolic prologue for *Passion* at the Ambassador, the trade press reported very little on McCormick in Los Angeles, except to mention that he briefly worked at the Kinema and "revived the old community singing idea."[102] Once he reached the Allen in Cleveland,

Fig. 4.31 *Wet Gold* stage prologue, Allen theater, Cleveland

however, his spectacles again merited attention. A good example was the prologue that introduced *Wet Gold*, a "fanciful melodrama" in which an adventurer is forced to join a gang of pirates, escapes their submarine during an explosion, and later returns to seize the pirates' plunder.[103] Titled "The Court of Pearls and Coral," the stylized stage set of layered flats against an aquamarine backdrop represents "the bottom of the sea at midnight" for a "little fairy tale about a diver" who, while searching for lost treasure, becomes enamored of half a dozen undersea "ballet girls."[104] Out of a huge starfish, three men emerge to dance; an off-stage singer performs Gilbert and Sullivan's "Pirate Song"; the "Queen of the Underworld" springs from a treasure chest and transforms the diver into a sea man. Far more charming than the film, McCormick's prologue for *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* was frankly bizarre. Titled "The Futurist Ball," the stage represents the time of 1950 "when the Futurists,

Fig. 4.32 *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* stage prologue, Allen theater, Cleveland

Cubists, Impressionists, Crystalists, etc. were in control of the world."[105] An"Orchestra from Mars," looking like Méliès performers, plays "Ain't We Got Fun"; next comes a large company of dancers, a "Zimmeresque Fashion Show, and a "Ziegfeld Follies Chorus—that is, four dancing boys in ballet skirts, tights, and toe slippers" and, from the waist up, in evening clothes and top hats. In short, a stunning burlesque vision of Caligari's supposed "mental condition." Impressive in a far different way was McCormick's series of patriotic presentations that the trade press imagined could be staged for any one of several holidays, from Independence Day or Lincoln's Birthday to "the newly created Armistice Day."[106] Accompanied by popular musical numbers, these tableaux, reminiscent of Franklin's stage sets during the Great War, culminate in a monumental

finale, "Triumphant America." An aptly jingoistic theatrical spectacle epitomizing what was fast becoming the myth of "American exceptionalism" in the early 1920s (Figs. 4.33 and 4.34).

Among the many other prologues singled out in the trade press, those of Rogers at the Tivoli in Chattanooga were of such high quality that *Exhibitors Herald* published small photos of selected ones for nine different films.[107] Perhaps the most recent introduced *The Passion Flower*, a Spanish tale of Acacia, a young peasant woman who hates the younger man her mother marries after her husband's death; but the two youths fall tragically in love.[108] The stage set features the backdrop of a distant

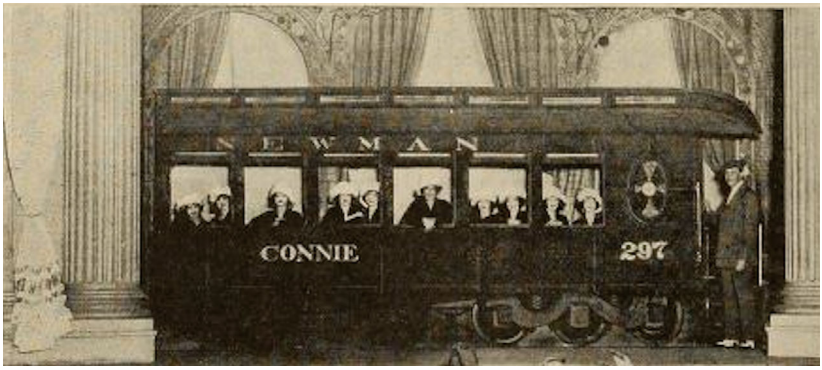


Fig. 4.33 *Polly of the Follies* stage prologue, Newman theater, Kansas City

Fig. 4.34 *The Trap* stage prologue, Central theater, New York

seacoast town, a stone house stage right, and a stone wall and huge tree stage left.[109] Near the house, a woman dressed like Acacia dances on a table top to the applause of half a dozen villagers. Fabian's 3,000-seat Branford theater in downtown Newark mounted a complicated prologue for *The Highest Law*, a Civil War story in which Lincoln pardons a young deserter whom he learns volunteered after his older brothers were killed and, without permission, visits his dying mother.[110] The triptych stage set has a miniature campground of tents in the center, with large cannon to the left and right. As day turns to night, a quartet dressed in Union uniforms sings a medley of tunes, followed by "a vision representing Lincoln freeing the negroes."[111] For his theater in downtown Kansas City, Frank Newman reworked the idea of a railway prologue for *Polly of the Follies*, the familiar story of a small town girl (Constance Talmadge), who, thwarted by an uncle in her amateur theatricals, heads for New York and finds success in the Ziegfeld Follies.[112] From a special Pullman car, labelled "Newman" and "Connie," that pulls in to fill the stage, some of the passengers dressed like "Follies" girls alight and perform a singing and dancing act.[113] Finally, for the 1,100-seat Central Theatre near the Strand in New York City, Andrew Cobe created an atmospheric prologue for *The Trap,* in which a French-Canadian trapper loses his mine and sweetheart to an adventurer; after getting his revenge, the dead man's young child softens the trapper's heart.[114] Cobe had his scenic artist make a rough sketch of what would become the stage set, the backdrop of a lake in a mountain landscape with tall pines stage right and a cabin stage left.[115] Anticipating the film's beginning, a singer dressed as the trapper, shouldering a bundle of furs, steps out of a canoe to meet the woman he loves, and they close the prologue with a duet.

Contrastive Prologues

By the fall of 1920, as outlined in Chapter 3, "contrastive" prologues were becoming common, even for many big city exhibitors. In Los Angeles, Grauman's prologue at the Rialto theater had nothing to do with *Flying Pat*, the contemporary story of a soldier, returned from the war, who insists that his wife make a career for herself; she takes up flying, which leads to complications and an eventual reconciliation.[116] The prologue stages "Memories of Old Mexico" in a courtyard within high stone walls, where half a dozen performers in nineteenth-century costumes dance and sing to musical numbers.[117] Also in Los Angeles,

Wilkerson concocted a prologue that had no connection with the California's screening of the sea adventure, *Wet Gold*. Instead, the wide stage set represents a cabaret scene in which "a girls' orchestra, with players dressed in black velvet trousers," play jazz numbers for "a Spanish dancer," to applause from guests at four tables.[118] In Indianapolis, the Circle celebrated its fifth anniversary with an "Oriental" prologue to introduce *The Sign on the Door*, the story of a husband and wife who both confess to shooting a philanderer; circumstantial evidence supports the wife's claim (although she is not guilty), and her explanation that she shot to protect her husband frees both of them.[119] In the stage set, eight steps lead up to a centered throne against a huge circular window and an abstract Middle Eastern cityscape in silhouette. After a performance by a harem of twenty female dancers, accompanied by costumed musicians, "a three-year old dancer 'broke up the show' when she appeared as a dancing girl of the Moroccan harem."[120] Two blocks south of Grand Circle Park in Detroit, the 1,488-seat Broadway Strand put on a prologue more fit for *The Love Egg*, a comic short starring Chester Conklin and Louise Fazenda, than for *The Call of the North*, a North Woods story pitting a "free trader" fur trapper against the manager of the Hudson Bay Company.[121] By contrast, the special presentation stars the touring "Sunshine Kiddies of Melody Land," called "America's cleverest juvenile entertainers," dressed in an array of odd costumes—but no furs[122] (Fig. 4.35).

At the New York Capitol, Rothapfel framed his screening of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* with a prologue and revealing epilogue.[123] A spacious room fills the darkened stage set, with a glowing fireplace stage right, moonlight streaming through a large library window stage left, and two men in silhouette seated at a centered table. One of the men,

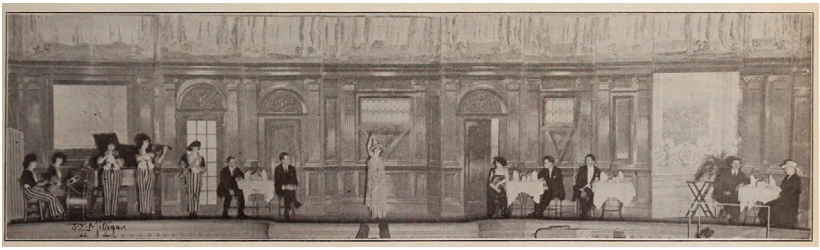


Fig. 4.35 *Wet Gold* stage prologue, California theater, Los Angeles

named Cranford in Katherine Hiliker's script, begins to tell the story of his strange encounter in an overgrown garden with a tall, slender young man with haunted eyes. As he asks, "Did you ever hear of 'The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari'?," a young woman approaches "as if in a dream," and the film begins with a matching scene. The epilogue hastens to erase any profound uneasiness created by the film. Set later in the same room, Cranford stands to admonish his listener with these emphatic words: "And he did! Francis Purnay is today a prosperous jeweler in Edenwald, happily married, with a couple of healthy, normal children. And the strangest thing about his recovery is the lapse of memory [...] He has completely forgotten his hallucination!" This little playlet may have soothed an audience into reimagining the film, not as a nightmare from which it cannot awake, but as a dream or hallucination now dissolved in the "blue haze of cigar smoke" drifting over the stage.[124]

Exhibitors now found fashion shows so beneficial that they could make them theatrical presentations independent of a feature film. For its opening in early 1921, the Albany Strand staged a fashion revue before *Jim the Penman*, the grim story of a forger who is finally trapped and sinks a yacht with himself and his gang locked inside its cabin.[125] The revue involved ten models from a local department store in a variety of spring outfits for parties and sports, before a backdrop setting of London Bridge.[126] Fashion shows were especially notable in Detroit's three major downtown movie theaters. The 1,770-seat Adams (on the north side of Grand Circle Park) hosted a "Spring Fashion Show" in contrast with *The Devil's Garden*, another grim story of a servant who strangles an aristocrat, and, in the end, sacrifices himself while saving his children in a fire.[127] That fall, the Madison mounted another revue to accompany *Serenade*, a Spanish story of revolution and counterrevolution.[128] Titled "Fashion's Footsteps, from 1880 to 1921," this revue featured "wondrously pretty girls [in] a fortune in gowns."[129] At the same time, the Adams staged a very different revue for *The Old Nest*, "the same old story of the innocent young man convicted of murder," with the last-minute rescue by his mother.[130] This was "The Shoe Fashion Revue," with "pretty girls, smart clothes, snappy footwear, novel staging."[131] Perhaps most surprising, a year later, was the fashion show that the Broadway Strand put on for *Nanook of the North*. Advertised as "Frank & Seder's $25,000 Fur Exposition," the many fashionable furs could hardly have come from Nanook's singular survival tactics.[132] But this was not the only such show for the film. The Circle in Indianapolis also

staged a "fur fashion review with 10 living models" sponsored by a local store.[133] And so did the Albany Strand in a prologue that had "a local fur merchant display his select stock on 'New York models'."[134] All three of these fashion shows set the opulence of commercially manufactured furs against Nanook's desperate efforts to catch just one seal. In doing so, they stressed the ease and opulence of current American life, sharply contrasting the "modern" versus the "primitive."

This is an apt moment for notes on the dances and songs performed during these few years. Dances often closely matched the well-established types of staged prologues. A good example for rural prologues was the "clever Southern clog" dance, highlighting *Boys Will Be Boys*. For urban prologues, there were a variety of dances for high society people in *The Affairs of Anatol* and the "Follies" girls that alighted from the special Pullman train car to dance in *Polly of the Follies*. In contrast, the prologue for *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* at the Allen theater in Cleveland staged a weirdly "futurist" burlesque of the Ziegfeld Follies. More dances, however, were linked to films set in earlier historical periods. See, for instance, the stereotypical Indian dances in different prologues for the 1876 tale of *Bob Hampton of Placer*. Beyond America, there was Acacia's Spanish peasant's dance in the prologue for *The Passion Flower*, and the masquerade performers of "Old Spain" dancing to "The March of the Toreadors" and "Serenade de Murica" in the prologue for *Buried Treasure*. Then, there were the "exotic" dances by white performers in disguise, such as the "Danse de Salammbo" for *One Arabian Night* and the harem of twenty female dancers, including a small girl, in an "Oriental" prologue for *The Sign on the Door*.

Likewise, prologue songs tended to match the films they introduced, but with a difference. There were well-known "classical" numbers, such as "Ave Maria" for *Inside of the Cup* and "Le Marseillaise" for *Passion* at the New York Capitol. Yet most were popular sentimental tunes, often favorites familiar to audiences in venues large and small across the country. Pointedly, it's very likely that moviegoers, of whatever class and ethnicity, were largely white as were the singers. Some tunes were romantic standards like "The Bedouin Love Song" in prologues for *One Arabian Night* and "Love's Sweet Song" in at least one for *Way Down East*. Intriguingly, the subject of others were mothers and their children. Soloists, for instance, sang either "Dear Little Boy of Mine," or "The Old Mother" in different prologues for *The Old Nest*. For the same film, a prologue at the Princess theater in Ames (Iowa) had a soloist and violinist perform

"Mother of Mine" as a duet; while another at the Allen theater ended with a celestial choir in the background singing "a hymn in praise to motherhood." These latter songs, along with others in the previous year or two, may have strongly appealed to audiences of women who knew relatives and friends whose sons had served in the Great War—and returned either dead or wounded—or who themselves had feared for their own sons on the distant battlefields.

Notes

1. Hugo Riesenfeld, managing director of the Rivoli, Rialto, and Criterion, was best known for elevating the standard of music in his theaters, but he also sometimes arranged prologues—Colby Harriman, "Pioneers in Presentations: Hugo Riesenfeld," *Moving Picture World* (11 April 1925): 568–569.
2. "Superb Acting and Marvelous Spectacular Effects in German 'DuBarry'," *Wid's Daily* (10 October 1920): 4.
3. "Capitol Extends 'Passion' Rum Following Seven Days of Broken Attendance Records," *Editors Herald* (1 January 1921): 59. Surprisingly, John Wenger was not mentioned as the set designer, and several months later, he resigned as the Capitol's art director, perhaps because his Metropolitan Opera stage settings were gaining even more acclaim—"Artist Wenger of Capitol Staff, Resigns," *Motion Picture News* (26 March 1921): 2188.
4. M. B. Blumenstock, "Blumenstock Story of 'Passion's' Record Week at Brooklyn Strand's Showman Classic," *Exhibitors Herald* (29 January 1921): 60–61. Mary Simonson analyzes Hyman's prologue in great detail in "'Adding to the Pictures': The American Film Prologue in the 1920s," *American Music* 37.1 (2019): 1–4.
5. "Novel 'Passion' Prologue," *Motion Picture News* (9 April 1921): 2453; and "Ambassador-Kinema 'Passion' Presentation McCormick's Greatest Work on West Coast," *Exhibitors Herald* (9 April 1921): 51.
6. "Weisfeldt Presents 'Passion." *Exhibitors Herald* (2 April 1921): 55. See also "Milwaukee Papers 'News-less'," *Motion Picture News* (4 May 1919): 2644.
7. "Circle Gives 'Passion' Elaborate Presentation," *Motion Picture News* (7 May 1921): 2932.

8. "Calvert's 'Passion' Prolog," *Motion Picture News* (26 February 1921): 1627.
9. "Bamburger Neglects No Exploitation Bets on 'Passion'," *Motion Picture News* (23 July 1921): 560. In London's 1,139-seat Scala Theatre, a tenor sang "an altered version of the Flower Song from *Carmen* [...] followed by a quartet from *Rigoletto*" (the backdrop is not described)—quoted from *The Daily Mail* (29 November 1922): 6, in Julie Brown, "Framing the Atmospheric Film Prologue in Britain, 1919–1926," in Julie Brown and Annette Davison, eds., *The Sounds of the Silents in Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 202.
10. "Newest Reviews and Comments," *Moving Picture World* (7 May 1921): 90.
11. "Five Troupes of Indians Will Exploit New Neilan Feature," *Exhibitors Herald* (26 March 1921): 38.
12. Rialto ad, *Omaha World-Herald* (8 May 1921): E9. See also the Nicholas Power ad, *Motion Picture News* (3 April 1918): 800.
13. "'Bob Hampton' Prologue a Hit," *First National Franchise* (15 May 1921): 2.
14. "Mayor of New York Welcomes Indians in 'Bob Hampton of Placer' Exploitation," *Exhibitors Herald* (28 May 1921): 54.
15. A reproduction of this prologue scene appears in *Motion Picture News* (18 June 1921): 3682. Opened in March 1921, with its seats spread out in six different sections, the Tivoli had a stage 100 feet wide and 45 feet deep.
16. Fritz Tidden, "One Arabian Night," *Moving Picture World* (1 October 1921): 574. The film is partly based on Max Reinhardt's *Sumurun*, which already had been staged in the United States.
17. "New York Strand's Prologue for 'One Arabian Night'," *Motion Picture News* (22 October 1921): 2150; and "'One Arabian Night' Gives New Life to Presentation," *Exhibitors Herald* (29 October 1921): 59.
18. "Brooklyn Mark Strand Presents Unusual Prologue for Picture," *Moving Picture World* (22 October 1921): 933; and "Elaborate Prologue for 'One Arabian Night'," *Motion Picture News* (29 October 1921): 2290.
19. "The Cycle of Success," *Exhibitors Herald* (3 December 1921): 44, 74.

20. At the Adams theater in Detroit, a single figure, either a dancer or singer, was the only performer in the stage set of a spare palace interior with a large circular window revealing a distant city vista—"'One Arabian Night' Gives New Life to Presentation," 59.
21. "Two More Original Prologue Ideas Devised for 'One Arabian Night' by Franchise Houses," *First National Franchise* (15 November 1921): 5.
22. "Johnson Stages Prologue for 'One Arabian Night'," *Motion Picture News* (17 December 1921): 3207.
23. "Prologues Turn an Evening in Sioux City into 'One Arabian Night'," *First National Franchise* (15 February 1922): 21.
24. A photo of this prologue scene is reproduced in *Motion Picture News* (24 September 1921): 1626.
25. "Pictures of Progress," *Exhibitors Herald* (1 October 1921): 63.
26. A photo of this prologue scene is reproduced in *Motion Picture News* (17 December 1921): 3204.
27. "Attractive Prologue for 'Way Down East'," *Motion Picture News* (17 December 1921): 3196. Formerly an Opera House and vaudeville theater, the Halsey soon went out of business in 1922.
28. A photo of this prologue scene is reproduced in *Motion Picture News* (22 July 1922): 350.
29. "Reviews," *Exhibitors Herald* (23 July 1921): 47.
30. "Atlanta 'Old Nest' Campaign Goes Big," *Motion Picture News* (15 October 1921): 1994. Howard Kingmore managed the Howard, which opened in late 1920 on what would become the "Broadway of the South." A photo of this stage set is reproduced on the previous page.
31. "'Old Nest' Symbolized in McCormick's Presentation," *Exhibitors Herald* (12 November 1921): 46.
32. "Gerbracht's Presentation of 'Old Nest' Goes Big," *Motion Picture News* (23 December 1921): 60.
33. "Putting It Over," *Wid's Daily* (10 February 1922): 4. The only theater in Elsmere, New York, had a barefoot boy in tattered clothes slowly enter a schoolroom and scrawl in chalk on a blackboard that "his friend 'Wes' Barry" would soon be appearing in *School Days*—"Kashin Originates Prologue for 'School Days," *Motion Picture News* (13 April 1922): 2186.
34. "School Days," *Exhibitors Trade Review* (22 April 1922): 1493.

35. A photograph of the Stanley's stage set is reproduced on the previous cited page.
36. A photograph of this stage set is reproduced in *Motion Picture News* (25 March 1922): 1743.
37. "Avondale Theatre Presents 'School Days' Prologue," *Motion Picture News* (6 May 1922): 2150.
38. Letter from Lee D. Balsly to Exhibitors Herald, *Exhibitors Herald* (8 July 1922): 33. A photograph of the stage set is reproduced on this page.
39. "Hyman Tries Out Advance Prologue Idea," *Motion Picture News* (2 April 1921): 2344.
40. "McCormick's West Coast Theatre Record a Chronicle of Consistent Showmanship," *Exhibitors Herald* (11 June 1921): 59.
41. "Ray Shows He Can Fight as well as Act Bashful," *Wid's Daily* (5 June 1921): 3.
42. "Plunkett and Hyman Develop Theatre Production Science," *Exhibitors Herald* (2 July 1921): 91.
43. "Novel 'Scrap Iron' Prologue," *Motion Picture News* (18 June 1921): 3691.
44. Fritz Tidden, "The Affairs of Anatol," *Moving Picture World* (24 September 1921): 446. The film is a very loose, updated adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler's celebrated play.
45. "Left-to-Right Review of 'The Affairs of Anatol'," *Exhibitors Herald* (8 October 1921): 58.
46. Two scenes from this prologue are reproduced in "Love Showmanship," *Exhibitors Trade Review* (8 October 1921): 1329, and in *Motion Picture News* (22 October 1921): 2157.
47. "Howard Theatre, Atlanta, Presents Elaborate Prologue," *Motion Picture News* (5 November 1921): 2422. The Café of the Green Fan was one idea for a prologue promoted by Paramount in Claud Saunders, "Paramount Still Suggestions for 'The Affairs of Anatol'," *Exhibitors Herald* (2 July 1921): 46.
48. Two scenes from this prologue are reproduced in *Exhibitors Trade Review* (12 November 1921): 1672, and in *Motion Picture News* (26 November 1921): 2830.
49. "St. Pierre Presents Interesting 'Anatol' Prologue," *Motion Picture News* (5 November 1921): 2424.
50. "Grauman's Prologues Effective," *Exhibitors Herald* (1 July 1921): 41.

51. Grauman's Million Dollar Theatre ad, *Los Angeles Sunday Times* (4 September 1921): 3.13.
52. "Grauman's, Los Angeles, Stages Style Show," *Motion Picture News* (19 December 1921): 3198.
53. "Made His Fashion Show Sell 'Scrambled Wives'," *Moving Picture World* (10 September 1921): 175.
54. "Repeated Fashions," *Motion Picture News* (26 November 1921): 1811.
55. "Peacock Alley Is Aid to Fashion Stunts," *Moving Picture World* (1 April 1922): 504.
56. "Palace's 'Peacock Alley' Fashion Show," *Motion Picture News* (1 April 1922): 1939.
57. "Gillen Uses 'Peacock Alley' as Fashion Show Vehicle," *Motion Picture News* (15 April 1922): 2186.
58. "Irwin's 'Saturday Night' Campaign," *Motion Picture News* (4 March 1922): 1348.
59. "More Fashion Shows to Exploit 'Slim Shoulders'," *Moving Picture World* (16 September 1922): 191.
60. "Fashion Shows Still," *Moving Picture World* (21 October 1922): 690; "Two Fashion Shows," *Moving Picture World* (28 October 1922): 792: and "At Last Men Have a Fashion Show," *Moving Picture World* (23 December 1922): 761.
61. "Frisco Fashion Shows Boost Feature the Grosses," *Variety* (1 December 1922): 37. At the California, for instance, Mrs. Douglas Crane was featured in one for *Slim Shoulders*—this show seemed separate from the touring Hodkinson companies.
62. "Money-Making Ideas," *Exhibitors Herald* (4 November 1922): 48.
63. "Chickens," *Motion Picture News* (26 March 1921): 2286.
64. "Sid Grauman's Prologue on 'Chickens'," *Motion Picture News* (30 April 1921): 2804. See also the north country cabin interior for *Over the Border*, with four violinists, three card players, a man with two dogs, and a barkeep, all dressed in heavy winter coats. This stage set is reproduced in *Motion Picture News* (1 July 1922): 47.
65. "At the End of the World," *Motion Picture News* (27 August 1921): 1139.
66. "Scene in Shanghai Café Makes Colorful Prologue," *Motion Picture News* (17 September 1921): 1503. See also the diptych

stage set for *What Every Woman Wants*—"Grauman Presents Colorful Prologue," *Motion Picture News* (28 May 1921): 3291.

67. Peter Milne, "The Case of Becky," *Motion Picture News* (25 September 1921): 120.
68. "Grauman's Prologue Another Novelty," *Motion Picture News* (5 November 1921): 2429.
69. This prologue stage setting is reproduced in *Exhibitors Trade Review* (29 October 1921): 1526.
70. Edward Weitzel, "The Devil," *Moving Picture World* (29 January 1921): 593.
71. "Plunkett's Prologue for "The Devil'," *Motion Picture News* (29 January 1921): 1000; and "Setting a Ballet Seen in 'The Devil' Featured in Strand Theatre Presentation," *Exhibitors Herald* (5 February 1921): 55. This prologue featured the film sets and the film's dancers for its reenactment of the climactic scene—Simonson, "'Adding to the Pictures': The American Film Prologue in the 1920s," 12–13. The Madison theater, Peoria, Illinois, arranged a much simpler stage set with two performers, a man and a woman in costumes, before the backdrop of a huge spider web—"Serkowich Plays 'The Devil' at Peoria," *Motion Picture News* (25 June 1921): 62.
72. "Barrymore Out of His Forte in Comedy Role," *Wid's Daily* (30 January 1921): 5.
73. "Plunkett 'Great Adventure' Prologue is Contribution to Exhibitor Stagecraft," *Exhibitors Herald* (12 February 1921): 57.
74. Edward Weitzel, "All for a Woman," *Moving Picture World* (17 December 1921): 855.
75. "Plunkett Originates Distinctive Prologue Number" and "Plunkett Stages Classic Prologue Number," *Motion Picture News* (24 December 1921): 56, 57, respectively. In October, Wenger was hired to design stage sets for the Strand, but for *All for a Woman* he painted one designed by Plunkett—"Managing John Wenger," *Variety* (28 October 1921): 24; and "Strand Presents 'All for a Woman' in French Style," *Moving Picture World* (24 December 1921): 936. Later Wenger would design three interior sets for a Yiddish play, *The Child of the World*, at the Irving Place theater—"Legitimate," *Variety* (21 April 1922): 18.
76. "Tarkington's 'Penrod' Makes Delightful and Wholesome Entertainment," *Wid's Daily* (26 February 1921): 3.

77. "A Few Original Ideas on Prologues," *Exhibitors Trade Review* (18 March 1921): 1119.
78. Louis Reeves Harrison, "The First Born," *Moving Picture World* (12 February 1921): 818.
79. "Chinese Orchestra Feature of 'First Born' Prologue," *Exhibitors Herald* (12 March 1921): 50.
80. "Review," *Exhibitors Herald* (18 March 1922): 57.
81. "'Smilin' Through' 'Theatre Feature'," *Exhibitors Herald* (20 May 1922): 55. The Des Moines theater in Iowa staged a much simpler prologue with only one woman posed in a bare walled garden—a photograph of the stage set is reproduced in *Motion Picture News* (6 May 1922): 2555.
82. "'Bits of Life," *Motion Picture News* (29 October 1921): 2347.
83. "'Bits of Life' Has Effective Prologue at Brooklyn Strand," *Moving Picture World* (12 November 1921): 201.
84. "Not Guilty," *Exhibitors Herald* (29 January 1921): 87.
85. "'Not Guilty' Given Elaborate Presentation," *Motion Picture News* (9 July 1921): 339.
86. "Big Strides," *Billboard* (25 September 1920): 26; and Julian Johnson, "Marietta Serves Coffee," *Photoplay* (October 1920): 31–33.
87. "'The Inside of the Cup'," *Motion Picture News* (22 January 1921): 911.
88. "Impressive Prologue Presented at the Criterion," *Motion Picture News* (22 January 1921): 842; and "'Polly with a Past' and 'Inside the Cup' Presentation Amplifies Review Information," *Exhibitors Herald* (29 January 1921): 62. Simonson offers an extensive analysis of this prologue in "'Adding to the Pictures': The American Film Prologue in the 1920s," 17–18.
89. See also the prologue preceding this film at the Broadway Strand in Detroit, in which a projected image of Christ, accompanied by a booming voice offstage, seemed to reach out to Mary Magdalene, who had been dragged toward a backdrop of the Temple of Pillars—"Mangen's Artistic Prologue: 'The Inside of the Cup' Elaborately Presented at Broadway Strand, Detroit," *Motion Picture News* (2 April 1921): 2344.
90. "Buried Treasure," *Motion Picture News* (26 February 1921): 1719.

91. "Riesenfeld's 'Buried Treasure' Prologue Adaptable for General Theatre Purposes," *Exhibitors Herald* (12 March 1921): 58. Cf. Grauman's use of his prologue performers for a treasure hunt advertised in a department store window display—"Prologue Players 'Double' in Grauman's Exploitation," *Exhibitors Herald* (2 July 1921): 90.
92. "The Golem," *Exhibitors Herald* (9 July 1921): 60.
93. Photographs of these two scenes are reproduced in *Motion Picture News* (9 July 1921): 356.
94. Abel Gance soon would create similarly expansive, yet far more stunning images in the famous triple-screen scenes near the end of his epic *Napoleon* (1927).
95. Mary Kelly, "Bunty Pulls the Strings," *Moving Picture World* (1 January 1921): 99.
96. "'Bunty' Prologue Goes Big in Los Angeles," *Motion Picture News* (5 March 1921): 1786.
97. "Boys Will Be Boys," *Motion Picture News* (28 May 1921): 3555.
98. "Wilkerson's Prologue on 'Boys Will Be Boys'," *Motion Picture News* (16 April 1921): 2565.
99. "Putting It Over," *Wid's Daily* (20 May 1921): 3.
100. A photograph of this stage set is reproduced in *Motion Picture News* (6 July 1921): 344.
101. "With First Run Theatres," *Motion Picture News* (18 June 1921): 3678.
102. "Revives Community Sings," *Moving Picture World* (14 May 1921): 170. Whether these community singalongs were linked to the prologues is unclear; but for an extensive study of the tradition of community singing in large theaters, see Ester M. Morgan-Ellis, *Everybody Sings!: Community Singing in the American Picture Palace*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018. Although McCormick is not named, see the prologue spectacle, "An Old Fashioned Husking Bee," for *The Old Swimmin' Hole*—a photograph is reproduced in *Motion Picture News* (21 May 1921): 3179.
103. M. A. Maloney, "West Gold," *Moving Picture World* (23 July 1921): 437.
104. "'Wet Gold' Prelude Highly Artistic and Entertaining," *Motion Picture News* (20 August 1921): 946. A photograph of the stage

set is reproduced in *Motion Picture News* (3 September 1921): 1205.

105. "McCormick's Futurist Ball," *Motion Picture News* (17 December 1921): 3193. A photograph of all fifty performers in this "Distinctive Prologue Number" is reproduced *in Motion Picture News* 17 September 1921): 3192.
106. "The Patriotic Holidays Provide Greatest Opportunity," *Exhibitors Herald* (24 December 1921): 86–87.
107. "Rogers and Parks Develop Presentation at Tivoli Theatre, Chattanooga, Tenn.," *Exhibitors Herald* (18 June 1921): 61. R. L. Parks was house manager of the Tivoli.
108. "Reviews," *Exhibitors Herald* (3 April 1921): 61.
109. A photograph of the stage set is reproduced in *Exhibitors Herald* (18 June 1921): 3682.
110. Epes W. Sargent, "The Highest Law," *Moving Picture World* (5 February 1921): 727.
111. "Atmospheric Prologue Proves Its Effectiveness," *Exhibitors Herald* (9 April 1921): 36.
112. "Polly of the Follies," *Motion Picture News* (25 February 1922): 1275.
113. "Newman Theatre Stages Elaborate Prologue Number," *Motion Picture News* (24 April 1922): 2312.
114. "Good Direction, Fine Acting and Unusual Pictorial Appeal in This," *Wid's Daily* (7 May 1922); 5.
115. "Two-Person Prologue for 'The Trap'," *Exhibitors Trade Review* (20 May 1922): 1820.
116. "Flying Pat," *Motion Picture News* (1 January 1921): 451.
117. "Grauman Contrasts Stage and Screen Entertainment," *Exhibitors Herald* (29 January 1921): 66.
118. 'Wet Gold' Plays Premiere," *Motion Picture News* (18 June 1921): 3685).
119. "The Sign on the Door," *Motion Picture News* (30 July 1921): 709.
120. "Circle Theatre Celebrates Anniversary," *Motion Picture News* (8 October 1921): 1873.
121. "The Call of the North," *Motion Picture News* (10 December 1921): 3100.
122. Broadway Strand ad, *Detroit Sunday Free Press* (18 December 1921).

123. "Rothapfel Prologue with Lines and Business," *Motion Picture News* (18 June 1921): 3693. Ross Melnick also calls attention to Rothapfel's epilogue in *American Showman*, 18.
124. To introduce *The Life of the Party* (1920), the Rivoli had lifted material from Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in a prologue titled "Falstaff's Dream"—Koszaski, *An Evening's Entertainment*, 51.
125. "Barrynore's Latest Is Fairly Interesting Adaptation of Stage Play," *Wid's Daily* (21 March 1921): 6.
126. "Style Revue Features 'Jim the Penman' Premiere at Opening of Albany Strand," *Exhibitors Herald* (9 April 1921): 41: and Albany's Exploitation for 'Jim the Penman'," *Motion Picture News* (16 April 1921): 2562.
127. Louis Reeves Harrison, "The Devil's Garden," *Moving Picture World* (6 November 1920): 107; and the Adams ad, *Detroit Sunday Free Press* (27 February 1921): 5.14.
128. "Nice Atmosphere but Slow Moving Story," *Wid's Daily* (11 September 1921): 3.
129. Madison ad, *Detroit Sunday Free Press* (11 September 1921): 5.7.
130. "Mother O' Mine," *Motion Picture News* (18 June 1921): 3743.
131. Adams ad, *Detroit Sunday Free Press* (11 September 1921): 5.7.
132. Broadway Strand ad, *Detroit Sunday Free Press* (17 September 1922): 5.9.
133. A newspaper ad is reproduced in "Circle Sells More on These Drawings," *Motion Picture News* (16 September 1922): 209.
134. "Exploitorials," *Exhibitors Trade Review* (12 August 1922): 769.

CHAPTER 5

Changes in the Prologue Scenes, 1923–1926

By the mid-1920s, the growing consolidation of the American film industry may account for the trade press's more restricted reporting on stage prologues. Notably, that reporting began to reduce the number of named exhibitors and their theaters. Hyman and Plunkett, even more than Rothapfel, still ranked as two of the trade's favorite exhibitor/producers. Perhaps that was because, excepting for *Exhibitors Herald* in Chicago, *Exhibitors Trade Review*, *Film Daily*, *Metronome*, *Motion Picture News*, and *Moving Picture World* were all published in New York City.[1] By contrast, after moving from Cleveland to Crandall's in Washington, D.C., for a short time McCormick became the Pathé company's overall Manager of Exploitation.[2] Although he kept mounting elaborate prologues in Los Angeles, Grauman's primary interest turned to real-estate development and building new palace cinemas, specifically the Egyptian in late 1923 and the Chinese in 1927.[3] The trade press briefly singled out several other New York exhibitors: B. S. Moss and others at the 1,760-seat Colony, Major Bowes at the Capitol, Andrew Cobe at the Rialto, and Frank Cambria at the Rivoli—the latter, after producing prologues for Balaban and Katz (B&K) in Chicago.[4] Initially, the trade press also noted the work of others across the country, from Thomas Soriero at the Century in Baltimore and Ralph Lieber at the Circle in Indianapolis to E. J. Weisfeldt at the Strand in Milwaukee and H. B. Wright at the Strand in Seattle. These changes prompt a slightly different organization for this chapter. The first section, much as before, describes

R. Abel, *The Exhibitor as Producer*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-71781-9_5

and analyzes prologue designs and performances from a wide range of exhibitors and theaters in 1923. The second, however, offers a more limited survey of prologues during the following three years, with special attention to those that introduced major features and stars, not only in metropolitan areas, and concludes with several surprising "contrastive" prologues.

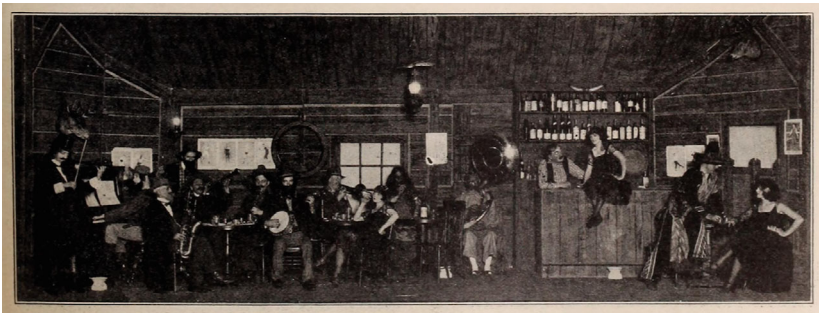
Another Peak Year, 1923

A good film to open this chapter is Edwin Carewe's *The Girl of the Golden West*, a tale of 1849—featuring a saloon-keeper (The Girl), a reformed bandit, a gambling sheriff, and a jealous dancing girl—in which The Girl wins the bandit in a poker game, and the sheriff saves him from a lynching.[5] The trade press singled out at least four different stage prologues that harmonized with the film. At the Brooklyn Strand, Hyman constructed a relatively simple bar room for a quartet dressed as miners to perform the title song, with The Girl, in an orange spot, closing the chorus. A scrim drops in front of the set as the film begins, "while the girl is still in the tableau."[6] At Balaban and Katz's flagship 3,700-seat Chicago theater in the Loop, the stage set was an elaborate two-story dance hall / saloon with The Girl initially off stage singing "Home Sweet Home" to more than two dozen miners and then entering to interrupt a brawl, after which a baritone comes in to close the playlet with the film's theme song.[7] At the Milwaukee Strand, Weisfeldt built a large dance hall / bar room for a small orchestra of "old-time players" dressed as miners, a dancer propositioned by a cowboy, and a singer dressed like The Girl sitting atop the bar. The Omaha Rialto devised an incongruous prologue of musical numbers oddly contrasting with the film. Against the backdrop of a covered wagon and distant hills, a band of eight cowboys led by a figure dressed as the film's hero play some "western jazz," followed by a second act with eight women dressed like The Girl, not the jealous dancer, performing a "Spanish Dance."[8] Even if audiences knew the film's stage-play origins, these lively Rialto performances were anything but an atmospheric lead in (Figs. 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4).

For the trade press, Hyman's Brooklyn Strand remained especially prominent, with Epes Winthrop Sargent claiming that "a large percentage of the patrons care less about the feature than the general program."[9] And prologues were crucial. A rural prologue introduced *Tess of Storm Country*, the remake starring Mary Pickford. The fishing village set,

Chicago Theatre Prologue to "The Girl of the Golden West."

Fig. 5.1 *The Girl of the Golden West* stage prologue, Chicago theater, Chicago



STOCK COMPANY DAYS are not altogether pleasant memories, but E. J. Weisfeldt, Strand, Milwaukee, remembers them well enough to obtain the services of old-time players still residents of that city in presenting his photoplay attractions. For First National's "The Girl of the Golden West" he staged the prologue shown above, using the scenes used elsewhere as the basis of his prologue. Very few pictures recently published have been so adequately presented as this one.

Fig. 5.2 *The Girl of the Golden West* stage prologue, Strand theater, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

bathed in green light, has stone houses stage right and left, a centered picket fence, and a bare tree against the backdrop of a rising sun. Performers representing Tess, her father, and her beau sing "Duna" and "Ship O' Dreams."[10] A more cluttered historical prologue led into *Bright Shawl*, the mid-nineteenth-century tale of a young American adventurer who joins the Cubans in seeking independence from Spain, falls in love with and loses a dancer who is in sympathy with the rebels, and returns

Fig. 5.3 *Tess of Storm Country* stage prologue, Strand theater, Brooklyn

home alone.[11] The stage set represents a Spanish garden scene with "a deep blue plush cyclorama as background behind a six-foot wall" and a stone building stage left. Two singers and four dancers perform, with the heroine in white threatened by a Spanish officer while another looks on.[12] A striking atmospheric prologue introduced *The Isle of Lost Ships*, a strange story of three people—a man arrested for murder, a detective, and a millionaire's daughter—whose ship drifts into a floating island of wrecked vessels ruled by a brute and his pirates.[13] In the prologue, the backdrop of a huge prison-like island looms behind a lone, spot-lit figure standing next to, and seemingly caught in, the chain of a ship's anchor.[14] Although described as a soloist, what he sings is unmentioned. By comparison, at Newman's theater in Kansas City, a large backdrop of wrecked sailing ships sets off half a dozen musicians clad in pirate costumes who, again in sharp contrast to the film, are playing jazz.[15] The popularity of jazz increasingly seemed to outweigh the usual practice of creating an apt atmosphere for this and other films.

In early 1923, *Motion Picture News* offered Hyman a forum to write a series of "Behind the Scenes" articles that described, at length, the equipment he used to properly present his films at the Brooklyn Strand.[16] That equipment included painted backdrops, transparencies, scrims, curtains, lights, props, etc. Months later, *Moving Picture World* confirmed his

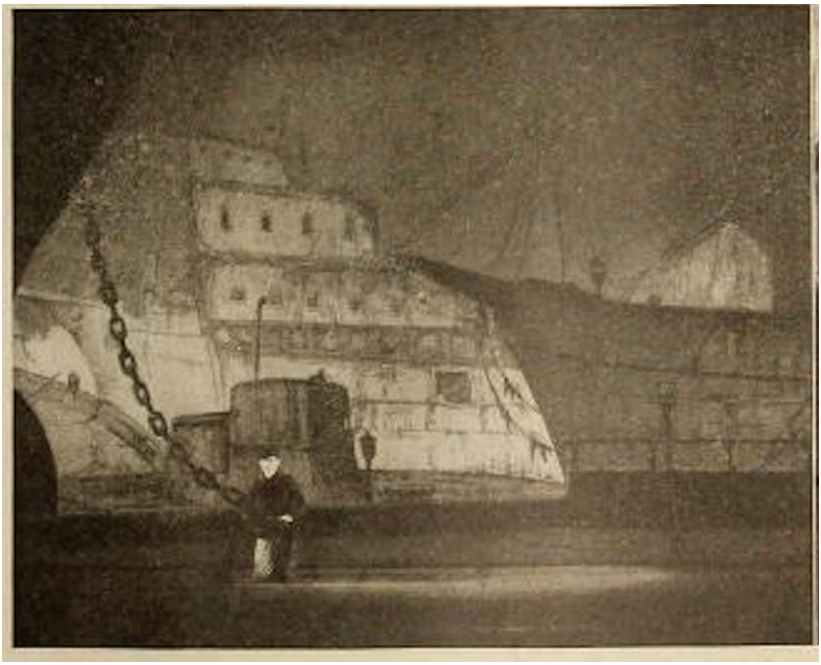


Fig. 5.4 *The Isle of Lost Ships* stage prologue, Strand theater, Brooklyn

status as a model to emulate by publishing a weekly column in which he offered hints, with examples, for producing prologues.[17] One of the first was for *Circus Days*, starring Jackie Coogan.[18] The stage set was a simple backdrop simulating "white patent leather" in front of which a pair of girl dancers emerge from two jackboxes, one dressed as a boy doll, the other as a girl doll, and both in patent leather costumes.[19] Victor Herbert's "Dance of the Toys" aptly accompanies their performance. Another introduced *Merry-Go-Round*, a lavish production in which an aristocrat falls in love with a poor organ grinder at an amusement park, is forced to marry his emperor's choice of a bride, but, after the latter dies, returns to the poor girl he loves.[20] This prologue's "atmosphere" came directly from the film: "A special backdrop of a general view of the amusement park shows a merry-go-round, Ferris wheel and other devices."[21] The set is lighted for night, with transparencies in the backdrop creating strings of light bulbs. Three figures representing the film's main characters sit at café tables on

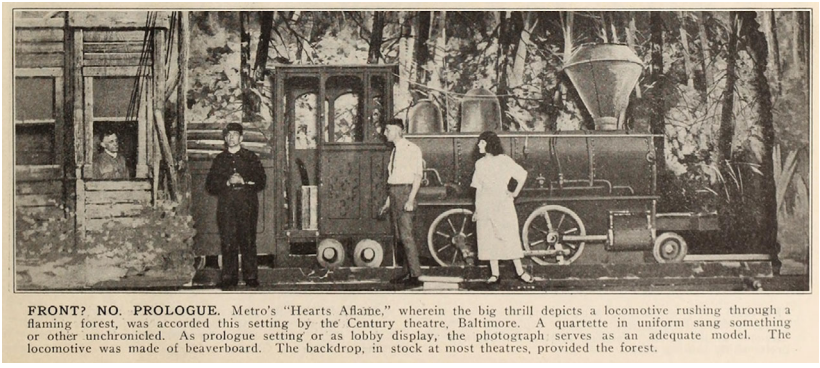
stage, watching two children dance to a "Viennese Polka" and listening to a violinist playing "Liebestreud," along with several "vocal numbers." When a scrim lowers, spots pick out the café figures from behind, and the screen comes down to end the prologue as the film begins.

At the New York Strand, Plunkett presented a prologue for *Circus Days* more topical than Hyman's. Before the backdrop of a big top, clowns, equestrians, and others rehearse their acts in the simulation of a three-ring circus. After that, a male quartet sings "Circus Days," the popular tune from "years ago as part of a musical comedy show."[22] A ballet master and his ensemble, starring Mlle. Deganove, then perform "the Galop and Finale." An atmospheric prologue, resembling his earlier one for *The Jack-Knife Man*, introduced *Fury*, a sea drama in which a father thwarts his son's love for a boardinghouse waif but, on his deathbed, orders his boy to "get" the man who long ago absconded with his mother."[23] Against the backdrop of a "typical wharf" in London's Limehouse district, a male quartet sings "Three Jacks" and "Eight Bells," with a "hornpipe dance" coming between the two songs and the latter's chorus enhanced by "a striking bell."[24] At his Million Dollar theater in Los Angeles, Grauman produced both a prologue and interlude for *Ninety and Nine*, in which a young man inadvertently witnesses the brother of his betrothed society girl shoot a man, takes on his guilt, and flees west; there he proves his innocence and heroism by racing a railroad engine through a forest fire.[25] The prologue's stage setting is a small-town railroad station, with a number of figures representing the film's characters populating the station platform.[26] Among them are the station agent, an "old maid," and the usual gang of men. While the agent performs stunts, the gang turns into "a 'hick' quartet." Interrupting the scene of the hero driving the engine through the fire comes the interlude's "spellbinder," replicating a mechanical effect once popular on the past century's melodrama stages. Against the backdrop of an immense forest, a giant locomotive, with smoke billowing from its stacks, seems to race ("by the aid of a treadmill") through flying red flare sparks. A "perfect illusion […] the best ever constructed by the theatre's staff of mechanics."[27]

One of the few stage prologues to claim press notices at Grauman's Egyptian in Los Angeles was "In the Days of '49" that preceded a premiere of *The Covered Wagon*.[28] This much lauded epic western from Paramount tracked a mammoth wagon train that, in a long trek in 1849, faced Indian attacks, desert heat, mountain snows, hunger, and

a violent rivalry between two wagon masters for the love of a woman, before reaching California and finally the "promised land" of pastoral Oregon. The prologue featured Tim McCoy, supervisor of the Wind River Indian Reservation, who had arranged for at least thirty Arapahoes—three Chiefs in war regalia, their families, and a survivor of the Custer massacre—to travel to the city for the event. After McCoy gave a brief talk, he gathered the Arapahoes on stage and asked them to speak of their personal stories for the audience, sometimes through an entertaining display of interpreted sign language.[29] Following a few unnamed "Indian dances," several covered wagons rumbled in, pushing aside the Indians, and performers dressed as "Forty-Niners" spilled out to indulge in "quaint songs and dances of olden days."[30] One year later, a similar atmospheric prologue introduced a second debut of the film at Grauman's Million Dollar theater[31] (Fig. 5.5).

Beyond New York and Los Angeles, the trade press singled out four other exhibitors. Two of Kingsmore's many prologues at the Howard in Atlanta were notable. In late 1923, for *The Spanish Dancer*, starring Pola Negri, he designed a gypsy camp against a backdrop of clouds and mountains, as a dancing couple and three women shaking castanets perform musical numbers.[32] A few weeks earlier, he put on a symbolic "holiday prologue," in which, first, a simulated turkey draws a huge horn of plenty across the stage, with a seated woman singing "Love's Melody," and, second, two "living girl models" hold up smaller horns, while three others balance a large chandelier holding two more models, all "against a sleek,



FRONT? NO. PROLOGUE. Metro's "Hearts Aflame," wherein the big thrill depicts a locomotive rushing through a flaming forest, was accorded this setting by the Century theatre, Baltimore. A quartette in uniform sang something or other unchronicled. As prologue setting or as lobby display, the photograph serves as an adequate model. The locomotive was made of beaverboard. The backdrop, in stock at most theatres, provided the forest.

Fig. 5.5 *Hearts Aflame* stage prologue. Century theater, Baltimore

black background."[33] Equally striking were two of Soriero's prologues at the Century theater in Baltimore. One, a short playlet, introduced *Grumpy*, in which an old criminal lawyer foils the theft of a diamond his future son-in-law hopes to give to his granddaughter.[34] Against a dark-blue velvet backdrop, a small girl descends stairs to perform the "Gardenia ballet," and returns to a raised platform; in the dark, four figures dressed as burglars enter to engage in an "eccentric dance" and, as if spying on the girl, dash up and kneel, "lighting her up with their flashlights."[35] Stealing an idea from Grauman, Soriero concocted an elaborate stage set for *Hearts Aflame*, in which a timber baron orders his son to transport a big load of lumber by rail, but his fiancée ends up driving the train through a forest fire. After a quartet of uniformed railroad agents sing a couple of musical numbers, a locomotive (on a treadmill) seems to rush past the backdrop of a flaming forest, with figures representing the film's main couple aboard.[36] At the Strand in Milwaukee, Weisfeldt hired local talent and a disbanded stock company to stage a rural prologue for *Slander the Woman*, in which a woman, falsely accused of shooting a man who tries to kiss her, flees into the North Woods and is exonerated when the man's wife is revealed as the shooter.[37] Within the rough, high walls of a log cabin that must resemble the one in the film's ending, a trial judge and two others confront a seated young woman.[38] Most unique was the urban prologue for *The Third Alarm* at the Temple in the small town of Alhambra, California: through an opening in the stage's back wall onto an alley, a fire engine dashes past, its siren screaming and gong clashing.[39]

Finally, many theaters staged fashion-show prologues that usually, but not always, harmonized with their feature films. In Seattle they were especially prominent. For *Other Women's Clothes*, the Winter Garden teamed up with a local store to furnish female models and winter garments and to advertise the film in its window displays.[40] At the Strand, for *The Rustle of Silk*, Wright had a large department store put on a summer style show in which one of its department heads drapes different dresses on a model, "using bolts of straight silk from the store."[41] Months later he persuaded the Baker Fur Company to present, four times daily, a fall fashion show for *The Girl of the Golden West*, with "four living models" displaying the store's alluring furs.[42] For screenings of *Poor Men's Wives*, the Liberty in Portland, Oregon, had two dry goods stores sponsor a spring fashion show, with many modeled gowns similar to those in the film's ball scene.[43] At the Circle in Indianapolis, Lieber arranged clever

tie-ins for *The Girl of the Golden West*: a candy company created chocolates given out as "A Kiss for the Girl of the Golden West," and "six trust companies" set up "a window display featuring an old whiskey keg and describing the way banking was done" in the days of 1849.[44] At the Century in Baltimore, Soriero put on an unusual "Old Fashion Show." From a large cabinet on stage, the tintype figures of two women and a man "come to life," dressed in the height of 1890s fashion. The two women dance while the man sings; a dozen other women, similarly costumed, join in the dance; and the act closes with a comedy couple performing "dumb antics."[45] As evidence of *Moving Picture World*'s continued claim that "the fashion show is the best bet in any small town," as long as an exhibitor "gets the right models," the Bijou in New Haven, Connecticut, boldly put on a fashion show for its screening of *Adam and Eve*.[46]

Continuity and Change, 1924–1926

The trade press became more and more selective in reporting on stage prologues as Hollywood became a crucial player in a corporate media industry. To be selected, exhibitors in smaller cities and towns had to be inventive, especially when screening films with major stars. For a good example, see the fashion-show prologues for *Irene*, in which Colleen Moore plays a successful model who arouses a rival's jealousy and her tenement mother's ire, but ends in the arms of a modiste shop's owner.[47] In Greensboro, North Carolina, the National created a stage set of platforms and scattered boxes framed by a high wall of elegantly draped curtains for half a dozen models in outfits furnished by a local merchant.[48] Both were simpler than, and just as effective as, Grauman's three-part prologue that the Million Dollar theater in Los Angles devised to trace the same film's narrative arc: "The Modiste Shop," "The Tenement," and "The Garden Party."[49] Another equally inventive example was the Chattanooga Tivoli's novel prologue idea for *The Gold Rush*. A Chaplin figure in silhouette stands by a small cabin on a hillside, looking down on snow-laden buildings in the distance. Notably striking was the black frame for this image: "the drop cut-out in the shape of a Chaplin shoe."[50] Compare the Tivoli's simplicity with Hyman's elaborate, two-tiered dance hall set on New Year's Eve at the Brooklyn Strand.[51] And especially with the eight-part extravaganza of "Charlie Chaplin's Dream" premiering at Grauman's Egyptian. After a tribute by "prominent stars," "The Land

of the Midnight Sun" has a prospector meeting Eskimos and witnessing their pastimes and dances, followed by "The Spirit of the Frozen North," with its "moods" represented by allegorical female figures.[52] A series of dances, involving balloons, ice skaters, and casino performers culminates in "Charlie's Awakening." This prologue has only a tenuous connection to the film, incongruously combining elements of *Nanook of the North* and those of DeMille's modern domestic spectacles (Figs. 5.6, 5.7, and 5.8).

Among the prologues in other smaller cities and towns, five stand out. In Meridian, Connecticut, the Community Playhouse designed a simple stage set for *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. As a bell tolls, a black curtain backdrop opens to reveal a bell slowly swinging; an actor in a monk's white garb steps forward to recite: "This is a story of the long ago/ Of Esmeralda, Clopin, Quasimodo […] The story of the Hunchback of

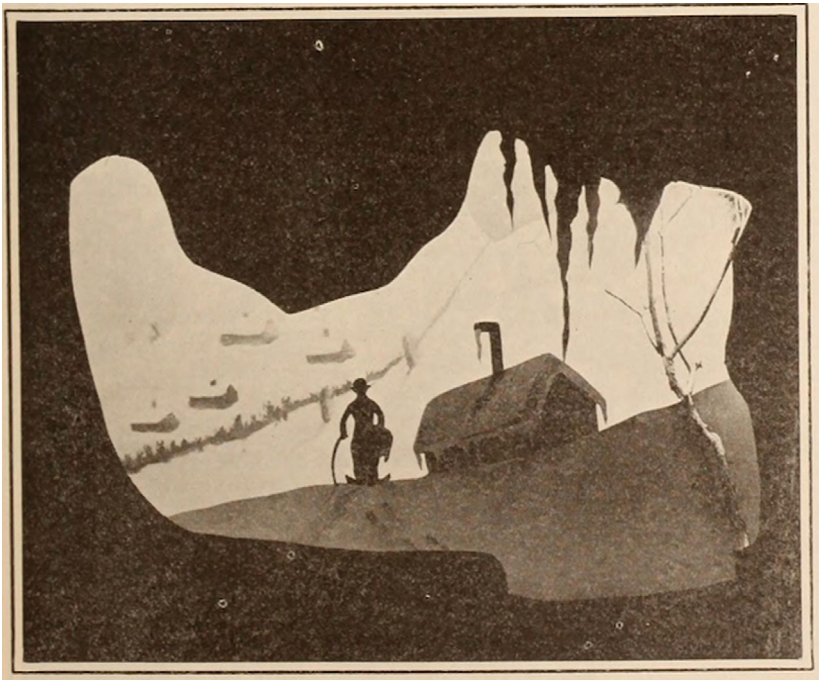


Fig. 5.6 *The Gold Rush* stage prologue, Tivoli theater, Chattanooga, Tennessee

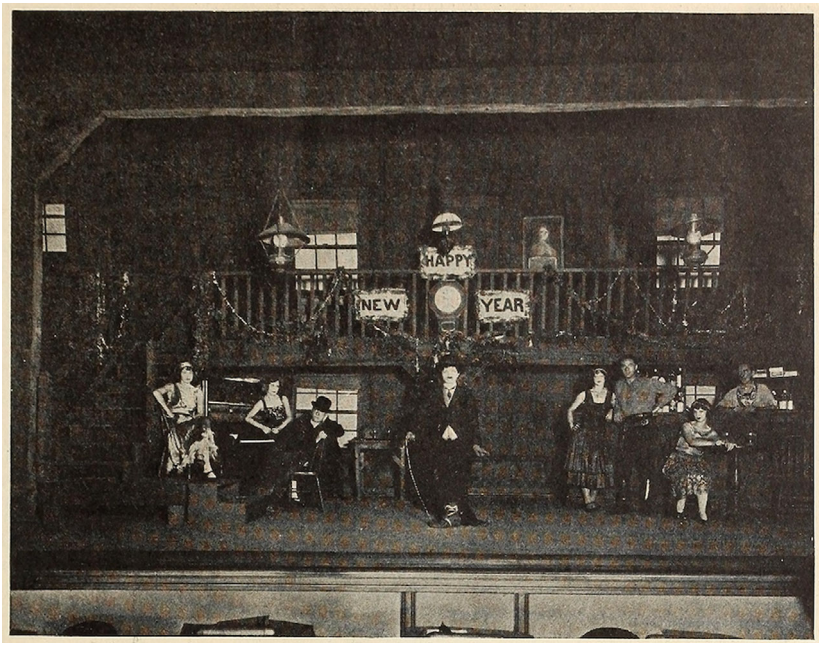


Fig. 5.7 *The Gold Rush* stage prologue, Strand theater, Brooklyn

Notre Dame."[53] As the reciter exits, from a victrola backstage a chorus chants Mozart's "Gloria from Twelfth Mass," and the film begins. In Des Moines, the Capitol created a symbolic prologue for *The White Moth*, in which a woman becomes a stage star (the White Moth), is lured to New York, accused of murder, and proved innocent.[54] The stage set features a young woman in white hemmed in by a large spider web and a long, fanged serpent.[55] In Eugene, Oregon, the McDonald theater (shortly after opening) devised a complicated two-part prologue for *The Lady*, in which Norma Talmadge plays a poor, young widow who leaves her infant son with a trusted couple, so the former father-in-law cannot get custody, but then fails to find them again. First, against the backdrop of a foggy London street, a short drama plays out among a crook, a lady, and a copper. Second, in an artist's studio, dark drapes frame a scrim painting of Whistler's "Mother"; lit from behind, the scrim then reveals a young soprano seated in the same pose singing. When Whistler's

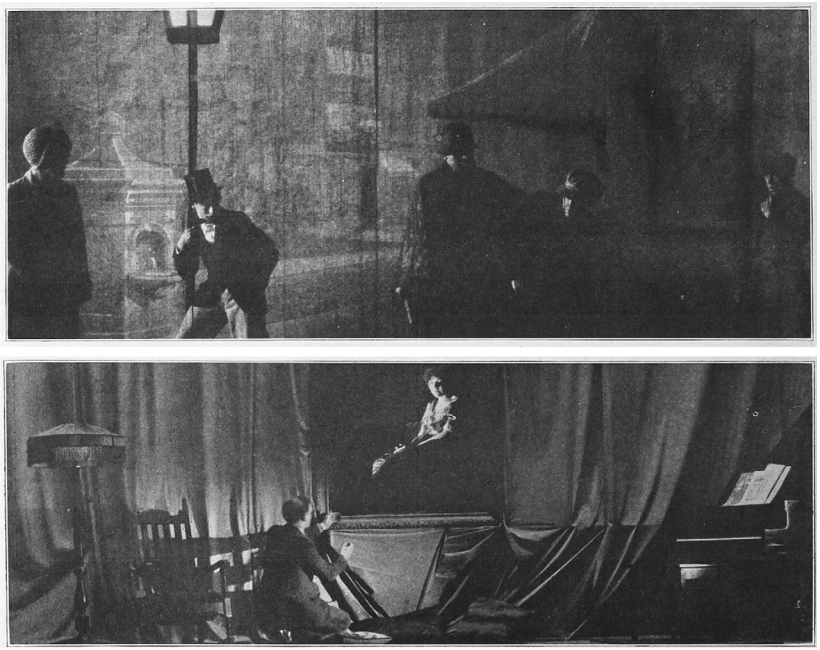


Fig. 5.8 *The Lady* stage prologue, McDonald theater, Eugene, Oregon

painting returns, the artist enters singing "Wonderful Mother" and kneels before the painting; again lit from behind, the soprano turns to look down at the artist and sing "Boy of Mine."[56] This prologue's narrative arc compresses the film's story with deft economy. In Oklahoma City, the Criterion designed a far simpler stage set for *Mike*, a rural melodrama in which "Mike," a girl, lives in an old freight car on a siding and, with her sweetheart, foils outlaws plotting to rob a train.[57] A cut out within curtain drapes frames a girl standing on top of a rail car looking down at a boy seated on another car; as a soprano and tenor, they sing "solos and duets."[58] Arrestingly, the cut-out's frame is shaped like a diamond.

Seattle continued to find favor with the trade press, but now for the work of different exhibitors. At the Blue Mouse, Henri C. LeBel designed a two-part prologue for *Under the Red Robe*, a historical drama in which a young acolyte is ordered to seize one of Cardinal Richelieu's enemies but falls in love with the target's daughter. In the first part, at stage

left, figures dressed like the lovers sing a duet of "Twilight Rose"; in the second, at stage right, another figure dressed like Richelieu sits at a desk reading a scroll, while a violinist, as if anticipating the film's ending, softly plays Nevin's "Love Song."[59] At the Columbia, to "hop up" his employees, M. H. Newman rehearsed an atmospheric prologue for *The Signal Tower*, another railway story in which a young woman shoots a lothario who, leaving a signal tower unattended, threatens her, and her brother sidetracks a runaway freight before it smashes into a passenger train.[60] Newman's stage set places a railyard signal tower and semaphore in front of a drop curtain of mountains.[61]As the semaphore's light changes from red to green, a workman carrying a switch-lantern enters stage right, to converse with a man in the tower; another workman enters stage left; and all three gather center stage to sing. Any fashion-show prologues now went unremarked in Seattle, but the trade press noted one at the Chattanooga Tivoli, where Rogers mounted "Fashions of the Ages" to introduce *A Slave of Fashion*. The show opens with Eve reaching for an apple in a garden, after which front lighting on a scrim hides her so that foreground models can display fashions of the past fifty years. As back lighting on the scrim returns, Eve grasps the apple, which leads to the film's innocuous subtitle: "Clothes—Eve started it in the garden of Eden."[62]

The trade press kept an especially close eye on New York City, and several prologues at a new theater, the Colony, grew increasingly spectacular. Howard W. McCoy, managing director, staged a typical garden setting for *Cyrano*.[63] After an old frier with a lantern crosses the stage; a trio of dancers performs a ballet; while "Cyrano" stands in an arched doorway beneath a balcony stage left, "Christian" sings "Si Mes Vers Avaient des Ailes"; and "Roxanne" appears on the balcony to join in the duet, "Duo d'Amour." B. S. Moss, the theater's owner, designed a more elaborate prologue for Harold Lloyd's *The Freshman*. The background features a blue-sky cyclorama, a centered "fantastically designed tower," flats of brick buildings stage left and right, a large fountain in front of them stage right, a profusion of foliage, and a jazz band in an archway stage left.[64] The "young freshman" joins a well-known pair for a "dance specialty," and the University of Southern California Trojan Five performs several college songs. Perhaps most unusual was the prologue for a revival of *Outside the Law* (1921), in which a pair of crooks (one a young woman) turn the tables on a rival and reform, softened by a boy who visits their hiding place.[65] This was Paul Leni's only theatrical

presentation before he directed *The Cat and the Canary*.[66] The stage setting is simply a few platforms, before or on which characters appear lit by spots against a backdrop of black fabric.[67] In two scenes a police officer tells a reporter the story, first, of a convict (the young woman's father), in pantomime, who is refused mercy and faces the electric chair and, second, of the rival who lives "outside the law" in an atmospheric setting of San Francisco's Chinatown. An especially striking stage moment comes in the first scene, when the convict walks "along an invisible platform about eight feet high," to face another policeman and then "the apparition of the girl" (his daughter).

At least two other New York theaters evidenced a wide range of prologues. The Rivoli produced a rather ordinary atmosphere for *Tongues of Flame*, in which a lawyer keeps a swindler from buying an Indian tribe's reservation when oil is discovered there, and a conflict breaks out between the Indians and local townspeople that ends to each's satisfaction.[68] Against a backdrop of "star-lit heavens […] an Indian in full regalia of his tribe" stands before a tepee stage right and sings a duet, "Pale Moon," with a "maiden […] hidden by the morning mists."[69] As the song's second verse begins, the mists fade to reveal her at stage left. Instead of reenacting a scene from the film, this prologue produces a stereotypical empathy for threatened Indians.[70] At the Capitol, Major Bowes devised an aptly elaborate prologue for DeMille's *The Volga Boatman*, a tale of romance between a boatman commoner and a Russian princess within the context of a revolution against royalists, only vaguely referencing the Red Army's post-war revolution.[71] Reproducing an early film scene, the stage set depicts a rustic peasant camp along a river bank against the backdrop of "a typical Russian skyline."[72] Costumed as peasants slowly struggling to haul an unseen boat along a towpath, an octet lustily sings the "Song of the Boatmen of the Volga," followed by a ballet corps of twelve girls and four boys who enthusiastically engage in Rimsky-Korsakoff's "Dance of the Buffoons." Bowes also concocted a fantastical prologue for *Mare Nostrum*, a complicated WWI tale of a shipowner who learns that a German submarine he has supplied has killed his son, betrays the young woman he loves (revealed as a German spy), and drowns, battling the submarine.[73] In an undersea stage setting, filled with seaweed-covered rocks and waves projected onto a scrim, an alternate story to the film's ending plays out.[74] After six mermaids on the rocks awake and dance, an octopus carries one off; a couple in undersea costumes do a toe dance and adagio; the octopus reappears and carries the female dancer to the top of a

rock, where she backflips into her partner's arms. The male dancer pursues and strikes the octopus dead. This fantasy turns the German enemy into a comic predator and recasts the film's tragic lovers as a dancing couple, magically reunited under the sea (Fig. 5.9).

The theaters that the trade press continued to highlight, however, were the New York Strand and the Brooklyn Strand. In 1925, *Moving Picture World* finally singled out Plunkett as a "pioneer of presentations" who drew on his experience as the former manager of legitimate stars, from William Faversham to Mme. Réjane.[75] During his past six years directing the New York Strand, Plunkett had shown "a remarkable ability to develop a divertissement as a prologue." Rather than "abruptly" shift from a newsreel to a feature, for instance, he projected the title of the film onto a scrim, then cut the projector's beam and turned on the lights backstage to reveal "a real and elaborate setting" with people portraying the film's characters in the same costumes. Whether the selected stage setting reproduced the film's opening or a later scene, it served to create an "atmospheric transition into the proper mood and spirit of the photoplay." A year earlier Plunkett had renovated the theater with, among other transformations, "an entirely new stage set" built to flexibly put on all manner of artistic presentations.[76] In September 1924, he devised a special prologue using three sets and the original costumes for a repeat screening of Valentino's *Monsieur Beaucaire*.[77] "The first shows a garden scene at Versailles," which fades into a ballroom interior where the ballet corps dances a minuet. In the third scene, the garden returns, with the dancers strolling in, as a tenor offstage sings the film's theme, "Love and the Rose." Later, he used lighting effects to stage a different three-part prologue for *The Swan*, in which a princess, engaged to a prince, falls in love with her tutor, who is wounded dueling with the prince's chief aide, and gets her mother's approval to marry the low-born man.[78] The backdrop of a palace exterior dominates an initially empty stage; as the lights in front dim, others in back come on to reveal dancers in royal costumes behind three large gothic windows.[79] In a finale, the front lights return, and the dancers slowly emerge from the central window's doorway to witness a love scene, anticipating the film's ending.

At least three other prologues evidence the range of Plunkett's designs. The first, a circus setting, aptly introduced Griffith's *Sally of the Sawdust*, in which Sally, an orphan unaware of her parentage, grows up in the care of a gentle crook and juggler; they join a circus and, after several plot twists that end in a courtroom, Sally discovers she is the judge's

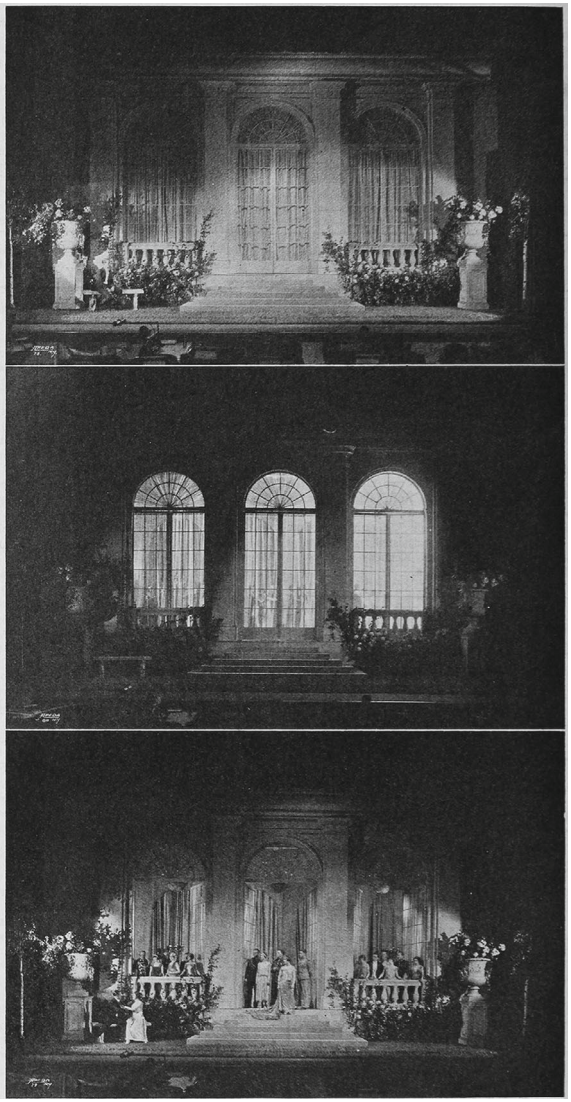


Fig. 5.9 *The Swan* stage prologue, Strand theater, New York

granddaughter.[80] A painted cyclorama depicts the interior of a circus tent, with various characters performing in front of a scrim.[81] They include a quartet, a pair of acrobats doing a balancing act, another pair doing backflips and then—one of the pair dressed in a large fur coat and small straw hat, the other in a white dress—engaging in a comedy routine. In the ending spectacle, against the cyclorama, green, blue, and yellow balloons slowly drift down to the tent floor. A grim urban prologue led into *Men of Steel*, in which a mineworker takes the blame for murdering his fiancée's brother, flees to become a labor leader at a steel mill, saves the owner's daughter when "agitators" wreck the mill, proves his innocence, and marries his fiancée, after she is hurt in an automobile accident. A dozen low steps extend across the stage and down to a trap, in front of which "red floodlights cast a fiery glow" as if from a mill furnace.[82] A male ensemble in workman's clothes slowly emerges from the trap and climbs the steps, their green-lit, distorted shadows thrown against a black-backed scrim. After one man sings a solo, the backing partially falls away to reveal "miniature steel mills with smoking stacks and seething furnaces" against the drop of a deep-blue sky. The film may align the labor leader with the steel mill owner, but the prologue creates an image of desperate millworkers who could turn into those agitators. For Valentino's *The Son of the Sheik*, Plunkett devised an exotic prologue in which the interior of an inn fills the stage, with archways that open onto the backdrop of a courtyard. The Strand's ballet corps "are dressed in scant Arabian costumes"; a pair of dancers "do some whirls"; and a solo dancer is garbed in "a white, spangled oriental costume."[83] As the film's first titles are projected on a scrim, the lights dim, and only a low red spot remains, in a moment of eroticism suiting the film, to highlight "the movement of the skirt and legs of the dancer" (Fig. 5.10).

In 1924, *Exhibitors Trade Review* celebrated the fifth anniversary of the Brooklyn Strand, which now "entertained fifty thousand patrons each week."[84] Throughout the following years, *Moving Picture World* continued to publish Hyman's weekly production hints, with specific examples of his recent prologues. Among those early on was a two-part prologue for *Captain Blood*, a swashbuckling tale of Peter Blood who, along with Irish rebels, is sent as a slave to Barbados, becomes a pirate terrorizing the Spanish, then a commander in the English navy, and is made governor of Jamaica.[85] The first stage setting features the scrim of an English colonial mansion exterior, before which ten members of the ballet corps, five dressed as ladies and five as noblemen, come on in pairs

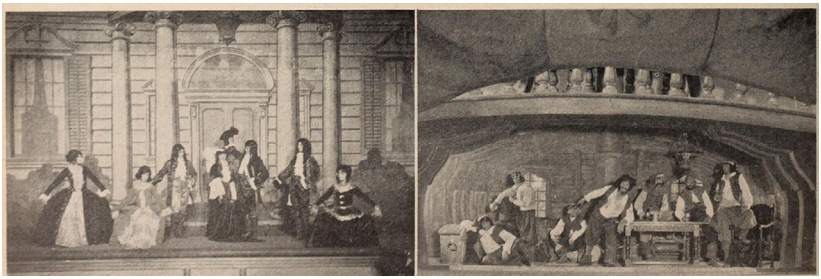


Fig. 5.10 *Captain Blood* stage prologue, Strand theater, Brooklyn

to perform an old English dance.[86] After the premiere danseuse enters for a solo performance and pantomime, the lights dim and behind the scrim orange spots come up on the backdrop of the cramped interior of a pirate ship, below the bottom edge of a full sail. The pirate captain, a basso, sings "Bells of the Sea," and his men, a male quartet, close the act by singing "Haul Away." A simpler prologue introduced *Madonna of the Streets*, in which an old man dies and leaves a fortune to his nephew, a preacher; Mary, the man's mistress, determines to marry the preacher, but he throws her out after discovering her affair with his secretary; repenting in the end, he finally reconciles.[87] This atmospheric prologue has sixteen figures grouped around a preacher on a box, before a backdrop of London's Limehouse district, in the dim light of a hazy night.[88] A Madonna figure enters the scene as the male quartet sings "Holy Night," which could either reenact Mary's initial meeting with the preacher or allude to the moment just before his reconciliation. The theater's program that Christmas week of 1924 was also significant because Hyman instituted a new publicity strategy: broadcasting the music directly from the stage through the WNYC radio station[89] (Figs. 5.11, 5.12, and 5.13).

Two months later, Hyman produced a two-part prologue that "went over with a bang" for *So Big*, in which Selena's father is killed in a gambling den, leaving her penniless; she becomes a schoolteacher, marries a farmer who dies, and makes the farm successful enough to educate her son Dirk; in the end he rejoins his mother and the young woman who loves him.[90] Billed as "Days of a Bygone Age," the first scene has the backdrop of an 1880's city street, before which a danseuse, among promenading figures, dances to the tune of "Little Old New York, "with a little comedy touch with a bustle."[91] The second scene's backdrop frames

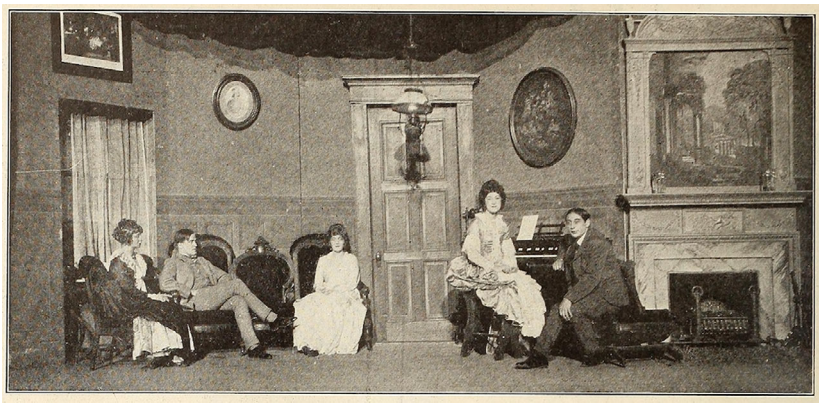


Fig. 5.11 *So Big* stage prologue, Strand theater, Brooklyn

Fig. 5.12 *The Iron Horse* stage prologue, Strand theater, Brooklyn

a farmhouse parlor, with figures dressed like Selina and her grown son. After several song and dance numbers, the scene fades, with only light glowing in the fireplace and pale blue moonlight streaming through a window. An historical prologue introduced Jack Ford's *The Iron Horse*,

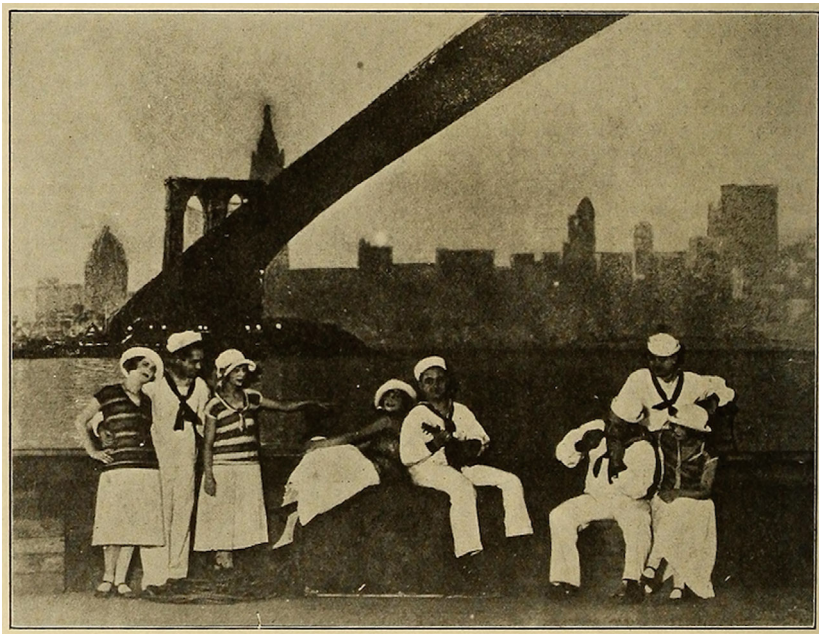


Fig. 5.13 *Shore Leave* stage prologue, Strand theater, Brooklyn

with a backdrop depicting a railroad station and other wooden buildings before a single train track at "Promontory Point, Utah, where the linking of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific took place."[92] After three men costumed as the film's "Three Musketeers" perform a medley of songs, a banjo player accompanies six ballerinas in 1860s' dresses. In a finale resonating with the film, "a profile reproduction of the famous engine 'Jupiter'" slowly steams into the station. A modern city scene highlights the prologue for *Shore Leave*, in which an orphaned woman pursues a young sea captain on shore leave; after twice refusing to live off a woman he believes rich, he returns to marry her, once she puts an old, inherited sailing vessel in trust for their first child.[93] Rather than set his prologue in a small New England town, Hyman devised a backdrop of the silhouetted Navy Yard against the New York City skyline, over which looms the long span of the Brooklyn Bridge.[94] Lounging in front of this scene, a baritone, ukelele player, and harmonica player, dressed in sailor whites,

perform "Three for Jack" to their listening sweethearts. If the performance seems slight, the spectacle of the Brooklyn Bridge aptly celebrates the theater's sixth anniversary (Figs. 5.14 and 5.15).

Promising "greater stage shows," Hyman concocted an extended prologue for *Memory Lane*, in which Mary's schoolboy sweetheart Joe goes off to "make his fortune" and neglects to write, leading her to marry another; later Joe returns and acts like a smart aleck to convince Mary that she will be happy with her husband and baby.[95] The four-part prologue, also titled "Memory Lane," creates a narrative arc slightly different from the film's.[96] The first part, "Babyhood," shows a mother sitting beside a cradle in front of a fireplace, whose simulated fire is the scene's only light. The mother, a contralto, sings a lullaby. The second, "Schooldays," has ten dancers costumed as boys and girls at desks against the backdrop of a schoolroom; at the close a male quartet sings the title tune. The third,

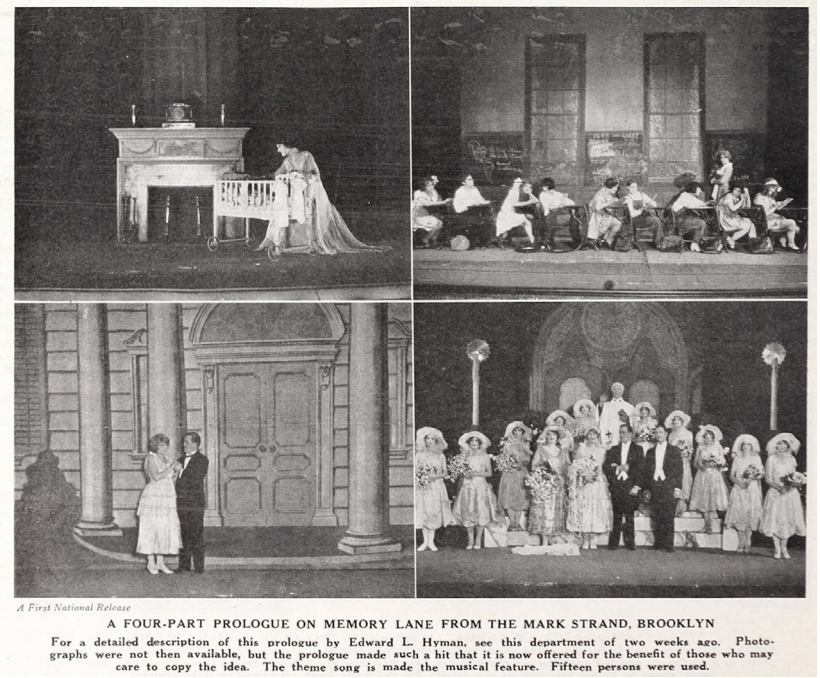


Fig. 5.14 *Memory Lane* stage prologue, Strand theater, Brooklyn

Fig. 5.15 *The Volga Boatman* stage prologue, Strand theater, Brooklyn

"Sweetheart Days," poses a tenor and soprano before the backdrop of a colonial mansion, as they sing "Will You Remember?" The last depicts the interior of a church where a dozen players enact a wedding, and all sing the chorus of "Memory Lane." This summary story seems to end ambiguously, leaving the audience in suspense about who that wedding couple are. Months later, Hyman devised a similar four-part prologue to introduce *Stella Dallas*.[97] After the first scene of a mother and cradle, the second shows a teenage girl with schoolbooks standing at a garden gate, followed by the third in which she and her sweetheart sit on a garden bench. In the final tableau, the ensemble of players engages in a less ambiguous church wedding. A single set seemed right for DeMille's lengthy tale of Tsarist Russia, *The Volga Boatman*.[98] Against a backdrop of the Volga River, with a background castle on a mountain, this prologue, unlike Bowes's at the Capitol, begins with ballerinas in a "Russian Dance."[99] To offstage strains of the "Song of the Volga Boatmen," rough men come on, tugging a heavy rope that slowly pulls the profile of a large boat along the river. By paralleling an early film scene, would this prologue's empathy for such laborers, like that for Bowes', displace

the unremarked Bolshevik Revolution with a generic, less violent struggle against a decadent aristocracy?

And what of Frank Cambria? In the late 1910s, he supplied stage equipment from New York to Balaban and Katz's Central Park and Riviera theaters in Chicago. When, in 1921, the downtown 3,600-seat Chicago and the south side 4,000-seat Tivoli opened, Cambria assumed the role of art and stage director for both.[100] In late 1923, one of the prologues he devised at the Chicago introduced *The Green Goddess*, a stereotypical colonial story of India during the British occupation. Pungently titled "The Rajah's Favorite" (incense wafts through the theater), the first part begins with "an Oriental dance before a seated potentate," followed by a tenor's vocal number.[101] The second features a dozen "Nautch girls "who dance before a green idol" that comes to life for a climactic number. In 1925, Cambria's duties extended to the newly opened, 4,300-seat Uptown, where he developed more elaborate prologues. A good example was "The Four Seasons" preceding *Her Sister from Paris*, in which a woman, after quarreling with her husband in Vienna, contrives with her twin, a Parisian dancer, to have the latter seduce her husband, but he discovers the ruse and confesses that he loves his wife.[102] "Summer" opens the prologue with nine ballerinas weaving a large silk veil into their dance. "Autumn" features a pair of men doing a "Hungarian Folk Dance." Following a solo dance in "Winter," a local star, Helen Yorke, sings the "Voice of Spring."[103] In late 1925, B&K merged with Paramount / Publix, and Cambria returned to New York.[104] There, at the Rivoli, he staged theatrical presentations such as the prologue for *Aloma of the South Seas*, in which the "native girl" Aloma falls in love with Meester Bob, a despondent white man; after a disruptive storm, Aloma returns to her "native lover" and Bob, to his former sweetheart.[105] A description of this aptly exotic prologue is brief, but it headlines the local stage star (and lead character in the film) Gilda Gray, supported by the recurring Prince Lei Leni, his Royal Samoans, and "a sextette of dancing girls"[106] (Fig. 5.16).

As for contrastive prologues, Cambria was not the only exhibitor or stage manager to mount one during these years. Several already have been mentioned: the Omaha Rialto's for *The Girl of the Golden West*, the Kansas City Newman's for *The Isle of Lost Ships*, and perhaps even the Brooklyn Strand's for *Memory Lane*. Also at the New York Strand, Plunkett created "two musical ballet divertissements" preceding the western, *Flaming Love*. In an Italian street scene, with a cart and burro, the

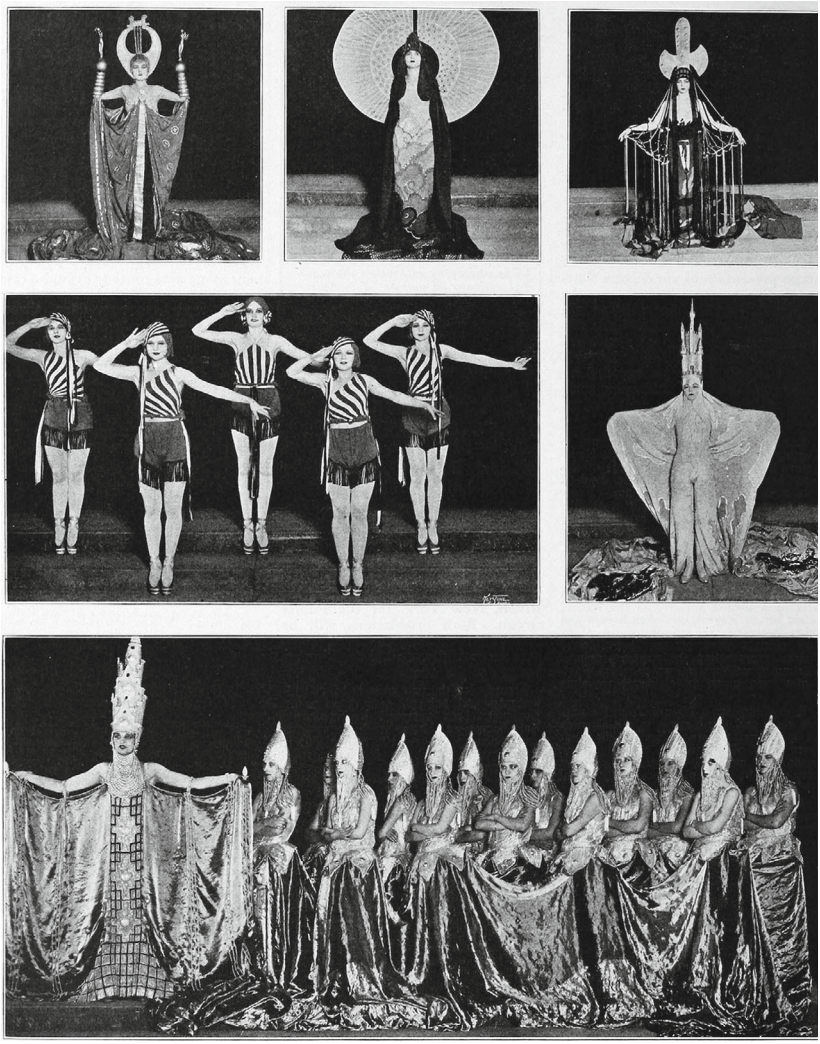


Fig. 5.16 *The Big Parade* stage prologue, Egyptian theater, Los Angeles

theater's ballet corps, a male and a female quartet, and a soprano put on a "Festa."[107] The following year at the Rivoli, Cambria staged a lengthy presentation at odds with *Born to the West*, a Zane Grey story of two schoolboy rivals who later fight over a young woman; after leaving to hunt for gold, the hero returns to rescue her from his rival.[108] Titled "Circus Week," this show featured twenty-nine performers and "almost everything connected with a circus from the parade to the acrobats, trained dogs, ponies, clowns, hot dogs and lemonade."[109] Most striking was "the illusion of three huge moving elephants."[110] More surprising was Grauman's prologue that introduced the war epic, *The Big Parade*, at the Egyptian theater in 1926. Titled "The Pageant of the Allies," it featured a host of models in costumes created by Erie, "the famous European designer," in a stunning fashion show.[111] Representing the Allied nations in the Great War, the costumes were luxurious, strikingly abstract, and symbolic, with single models named "La Belle France," "England," "Italy," and "Bleeding Belgium."[112] Not unexpectedly, Grauman had a chorus of five models for a "Danse Americaine" and, for its climax, a dozen in extravagant headdresses and piles of velvet-draped dresses, attending on a statuesque "queen." No wonder "it stopped the show." For more on the phenomenon of contrastive prologues, the next chapter highlights those featured on Fanchon and Marco's circuit in West Coast theaters.

The consolidation of the Hollywood studio system, in which companies either controlled or became affiliated with many movie theaters, may have reduced trade press coverage from the mid-1920s on. Yet, lots of exhibitors, including those in relatively small venues, kept carving out space and time on their programs for their own theatrical productions. Even far beyond New York and Los Angeles—from Meridian, Connecticut, and Greensboro, North Carolina, to Seattle and Eugene, Oregon—prologues continued to lure audiences into immersing themselves in whatever feature film followed. As inventive "producers," in Franklin's words, theater managers could still create multisensory spectacles that captured moviegoers' attention and sometimes upstaged a film or star as a program's main attraction.

Notes

1. Eric Hoyt, *Ink-Stained Hollywood: The Triumph of American Cinema's Trade Press* (Oakland: University of California Press,

2022). The only relevant issues of *Metronome* (February–May 1926) are located in the New York Public Library.

2. Harry Crandall, "The World Do Move," *Exhibitors Trade Review* (26 April 1924); "S. Barret McCormick Joins Pathé," *Exhibitors Trade Review* (27 September 1924): 24; and "S. Barret McCormick Appointed as Pathé Manager of Exploitation," *Motion Picture News* (20 June 1925): 3030.
3. For a recent study of Grauman's investments in the 1920s, see Ross Melnick, "A Prologue to Hollywood: Sid Grauman, Film Premieres, and the (Real-Estate) Development of Hollywood," in Rob King and Charlie Keil, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Silent Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024), 440–459.
4. The New York trade press also specifically seemed to reduce its coverage of stage prologues in Chicago and Los Angeles.
5. "The Showman's Guide," *Exhibitors Trade Review* (2 June 1923): 33.
6. "Bar Room Set Can Make Appeal," *Motion Picture News* (23 June 1923): 2994.
7. "Thirty in Chicago Prologue," *Exhibitors Herald* (16 June 1923): 37. Frank Cambria is not mentioned as the stage manager.
8. "Double Prologue Offered," *Exhibitors Herald* (14 July 1923): 43.
9. Epes Winthrop Sargent, "Selling the Picture to the Public," *Moving Picture World* (3 March 1923): 55.
10. "Hyman Details Plan of 'Tess' Presentation," *Exhibitors Herald* (6 January 1923): 54–55.
11. Charles S. Sewell, "Newest Reviews and Comments," *Moving Picture World* (28 April 1923): 942.
12. "Curtain Offers Opportunity for Ideas," *Motion Picture News* (9 June 1923): 2792. A photograph of the stage set is reproduced in *Exhibitors Herald* (2 June 1923): 41.
13. "The Isle of Lost Ships," *Exhibitors Trade Review* (31 March 1923)" 915.
14. A photograph of the stage set is reproduced, with a brief caption, in *Exhibitors Trade Review* (23 June 1923): 173.
15. Ibid.
16. The first of these articles was "Behind the Scenes with E.L. Hyman, Mark Stand, Brooklyn," *Motion Picture News* (17 March 1923): 1315.

17. Other "hints" described versions of the "Revuette Populaire" that Hyman sometimes staged before his feature films—see "Production Hints from Edward L. Hyman," *Moving Picture World* (20 October 1923): 654.
18. H. H. B., "Jackie Coogan in *Circus Days*," *Exhibitors Herald* (23 June 1923): 55.
19. "Production Hints from Edward L. Hyman," *Moving Picture World* (8 September 1923): 146.
20. "Merry-Go-Round," *Screen Opinions*," (1–15 August 1923): 122. Julian replaced Eric Von Stroheim as director midway through the film's production.
21. "Production Hints from Edward L. Hyman," *Moving Picture World* (22 September 1923): 335.
22. "Plunkett Stages Colorful Prologue," *Exhibitors Trade Review* (25 August 1923): 561.
23. "Fury," *Motion Picture News* (27 January 1923): 471.
24. "Atmospheric Prologue Staged by Plunkett for 'Fury'," *Motion Picture News* (3 March 1923): 1045; and "Plunkett's 'Fury' Prologue Pleases Strand Patrons," *Exhibitors Trade Review* (3 March 1923): 713. Cf. the prologue at the Tivoli in Roseville, New Jersey, in which one of the film's actors, and a baritone, appeared on stage to speak "about the ships at sea, the difficulties encountered in making 'Fury' and wind up with a sea chanty"—"Singer Appears in Prologue to Aid Showings of 'Fury'," *Motion Picture News* (19 May 1923): 2392.
25. "Ninety and Nine," *Screen Opinion* (2–15 February 1923): 190.
26. "Grauman Devises Unique Prologue," *Moving Picture World* (31 March 1923): 669.
27. Cf. the brief description of the prologue's three scenes ("The Wise Men," "The Babe of Bethlehem," and "The Last Supper") introducing DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* at Grauman's Egyptian theater—"Grauman Gives 'Commandments' Elaborate Setting," *Motion Picture News* (22 December 1923): 2877.
28. "Aborigines Invade City," *Los Angeles Times* (6 April 1923): 37; and Grauman's Hollywood Egyptian Theatre ad, *Los Angeles Sunday Times* (8 April 1923): ? Apparently, a similar prologue featuring "the songs of 1849" accompanied the film's initial premiere two weeks earlier at the New York Criterion—"Premiere

of 'The Covered Wagon'," *Exhibitors Trade Review* (24 March 1923): 837.

29. Unfortunately, no description or photograph of the stage setting seems to survive.
30. "Brilliant Premiere for 'Covered Wagon'," Paramount Pep (15 April 1923): 7. Thanks to Patrick Adamson for alerting me to Grauman's prologue at the Egyptian.
31. "'Covered Wagon' Starts Another Long Run Here," *Los Angeles Times* (25 June 1924): 27.
32. "Suitable Atmospheric Prologue to 'The Spanish Dancer' Showing," *Motion Picture News* (15 December 1923): 2791.
33. "Tableau Scores Decided Hit with Audience," *Exhibitors Trade Review* (5 January 1924): 43.
34. "Reviews," *Exhibitors Herald* (14 April 1923): 53.
35. "Attractive 'Grumpy' Prologue Is Put Over by Soriero," *Motion Picture News* (9 June 1923): 2765. The "Gardenia" ballet probably is excerpted from "Jardine Anime" in Act 3 of the French ballet, *Le Corsaire*.
36. "Front? No. Prologue," *Exhibitors Herald* (30 June 1923): 61.
37. "Fine Production but Story Is Weak and Far from Convincing," *Film Daily* (3 June 1923): 55.
38. "Are Prologues Going Out?" *Exhibitors Herald* (1 September 1923): 58. Cf. the lively rural prologue at Loew's Warfield in San Francisco for *Quincy Adams Sawyer*: within the wood plank walls of a barn, nearly a dozen dancers and musicians enjoy a spirited dance. In a touch of irony, near a straw-strewn loft, a sign reads "Smoke LA Insulated Cigars." A photograph of this prologue is reproduced in *Motion Picture World* (5 May 1923): 2172.
39. "Stages Prologue in Back Alley," *Exhibitors Trade Review* (24 March 1923): 856.
40. "Style Show Furnishes Prologue for 'Other Women's Clothes'," *Exhibitors Herald* (27 January 1923): 499.
41. "'The Rustle of Silk' Tied Up with Department Store," *Motion Picture News* (28 July 1923): 415.
42. "Fur Fashion Show Prologue to 'Girl of Golden West'," *Motion Picture News* (8 September 1923): 1200.
43. "Fashion Show Tied Up with 'Poor Men's Wives' Run," *Motion Picture News* (26 May 1923): 2522.

44. "Tie-Up Broadsides Effective on 'Girl of the Golden West'," *Motion Picture News* (28 July 1923): 416.
45. "'Old Fashion Show' Staged by Soriero at Century," *Motion Picture News* (22 December 1923): 2890.
46. "Society Models Put Fashion Show Over," *Moving Picture World* (31 March 1923): 535. A photograph of the Bijou fashion show is reproduced in *Exhibitors Trade Review* (12 May 1923): 1194.
47. Frank Elliott, "Irene," *Motion Picture News* (27 February 1926): 1014.
48. A photograph of this prologue's stage set is reproduced in *Motion Picture News* (29 May 1926): 2599. See also the "miniature musical review" at the Grand in Ennis, Texas, with local models, one a small girl, showing off dresses, hats, and shoes—"Local Talent Nights Supply Players for Prologues at Small Town Theatre," *Motion Picture News* (17 April 1926): 1840.
49. "3-Scene Prologue to Long Film Is Novel Attraction," *Exhibitors Herald* (20 March 1926): 49.
50. A photograph of this prologue idea is reproduced in *Motion Picture News* (10 October 1925): 1705.
51. A photograph of this prologue set is reproduced in *Exhibitors Trade Review* (9 January 1926): 9.
52. See the brochure digitized on the Media History Digital Library's website. Six of these costumed models are reproduced in *Exhibitors Herald* (29 August 1925): 75. A less extravagant prologue at the Egyptian introduced *The Iron Horse*. Again, members of the Arapahoe and Shoshone Indians from Wyoming performed on stage, but the big attraction was "the original Central Pacific engine that was featured in the film," and "the famous old stagecoach of the Union Pacific," both of which nearly filled the theater's forecourt—"'The Iron Horse' Is Given Brilliant Premiere in West," *Exhibitors Herald* (7 March 1925): 42; photograph of Arapahoe and Shoshone Indians, *Exhibitors Herald* (14 March 1925): 38; and "Sid Grauman to Film Prologue of 'Iron Horse'," *Los Angeles Times* (9 May 1925): 62.
53. "Impressive Prologue Given with 'Hunchback' Run," *Motion Picture News* (1 March 1924): 982; and "Effective Prologue to 'Hunchback'," *Exhibitors Trade Review* (26 April 1924): 43.
54. C. S. Sewell, "The White Moth," *Moving Picture World* (21 July 1924): 743.

55. A photograph of this prologue is reproduced in *Exhibitors Herald (*16 August 1924): 42.
56. "Economical Prologue," *Motion Picture News* (22 August 1925): 940–941; and "A Good Prologue for You Devised by Two Oregon Men," *Exhibitors Herald* (22 August 1925): 40.
57. George T. Pardy, "Mike," *Motion Picture News* (23 January 1926): 483.
58. A photograph of this prologue is reproduced in *Motion Picture News* (20 March 1926): 1317.
59. "Novel 'Under the Red Robe' Prologue," *Motion Picture News* (19 April 1924): 1761.
60. "Reviews," *Exhibitors Herald* (17 May 1924): 49.
61. "Newman Holds Special Preview for 'Hopping Up' Employees," *Universal Weekly* (6 September 1924): 33.
62. "Miniature Show of 'A Slave of Fashion'," *Moving Picture World* (3 October 1925): 396.
63. "Colony Theatre," *Moving Picture World* (18 July 1925): 329.
64. "Colony Theatre," *Moving Picture World* (3 October 1925): 402.
65. "Reviews," *Exhibitors Herald* (5 February 1921): 76. Lon Chaney plays the rival, "Black Mike." Universal re-cut and re-titled the film for this revival at the Colony—"'Outside the Law,' Universal's Big Production to be Revived," *Moving Picture World* (15 May 1926): 240.
66. Paul Leni's Prologue Gives Aid to 'Outside the Law' Revival," *Exhibitors Herald* (22 May 1926): 33.
67. "The Prologue," *Moving Picture World* (5 June 1926): 503. Jerry De Rosa, the Colony's production director at the time, apparently staged Leni's design.
68. C. S. Sewell, "Tongues of Flame," *Moving Picture World* (27 December 1924): 830.
69. W. Stephen Bush, "Ideas!," *Moving Picture World* (27 December 1924): 812.
70. Evidence of the then-current ignorance of the Osage killings in Oklahoma, also over oil exploitation.
71. C. S. Sewell, "The Volga Boatman," *Moving Picture World* (24 April 1926): 620.
72. "From One Broadway Stage to Another," *Moving Picture World* (26 June 1926): 764.

73. C. S. Sewell, "Mare Nostrum," *Moving Picture World* (27 February 1926): 785.
74. "How B'way Does It," *Film Daily* (12 September 1926): 5. The Victory Theatre in Denver also presented a dance spectacle, with one dancer emerging from a huge seashell, against the backdrop of undersea wreckage—" 'Mare Nostrum' Presentation," *Motion Picture News* (9 October 1926): 1406.
75. "Pioneers in Presentations: Joseph Plunkett," *Moving Picture World* (18 April 1925): 660.
76. "Mark Strand Interior Undergoes Change," *Exhibitors Trade Review* (5 January 1924): 18.
77. "Three Sets Used in Plunkett's Prologue to Valentino Picture," *Exhibitors Herald* (6 September 1924): 42.
78. C. S. Sewell, "The Swan," *Moving Picture World* (14 March 1925): 167–168.
79. "Special Plunkett Prologues," *Moving Picture World* (16 May 1925): 324.
80. C. S. Sewell, "Sally of the Sawdust," *Moving Picture World* (15 August 1925): 733.
81. "Big First Run Presentations," *Moving Picture World* (15 August 1925): 728.
82. "The Production Forum," *Moving Picture World* (24 July 1926): 243. In Chattanooga, the Tivoli's prologue cast a single white spot on a worker striking an anvil, as the hammer threw sparks, and singing the Armorer's song from "Robin Hood"; huge shadows of mill machinery stud a plain, dark backdrop—a photograph of this prologue is reproduced in *Motion Picture News* (30 October 1926).
83. "From One Broadway Stage to Another," *Moving Picture World* (7 August 1926): 378.
84. "Brooklyn Mark Strand Has Fifth Birthday," *Exhibitors Trade Review* (18 October 1924): 16.
85. C. S. Sewell, "Captain Blood," *Moving Picture World* (20 September 1924): 247.
86. "Production Hints from Edward L. Hyman," *Moving Picture World* (22 November 1924): 314. As evidence of recirculating scrims and backdrops, the ship's cabin had appeared earlier for *The Sea Hawk*, disguised now by different lighting choices.

87. Len Moran, "Nazimova Returns to Silent Drama," *Exhibitors Trade Review* (1 November 1924): 49.
88. "Production Hints from Edward L. Hyman," *Moving Picture World* (6 December 1924): 536.
89. See also Hyman's claim that these broadcasts each Sunday night lured radio fans to the theater to see and hear their favorite artists in person on stage—"Production Hints from Edward L. Hyman," *Moving Picture World* (4 April 1925): 452.
90. C. S. Sewell, "So Big," *Moving Picture World* (17 January 1925): 267.
91. "Production Hints from Edward L. Hyman," *Moving Picture World* (14 February 1925): 692.
92. "Production Hints from Edward L. Hyman," *Moving Picture World* (14 November 1925): 159.
93. Frank Elliott, "Shore Leave," *Motion Picture News* (29 August 1925): 3063.
94. "Why Anniversaries?" *Exhibitors Trade Review* (14 November 1925): 26.
95. "Hyman Plans for Greater Stage Shows," *Exhibitors Herald* (9 January 1926): 53; and Frank Elliot, "Memory Lane," *Motion Picture News* (23 January 1926): 485.
96. "Production Hints from Edward L. Hyman," *Moving Picture World* (6 March 1926): 50. A full description of this prologue, along with four photographs, is reproduced in Bernard N. Beck, "Presenting the Picture," *Metronome* 42 (15 May 1926): 15.
97. "Production Hints from Edward L. Hyman," *Moving Picture World* (3 July 1926): 22.
98. C. S. Sewell, "The Volga Boatman," *Moving Picture World* (24 April 1926): 620. Exiled Russian aristocrats were recruited to play many of the royal characters in the film—"Titled Russians Appear in De Mille's 'Volga Boatman'," *Moving Picture World* (6 February 1926): 538.
99. "Production Hints from Edward L. Hyman," *Moving Picture World* (24 July 1926): 220.
100. "Chicago's New Tivoli a Classic Theatre," *Moving Picture World* (5 March 1921): 22.
101. "Real Prologue at Chicago," *Exhibitors Herald* (8 December 1923): 44. By then, Cambria was also a member of the Better Theatres organization and was penning a series of articles on

theater history, beginning with "Better Theatres Advisory Staff," *Exhibitors Herald* (8 December 1923): X!!). Wafting incense and other scents into a theater's auditorium was relatively common—Simonson, "'Adding to the Pictures': The American Film Prologue in the 1920s," 22.

102. "New Pictures," *Exhibitors Herald* (22 August 1925): 54.
103. "Helen Yorke Dominant Figure in Exceptional Stage Show at Uptown," *Exhibitors Herald* (28 November 1925): 60.
104. "Cambria and Harris Join Publix, N.Y.," *Exhibitors Herald* (26 December 1925): 49. The Theater History Society archive includes half a dozen photographs of stage settings for Paul Ash's musical revues at the Balaban and Katz's new Chicago theater, the Oriental, in late 1926. These revues, like Fanchon and Marco's "Ideas," seemed independent of the feature films—see the Oriental ads, *Chicago Tribune* (11 November 1926): 32, and 3 December 1926): 18.
105. "Aloma of the South Seas," *Film Daily* (23 May 1926): 22.
106. "Gilda Gray Stars in Stage Prologue for 'Aloma'," *Motion Picture News* (29 May 1926): 2599.
107. "Plunkett Presentations," *Moving Picture World* (7 February 1925): 587.
108. Lawrence Reid, "Born to the West," *Motion Picture News* (17 July 1926): 229–230.
109. "How B'way Does It," *Film Daily* (4 July 1926): 5. See also the prologue for *North of 36*, a western tale of rival whites on a cattle drive from Texas to Abilene "across Indian country." An example of a touring act in the B&K circuit in the Midwest, the description is so scant, merely noting that "Three Indians comprise the cast of this prologue," that it may or may not set up a bad end for a villainous outlaw—Epes W. Sargent, "North of 36," *Moving Picture World* (13 December 1924): 624; and "'Publicity Presentations' Is Policy Over Midwest Circuit," *Exhibitors Herald* (17 January 1925): 21.
110. The contrast here may well have been due to the emerging industry practice of filmed prologues, in this case an apt one that introduced the film's schoolchildren. "New Pictures," *Exhibitors Herald* (1 May 1926): 62.
111. "Costume Feature of Grauman's Prologue," *Moving Picture World* (13 February 1926): 668.

112. "Grauman's 'Big Parade' Prologue," *Exhibitors Herald* (6 February 1926): 52.

CHAPTER 6

Production Circuits, Design Blueprints, and Debates

Throughout the 1920s, stage prologues provoked questions that bedeviled some exhibitors. One question arose early on: might their production be systemized so that all of the components of a particular stage set, and its performance acts, could circulate among a number of different movie theaters? Could that be done efficiently and profitably? Another repeatedly cropped up: despite their supposed popularity, were stage prologues really such a desirable phenomenon on movie theater programs? When were they effective, when not, and why? The latter questions set off a heated debate that the trade press found difficult to resolve.

Production Circuits

As early as 1920, at least two companies tried to capitalize on the popularity of stage prologues. One strategy was the formation of a prologue circuit.[1] Jack Callicott, manager of the Los Angeles Kinema, may have set up the first circuit, which had the advantage of First National's financial sponsorship.[2] The plan was to book some of the prologues he staged at the Kinema into the film company's recently established chain of fifteen theaters in California.[3] That would involve shipping all or most of the stage sets, props, and performers to each of those theaters according to an agreed schedule. Obviously, a difficult task. Although each selected prologue would initially be restricted to major theaters on the Pacific Coast, exhibitors in small towns could book a reduced "road form" less

R. Abel, *The Exhibitor as Producer*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-71781-9_6

costly to rent. To assist the latter exhibitors who hired local talent, First National produced press-sheet aids with "an original script" characterized by a simplicity of dialogue and an inexpensive setting.[4] Within a year, those aids also included ideas for stage settings, if a theater could not afford a full touring prologue, by printing relevant stills of film scenes from a booked feature film.[5] For an example, see the Highland dancers within the deep space of a house party set that could introduce *Courage*, a feature set in Scotland.[6] Another circuit was the Manhattan Booking Exchange founded by Arthur Klein, a well-known vaudeville manager.[7] According to his announcements, the Manhattan's service would offer "a variety of recognized talent, consisting of singers, musicians, [and] miniature 'jazz' bands."[8] Unlike Callicott, no stage settings and props were involved, but the musical talent could perform within a theater's own constructed set. Despite the backing of First National, neither Callicott's circuit nor that of Manhattan Booking drew any mention in the trade press beyond 1921. The promise of a systematic service seemed to fade, but, in 1926, Balaban and Katz, together with Famous Players-Lasky, announced plans to construct a New York studio that would produce stage presentations for touring through a circuit of movie theaters.[9] Later that year, as Balaban and Katz aligned with Publix Theatre Corporation, Frank Cambria became Art and Stage Director for its growing number of theaters.[10] In early 1927, there is slight evidence of stage sets for presentations, not prologues, at the Paramount theater in Chicago, but further research has to determine whether Publix's attempt to systematize production met with success[11] (Figs. 6.1 and 6.2).

That was hardly the case once Fanchon Lucile Wolff and Marco Wolff stepped onto the scene. Initially a brother and sister act in vaudeville, in 1919 they began producing revues and scored a big hit with a 1921 touring show, *Sun-Kist*.[12] That led to their production of stage prologues, first in the Los Angeles area and then throughout the West Coast Theatre circuit. Billed as "Ideas," Fanchon and Marco's prologues were designed to be separate from, or contrastive to, the feature films that followed. Each was tried out in a small town outside Los Angeles and then, after being honed, brought into the 2,450-seat State theater "for the big break."[13] Typically, their prologues featured glamorous showgirls performing in lavish settings. For a good example, see the "Perfume Idea" staged at the State that preceded *Beautiful City*, a gangster story of brothers on New York's east side.[14] Opening a miscellany of acts was "a large perfume bottle against a black drop with a dancer posed

Fig. 6.1 "Perfume Idea" stage prologue, Loew's State theater, Los Angeles, Fanchon and Marco Collection, Huntington Library

before it," followed by another set with platforms topped by seven differently shaped perfume bottles, from which "girls" emerge in "elaborate costumes representing the French perfume brands."[15] More acts are then performed before that same huge bottle: a tenor aria, a "Gollywog" number, "The Fragrance of Perfumes," a "Russian costume dance," a comic "Charleston in hoopskirts," and a final dance "in an effective pink creation." Another example, at the Warfield theater in San Francisco, was an "Arabesque" prologue for a screening of *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife,* a contemporary tale starring Gloria Swanson. Against a black drop again, the stage set features a large wooden door in a silvered mosaic wall, topped by oblong curtained globes within the gold frames of a pair of minarets, with another globe hung far above. Emerging from the door, the "[Theodore] Kosloff dancers stage a Persian ballet," followed by singers exotically costumed in silver and one lead singer in a gown of gold and arrayed in "costly plumage."[16] Assisted by choreographer Carlos Romero and dress designers Helen Rose and Bonnie Cashin, Fanchon and Marco created prologues characterized by spectacular sets,

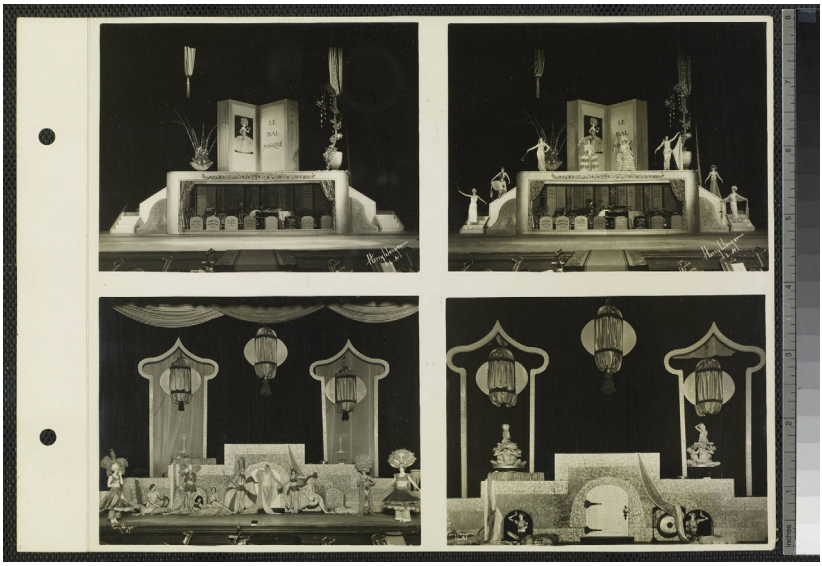


Fig. 6.2 "Bluebeard's Eighth Wife" stage prologue, Loew's Warfield theater, San Francisco, Fanchon and Marco Collection, Huntington Library

stunning costumes, intricate dances, and a chorus of showgirls known as Fanchonettes, all in lengthy, yet snappily paced productions. And they designed and toured these "Ideas" irrespective of theaters' feature films well into the 1930s.[17]

Design Blueprints

In late 1920, together with the efforts to establish prologue circuits, *Motion Picture News* adopted a more "practical" strategy for showing theater managers how to produce their own prologues. The idea was to have a well-known exhibitor share the blueprint for one of his stage sets, along with a helpful description.[18] Norman K. Whistler, current manager of the Los Angles California theater, was the first to offer the working script of his prologue for *Earthbound*.[19] In a simple front view line drawing, letters mark specific parts of the stage set, and the accompanying text identifies those in some detail, along with notes on the required light cues. Two weeks later, Edward Hyman, manager of the Brooklyn

Strand, shared a "complete prologue manuscript" for his screening of *19 and Phyllis*.[20] Included is a line drawing (viewed from above) with letters that the accompanying text identifies as the required props and lights. But another line drawing presents a front view of this garden stage set with trees and shrubs framing a centered hammock swing under a boldly striped awning. Weeks later again, Hyman produced a similar working script for his prologue introducing the German film, *Passion*. In an overhead line drawing, letters identify parts of the set and lights; another drawing offers a front view of this "French interior," with steps leading up to a heavy oak door upstage, a hanging lamp above, and a "three bracket candelabrum" downstage right.[21] This time the text describes the dancing of Jeanne (Pola Negri's role) and the "Passion" figure, ending as the two look fearfully at a guillotine revealed behind the door and the growing sound of a cannonade as each of the three candles go out. At the same time, the Newark Branford theater contributed a working script for its screening of *Peaceful Valley*. Here, too, a line drawing offers a front view of an unusually wide, deep landscape. Text spells out three simple mechanical devices needed for the scenic effects: a rising moon, "a shimmering moving river," and "a miniature lighted railroad train" crossing a bridge, all in the distant background[22] (Figs. 6.3, 6.4, and 6.5).

Motion Picture News also convinced Joseph Plunkett of the New York Strand to contribute several prologue scripts.[23] The most interesting was that for "The Old Swimmin' Hole," partly because the trade press article included not only the line drawing and descriptive text but also a photograph of the constructed stage set, which reproduced a scene from the film.[24] The drawing gives special attention to the "swimmin'

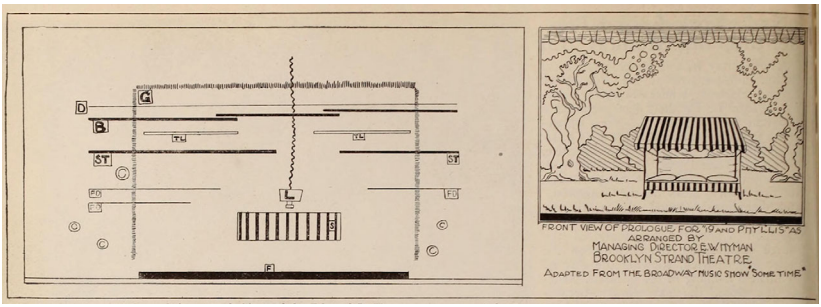


Fig. 6.3 Edward Hyman, *19 and Phyllis* prologue design

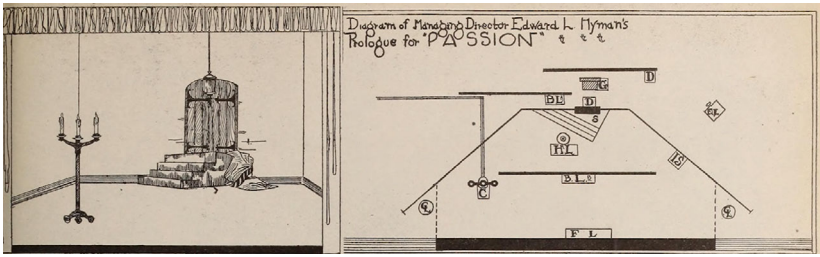


Fig. 6.4 Edward Hyman, *Passion* prologue design

hole," backed by the drop of an old mill's revolving water wheel. "A ripple effect on green gauze," accentuated by green and blue lighting, simulated the water surface, where three boys, members of the theater's quartet, "splash" about by throwing rice at one another. The fourth member, dressed as a fisherman, sits on a stump stage left. After all four sing "The Water Mill," the boys duck under the green gauze as a constable passes by, and the quartet closes with "Little Tommy Went a-Fishin'." Harold B. Franklin of Shea's Hippodrome in Buffalo composed a somewhat different descriptive text, "miniature plot" or sketch, and photograph of his "contrastive" stage set for *School Days*.[25] The rough pencil sketch depicts the idea for the photo's finished stage set that posed a woman costumed as an "Indian" before three tepees stage right, backed by a path leading to the drop of a distant lake and mountain, framed by leafy trees. Unlike Plunkett, Franklin offers a detailed plan of the lighting plot for four daily performances of the woman who sings "In the Land of the Sky-blue Water." Months earlier, Roger Ferri wrote a "Farcical Sketch" for the same film that filled two full pages.[26] The stage set of a schoolroom resembles the one at the Stanley theater in Philadelphia, but the playlet features an extended dialogue between a teacher and the schoolchildren. She first looks through a window and runs outside to call in children playing in the school yard. Once all are back inside, the teacher admonishes a late boy, has one child after another sing bits of popular tunes or recite lines from a poem, and then leads a question-and-answer session, sometimes angrily. Given the long text, a note warns that any exhibitor would have to cut parts of this "prologue" to make it work. Or was the whole playlet tongue-in-cheek? (Fig. 6.6).

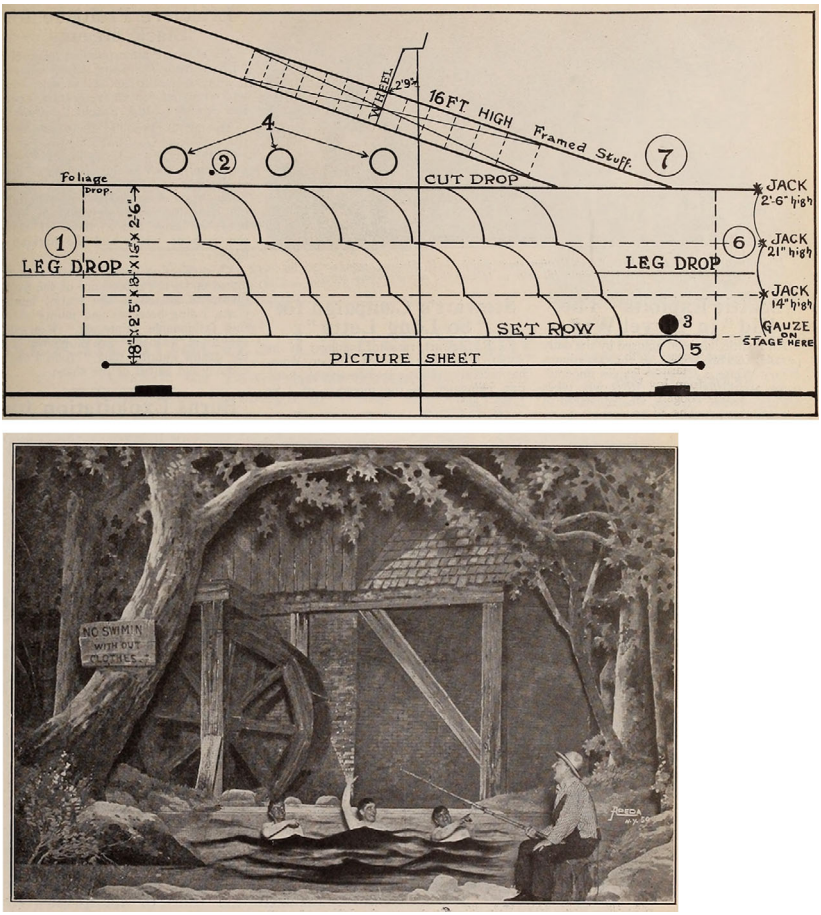


Fig. 6.5 Joseph Plunkett, *The Old Swimmin' Hole* prologue design

At least two theater managers contributed blueprint designs that others might construct for whatever film they chose. Hyman designed a "huge set-piece fan [for] pictures with an Oriental theme or Colonial setting" or even with no connection to a film.[27] His line drawing shows a front view of the frame (11 feet high and twice as wide), both open and closed. In an accompanying photo, "a dark plush cyclorama" backs a richly decorated fan of transparent canvas, lit from behind, with front lighting picking out

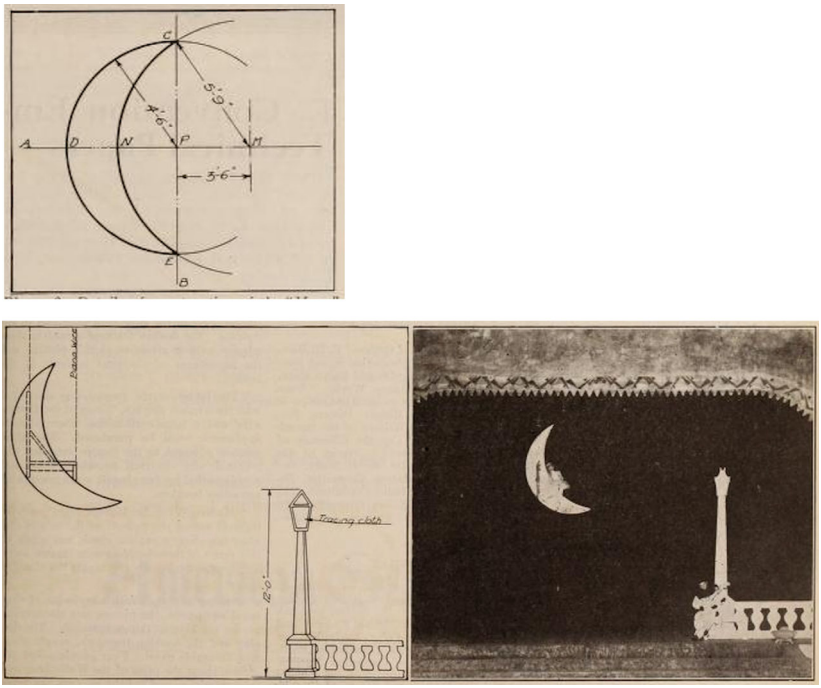


Fig. 6.6 Hershel Stewart, *The Girl in the Moon* prologue design

three costumed dancers, each with her own small fan. Hershel Stewart, manager of the Missouri theater in St. Louis, supplied an even simpler prologue titled "Pierrot's Serenade to the Girl in the Moon."[28] His line sketch shows a crescent moon (upper left) and a tall lamppost topping a low wall (lower right). In a photo of the stage set, a black drop sets off both the "girl" seated on the moon and Pierrot seated beneath the lamppost singing to her as he strums a mandolin. Lowered by invisible wires, so says the text, she descends and goes into a "Flirtation Toe Dance," but repels Pierrot's advances, and slowly ascends to her initial position. Much like Ferri's playlet, an unnamed writer composed a much shorter prologue for *The Phantom of the Opera*.[29] A bare set marks the first scene, as, offstage, a door slams, a chain falls, and a figure dressed in scarlet slowly saunters in with a lantern that illuminates his white mask. He hesitates, glances behind, and exits. Within the second scene's Parisian

bed chamber, a performer playing the film's vocalist, Christine, paces, receives an unsigned letter from her maid, and sings the "Waltz Song" from *Romeo and Juliet*. In the same set for the third scene, the chamber is nearly bare; another performer dressed as Raoul kneels before a small table, singing the "Prayer" from *La Bohème*; after Christine silently enters, they embrace and softly plan their escape. Unlike Moss's prologue at the New York Colony theater, this playlet sketches several scenes from *Phantom of the Opera*. But did any theater manager ever mount this prologue idea? (Figs. 6.7, 6.8, and 6.9).

Besides Hyman, the most consistent promoter of prologue designs was Colby Harriman. In 1924, following others, he argued that the stage was crucially important as a framework for the feature film, even in smaller theaters. For the latter, major theaters served as "laboratories" for "every known form of stage construction, every type of stage setting, and every type of stage effects."[30] Two years later, in a series of weekly articles, Harriman wrote detailed suggestions for those small house exhibitors, especially in the use of inexpensive textiles or fabrics.[31] For the first of these, the "fiery oil drama," *Flaming Waters*, he devised a "scene plot" (top view), "construction data" (side view), and sketch of oil wells framed by the legs of another in the foreground.[32] He even added the possible action of a "good time" evening performed by people "who have come to this new country in search of riches." For *The Sea Beast*, a reductive version of *Moby Dick* with an added romance, his suggestions were equally detailed.[33] The designs include a "painted scrim" sketch of two sailing ships in rough seas backed by a full moon, a "set piece" sketch of a sailor climbing to the top sail rigging, and construction data for the "ground plot" and "cut-out ship" (top view) as well as a "detail of the mast piece" (front view).[34] For *Ibanez's Torrent*, the romantic tale of a poor Spanish girl who becomes an opera star, Harriman offered two "prelude" options.[35] One sketch represents a "simple interior" in which flats of two walls with side openings frame an arch within which is an angled wall painted in warm tones with a high window revealing a blue sky. This option also includes construction data for the arch and "flat with window" (front view) as well as the "scene plot" (top view). As a singer performs the film's theme song in the other "prelude," the sketch shows curtains drawn to reveal the distant silhouette of "cut-out buildings in a blue-green haze." Above and behind are storm clouds; below, the "mechanical effect" of turbulent ocean waves. In a later novel design for the "Greater Movie Season" of August 1926, *Moving Picture World* gave permission

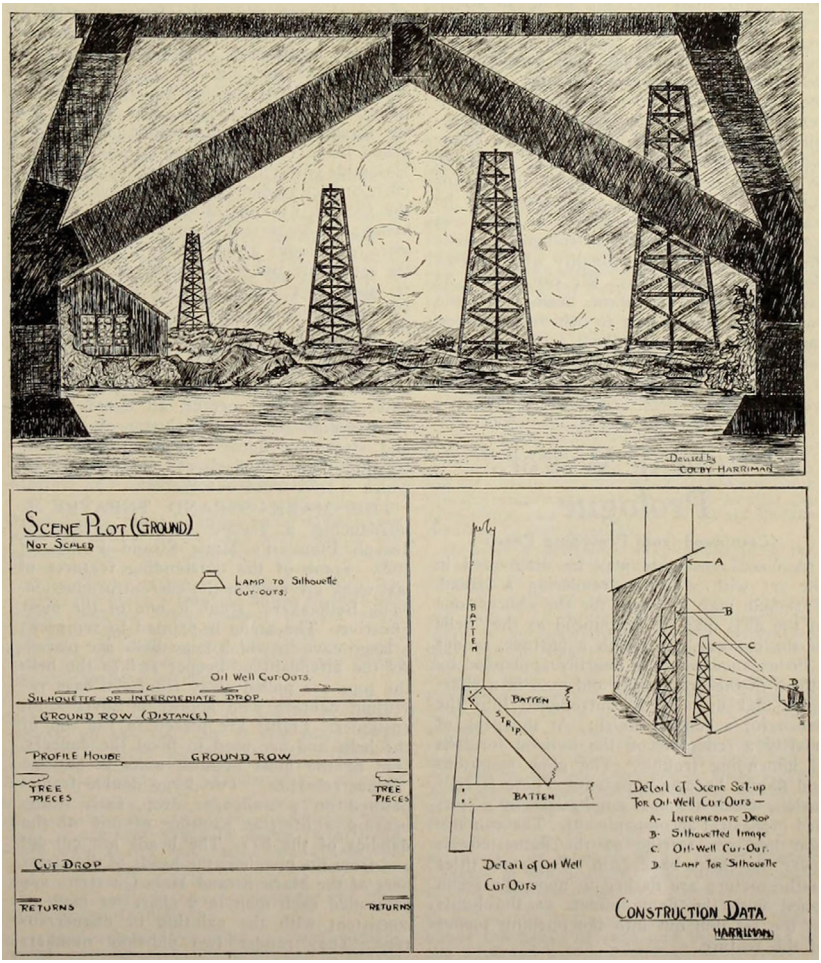


Fig. 6.7 Colby Harriman, *Flaming Water* prologue design

"to any producer or exhibitor to use the Colby Harriman suggestions appearing in this section."[36]

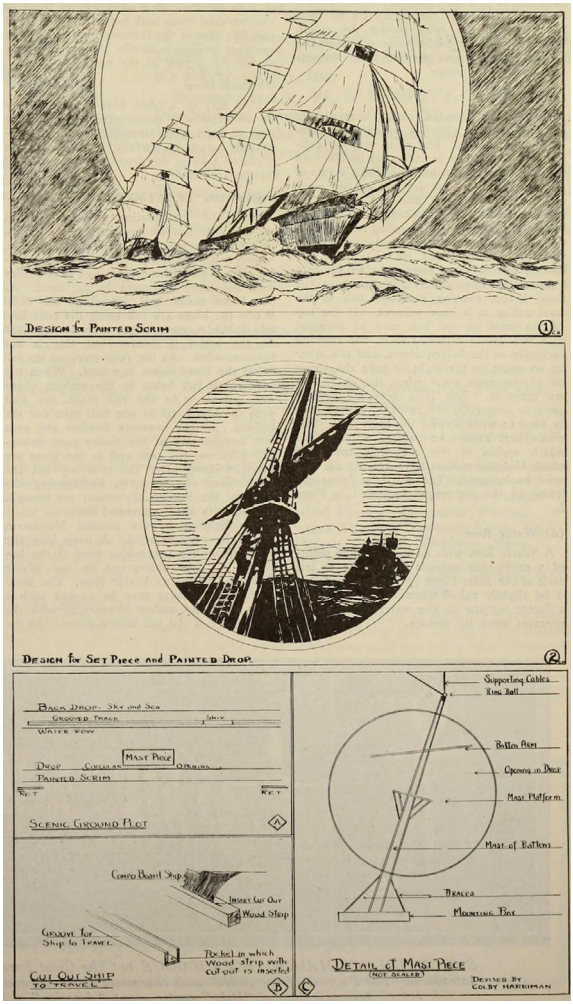


Fig. 6.8 Colby Harriman, *The Sea Beast* prologue design

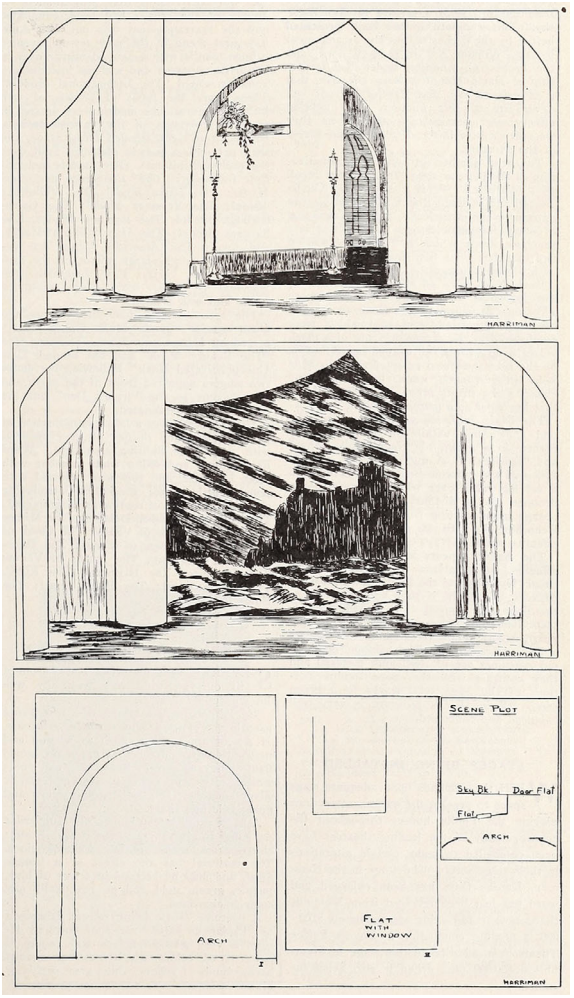


Fig. 6.9 Colby Harriman, *Ibanez's Torrent* prologue design

Debates

Despite the proliferation of prologues in movie theaters, they did provoke controversy. In late 1919, Tom Moore, in Washington, confessed that "ordinarily I do not believe in prologues," even though he had "gained a reputation" for producing them, at least when they could be effective for the right features like *The Blue Bird*.[37] In July 1920, editor Franchon Royer complained in *Camera!* that "dozens of good productions have been injured at theatres by the accompanying presentation of prologues."[38] Her example, oddly, was *Yes or No?*, for which the Kinema had created the novelty of adjacent stage scenes to trace the narrative arc of the film's parallel stories. Months later, she congratulated First National for seeking to improve the prologues for its features but could not resist adding that "the absolute elimination of them would be a favor to humanity."[39]

Such objections soon led Joseph Plunkett to defend the prologue, although he too admitted that "ill-considered, badly designed and inappropriate prologues [can] disgust patrons by suggesting a poor substitute for a vaudeville act."[40] Yet, his main point was that a prologue "is not a complete performance" as in vaudeville, but an "introduction to something that is to come […] an adjunct to the feature picture." "Its aim should be to put the audience and the feature production on intimate terms" and thus increase the theater patrons' enjoyment.[41] Assuming the principle of harmony extolled by Rothapfel, Grauman, Franklin, and others, Plunkett offered this advice. The prologue should not "overshadow the feature"; it should not be too long ("four or five minutes is most effective"); it should not be "too elaborate," which theater managers ignored to audience applause. He concluded by dividing prologues into "two classes […] 'atmospheric' and 'action'." His example for the first was the "exotic" Hawaiian stage setting for *The Idol Dancer*, which the Detroit Madison created for the Hula dancer Doraldina. For the second, he cited a triptych stage setting for *The Beauty Market*, which climaxed in a telephone call that comes during a society dance, threatening a young woman with marriage to a wealthy man or her life "will go to smash."[42] The stage set uses a drop curtain of three transparencies, one for each of three different scenes. Lighting first reveals dancing couples in the center scene, then dims to disclose a library scene (stage left), where an angry, impatient man is ready to speak into a telephone,

and a boudoir (stage right) where the woman picks up her phone, registers amazement and dejection, and slowly hangs up. As the library scene fades out, a poorly dressed young man in the center scene (now empty) raises his arms toward the woman, who sinks onto her dressing table in tears. This wordless pantomime neatly condenses the arc of the film's story, yet without giving away the ending.

Perhaps the least expected came from Charles D. Issacson, *Motion Picture News*'s music editor. In early September 1920, one of his "Music and the Picture" columns addressed the question, "Why the prologue?"[43] If the prologue is "the oldest device of playwrights," he asserted, why shouldn't a "motion picture impresario" think it a good idea for a movie theater program? After suggesting hypothetical versions that could complement a variety of feature films, Isaacson concentrated on how a prologue could engage an audience. "It can establish the atmosphere of the picture," set in a film's opening scene. It can call attention to one or more crucial characters in the film's action. "It can take the best moment of the play and put it first (without giving the secret away)." "It can simply arouse the imagination and the curiosity" of an audience for what it expects to find in a feature film. In November, Issacson added, the prologue can, more specifically "create the feeling of the locale—the climate, the place, the time, the historical epoch, the geographical distance"; "it can "bring forward the dramatic climax" or "establish the dominant mood of the picture."[44] In short, its purpose is to "pique the curiosity and whet the desire" of the audience. Two weeks later, he had a few more suggestions.[45] The prologue could "sketch influences which were at work before the start of the story." See the Minneapolis New Lyric's prologue representing the olden days of Palestine for its screening of *Humoresque*. Or it can "create a bizarre effect or state of curiosity or anxiety." Here a good example would be the "The Palace of Diversions," the Arabian Nights spectacle radically opposed to *The River's End*, a story of the snowy Northwest shown at the Circle theater in Indianapolis. Finally, he argued, "rather no prologue at all than one which lags or limps. If it doesn't excite and arouse, it's no good." In short, he exhorted: "The Prologue must be fast, tight, and Unified!"[46] Yet Isaacson's defense would hardly be the last word. For Rothapfel, Plunkett, Hyman, and others continued to take on the frequent query, "Why the Prologue?" and to assert its value in movie theater programs throughout most of the 1920s.

By 1924, Rothapfel simply assumed that "the prologue has become an integral part of the picture presentation."[47] Eschewing rules, he argued that "each picture requires a different preliminary treatment," especially an atmosphere "that must be carefully developed and ingeniously sustained." A special feature, "with massive settings, colorful background and a wide scope," for instance, "requires a prologue built along appropriate lines." For an example at the New York Capitol, he chose one for *Rosita* (starring Mary Pickford) that reproduced one of the film's crucial scenes. It featured "the public square in the Spanish city of Toledo," with "Rosita" dancing on a raised dais before a crowd, enhanced by "brilliant color effects." However, *The Unknown Purple*, in which a purple ray renders an inventor invisible so he can wreak vengeance on his wife's lover, needed something more "simple."[48] For this "ordinary film," the entire stage and proscenium was bathed in purple light, "developing with the climax […] of a special orchestral prelude." Against those who dubiously opposed them, Plunkett defended the prologue as an act equal in importance to the feature film in the "show" that audiences had come to expect.[49] In contrast to Rothapfel, however, he argued that a prologue must not replicate "a certain scene or anything else."[50] Instead, it should be "representative" of a film's "style or type." More specifically, it could "typify the locale for one, be 'atmospherical,' strike a note of symbolism, and suggest the nature of the picture that is to follow." He warned, however, that "the only time a prologue idea will jar is when there is a constant repetition of the same scenery, soloists, music or other embellishments." Repeating a scene "Chinese in character" before a feature of the Alaskan wilds, for instance, would shock an audience much like slamming on the brakes of a speeding car. If so, how would Plunkett have reacted to the overtly contrastive prologues created by Fanchon and Marco?

In early 1925, Colby Harriman outlined the development of the prologue, which, he claimed, had reached a peak of high quality.[51] Helpfully, he also clarified how distinctly different a prologue is from a presentation. As a "divertissement," the latter is "complete in itself and does not necessarily relate to the feature picture." By contrast, "a prologue is directly related to the feature picture." Like the "prologas" of the ancient Greek theatre, he added, it is a kind of "preface" that creates an effective atmosphere for a picture and even can epitomize its story and theme. Two months later, Harriman insisted that selecting a prologue's subject "is as important as booking the feature."[52] And he offered practical tips. Actual construction demands that an exhibitor consider several

essentials for mounting a stage setting: his finances, the physical limitations of his stage, standardized equipment, rented or purchased materials for repeated use, and reliable local suppliers. All those essentials also require a schedule of preparation, weeks in advance. As a designer, Harriman ignored the personnel involved in producing a prologue, from the craftsmen to the song and dance performers. But Rouben Mamoulian, stage director of the 3,350-seeat Eastman theater in Rochester, New York (and later a well-known Hollywood filmmaker), singled out the latter's crucial attraction. The prologue or presentation supplies "the element which the picture lacks—that being the actual presence on the stage of human beings," which "adds immensely to the fascination and artistic power of the theatre."[53] Anticipating one of the conclusions in Chapter 3, he argues that "motion picture houses require a special character of stage performance"—that is, "the actual human body and voice" absent in the silent film.

By the end of 1925, the chief opponent of the prologue, ironically, was Major Edward Bowes, the managing director of the New York Capitol. Contradicting Rothapfel, he found many prologues "absurd," especially those that "take a scene in the picture from its place in the logical development of the story and attempt to reproduce it and achieve a similar atmosphere on the stage."[54] "The physical limitations of the stage," he explained, "compared with the wide and far-flung scope of the screen, only serve to make the prologue appear in the light of a cheap and puny imitation." But could he have said that about John Wenger's action-packed prologue for *Passion* at the same theater several years earlier (see Chapter 4)? Instead, he argued that orchestral music was the "logical medium" for introducing a feature film and then sustaining its atmosphere and development throughout its screening length.[55] Despite these criticisms, the following year Bowes or his stage manager mounted an elaborate, much praised prologue for *The Volga Boatman* at the Capitol (see Chapter 5). Yet, within months, he had abandoned the prologue altogether. *The Big Parade*, he claimed, was the first big feature "to break away from the tradition that important screen productions should be introduced by a stage prologue" and to rely solely on music.[56] As if his own practice was representative, he imagined that the prologue had "practically vanished." To that his colleagues objected.

Confronted with this "flaying," Hyman quickly came to the prologue's defense. Bowes might be right about the New York Capitol's programs, he admits, but that is hardly the case in "other cities and in other

theatres."[57] At his own Brooklyn Strand, the prologue "stands forth as one of the most important incidents of the program." He even accepts it as "permissible to copy a scene from the picture," but only if the performers "do nothing which would take parts out of the picture itself." The point is to "build original incidents through means of vocal solos, dance interpretations, instrumental numbers and pantomime." At the same time, Harriman reproduced Hyman's defense but added another from Russell F. Brown of the Eugene Greater Theatre Company in Oregon.[58] Unlike his colleagues, Brown wrote that, in several theaters, he had "successfully introduced prologues that led directly into the opening action of the picture." With this caveat: "we were very careful NOT to give any indication in those prologues of what the plot of the picture would unfold AFTER the opening." His box office figures confirmed that, whatever form a prologue took, "the great American public want 'something on the stage' WITH the picture program." "Why deny the possibility," he concluded, of "beautiful lighting harmonies possible in stage presentations no picture can attempt."

Neatly wrapping up this chapter is the forum that *Motion Picture Director* offered filmmaker Sidney Olcott and impresario Sid Grauman to debate whether the prologue makes or mars the feature film.[59] "The average motion picture feature," Olcott argues, "is built for an evening's entertainment" and anything that precedes it "is either superfluous, repetitious, or irrelevant." How can one compare, he adds, the feature film "upon which considerable labor and thought have been expended" to—blithely ignoring Harriman—"some theatric concoction cooked up in a few days." He also takes exception to the notion that audiences want prologues on their theater programs. It is "common knowledge," he claims, that many moviegoers "endeavor to time their arrival at the theatre to get there after the prologue is over and just as the picture starts." As if following Mamoulian, Grauman points out that "screen drama is *silent* drama and needs as its complement some auditory appeal." "The prologue affords the opportunity," he continues, "to vary the sensory appeal and prepare the audience for the picture production." A stage spectacle may create "a sense of rhythm through the dance; beauty, grace and poise through the tableaux"; and "appeal to the humorous and dramatic senses of the audience." "An atmospheric prologue," he concludes, may lead the spectator to anticipate "the dramatic qualities of the photoplay." Moreover, it can sweep the spectator into "the opening of the screen drama with barely a perceptible pause—much like a lap-dissolve. Despite

the monthly magazine's title, the caption under a photo of Grauman seems to tip the debate in his favor: the prologues at the Egyptian theater are "the talk of the country."

Notes

1. Even earlier, Thomas Ince had experimented with producing a large-cast roadshow prologue for *Civilization* (1916) that toured select movie theaters, but the strategy proved unsuccessful—"Thomas Ince Introduces Novel Projection Scheme in 'Civilization'," *Motion Picture News* (24 June 1916): 3944–3945; and "'Civilization' in Chicago," *Motography* (8 July 1916): 62.
2. "Callicott's Prologue Circuit," *Exhibitors Herald* (5 June 1920): 51.
3. A. H. Giebler, "Los Angeles News Letter," *Moving Picture World* (10 July 1920): 213.
4. "Prologue Manuscripts a Part of Press Book," *Motion Picture News* (21 August 1920): 1503.
5. "Suggestions in the Stills," *Exhibitors Herald* (21 May 1921): 44. Within months, Famous Players-Lasky would adopt a similar strategy—"Suggestions in the Stills," *Exhibitors Herald* (15 October 1921): 56.
6. "Suggestions in the Stills," *Exhibitors Herald* (2 July 1921): 53.
7. "Musical Acts to Aid Pictures," *Motion Picture News* (2 October 1920): 2645; "New Amusement Companies," *Billboard* (23 October 1920): 7.
8. "Singers—Musical Acts—Musical Attractions," *Motion Picture News* (2 October 1920): 2537; "Information," *Motion Picture News* (16 October 1920): 2908.
9. "B & K-F.P. Bare Stage Show Plans," *Exhibitors Herald* (25 December 1925): 127.
10. "Cambria Appointed to Post with Publix," *Motion Picture News* (30 October 1926): 1700.
11. See also the photographs of theatrical presentations at the New York Paramount in 1927—Leo Morgan Paramount Publix and Strand Theatre materials, Box 1, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
12. "Fanchon and Marco Offer 'Sun-Kist'," *Billboard* (18 June 1921): 21.

13. "Presentation Best Field for Acts," *Exhibitors Herald* (25 December 1925): 125. Loew's Inc. had a controlling interest in the State theater. *The Sea Beast*'s prologue at the Brooklyn Strand was simpler: standing at a ship's wheel before a huge sail, "a basso-baritone sang 'O'er the Billowy Sea'," with "the scene changing from beautiful moonlight night, with full rounded moon, to storm tossed seas, with clouds, lightning, thunder, and wind"—see the description and photograph reproduced in *Metronome* 42 (1 May 1926): 22.
14. Frank Elliott, "The Beautiful City," *Motion Picture News* (14 November 1925): 2361. See also two stage-setting photographs and a blueprint of nine acts for the "Way Out West Idea" that accompanied *Hula* with Clara Bow in 1926—Myra Finch scrapbook, volume 1, Billy Rose Theatre Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
15. "'Perfumed Idea' Is Unique Act; Dancers Play Feature Roles," *Exhibitors Herald* (2 January 1926): 69. Digital photos of this and the following theatrical presentations are viewable online from the Fanchon and Marco Collection at the Huntington Library.
16. "Elaborate Mounting, Rich Costuming in Fanchon, Marco Act," *Exhibitors Herald* (20 February 1926): 57. The Huntington Library website hosts hundreds of Fanchon and Marco stage setting photos through the 1930s.
17. *Footlight Parade* (1933) tells the story of a production company, perhaps drawing on the likes of Fanchon and Marco or even Balaban & Katz, whose bright idea was to tour stage prologues with no relation to feature films through big New York theaters. Their size, length, and extravagance, however, makes little sense as part of movie theater programs.
18. In *Kinematograph Weekly* in 1927, Frank A. Mangan, director of the Plaza Theatre in London, published a similar series of articles in which he described some of his stage prologues, along with photographs and diagrams—Julie Brown, "Framing the Atmospheric Film Prologue in Britain, 1919–1926," in Julie Brown and Annette Davison, eds., *The Sounds of the Silents in Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 204–205.
19. "Enter the Practical Prologue," *Motion Picture News* (25 December 1920): 121.

20. "Another Complete Prologue Manuscript," *Motion Picture News* (8 January 1921): 522.
21. "Detailed Plans for 'Passion' Prologue," *Motion Picture News* (22 January 1921): 837.
22. "Details for 'Peaceful Valley' Prologue," *Motion Picture News* (22 January 1921): 841. The Howard theater (Atlanta) constructed a similar background set for its prologue for *The Old Nest*.
23. See also Plunkett's descriptive text and line drawings of the "proposed stair," from top and side views, for *The Devil*—"Presentation of 'The Devil'," *Motion Picture News* (5 February 1921): 1146.
24. "Artistic 'Old Swimmin' Hole' Prologue," *Motion Picture News* (19 March 1921): 2053.
25. "A Modern Theatre Production Idea," *Exhibitor Trade Review* (6 May 1922): 1647.
26. "This Prologue for 'School Days'," *Moving Picture World* (4 February 1922): 524–525.
27. "Unusually Simple Set Piece for Effective Stage Presentation," *Motion Picture News* (19 May 1923): 2419.
28. "Construction and Presentation of Prologue," *Motion Picture News* (29 September 1923): 1571.
29. "The Phantom of the Opera—A Prologue," *Exhibitor's Herald* (12 September 1925): 39.
30. Colby Harriman, "Planning and Building Your Own State Settings," *Exhibitors Herald* (1 March 1924): V.
31. William Reilly, "A New Moving Picture World Service—Presentations for Specific Pictures," *Moving Picture World* (16 February 1926): 213.
32. Colby Harriman, "A Prologue to 'Flaming Waters'," *Moving Picture World* (16 January 1926): 243.
33. "New Pictures," *Exhibitors Herald* (15 May 1926): 136.
34. Colby Harriman, "A Prologue to 'The Sea Beast'," *Moving Picture World* (13 February 1926): 667.
35. George T. Pardy, "Ibanez's Torrent," *Motion Picture News* (6 March 1926): 1111; and Colby Harriman, "'Ibanez's Torrent' Prologue—Part II," *Moving Picture World* (3 April 1926): 363.
36. "A Moving Picture World Presentation," *Moving Picture World* (20 June 1926): 890–891. In a later series that year, Harriman offered all kinds of examples from Plunkett's prologues, to "cut out and paste in your scrap book"—see, for instance, "Production Tips,

Kinks and Wrinkles," *Moving Picture World* (2 October 1926): 312, and (23 October 1926): 508.

37. "Personal Inspection of Tom Moore's Exploitation Methods," *Motion Picture News* (22 November 1919): 3738.
38. "Inappropriate Prologues," *Camera!* (24 July 1920): 5. Founded in 1918, *Camera!* was the first trade weekly to publish in Los Angeles; most of its editorials, like this one, were written by Franchon Royer—Lisle Foote, "Franchon Royer," *Women Film Pioneers Project,* 2014; and Hoyt, *Ink-Stained Hollywood*, 111–114.
39. "Better Prologues," *Camera!* (11 September 1920): 3.
40. "Prologues Effective When Properly Presented, Says Plunkett," *Motion Picture News* (23 September 1920): 2419.
41. See also Hugo Riesenfeld's insistence that "a feature film must be introduced, and it must be introduced artistically," an audience has to "be led into it"—"Films Must Be Artistically Introduced," *Metronome* (November 1920): 80.
42. "The Beauty Market," *Motion Picture News* (31 January 1920): 1321. Plunkett was probably thinking of Frank Costello's "double exposure" presentation at the San Francisco Tivoli—"Turner & Dahnken Genius," *Exhibitors Herald* (8 May 1920): 75.
43. Charles D. Isaacson, "The Prologue—Some Suggestions and Variations of the Idea," *Motion Picture News* (6 September 1920): 3543, 3612.
44. Charles D. Isaacson, "The Prologue—Some Suggestions and Variations of the Idea," *Motion Picture News* (6 November 1920): 3543, 3612.
45. "More on the Prologue," *Motion Picture News* (20 November 1920): 3982.
46. One strategy that did not catch on was D. W. Griffith's original prologue for *The Greatest Thing in Life*, which premiered at Clune's Auditorium. It ran nearly thirty minutes, and a witness admitted that "the film would be a big success without [it]." "Griffith Himself Stages Prologue for 'Greatest Thing in Life' in Los Angeles," *Motion Picture News* (4 January 1919): 88.
47. S. L. Rothapfel, "The Prologue as a Basis for Atmosphere, Relaxation and Entertainment," *Exhibitors Trade Review* (26 April 192): 17.
48. "Reviews," *Exhibitors Herald* (15 December 1923): 45.

49. Joseph Plunkett, "Presentation Half of Bill, Says Plunkett," *Exhibitors Herald* (28 November 1925): 59.
50. Joseph Plunkett, "Need of Prologue for Effective Presentation," *Motion Picture News* (13 March 1924): 1223.
51. Colby Harriman, "An Analysis of the Prologue and Presentation," *Exhibitors Herald* (31 January 1925): 8.
52. Colby Harriman, "Making Presentations Pay," *Moving Picture World* (4 April 1925): 446.
53. "Is Entertainment or Atmosphere Chief Aim of Presentations?," *Motion Picture News* (12 December 1925): 2858.
54. Major Edward Bowes, "Bowes Flays Prolog; for Presentation," *Exhibitors Herald* (5 December 1925): 60, 64. Bowes's diatribes led both H.F. Kessler-Howes and Frank A Mangan to criticize stage prologues in England, although they continued to bolster their reputations by producing them—Brown, op.cit., 210. Mangan complained specifically of the "cheap creations of shoddy showmen," in "Frank A. Mangan Raps Flimsy Presentation," *Exhibitors Herald* (5 June 1926," 80–81.
55. "Music the Logical Medium," *Exhibitors Trade Review* (26 December 1925): 56–57.
56. "Prologue Passes from Special Showing," *Motion Picture News* (3 June 1927): 2197.
57. "Hyman Finds Prologue Best for Strand," *Exhibitors Herald* (2 January 1926): 63–64; and "The Prologue Is Paramount," *Exhibitors Trade Review* (9 January 1926): 9. As a sign of Hyman's influence, the first article was reproduced in *Metronome* 42 (1 April 1926): 17.
58. Colby Harriman, "In Defense of the Prologue," *Moving Picture World* (9 January 1926): 179.
59. Sidney Olcott and Sid Grauman, "Do Prologues Make or Mar a Picture?" *Motion Picture Director* (July 1926): 16.

CHAPTER 7

Epilogue

A brief epilogue lets me sketch out a few questions for further research. One, of course, is: did theater managers continue to stage prologues after 1926? According to trade press articles and photographs, the answer is yes, but with some qualification. In February 1927, at the New York Strand, Plunkett mounted an elaborate prologue that reproduced the castle scene in *The Night of Love*. Before a huge backdrop of interior castle walls, a large assembly of royalty fills the stage, with the villainous Duke posed in a tall opening in the background (stage left).[1] Later that year, at the Brooklyn Strand, Hyman put on "All Around Town" to introduce *East Side, West Side*, the story of an East Side tough who makes good. A harmonica band sits on a high long fence before the reused Brooklyn Bridge drop, with performances by the band, a whistler, a singer, and a "one-legged dancer."[2] Even the Granada Theatre in Santa Barbara, California, staged a big prologue for the WWI comedy *Buck Privates*. Before a backdrop of the film's Gasthaus, a band sits on beer barrels, and barmaids serve great steins of beer.[3] Performances include music, "a military dance by clever children, a goofy dance by two buck privates," and a finale of the title song. The coup de grace, however, was Grauman's massive staging, "The Meeting Place of the Populace," at the Chinese theater for *The King of Kings*.[4] A cast of over one hundred players performed four long scenes in front of an enormous palace exterior: "Twilight Prayers of the Common People," "Dance of the Ebony Slave," "The Chant of the Israelite Priests," and "The Holy City."[5] Like Grauman's prologue

R. Abel, *The Exhibitor as Producer*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-71781-9_7

for *The Gold Rush*, these spectacular scenes ran so long that an irritated DeMille "vowed never to open another film in Hollywood."

A further question is: how long did stage prologues continue after 1927, especially during the transition to sound cinema?[6] If the human voice could now accompany a film (however compromised, initially), the transition to sound included installation of the required equipment and was costly for movie theaters, especially smaller ones. The careers of at least four prominent New York theater managers offer partial answers, as they took higher positions within the movie industry. In late 1927, Colby Harriman, moved to Washington, D.C. to organize stage presentations for Stanley-Crandall theaters in Baltimore.[7] A year later, he was managing director of Loew's theater chain in the East (with offices in New York) and visited Washington weekly to get "stage units set and routined for the circuit of houses to follow."[8] In 1928, perhaps replacing Harriman, Joseph Plunkett became head of the Stanley Company's production department to create stage-unit shows for its theater circuit.[9] By early 1929, he was "general manager of the Radio-Keith-Orpheum [RKO] chain," which numbered 700 theaters.[10] In 1928, Stanley hired Edward Hyman "to produce shows not only for the Brooklyn house, but for the theaters in Washington, Baltimore, and Richmond."[11] And he continued working for Stanley through the next decade. By 1929, as general production manager of Publix Theatres, Frank Cambria was producing stage spectacles like "Pearls of Bagdad" to accompany a weak feature, *The Hole in the Wall*, at the New York Paramount.[12] All of these examples suggest that, along with introductory filmed prologues, theatrical presentations independent of any feature film were likely replacing prologues in large movie theaters. And they confirm Vincent Longo's argument that live performances continued to play a significant role in their programs, especially in first-run palace cinemas.[13] Moreover, Hollywood studios were becoming heavily involved in their production and/or financing. When those performances acted as program headliners, with popular band leaders like Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington, Longo adds, audiences often preferred them to the features, much as they did some earlier prologues that introduced not only "ordinary" films but also features with stars. (Fig. 7.1).

One more question extends beyond the geographical bounds of this study. Did stage prologues appear in countries other than the United States? The trade press offers several tantalizing examples. In 1923, in Melbourne, Australia, the New Princess theatre staged "an exceptional

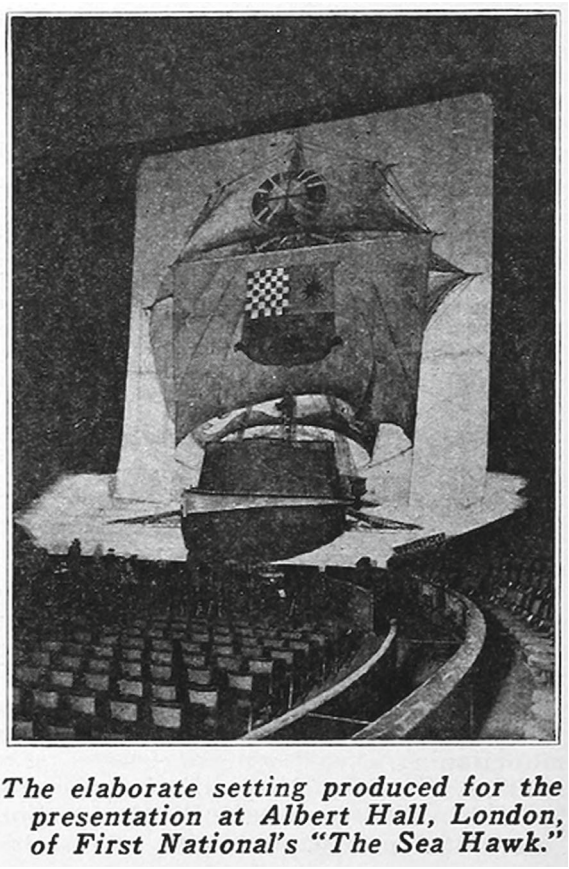


Fig. 7.1 *The Sea Hawk* stage prologue, Royal Albert Hall, London

prologue" for *Robin Hood*, showing "a replica of the King Richard castle set," covered with creeping ivy and backed by a blue cyclorama.[14] A play of lights shifts from morning to evening, two pages enter and "sound a trumpet call," and the castle gates open to reveal the screen and the film's initial scene. In 1925, an unnamed theater in Victoria, Australia, produced a prologue for *The Ten Commandments* that featured the exterior of a huge Egyptian palace created by curtains, transparencies, and a "distant" backdrop.[15] In 1923, Tim McCoy brought "twenty living North

American Indians" to star in a prologue for *The Covered Wagon* at the London Pavilion.[16] In 1926, the 6,000-seat Royal Albert Hall in London mounted a majestic prologue for the French epic film, *Michel Strogoff*. Among the 150 performers were "prominent British stage players" and "scores of dancing girls" engaged in a "colorful Tartar atmosphere."[17] Two years earlier, the Royal Albert Hall created an equally impressive prologue for *The Sea Hawk*.[18] Filling the entire stage was a huge Spanish galleon with full-set sails, its deck manned by victorious Elizabethan soldiers. The ship's prow "was 24 feet wide and 16 feet high"; and the whole set (measuring 104 by 130 feet) could "hold a number of the Royal Welsh choir and 27 effects men." At the end of the prologue, "the big foresail was furled," revealing the film's initial seascape scene.

Two recent essays offer even more pertinent information. In Britain, unlike in the United States, Julie Brown has found that the most elaborate stage prologues, like that for *The Sea Hawk*, were "one-off productions for evening trade showings for trade audiences and special guests."[19] And such specials would continue into the late 1920s, evidenced in the London Tivoli's prologue for *Trail of'98* in 1929.[20] Brown also gives several reasons why staging prologues, especially in "ordinary" theaters, was problematic. The lack of large movie theater construction after the war meant that existing theaters had limited stage space for theatrical presentations, which were especially costly for smaller venues.[21] Also, licensing laws could prohibit or restrict the employment of local talent.[22] Moreover, the practices of showing two features on a program as well as running continuous programs could limit the time available for extra attractions.[23] A unique practice that some British exhibitors did develop, however, was the "advance prologue," a presentation put on a week before a feature film's screening that served as an advertisement.[24] This could be a "minimally animated tableau-style poster," as for *The Navigator,* or a more standard presentation, as for *The Thief of Bagdad* at the Brixton Palladium. In Brazil, Luciana Corrêa de Araújo's fascinating research has revealed that four theaters in Rio de Janeiro's new Cinelândia complex —the Capitólio, Glório, Império, and Odeon—were mounting stage prologues in 1926. They, too, were unique, as carnivalesque revues mixing high and low culture references that drew on the model of the *teatro de revista*.[25] At the Glório, for instance, the "Parisina" prologue had no direct link to the feature film, *Her Sister from Paris*. Instead, the traditional figures of a *compère* and *comère* introduced a series of sketches, including a parade of typical Parisian types,

comic exchanges, and song and dance acts. Although these prologues were popular in offsetting the "foreign influence" of imported features, they proved expensive, lengthy, and could not be sustained.[26] The trade press and newspapers also claimed they were "poisonous" for sought-after middle-class audiences.[27]

These examples provoke further research questions. In Britain, would newspapers reveal that prologues were actually staged at times other than for trade showings and, if so, how widely throughout the country? Even if limited, were they popular or not, as some reports indicated they were not, and were they waning by 1926?[28] Similarly, in Australia, were prologues only put on in movie palaces showing special feature films, or did they also appear in smaller theaters and/or for "ordinary" films? Were stage prologues a phenomenon in other European countries such as France and even elsewhere in the world?[29] In what kinds of theaters and for what kinds of feature films? Finally, did prologues give way to revues and the presentation of separate theatrical acts, as they did in the United States?

Finally, returning to local issues, at least two questions barely considered in the previous chapters deserve attention. How might exhibitors have linked their prologues to lobby decors, local store window displays, and other "Business Builders" that could lure audiences into movie theaters? The trade press, for instance, often described the efforts of theaters to frame or line their lobbies in such a way as to prepare moviegoers for both the stage prologue and feature film they would experience in the auditorium. Supplementing those descriptions were nearly as many photographs of lobbies as there were of prologue sets. Moreover, what can be said about those moviegoers and their responses to the stage prologues? What can one know not only about who they were, but also how they differed from big cities to small towns, from one region to another, as well as in age, gender, and class? Even if they were categorized largely as *white* (however heterogeneously defined), how exactly would a specific performed song, for instance, help moviegoers get in the "proper mood" for a prologue? And how might the choice of a song and its possible meaning, especially in the case of a popular tune, change from the historical context of the Great War and its aftermath to that of the heady days of Hollywood's dominance in the mid- to late 1920s? A most difficult task, no doubt!

There's lots more work to do.

Notes

1. A photograph of this prologue is reproduced in *Motion Picture News* (18 February 1927): 602.
2. "Production Hints from Edward L. Hyman," *Moving Picture World* (17 December 1927): 36.
3. "Prologue," *Universal Weekly* (10 September 1927): 31.
4. Grauman's Chinese Theatre ad, *Variety* (11 May 1927): 63.
5. Charles Beardsley, *Hollywood's Master Showman: The Legendary Sid Grauman* (New York: Cornwall Books, 1983), 20. A photograph of this prologue set is reproduced on this page.
6. The stage prologues for three theaters in *Footlight Parade* (1933)—from "Honeymoon Hotel" to "By a Waterfall" and "Shanghai Lil"—become more and more spectacular and seem to need no following feature film. Rather than implausibly suggest that prologues could function in the transition to sound cinema, they confirm how film can stage a theatrical presentation far better and more extravagantly.
7. "Baltimore," *Motion Picture News* (11 November 1927): 1510.
8. "In Washington, D.C. - - - - - There Is:," *Variety* (2 January 1929): 193; and Hardie Meakin, "Variety Bureau, Washington, D.C.," *Variety* (29 May 1929): 61.
9. "Take New Stanley Posts," *Motion Picture News* (21 April 1928): 1264-C. Earlier in the 1920s, Adolph Zukor had gained controlling interest in the Stanley Company's circuit.
10. "Plunkett Named General Manager of RKO Houses," *Exhibitors Herald-World* (19 January 1929): 21. The following year, when Paramount-Publix, Warner's, RKO, and Fox informally divided up the country, Plunkett was still at RKO, and Harold B. Franklin was serving as the western manager of the Fox theater circuit—"Big Four Smoking Peace Pipe' Divide Country; Swap Theatres, Playing Time?," *Motion Picture News* (19 July 1930): 19. RKO formed from the merger of two vaudeville companies (Keith-Albee and Orpheum), a radio company, and a production company—Richard Jewell, *RKO Radio Pictures: A Titan Is Born*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.
11. Lee S. Ferguson, "Development of Screen and Stage Shows Traced in Career of E.L. Hyman," *Motion Picture News* (7 January 1928): 43.

12. "'Meet the Missus' A Christie Talker Steals the Honors at the Paramount," *Motion Picture News* (20 April 1929): 1254. In this 28-minute show were a vaudeville team playing tourists, soloists, a dozen ballet girls, and a singing ensemble. See also Cambria's revue titled "The Jazz Clock Shop" that accompanied *The Lady Lies*—Fred Schader, "Broadway Show Reviews," *Motion Picture News* (14 September 1929): 982.
13. Vincent Longo, "A Hard Act to Follow: Live Performance in the Age of the Hollywood Studio System (1920–1950)," Doctoral Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2022.
14. "Elaborate Prologue Staged for 'Robin Hood' Run," *Motion Picture News* (21 January 1923): 2563.
15. A photograph of this stage set is reproduced in *Exhibitors Herald* (12 December 1925): 58.
16. "The Film World," *The Times* (29 August 1923): 8; and "Covered Wagon a Hit in London," *Motion Picture News* (22 September 1923): 1458. The film circulated at length in other venues such as the Aldershot military depot, where theater staff "dressed up as Indians and gave a brief prologue similar to the one used in the picture's premier at the London Pavilion"—"Goes Big in England," *Moving Picture World* (10 January 1925): 165.
17. "'Strogoff' Feb. 8 Release," *Motion Picture News* (13 November 1926): 1855.
18. "Elaborate Effects Now Used in English Presentations," *Exhibitors Herald* (29 November 1924): 32; and "'Sea Hawk' in London," *Exhibitors Trade Review* (6 December 1924): 59.
19. Julie Brown, "Framing the Atmospheric Film Prologue in Britain, 1919–1926," in Julie Brown and Annette Davison, eds., *The Sounds of the Silents in Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 205.
20. Op.cit., 216.
21. Op.cit., 211.
22. Op.cit., 214–215.
23. Op.cit., 213–214.
24. Op.cit., 211–212.
25. Luciana Corrèa de Araujo, "'Poisonous Prologues' at Cinelândia, Rio de Janeiro," *Silent Film Prologues in Brazil* catalogue (University of Reading: Reading): 17–18.
26. Op.cit., 14.

27. Op.cit., 22–24.
28. Late in the publication process, Ian Christie found a 1925 photograph of the West End Rialto theater (London), in which an old man and a boy, according to the caption, are performing part of a "prologue for the silent film *His People*."
29. In 1928, Frank Mangan was producing "high grade presentations" at the Paramount theater in Paris—"France's Heroes See 'La Grande Epreuve' at the Paramount, Paris," *Paramount Around the World* (1 June 1928): 18; and "Paramount's High Grade Presentations in Celebrated Paris Theatre," *Paramount Around the World* (1 July 1928): 17.

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Motion Picture News
Motography
Moving Picture World
Shadowland
Variety

Newspapers

Chicago Post
Detroit Sunday Free Press
Detroit Sunday News
Los Angeles Times
New York Times

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