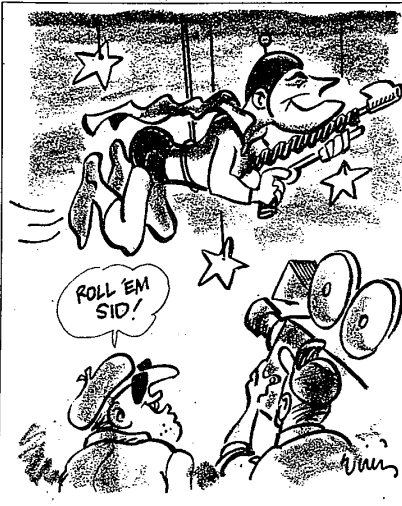


# 'Special effects' dive in '80s



In an effort to avoid a financial crash, film makers likely will run out of space and special effects "right into the ground" during the early 1980s, predicts Frank Beaver, professor of communication at the University of Michigan.

"Hollywood is going to drive a good thing right into the ground by continuing to make films about 'right into the ground' during the early 1980s," says Beaver. "It may, in fact, already have begun to do so."

Space movies are one of the best mediums for special effects, which Beaver says film makers are using for their own sensationalistic appeal — much as cinemascope, cinerama, three-dimension and sensurround were capitalized on during the 1950s and later — rather than to enhance the story.

But special effects have not confined themselves to the galaxies, Beaver points out.

The movie "1941" could have been "an interesting little comedy," he says, if the producers — who spent \$24 million on the film — had not been so sidetracked with special effects, "that's all it was — a special effects extravaganza."

THE INDUSTRY, he explains, seems destined to repeat itself, as it did during the 1930s when films about 18th-century heroes were in vogue.

The market became so saturated with that genre of film, he recalls, that one movie exhibitor finally proclaimed, "Don't send me any more movies where the hero writes with a

## film

feather." Now, Beaver imagines a moviehouse manager making a parallel statement of "Don't send me any more movies where the hero flies through space."

With or without benefit of space, sequels and comic book-like films, such as "Superman," also will flood the theaters, Beaver thinks.

"We're going to see the continuation of highly escapist films, the comic book approach to film. Producers are making a number of films based on comic books, films that look like comic books, as well as take their inspiration from them."

In general, Beaver concludes, moviegoers themselves can divine what films will be made during the 1980s by simply looking to the past. The films currently on the market can be traced back to about five strains of movies made during the 1970s. Beaver adds that more films will be made from readily available sources, such as novels about popular characters and already existing subjects.

Making films dependent on the novelty of special effects or the familiarity of topics that have already proved their mass appeal reflects a strong trend toward conservatism among film makers, according to Beaver.

DURING THE 1970s, a practice called "blind booking" evolved wherein exhibitors compete to obtain a movie without ever having screened it, he notes.

Also, a profit system was established that provided movie houses with an increasing percentage of a movie's proceeds from week to week so that exhibitors were forced to keep movies for longer periods of time than previously.

As a repercussion of these extended runs, Beaver points out, movie houses have begun to show more than one film at a time, in hopes that the more successful movies will take up the financial slack caused by the less popular films.

Another aspect of commercial pressure on film is that the cost of publicity for films has skyrocketed, Beaver says. That phenomenon also will probably

affect the availability of foreign films, which are even more difficult to promote than domestic products.

"Distributors just aren't picking them up," Beaver says, noting that the foreign films "Black and White" and "Madame Rosa," both Oscar winners, have not yet been shown in a commercial theater in Ann Arbor.

The only refuge for artistic experimentation in the near future, Beaver speculates, is in films that are the property of stars who are sufficiently wealthy and established to indulge in "personal expression."

Otherwise, Beaver concludes, "until blind booking disappears and profit-making on a graduated scale is reconsidered, we will continue to see more films that look as if they've been put together by a committee."

## Vocal group chapter moves

The Farmington Hills Chapter of Sweet Adelines recently moved its rehearsal location to the Trinity Episcopal Church on Lamuera between Middlebelt and Orchard Lake Road, Farmington.

The chapter is busy preparing for the regional competition in London, Ont., the first weekend of May.

New developments have made it possible for young women 16 years or older to join the Farmington Hills chapter. A membership party will be held in

May. For details, call membership person Barbara Jeraloman at 425-5475.

## O'Mara appearing

Michael O'Mara, vocalist and guitarist, will entertain for two weeks beginning April 15 at Win Schuler's Restaurant lounge, The Ha'Penny, in West Bloomfield. O'Mara, who is also a composer, presents an array of folk-rock music by today's top songwriters.

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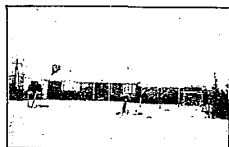
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