

# Amos 'n' Andy

**C**HECK and Double Check, the motion picture built around the affairs of Amos 'n' Andy, was, according to film standards, a complete anomaly. It had none of the outstanding merits by which film values are weighed—it added nothing to the prestige of the performers or the producers—yet it brought in an almost record gross for the maker.

*In brief, it was a successful flop.*

Motion pictures which warrant Academy awards and similar honors in the world of celluloid, manage to roll up a tradition about themselves through the medium of professional critics and the word-of-mouth advertising of the public at large. Both the critics and the spectators damned Check and Double Check with the faintest of praise.

But the sheer magnetic power of Gosden and Correll themselves drew audiences into the theaters where the production was shown. And despite the indifferent quality of the picture the boys suffered not a whit in the prestige won by their work on the air.

Those radio listeners so firmly addicted to Amos 'n' Andy that nothing could shake them loose from their devotion, paid little, if any, attention to the quality of the film. The more discriminating remained unaffected



Charles Correll, Andy (left) and Freeman Gosden, Amos, as they appeared at the microphone on the West Coast last month

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because they were able to discern that Gosden and Correll had been more imposed upon than featured.

In typical fashion the picture magnates merely had traded on the Amos 'n' Andy popularity and, instead of actually featuring the comedians, used them incidentally as mere justification for the sale of the picture on the strength of their names.

So the real histrionic skill of these super artists was in no way tested. And although the picture itself was an artis-

tic failure despite its financial earnings, the boys met increased radio popularity, and NBC executives managed to escape the wrath of Mr. Sarnoff. It was a narrow squeak for the ones he threatened to place under his wrath. The day only was saved by the throttling grip which Gosden and Correll held on public fancy.

There are many who hint that their current sojourn in Palm Springs, California, was arranged in order that certain

future motion picture plans might be discussed at leisure, but no amount of interrogation would elicit verification from either of the principals. Their plans for the future are of necessity uncertain because, after all, there still is the sponsor to be considered.

All of the original options have been taken up excepting that of 1936, but it is not signified that the tooth-paste firm which sponsors them will not prevail upon their stars to accept a renewal of their contract.

"After the present arrangement runs out," Gosden declares, "we'll be sitting out on the curbstone again," but it would be difficult for the rankest sentimentalist to conjure tears over that forlorn prediction. Even if their present sponsors were to feel that Amos 'n' Andy had run out their string with them, Gosden and Correll hardly would find themselves in the plight of many artists who have become so identified with a product that other advertisers are afraid to employ them lest the public be unable to disassociate them from wares. So thoroughly individualistic are Gosden and Correll; so completely have their characters dominated their record-making "run" on the air, that the product has been subjugated by the broadcasts.

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**P**ROBABLY both Gosden and Correll would welcome a few weeks away from the air and a corresponding stretch of time during which there were no scripts to write and no personal appearances to make. But to picture them permanently out of the amusement field would be parallel to contemplating a world without radio. And in addition to the public clamor there would be their own reaction to a universe suddenly shorn of acclaim and homage. Financially there would be no problem.

Any mention of their opulence prompts the usual query about the sums earned by the boys. Naturally this is a matter which they do not discuss, so speculation on their wealth is reduced to the field of "estimate." Estimation, in matters of this sort, is tantamount to mere gossip, hence there is no firm ground on which to base a conclusion.

The general opinion is that from their radio contract the boys earn \$150,000 each, annually. Added to

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these are sums from various sources, particularly personal appearances for which they are solicited continuously. It is safe to say they do not play theatrical engagements for less than \$2,500 weekly, each.

PERHAPS a hint to their earnings from the stage can be gleaned from a chance comment made by Correll to a group of intimates. Following the bank moratorium in 1932 he revealed that their day of reckoning with a theater manager had occurred on the second day of the financial holiday. The boys were paid in bills.

"I certainly was uncomfortable," he is reported to have complained. "I had all of my pockets stuffed with bills, and the rest filled a small suitcase which I always carry for odds and ends of clothing. I was nervous lugging that bag around

but just had to take my chances. I threw an old shirt over the top of the money and closed the grip, and I guess nobody was suspicious because nothing happened."

But all of these tales of their incomes are born in the realm of conjecture, and are not offered as concrete information. It is easy to assume that, whatever their earnings, they are among the largest in radio, as is befitting their status as outstanding performers in that field. Their sponsors are enthusiastic about the huge sum which they have turned over to these greatest of stars, and have no feeling of having been "heisted" into an excessive contract by virtue of the program's popularity.

They point to the prosperity which Gosden and Correll have brought them, and were they reticent in this acknowledgement the enduring contract which they have had with the boys would attest their gratification over the selection they once felt was a venture.

In summarizing the careers (to date) of Gosden and Correll, the contemplation of the basis for their enduring popularity automatically intrudes itself. A little inquiry among fellow-artists of the air reveals not so much the reasons for the boys' standing with the public as the reasons why contemporaries cannot even approach their greatness.

Indifferently, many ascribe it to "the breaks," "getting into radio when it was in its infancy"; a few of the more generously minded admit the boys have something on the ball. But it remained for a country-bred artist of the air, a mere singer of fireside ballads, to get at the root of Gosden and Correll's unflinching favor

He is the Arkansas Woodchopper of WLS, and his piercing observation seems to epitomize the entire issue.

"When those boys close the studio doors behind them," he declares, "they cease to be Gosden and Correll and literally become Amos 'n' Andy. Those doors sepa-

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rate them entirely from their everyday life, and they seem to be transported into a world where they are really the two Harlem boys struggling with their momentous adventures. So completely do they shuffle off their personal characteristics that some sort of transmigration seems to have taken place.

"And that is only half of it. With the same consummate skill they flit from the Amos 'n' Andy characters into all of the others which they portray, so smoothly and with such fine fidelity to the characteristics of each different personality, that they are practically magicians. And these wizards, as with any wizards, hold the public in their spell."

All of which, reduced to its briefest equation, forces into the open the conclusion that Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll are sheer artists. They are consummate actors who, by the process of trial and error, discovered their true medium. Had radio not offered itself, the very theory that a cork will float eventually would have supplied an outlet for their histrionic ability.

The Booths, the Barretts, the Keens and the Irvings were ever just the Booths, the Barretts, et al, aggrandized by the glittering robes of mummery. Even greater than these are Gosden and Correll. Robbed of the grand gesture, the arena in which to strut, and all of the other false props to Thespian achievement, they must strive in an atmosphere of invisibility, winning their plaudits on unadulterated art and skill alone.

If radio had not another accomplishment to its credit, it has earned its niche in the Hall of Fame for bringing the creators of Amos 'n' Andy to the world of listeners. Gosden and Correll owe far less to radio than radio does to them, and their names should be enshrined permanently for the enduring glorification of a medium which was raised in large measure by them from a status of admitted puerility to adult stage.