

John Balaban Real Pioneer For Theaters

Showman Dies at 62
But Fans Recall
His Influence

CHICAGO (AP)—Movie pioneer John Balaban's death recalls to film fans his big role with his brothers in moving motion pictures from the shoebox theater to palatial halls.

Balaban, who died yesterday at the age of 62, was regarded as the "showman" of the seven Balaban brothers who pioneered in the motion picture field.

The brothers, sons of a Russian immigrant who operated a West Side grocery, leased their first theater in 1908. The theater had 104 folding camp chairs.

'Give What They Want'

They parlayed a sense of showmanship and a "give the public what it wants" policy into a nationwide motion picture-making and exhibiting organization.

At his death, Balaban was president of the Balaban & Katz Corp., operator of nearly 100 theaters, including 40 in Chicago, a director of the American Broadcasting Co. and Paramount Pictures, Inc. An older brother, Barney of New York, is president of Paramount. Three other brothers are dead and two own an independent motion picture house chain operating in the Chicago area.

The brothers were credited with building the first deluxe movie house in 1917, the first in the nation to have mechanical air conditioning. John and Barney got the idea of air cooling the theater from watching coal dust being cooled and watered down at a coal yard where they had worked as youths.

Set Precedents

Then followed a series of luxurious theaters which set the precedent for other movie houses throughout the United States.

At the same time John brought in acts, which previously could be seen only in vaudeville or on the legitimate stage.

In the 1920s and early 30s the Balaban shows were packaged and toured the country.

The band era came and Balaban hired the big names, like Fred Waring and Tommy Dorsey, who had in his band a singer named Frank Sinatra.

Hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Balaban offered the U. S. government the facilities of Chicago's first television station to train radar technicians. More than 67,000 radarmen were trained at the station during World War II.

He was active in many civic organizations and was former chairman of the United Jewish Appeal fund drive.

INSIDE HOLLYWOOD

By BOB THOMAS
HOLLYWOOD (AP)—The awards season is over at last — thank heavens!

No longer will the TV viewer be subjected to an endless procession of excited and grateful winners—who are not too excited to express their gratitude to everyone from their kindergarten teachers on up. No longer will critics be forced to point out the lack of entertainment values of such shows.

Not until next year, anyway. That's the trouble with critics — always carping and never offering constructive advice. I shall reverse the trend. Awards shows CAN be entertaining. Here are some helpful suggestions on how to make them so:

1. How about a ballet number? Marge Champion could be painted gold to symbolize Emmy and Gower could portray a golden Oscar. The gimmick is that they are in conflict through most of the number, but end in each other's arms at the finish.

2. Put the awards on a competitive basis. Make the stars fight each other on an intellectual level, answering such questions as, "Who shot Lincoln?" (Questions may have to be easier than this.) The quiz winner gets the award, "his" and "her" swimming pools and Art Linkletter.

3. Make the winners take a lie-detector test when they receive the statuettes. If they flunk, they lose the award. Thus they won't be able to thank everyone in sight but will be forced to say, "I must confess I played this role against the advice of my agent, with a no-talent director and a fat-headed costar."

4. How about an Academy Award losers show? The four losers in each category would be given equal time with the winner to expose their feelings in the matter. I can imagine such lively comments as: "It was big studio politics that licked me," "Who wants to win an award and become a has-been?" and "We was robbed!"

Perhaps the motion picture and TV academies will disregard these suggestions as undignified. Academies are great organs for dignity, as many a bored TV viewer can tell you.

Anyway, I tried.

Antarctic Icebreaker Arrives in Seattle

SEATTLE (AP)—The Navy icebreaker Atka, one of two Seattle-based ships which have been fighting the Antarctic ice for months, arrived here Friday morning.

The Atka returned from five months in the Antarctic where it had been engaged in Operation Deepfreeze. The expedition established bases for the International Geophysical Year studies.

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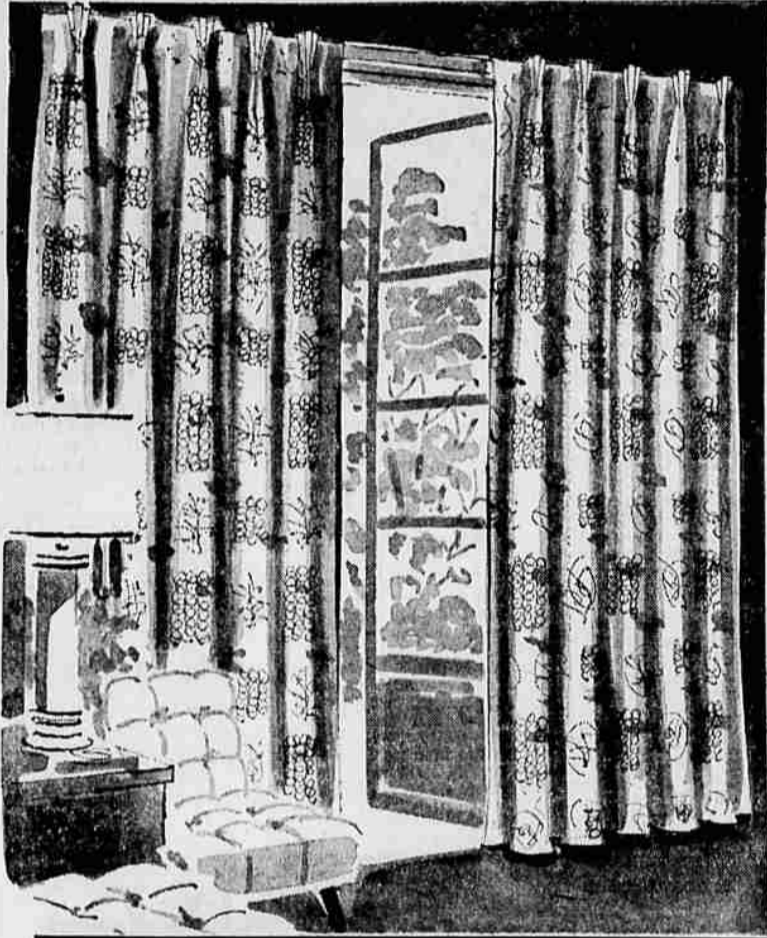
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