



JAMES THE GREAT
Cameron's latest has shattered the \$2 billion mark and may be the top grossing film of all time

to offer 3D on film will retard the digital conversion, confuse our industry's patrons and devalue the expanding but still nascent consumer image of digital 3D.

I have seen 3D on film demonstrated. It looks good, but not as good as digital. And the demonstrations to date have been in pristine environments with good prints and sophisticated operators. I can only imagine what 3D looks like on a scratched or dusty print several weeks or months into a run at an average cinema. The film 3D model is less expensive than digital 3D. But to me, here the old adage rings true: you get what you pay for.

Another significant, and perhaps fatal, problem lies in the lack of unanimous support from the major studios. In meetings with five of the major distribution offices in late January, I learned that one studio aggressively supports 3D on film, two studios reluctantly support it as an interim strategy to quickly expand the number of 3D capable screens and two major companies (with dense upcoming 3D release schedules) emphatically oppose 3D on film and will not distribute their movies to any such locations. I do understand that the 3D release schedule in 2010 demands more screens, but I don't believe that film-based technologies are the way to do it.

The digital transition should, but hasn't yet, expanded the potential for independent movies

I am writing this column, as I often do, on an airplane—this time leaving Utah where I attended and spoke at the Sundance Film Festival. During my weekend in Park City at Mr. Redford's event, I watched some entertaining and thought-provoking movies, heard brilliant moviemakers describe their passion and work, witnessed high-tech but

low-cost micro movie shoots, participated in a stimulating panel discussion about the future of the cinema and engaged in many random conversations about independent movies and digital technologies.

One would think that the digital revolution would expand the potential for independent movies in our members' cinemas. For starters, digital technologies dramatically reduce the costs of production. At Sundance I watched young moviemakers capture brilliant images on HD camcorders that cost about \$5,000. Digital technologies also increase the efficiency (and reduce the costs) of editing and post-production. As for distribution, digital cinema could eventually reduce costs by 80-90 percent over the fragile and tedious distribution format of celluloid film. Finally, in exhibition, digital cinema provides the cinema operator much greater flexibility in programming.

However, as my colleague Patrick Corcoran described in last month's *Boxoffice*, more and more people are coming to the cinema to watch fewer and fewer movies. The top 20 percent of the movies released over the past two years garnered north of 90 percent of all box office grosses. Yet twenty years ago, the top 20 percent of movies earned 75 percent of the grosses. I was stunned to learn of this paradox. Somehow, as digital technologies expand the universe of affordable movie production, distribution and exhibition—and as the multiplex environment offers more screens within a complex to play more movies at the same time—the biggest movies are earning even more of the revenues.

There are many possible explanations for this and no more room in this column. I will simply conclude by saying that digital cinema and 3D will grow the movie distribution and exhibition industries. I just hope we can find a way to use the technologies to grow a more diverse film slate at the same time. ●

JACK WARNER ON 3D

BOXOFFICE / March 28, 1953

It is time for exhibitors and public to be informed of the scientific facts of three dimensions on the motion picture screen.

The most important fact, and I stress the word 'fact,' is that polaroid viewers are a comfortable part of viewing properly photographed three-dimensional motion pictures. Physicists and physiologists, with all the facts of optical science in their possession, as yet are unable to conceive of the possibility of true three-dimensional film viewing without an accessory. We have proved to our own satisfaction that there is no inconvenience of any kind in wearing polaroid viewers. We are convinced that the public will wear such viewers as effortlessly as they wear wrist watches or carry fountain pens.

Those who have not yet had our experience with three-dimensional film production, as in *House of Wax*, are prone to say that they have three-dimensional film which may be seen without glasses. It is true that you can see it without glasses but it isn't three-dimensional film. There are some effects or illusions possible in some small degree, but science and our experience prove to us that the only real thing in third-dimension is the method we are using to photograph, project and see.

Self-appointed spokesmen have decried the use of viewers. They say the public won't take to them. That is not true. The public, I have noted on certain occasions, disagrees with the so-called 'experts' and makes up its own mind. If they like something contrary to the experts' prophecies, the experts simply find they've been wrong again. The public decides, as it always will.

We are the proud owners of as fine a set of press quotes on *House of Wax* as anyone ever enjoyed. We believe the press very ably represents public opinion. We do not believe the press supports unsupported claims. Exhibitors have told us how revolutionary, exciting and enjoyable our *House of Wax* is. The RCA Victor officers and board of directors applauded a showing we held for them at the studio. Such response is more than gratifying. We encountered no reluctance to wear viewers. There was no consciousness of them. That is because the picture has been photographed intelligently and because optical science gives us thrilling true third dimension on the screen.

We know the hazards of prophecy and pioneering from the days when we began to introduce sound in the midst of derision from our own fellow producers. One prophet even said sound would keep awake those who went to film theaters to sleep. There were prophecies, later embarrassing to those who made them, that sound was a brief wonder, merely a quick circus attraction that wouldn't last 30 days. We worked it out anyway, believing public, press and exhibitors would justify our hopes for it. They did. We hear the same type of anti third-dimension talk within production circles. Many who foretell doom for third-dimension did the same with sound. Many producers predict, with little knowledge, many things that only the public will decide. Our showings to date to the country's leading exhibitors and members of the industry press corps indicate that such opinion-droppers and crystal-ball-gazers are wrong.

To summarize, I urge the motion picture makers to let the public decide in the matters of merit and material and to refrain from confusing with claims, counterclaims, statements impossible of proof, prophecies and early decisions on 'They will or they won't.' Let us eliminate confusion instead of creating it. Let us build our industry instead of tearing it down.

[House of Wax was the first color 3D film released by a major studio and was the third top grosser on the BOXOFFICE Barometer for 1953-54. Another 3D film, *Bwana Devil*, was the top scorer during the same period.]