

# THE SPIEGEL TOUCH



Producer Sam Spiegel, left, with David Lean, director of "Lawrence of Arabia."

by JAMES F. FIXX

LONDON.

ONE DAY last year, according to a story making the rounds among the international film set, producer Sam Spiegel ("Bridge on the River Kwai," "The African Queen," "On the Waterfront") picked up the phone in his London office. At the other end of the line was Billy Wilder, one of Hollywood's most famous names and a writer, producer, and director whose earnings are enough to give him a respectable rank among the country's major industries. Wilder said he happened to be in London and understood that Spiegel was having difficulty getting a satisfactory script for a film he wanted to do. Yes, Spiegel said, he was; several writers had tried it but none had even come close.

"Sam," said Wilder, "I'll work on it for you for three weeks, free, if you'll do something for me."

"It's a deal," said Spiegel. "What can I do?"

Wilder explained that he would like to spend the three weeks in a suite at the Hotel de Paris on the Riviera. The difficulty was that the suite he wanted was always held in readiness for special guests of Prince Rainier of Monaco and was never available to anyone else for more than three days at a time.

"I'll call you back," said Spiegel.

Twenty minutes later Spiegel called Wilder. "It's all set," he said. "You have the suite for three weeks."

Thereupon, Wilder headed for the Hotel de Paris to rewrite the script. Meanwhile Spiegel, who hadn't had the vaguest idea how he was going to get Wilder into Prince Rainier's suite, started hurriedly pulling all the tangled strings that would make his promise good.

Even if this story were totally apocryphal (and the most reliable indications are that it is not), it would nevertheless illustrate several astounding facets of an astounding personality. For Sam Spiegel, one of the canniest, most ingenious, and most resourceful producers in the world today, has enormous confidence in his own ability to get things done, the performance record to justify that confidence, and a consistent serendipity that is the envy and the despair of lesser men.

ALL these qualities come together as never before in Spiegel's latest film, "Lawrence of Arabia" (see page 29), a movie as remarkable in its way as the man behind it is in his. And there is no question, despite the roster of big names involved, exactly who is behind it. Says Spiegel simply: "Somebody has to be the boss."

The boss in this case is a rotund, energetic, cigar-smoking man of sixty

or so who has an almost legendary ability to bring together divergent men, ideas, and visions and somehow weld their differences and contradictions into a film whose seams rarely show the tensions and strains that have gone into it. It is this ability that makes Spiegel a kind of focal point at which all the lines of independent film production come together. For an understanding of what independent production means, there could hardly be a better tutor than Sam Spiegel; and for an understanding of Spiegel, there could hardly be a better touchstone than "Lawrence of Arabia" and his attitudes toward it. Spiegel, like T. E. Lawrence, is a bafflingly complex person. His cultured Viennese accent, with its overtones of London and Park Avenue, can at one moment convey a meltingly persuasive charm, and at the next dismiss an idea or person with one crisp word. He can be as guileless as a child or, when it suits his purposes, his associates say, he can plot with the patience and strategic cunning of a grand master at chess. But above all, he knows how to get his way.

Spiegel's way with movies and people has developed over some thirty-five years in films, first as an adviser on foreign story material for M-G-M, later in preparing American films for foreign distribution (the anti-war classic "All Quiet on the Western Front" was among them), and finally as a successful in-

dependent producer long before most men had even thought of producing movies on their own. His very first independent production, in the Thirties, enabled him to buy a house in Berlin and to start gathering paintings by Rouault, Picasso, Chagall, Monet, Degas, and a vast spectrum of other artists that make the Spiegel collection today look like a Who's Who of top painters.

But it was in 1947 that Spiegel really began to hit his stride. In that year he and John Huston formed Horizon Pictures, Spiegel's present organization (Huston and he later parted, but Spiegel retained the Horizon name). Some memorable movies followed, among them "We Were Strangers," "On the Waterfront," "Bridge on the River Kwai," and "Suddenly Last Summer."

Today, as an undisputed master of the producer's art, Spiegel is strikingly articulate in talking about what he is doing, whether he is explaining to a director the precise effect he wants or to a visitor the mood he has tried to imprint on celluloid. Part of this articulateness, which takes the form of precise, rhythmic sentences that could be dropped unchanged into one of his scripts, is no doubt the result of his study of economics, dramatic literature, and languages at the University of Vienna in his native Austria. But part is also a tenacious, single-minded passion for seeing films steadily and seeing them whole. Even when most deeply involved in the minutiae of producing a movie—as he was with the finishing touches of "Lawrence" when I talked with him a few days ago—he is nevertheless able to discuss the total impact, the sweep, the emotional coloring of great stretches of film as few men can.

AS we rode out to the Shepperton Studios, some seventeen miles from London, in his chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce, Spiegel explained what the legend of T. E. Lawrence meant to him and what he had tried to bring to the audience. He talked of the legend's baffling contradictions—how Lawrence, the young English adventurer who led the Arab tribes in their war against the Ottoman Empire from 1916 to 1918, combined meekness and humility with unbelievable vanity and affection for power, a professed reverence for human life with a taste for epic blood baths, a searching introspection with action so swift and irrevocable that it seemed at times an unthinking reflex, and how, after becoming known as the Uncrowned King of Arabia, he sought forgetfulness and anonymity as an ordinary aircraftman in the Royal Air Force.

Many people have tried to explain Lawrence, and many of their explana-

tions have some plausibility. Anthony Nutting, for example, argues in his "Lawrence of Arabia" that part of the key lies in Lawrence's discovery when he was about ten that he was an illegitimate child: "This discovery seems to have instilled in T. E. an obsession to prove himself better than his fellows, to show that in spite of his background—which set him apart from all his friends and associates—he could excel them in every way. This compulsion was in part responsible for driving him throughout three quarters of his life to make superhuman demands upon his mind and body."

But as I talked with Spiegel, who has been fascinated by the legend since Lawrence's "Seven Pillars of Wisdom" was first published in 1922, he emphasized that the endless speculation about Lawrence's motives was of small concern to him as a film producer. "I'm trying not to resolve the legend," he said, "but to perpetuate it. This film says to the audience: 'All right, you've seen the man. Now you form your own evaluation of him.' There's really no way to resolve clearly what made Lawrence tick, and that's why the film doesn't even try. There must be a co-authorship of the audience."

"Lawrence," he went on, "has the intriguing quality of having been a controversial legend for a long time, and for this reason he has remained almost a contemporary character. The secret of the fascination with Lawrence is that he was not only an adventurer in fact, but an adventurer in spirit as well. He combined the adventurousness of Galileo, Luther, and Marco Polo. Like them, he crossed not only physical distances but philosophical distances."

Spiegel said it is this concentrated involvement with adventure, combined with Lawrence's deep need to be known and admired for his adventures, that persuaded him to bring "Lawrence" to the screen. "Each one of us," he told me, "has the same contradictions Lawrence had. And each of us is also a bit of the charlatan, as Lawrence certainly was. Even saints are not satisfied to be saints in private: they want to show people their stigmata."

The method used in the film, Spiegel explained, was "to try to come, obliquely and through certain facets of his exploits, to Lawrence's personality." The fundamental problem, he said, was that, while the movie is necessarily concerned with physical action, it also had to come to grips with the restless intellectual search that was the true heart of Lawrence's adventures. And a reading of the script does indeed show that all the film's action—even when it is most a spectacle, even when

the Super Panavision screen is filled with hundreds of horses and camels and with shouting, fighting Turks and Arabs—is seen through a clearly delineated point of view. Spectacle never seems to be presented merely for the sake of spectacle. As Spiegel says, "We never used a thousand horses when a couple of hundred would do just as well."

IT is this attention to dramatic values rather than to bigness that has given Spiegel a reputation for being able to make a backer's dollar go about as far as any producer could possibly make it go. "I'll spend money to enhance the drama of a film," he says, "but never to create meaningless spectacle." Just how far the dollar has gone in "Lawrence," however, is Spiegel's own secret. "I don't want this picture to be judged by the amount of money we spent," he says. "I want it to be judged only as a film." Reliable estimates, however, put the cost at substantially over \$10,000,000.

Spiegel is an accomplished diplomat who is able to get the most out of the people he works with. "Sam is a demanding person," says an associate who has worked for nearly three years on "Lawrence." "He's a great and persuasive talker and always knows how to get what he wants. But if he doesn't like you, then you might as well quit."

The people who counted in "Lawrence," however, did not quit, despite what must occasionally have been an overwhelming temptation to do so. For rarely has a picture caused such raw hardship for the people involved in it. From Sam Spiegel, who commuted between London and the desert shooting site 250 miles from the port of Aqaba and over 100 miles from the nearest oasis, to the actors and technicians who had to work in 125-degree temperatures, the entire unit lived as Lawrence and the Arab warriors had themselves lived during their desert campaigns. For visual authenticity was what Spiegel and director David Lean were after, and this remote site was the place, and in their minds the only place, that offered it. Horizon Pictures Ltd. established offices in the capital city of Amman, shipped equipment through the Suez Canal and the Red Sea to Aqaba to set up shooting sites there, and finally cut a 250-mile path with Land Rovers and Austin Gypsies to a spot in the desert that had until then been unmarked on any map. Since water requirements for personnel, camels, and horses were as much as 35,000 gallon a day, a fleet of fourteen tank trucks made continuous 200-mile circuits to the oasis at El Hasa. Under the cruel desert regimen, the weight loss among



members of the unit averaged fifteen pounds.

Nearly 3,000 Bedouin were used in one of the sequences, but difficulty developed when the unit learned that Bedouin women are not permitted to appear before cameras, since it is considered bad luck to permit another man to own a picture of one's wife. When women were needed for authenticity, twenty of them were obtained from a Christian church at Aqaba whose priest gave them special permission.

Finally, after nearly a year in the desert, the "Lawrence" unit moved—or, more properly, retreated—to Seville, Spain. "The physical conditions had become so difficult," says Spiegel, "that I realized the picture would never be properly finished. The unit would have physically collapsed. The logistics alone created a problem that even an army couldn't resolve. While we were out in the desert, British soldiers were in the port of Kuwait. They had to be rotated home for rests despite the fact that their fleet was there to support them. But there's no desert like it anywhere in the world. I've never regretted my part in what we did."

Then, after discussing the three years of intricate planning and hardship that had gone into "Lawrence," the man who had spent several million dollars on the film looked reflectively at the glowing end of his cigar and said quietly: "If we haven't succeeded, then we've made a terrible mistake."

49 Continued

DRYDEN  
Lawrence, only two kinds of creature get  
'fun' in the desert, Bedouins ... and -  
(his gaze wanders round the  
photographs of silent sun-  
scorched figures and the  
fragments of stone)  
- gods. And you're neither. Take it  
from me for ordinary men it's a burning  
fiery furnace.

DRYDEN is irritably tapping a black Russian cigarette for himself.  
LAWRENCE steps forward, takes a box of matches and lights it for him.

LAWRENCE  
(very quietly)  
No, Dryden, it's going to be fun.

The set intensity of his expression is in utter contradiction to his words.

50 CLOSE UP. DRYDEN. He looks from the burning match in LAWRENCE's fingers to LAWRENCE's face.

DRYDEN  
(rather sourly)  
It is recognized that you have a funny  
sense of fun.

51 CLOSE UP. LAWRENCE. He smiles and raises the flame to his lips. He bows it out in the normal manner.

DISSOLVE TO

52 SUNRISE IN THE DESERT:

A series of shots taken with an under-cranked camera so that the change from grey dawn to brilliant sunlight is speeded. The audience should be unaware of the trick process, but from the first appearance of the sun over the horizon and the casting of the first shadow there should be a constant sense of movement as the sun rises higher and higher and the shadows grow shorter and shorter. Prominent in the composition of almost every shot should be the footprints of two camels. We do not see the actual camels until the series of under-cranked shots are finished and we

CUT TO

Page of Robert Bolt's script  
for "Lawrence of Arabia."

## THE PLAYWRIGHT IN FILMS

By ROBERT BOLT, *author of the play "A Man for All Seasons," which won the Critic's Circle Award, and of the screenplay for "Lawrence of Arabia," which opened this week.*

IN THEORY at any rate, the purpose of a theatre production is to realize the play as written. Since the writer wrote it, he is assumed to know most about it. Even very important actors in the theatre would claim, as a matter of pride, to submit themselves to the intention of even a very unimportant author.

One reason for this is that the author in the theatre can claim brotherhood, however junior, with Sartre, Beckett, Williams, and Miller, and descent, however attenuated, from Chekhov, Congreve, and Shakespeare.

It is not so in films. The ordinary cinemagoer can name you half a dozen film actors. The conscious film financier can name you half a dozen film directors. Only a professional film maker could name you half a dozen film writers—and that with a strictly professional intonation, as useful chaps to employ, perhaps at short notice. If he names them with respect as artists it will be because they have won respect elsewhere, as John Steinbeck and Graham Greene have.

One man directs a film from start to finish; one man produces it from start to finish; but half a dozen men may have collaborated on the script. And "collaborated" often means that they were called in piecemeal.

Here I must explain that my own recent experience writing the screenplay for the film "Lawrence of Arabia" (and it is my first film script) has not been thus.

Coming to film writing in a state of perfect ignorance, I assumed that my status as writer would be that of a writer in the theatre, and the generosity of Sam Spiegel and David Lean allowed them to accord it to me, with some little amusement, I think. If I now have quite strong feelings about the status of the writer in films it is because I know that my experience was exceptional, and because even these colleagues from time to time revealed an assumption about the nature of writing which seems to me damaging, and because I have come to understand

from them something of the beauty and power of this medium.

Put briefly, and harshly, the writer in films is an idea man with the gift of the gab. Of course he should be both those things; that is, should be inventive and articulate (articulate on paper I mean, he may not be articulate in conversation; heaven help him then in those late night "conferences" in hotel bedrooms). But in addition a writer in any dramatic medium has, or should have, a sense of form.

And this is something impossible to communicate. The over-all shape of any piece of dramatic writing can't be seen until it's completed. Until completion it is sensed intuitively by the writer if at all. He senses intuitively that a scene should go thus and not thus because the yet unwritten scenes to follow are taking shape beyond the reach of his conscious mind. If he is challenged on the scene he cannot give his real reasons because he doesn't yet know them. He only knows he has them.

The challenge will be intelligently and specifically leveled and must be met. Intense discussion then takes place on every aspect of the scene except the vital one of form, because that is unknown. The writer must accept the terms of the discussion and defend himself with those. If he is very sure of his intention, and very wily, he will use the terms as counters with which to win the game and get, quite coldly, his own way. More probably, because the discussion is intense and serious, he will enter in wholeheartedly and be convinced, and leave the conference having undertaken to do things he feels, vaguely but passionately, he ought not to do.

OF course an intuition can be clarified by discussion or even quite properly discarded. The heat of discussion can produce a flash of authentic inspiration—not always the writer's. But there is a limit to what a writer can discuss about his work in progress, and I think that in the world of films this is not recognized, or is recognized unwillingly and only in theory. If you ask an electrician why he is joining this wire to that plug he doesn't say, "I have a feeling that I should"; he gives you an answer which is precise and exhaustive. The film writer is regarded as a techni-