

MAHANOY CITY CHRONICLES

Schertzingers toast of Hollywood

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HE WAS a famous motion picture producer, director, writer, actor, conductor, composer, musician, concert violinist and one of the most brilliant personalities in Hollywood.

All these things describe Mahanoy City-born Victor Schertzingers, who stood at the pinnacle of moviedom success 50 years ago.

According to metropolitan newspaper stories in April 1938, Schertzingers was the most talented man in all of filmdom.

Check the credits attached to his name:

—Producer of the first movie in technicolor.

—Composer and conductor of the music for the first movie with orchestral background screen.

—Producer who changed Jimmy Cagney's image from tough guy to song-and-dance man.

—Producer-director-composer of the movie and title song that catapulted Grace Moore to stardom ("One Night of Love.")

—Composer of the song "Marcheta" which sold six million copies.

—Composer of songs for the Ziegfeld Follies.

—Conductor of orchestras for Broadway musicals and Hollywood theatres.

—A violin virtuoso who, at the age of 10 years, played for the famed Victor Herbert and John Phillip Sousa orchestras.

THAT'S JUST a sampling of the long list of amazing achievements of Victor Schertzingers (1890-1941).

His musical talent was inherited from his parents, who were renowned violinists in their own right. His father, Charles Schertzingers, was a court violinist to Britain's Queen Victoria. His mother, Pauline Weber, a niece of the noted German composer Carl Maria von Weber, was hailed in her prime as one of the world's greatest violinists.

And they all lived at one time in Mahanoy City. The Schertzingers came here in the early 1870s. Charles and his brother Edward were watchmakers and jewelers who shared a shop at 9 E. Centre St. until Charles opened his own shop at 113 W. Centre St.

YOUNG VICTOR was born here in 1890 and began violin lessons at the age of four. He attended Mahanoy City's public schools and in addition to the musical training imparted by his parents, he was tutored by Professor John Jones, a local musical instructor and band conductor who directed the Mahanoy Township High School

Band in its formative years after World War I.

At the age of eight Victor he made his first public appearance, traveling to Philadelphia at the invitation of Victor Herbert to play in a symphony concert at Washington Park. For the next six years, young Victor played concert violin for Herbert and for John Phillip Sousa. During this period he also went to Europe to study music and earn a degree at the University of Brussels.

By the time he reached adolescence, his family was making its home in Philadelphia where the father opened a jewelry business while continuing ownership of the Mahanoy City store. It was obvious that the boy was a violin prodigy, and this may have influenced the parents' decision to move to the city where Victor had access to more private tutoring. In addition of the father's jewelry business, the mother managed a music store in the city.

VICTOR entered Brown Preparatory School in Philadelphia with intentions of going on to the University of Pennsylvania but business setbacks suffered by the family forced him to put his education aside and use his talent to support the family.

His jobs as a concert violinist took him through Europe and across the United States. He also appeared beside noted opera personalities of the era with names like Calve, Sembrich and Melba.

At age 14 he teamed up with a road company headed by Ellen Beach Yaw, a noted singer, and began earning the unheard-of salary of \$200 a week. The group played major theatres across the country, which took him to Los Angeles.

AFTER ARRIVING in LA, Victor left the Yaw company and accepted the position of orchestra leader at the Belasco Theatre, remaining there for two seasons.

Next he returned east to the ballyhoo of Broadway. He served as conductor for various musicals and began composing. Several of his numbers were used by Florenz Ziegfeld in his famed Follies, but the tune that brought him instant fame was "Marcheta" which sold six million copies.

Before long, Victor was wooed back to Los Angeles by Fred and David Belasco to resume directorship of their theatre orchestra. It was 1916 and the motion picture industry was getting started. Two of the pioneers, Hobart Bosworth and Thomas H. Ince, talked a reluctant Schertzingers into joining their productions.

Victor continued his orchestra conducting and composing duties while also participating in the

movie ventures, all the while learning the knack of directing, producing and sometimes acting.

Finally, Ince asked him to write the music for the epic film "Civilization," which is credited with being the first movie with an orchestral background on screen. It was a huge success and Schertzingers continued his association with Ince for two years, during which time they produced 16 movies.

EVENTUALLY Schertzingers established his own studios and embarked on a career that turned out more than one hundred productions. His silent screen films included "The Showdown," "Forgotten Faces," "Nothing But the Truth," "Wheel of Life," "Fashion in Love," "Laughing Lady" and "Paramount on Parade," all recognized as major productions of the era.

By happenstance, another Mahanoy City native appeared in one of the Schertzingers films in 1925. The movie was a Civil War story entitled "Thoroughbred" and some of the scenes featured a company of U.S. Cavalry horsemen from Fort Huachuca, Arizona. In command of the company was First Lieutenant William Wren, born and raised in Mahanoy City. Two years later Lt. Wren was killed when his horse stumbled. His military funeral took place from his home here at 216 W. Mahanoy St. and he was buried in the U. S. Military Academy Cemetery at West Point where he was graduated in 1924.

IN 1929 when sound became widespread on the screen, Schertzingers produced a string of top-rated films such as "Safety in Numbers," "Uptown New York," "Strange Justice," "The Cocktail Hour," "My Women," "Beloved," "Let's Live Tonight."

Until Grace Moore came under Schertzingers' direction, she was a spectacular flop at another studio. Victor boomed her into a great attraction when he wrote the title song and cast her in "One Night of Love." She followed this with another major success, "Love Me Tonight," and her fame was established.

His 1938 production of "Something to Sing About" marked a new turn for the career of Jimmy Cagney. The role changed the Irishman's stereotyped image from that of a tough guy to one of the leading song and dance artists of his day.

One of the early Schertzingers films was "Redskin" starring Richard Dix, which is credited with being the first movie in color.

He also directed the first Jackie Coogan movies, including "Long Live the King."

MAHANOY CITY moviegoers

saw the talents of their native son for the first time on Feb. 7, 1923, when his film, "The Kingdom Within," played at the Family Theatre.

Billed as "A Victor Schertzingers Production," it was the first movie to be produced entirely in his studio.

The Record-American writer who reviewed the film reported: "We are not a moving picture fan but it was with a great amount of satisfaction we viewed the production in its entirety and we are honest enough to say that we were alert to a possible flaw if there was any but we failed to discover one. The scenes were well laid, the acting fine and the titles perfectly put so that the picture reached our every expectation, and like thousands of others we left the Family Theatre last evening well pleased with the film and better pleased to know it was a town boy's effort."

A 1938 newspaper story on Schertzingers noted that his hobbies were collecting rare and beautiful art, lustreware, cameos and violins, and found relaxation by playing the pipe organ in his luxurious home north of Hollywood.

The story added, "Having known the privations of a career, Schertzingers sympathizes with child prodigies and beginners in picture work and has helped many of them over rocky roads. He has maintained his popularity with co-workers and employees by his generosity and subtle sense of humor which seldom allows him to become temperamental — for which Hollywood and the motion picture business should erect a stauary emblem or something."

SCHERTZINGERS died of a heart attack at his Hollywood home on Oct. 26, 1941. He was 51.

Some of the movies he produced during the last few years of his career will be remembered by fans of the early 1940s: "Kiss the Boys Goodbye," "The Road to Singapore" and "Birth of the Blues." At the time of his death he was directing "The Fleet's In."

Victor was married in 1914 to Julia Niklin, a noted dancer. They had two daughters, Patricia, born in 1924, and Paula, in 1926.

The Schertzingers girls, if they're still alive, would be 63 and 62 today. As Mahanoy City winds down its year of quasiquintennial celebration, are the daughters of Victor Schertzingers aware of their roots in this little hard coal town? Do they know it was here that their grandparents conducted a jewelry store and their dad romped as a boy and received the first music lessons that were the beginning of his journey to fame?



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FAMED IN FILMDOM — Victor Schertzingers, top photo, made the journey from childhood in Mahanoy City to fame and fortune in Hollywood. Below his autographed photograph is the advertisement for the first film he produced when it made its local debut in February 1923.