Hollywood Goes to a Hospital

by DOUGLAS DUNCAN

ONE DAY early this year four tons of motion picture equipment, accompanied by a team of 80 actors, actresses, and technicians, moved into Manhattan General Hospital in New York City. Patients, nurses, residents, and interns walking through the corridors suddenly found themselves sharing a scene with film stars Frederic March, Eddie Albert, Dick Clark, Ben Gazzara, Aline MacMahon, and Ina Balin. The movie, The Young Doctors, to be released by United Artists later this year, also was filmed at Woman’s and St. Luke's Hospitals in New York City and at Vassar Brothers Hospitals in Poughkeepsie, New York.

The movie, which dramatizes the little-publicized work of the pathologists, is based on a novel, The Final Diagnosis, by Canadian author Arthur Hailey. The producers, Stuart Millar and Lawrence Turman, both in their 30's, using an "un-Hollywood" approach, took their cameras into the hospitals in an effort to achieve realism and authenticity. Some of the supporting roles were played by nurses, medical technologists, and other members of the hospital staffs. New York City Commissioner of Hospitals provided technical advice, and Dr. Charles F. Begg, chief pathologist at St. Luke’s, supervised medical
details of the film shooting. And Richard O. Myers, M.D., Van Nuys, California, pathologist and member of the AMA Physicians Advisory Committee on Television, Radio, and Motion Pictures, reviewed the script before filming started and advised the producers on numerous details ranging from medical ethics to exact scientific terms that pathologists use in discussing a case.

The basement corridor of Manhattan General Hospital was recreated on a New York City soundstage for the pathology laboratory scenes. The 92-foot set required 2000 feet of plumbing and 1000 feet of wallboard. Equipping the pathology lab alone was a major logistics problem. Over 500 photographs of 75 hospital laboratories were studied by the set designers. The mocked-up lab for the movie required 15,000 test tubes, bottles, knives, and other pieces of equipment, some bought, some borrowed from various hospitals in the area. It took two weeks to shoot 30 minutes of film for the laboratory scenes—and an additional two weeks to sort out and return all of the pieces of equipment used.

By making the movie in and around New York City, the producers were able to use actors and actresses who were appearing at the same time in several of the Broadway shows. They were

Much of story of The Young Doctors is concerned with pathology—study of effects of diseases on tissues. Star Ina Balin is about to witness autopsy of patient.

Ina slips out of the morgue to recover from her queasiness and is met in the corridor by young Dr. David Coleman, played by Ben Gazzara. The young pathologist talks to Ina, persuades her to return to autopsy. Ina plays role of student nurse Cathy Hunt.

Student nurses show mixed reactions to dissection of human body. Ina’s reaction includes a queasy feeling. Pathologist, who performs autopsy, explains to girls that autopsies are important because living people can benefit from studies of the tissues of dead patients.
Dr. Joseph Pearson, played by Frederic March, meets Ina after the autopsy, tells her there's nothing to counter effect of death like living it up.

Young Doctors uses both professional actors and professional medical personnel. Looking into microscope in foreground is Dr. Nora Spens, resident pathologist at St. Luke's, New York.

In another scene using hospital staff members, teen-age idol Dick Clark hands baby delivered in ambulance to Judith Pihlow, R.N.

Ina Balin and Ben Gazzara meet again in film story when Ina slips on the ice outside nurses' residence, hurts her knee. Ben thinks she's faking but invites her to dinner.
Actress Phyllis Love, the only star of the show flown from Hollywood to New York for the filming, plays the wife of Dick Clark. Scene above was done outside Vassar Brothers Hospital, Poughkeepsie, in near-zero weather.

given time off in order to make their regular matinee performances.

Since the hospitals could not be asked to suspend their public address systems for paging doctors while the movie was being made, the background noises were recorded in the soundtrack of the film. One exception to this rule was made at Woman’s Hospital where there is a Doctor Coleman on the staff. This also is the name of a young pathologist played by Ben Gazzara in the film. The movie makers felt it would appear incongruous if the fictional Doctor Coleman ignored the “Doctor Coleman” calls on the speaker, so that part of the paging was cut out of the soundtrack.

Dramatic scene when it’s discovered that Dick Clark’s baby is victim of blood disorder brings together Gazzara, March, Edward Andrews, Eddie Albert, and Clark. A blood transfusion is ordered.

Dr. Speirs and Mrs. Ello Smith, histology technician at St. Luke’s, helped set up the props for movie scenes.

Dick Clark’s role is that of a young doctor whose child’s life depends on correct blood analysis. Here, he anxiously asks about tests.
Aline MacMahon and March study x-ray of Ina's leg, which has become increasingly painful, discover malignant growth.

Preparing for the surgery scene, Ina is briefed by Dr. Charles Bagg, chief pathologist at St. Luke's.

Movie has traditional happy ending as young pathologist plans to marry student nurse despite her leg amputation.