

Mr. Broadway Gambles *Against Hollywood*

George M. Cohan has his chips on the table—and one on his shoulder. He'll make movies in New York, but out West—no!

By Anne Castle

"SURE I'm worried about this movie. I've been worried for sixty-three years. You say I don't look sixty-three? What? Forty-five? Lady, if I were forty-five, I'd jump up and swing from that chandelier. And then I wouldn't have to earn a living by playing in a movie.

And then, maybe, I wouldn't be worried!"

It was George M. Cohan speaking. The movie he was worried about was "Gambling." He had written the play himself some years ago. He had played in it on Broadway, and it is numbered among his successes. And now, out at the Astoria, Long Island studio, he was making it into a motion picture.

Most people thought that Cohan would never try to make another movie. His Hollywood talkie experience, just two years ago, was brief and unhappy. It started

when he was lured to the Coast to appear in "The Phantom President." And it ended the minute the picture was finished.

"I wouldn't have gone back into pictures—in Hollywood," Cohan says bitterly. "I didn't like the folks out there; they didn't like me. But making this

movie here in the East, that's different. For one thing, it's my own play; I wrote it. 'The Phantom President' was written by twelve hundred other people. Oh, it must have been at least twelve hundred, for there was a new author brought in every minute!

"Another thing. I'm making this picture for a boy I've known all my life—Harold Franklin. That makes a difference."

But if you know Cohan, you realize that his dislike for Hollywood is based on something far more human and fundamental than the fact that on the

Coast he didn't know the producer, and that the script had too many authors.

And even Hollywood must admit that George M. Cohan was treated strangely.

In the first place, Cohan went to Hollywood with the understanding that he was to help write the script. But among the alleged twelve hundred authors, Cohan was not numbered. It was almost as if Hollywood forgot, or didn't know, that George M. Cohan [PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 114]



Cohan didn't like Hollywood and says Hollywood did not like him. But if "Gambling" proves a success, he may make more pictures in the East

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had written forty plays himself—among them successes such as “Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford,” “Forty-Five Minutes From Broadway,” “The Miracle Man,” “Seven Keys to Baldpate,” “The Song and Dance Man,” “The Tavern,” and many others. Whether Hollywood remembered or not, the script of “The Phantom President” was never given benefit of the Cohan touch!

IN the second place, when Cohan went to Hollywood he took his transposing piano along. But he never had a chance to use it. The whole world had marched to his “Over There,” and his “Sidewalks of New York” had become a political anthem. “The Phantom President” would have been helped immeasurably by a stirring song.

And Cohan was hanging around the studio idle, anxious for something to do. But nobody seemed to want George M. Cohan to write music.

Added to these situations, Cohan was homesick for Broadway. It's been home sweet home to him most of his life.

So, if the nation's movie public is going to get well acquainted with the famous Song and Dance man, it looks like it will have to be in Eastern-made pictures.

Not that movie-making, even in the East, is looked upon gladly by Cohan. He isn't very enthusiastic about facing motion picture cameras anywhere. If he were, he'd be a big Hollywood star now instead of Mr. Broadway.

Even back in 1916-1917, when Cohan made his first excursion into picture-making, eventually filming six of his Broadway plays for Artcraft, he wasn't very enthusiastic. Well launched then in the first boom days of pictures, he dropped the work and scurried back to Broadway. He didn't look a camera in the eye until he was talked into the unhappy “Phantom President” experience in 1932.

Ask him now if he likes working in pictures and he'll answer slowly, “Well, I guess it's that I don't like getting up so early in the morning. Work over here at the studio, you know, starts at eight A.M. That means rising at six for me.”

But watch him on the “Gambling” set and you suspect the six o'clock rising is a minor and superficial reason for his lack of enthusiasm.

Picture making is obviously a tedious business for Cohan. The stage is his element. He was born in it. He came to the Astoria studio with the applause of many audiences still ringing in his ears. His acting for the Theater Guild, in Eugene O'Neill's “Ah, Wilderness,” probably was last season's most admired performance. He played his first big rôle forty-four years ago, as the juvenile lead in “Peck's Bad Boy.” For nearly half a century since he has been working in the theater, and much of that time he has been his own boss. Before he went to Hollywood he was quoted as having said, “I haven't worked for anybody since I was twenty.”

But in pictures—even if you're a pal of the producer's—you're working for several people. Pictures are closely directed. Working in a movie, Cohan must act on a chalk-mark. If he steps off the mark—“Cut! Cohan's out of camera range!” And the scene must be re-

taken. Yes, pictures are closely directed. Mr. Cohan must raise his hand just so high, he mustn't take a step on that line, he mustn't turn or the shot will be out of focus. Of course, he wrote the play, but Mr. Cohan must not ad lib. Lines must be followed precisely or the others miss their cues. But Mr. Cohan, accustomed to the freedom of the stage, ad libbed. The scene must be shot again. Over and over and over. On a narrow set, without an audience, directions to be exactly followed, lines to be memorized and repeated precisely.

COHAN usually has been his own author, director, often his own producer. Why, much of the time he even owned the theater he was playing in, for at one time he was landlord of a number of the legitimate houses on Broadway.

However, throughout the tedium of filming “Gambling,” George M. Cohan retained his Irish good nature, his quiet sense of humor.

“I don't know whether I'll make another picture here or not,” he said. “Wait till I see this one, then maybe I can tell. Just now I'm so worried about ‘Gambling,’ I can't be bothered with future picture plans.”

It's undoubtedly important to Cohan that “Gambling” be a success. For many years he has been one of the most successful men in the show business. And the standards he sets for himself are high.

But more than that, Cohan undoubtedly wants to show Hollywood what he can do, making a movie in a friendly, sympathetic atmosphere. Probably it's more correct to say he wants to show Hollywood what he can do, making a movie in New York. For Cohan is a man of terrific loyalties and great patriotism.

He is Cohan, the flag waver, Mr. Yankee Doodle. And his patriotism is pretty strong where Broadway is concerned. “Gambling” is a Broadway play; Franklin is a Broadway producer. The picture is being made twenty minutes from Broadway, on Long Island, New York.

Good? It's got to be good! It's Mr. Broadway's gamble against Hollywood. And, on home ground, he's never lost a bet yet!



A bicycle that was not built for two. And neither Jack Oakie nor Helen Mack appears to know quite what to do with it. The pair were cavorting around the Paramount lot when surprised by the cameraman