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THE HISTORY OF THE DIRECTORS GUILD OF AMERICA



When solidarity began for Hollywood's film directors nearly sixty-four years ago, two evenings before Christmas, 1935, a dozen-plus directors gathered in a secret meeting at the home of King Vidor: the agenda for discussion was to deal with two threats to the standing of the filmmakers' profession — a possible unilateral slash in pay for all filmmakers by studio moguls (who had made a similar cut in 1933), and an edict issued by Paramount Pictures to its contract directors to either accept movies as assigned by the studio or else hit the street.

From the organizational skills of such masters of the trade as Frank Borzage, Herbert Biberman, John Ford, Howard Hawks, Henry King, Rowland V. Lee, Ernst Lubitsch, Rouben Mamoulian, Lewis Milestone, A. Edward Sutherland, Frank Tuttle, W.S. "Woody" Van Dyke, Richard Wallace and William A. Wellman, who gathered that evening in Vidor's home, grew what has become one of the strongest, most influential and trend-setting forces in American entertainment labor: The Directors Guild of America.

The Guild incorporated in Sacramento, California on January 13, 1936, under the name SDG, Inc. Two days later, at 29 strong, the Screen Directors Guild met in a downtown Los Angeles office building to adopt bylaws, elect a board of directors and install as its president Vidor, maker of such classics as *The Big Parade* (1925) and *The Crowd* (1928).

Vidor and the Guild's founding fathers were rich men and the most respected filmmakers in the business, but they realized that in order to protect their rights, and those of their less-powerful fellow craftsmen, they must band together to achieve common goals.

"First and foremost, the Guild is genuine protection," the late Martin Ritt said on screen for the DGA-produced documentary on its history, *Fifty Years of Action*, in 1986. The late Richard Brooks also emphasized the Guild's protective qualities in that film: "If you didn't

have the Directors Guild, directors—with the exception of a few mavericks—would be cut to pieces because the Directors Guild really stands behind its members and the studios know it." Milos Forman called the DGA "one of the few truly noble institutions."

The Directors Guild is an organization that was born because of obstacles, and it grew and flourished by tackling them. For decades, the guild has used its hard-bought influence to combat roadblocks in the way of its members' creative lives.

Six decades, three headquarters, one very short strike and more than 10,000 members later, the Guild has become the foremost of Hollywood's collective bargaining units. The Guild membership has reaped wage and benefit victories, a solid pension plan, marked increases in residuals collections and creative rights achievements. Most importantly, the Directors Guild of America is the guardian of its members jobs and creative integrity.

1931

- In January, King Vidor, Cecil B. DeMille, Frank Borzage and Lewis Milestone sign a "Directors' Declaration of Independence" and plan to form an organization called the Directors Guild to produce quality independent films. None of the intended films were produced.

1933

- Studio heads enact unilateral pay cut for all filmmakers.

1935

- In December, a dozen or so directors hold a secret meeting at King Vidor's home to discuss organizing in order to prevent further economic cutbacks and increased control by the studios.

1936

- Screen Directors' Guild created and incorporated as SDG, Inc. in Sacramento, California on January 13. King Vidor is named first president.
- SDG's first offices are located in the Crossroads of the World building in Hollywood.

1937

- Screen Directors' Guild admits Assistant Directors. Francisco "Chico" Day is the first Mexican-American to join the Guild as an AD.



The first discussion of the need of a guild took place on the sidewalk outside of the Roosevelt Hotel after a blanket salary cut was proposed by the producers. Any individual who stood up with a contrary idea or to propose that the executives take the same cut was singled out as a target for penalty. The need for speaking as a group was obvious.

—King Vidor



One night in 1935, a bunch of us directors gathered in King Vidor's living room to talk about our mutual problems. Now directors, because of the nature of their profession (some might say the cussedness of their natures, too), are among the greatest individualists in the world. But all of us in that room realized the need to band together to protect the integrity of motion picture direction.

— John Ford



1930s



Capra's Power Play

The Screen Directors' Guild was just gathering momentum in the late 1930s, but the studios wouldn't recognize it as the bargaining unit which represented the people who actually crafted the movies.

According to his interview with Variety's Dave Robb on the occasion of the Guild's 50th anniversary, Frank Capra recalled that he changed the studios' attitude with a power play that reverberated throughout Hollywood. At the time, he was serving as president of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Joseph Schenk, then president of Twentieth Century-Fox, was also head of the Association of Motion Picture Producers, and he refused to recognize the SDG as a bargaining agent. To force such recognition, Capra called on Guild members to strike and threatened not only to resign as Academy president, but also to instigate an industry-wide boycott of the Academy Awards, which were a week away on February 23, 1939. The



Also at that time, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) was still deciding on the Guild's case, filed in 1938, claiming that the studios were obligated to recognize it as a bargaining agent. Capra's threat, along with the studios' increasing awareness that the NLRB decision was going to go against them, resulted in Schenk caving in. The AMPP head told Capra that the studios would meet his demands and the SDG finally received blanket studio recognition on February 18, 1939.

As a coincidental bonus, Capra's *You Can't Take It With You* (1938) was named the Oscar-winning Best Picture and he was named Best Director at that year's Academy Awards.

ADs Join Guild

Joseph C. Youngerman, who would serve the Guild for five decades (until his death in November 1995) — most of those years as executive secretary — was an assistant director on dozens of films in the 1930s and '40s. He remembered one instance in 1927 in which he didn't get to bed for seven days while on location in Sonora, Mexico for *Man Power*. Assistant directors and UPMs were used



to those kinds of grueling hours, little recognition and low pay.

The process of admitting ADs and UPMs into the Guild was not an easy one. In 1937, the studios' attorneys told the Guild that they would not negotiate if those so-called "less creatively skilled" personnel were included in the SDG. Twentieth Century-Fox's

moguls counted on the awards for their publicity value and couldn't afford a strike.

Darryl F. Zanuck, chairman of the producers' negotiating committee, claimed that ADs and UPMs were business and managerial officers, not creative personnel.

ADs were admitted into the Guild in 1937. UPMs, however, went on to form their own guild, but eventually would merge with the Directors Guild in 1964.

1938

- D.W. Griffith receives the Guild's first Honorary Life Membership from Frank Capra.

PICTURED, from left, John Ford, George Cukor, Guild legal counsel Mabel Walker Willebrandt, Rouben Mamoulian, Griffith, Sam Wood, W.S. Van Dyke, William Wyler, Capra, Leo McCarey and George Marshall.



- Dorothy Arzner is the first woman director to join the Guild.

- Screen Directors' Guild represents 95 percent of film directors and assistant directors in Hollywood.

- The Guild goes to the NLRB in an effort to force the producers to recognize the Guild as the bargaining agent for directors. The studios, apparently aware that the NLRB decision is going to go against them, agree to recognize the Guild and enter into a tentative agreement covering directors and assistant directors.

1939

- An AMPP agreement provides a nine-year contract that can be renegotiated after three years, providing for an 80% Guild shop — meaning that 80% of the studios' directors and assistant directors would have to be SDG members. Creative rights that directors won include the right to be consulted on the cutting of the film and to be consulted on the employment of principals.

- Frank Capra elected president.



CAPRA

1941

- George Stevens elected president.
- With the U.S. joining the Allied Forces in World War II, many Guild members join the armed services. Several, such as Frank Capra, John Ford, John Huston, William Wyler and George Stevens, make documentary films.

1942

- The 1939 AMPP agreement with the SDG appended to include minimum salaries for directors.

1943

- Mark Sandrich elected president.

1944

- John Cromwell elected president.

1945

- In June, the Educational and Benevolent Foundation is formed with donations from several SDG members.
- In July, with some 150 members working in the Chicago and Detroit areas, the Guild opens a Chicago office and hires CBS production manager Richard W. Ortner to serve as midwest executive secretary.



STEVENS



SANDRICH



CROMWELL

1940s



Directors in the Armed Forces

During World War II, from 1941 to 1945, many Guild members served in the armed forces. While some served in traditional roles, others worked as combat cameramen. A few directors, including Frank Capra, John Ford, William Wyler, George Stevens and John Huston, made documentary films to aid the war effort as part of the U.S. Army Signal Corps.

Capra's *Why We Fight* series was a landmark undertaking in the medium and footage from Ford's *The Battle of Midway* and Wyler's *Memphis Belle* would show up in other documentaries and features into the 1970s. Huston's *Let There Be Light*, about shell-shocked soldiers in Army hospitals, is still counted among the most poignant anti-war pictures.



- William Wyler, left, receives the Best Director Oscar for *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) from Billy Wilder, the previous year's winner, who won for *The Last Weekend*. Photo courtesy of the Wyler family.
- Radio and Television Directors Guild forms in New York.

1947

1949

- In January, president George Stevens conducts a board meeting to discuss upcoming contract negotiations.

PICTURED *clockwise, from behind the desk, Stevens, William Wyler, Frank Capra, Cecil B. DeMille, John Ford, George Sidney, Irving Pichel, J. P. McGowan (executive secretary), Tay Garnett and King Vidor.*

- The Screen Directors' Guild Awards are established. The first Best Director Award is presented to Joseph L. Mankiewicz and his AD, Gaston Glass, for *A Letter to Three Wives* at the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel in May.

PICTURED, *from left, George Stevens, who received the plaque for "Outstanding Service" as past president of the SDG; producer Darryl F. Zanuck, who accepted an award for Anatole Litvak; George Marshall, who was elected president of the SDG; Fred Zinneman, another award winner; and Joseph L. Mankiewicz, who won the Guild's first annual Achievement Award. Howard Hawks also won an award but was not able to attend.*

Entertainment

CITIZEN-NEWS, Hollywood, Monday, May 23, 1949 15

Mankiewicz Gets First of New Director Awards

Joseph L. Mankiewicz has received the first annual achievement award of the Screen Directors Guild for his direction of the film "Letter to Three Wives."

A silver medallion was presented to Mankiewicz last night in token of the award.

The director was one of four to receive quarterly awards voted by the Guild. The others are Fred Zimmermann for "The Search," Howard Hawks for "Red River," and Anatol Litvak for "The Snake Pit."

George Marshall was re-elected president of the Guild at the dinner meeting. New members of the Guild board were announced as Frank Borzage, Clarence Brown, David Butler, Merian C. Cooper, John Farrow, Tay Garnett, Vernon Keays and Walter Lang.



1950

- Joseph L. Mankiewicz elected president.
- Joseph Youngerman named Guild executive secretary.
- In October, the infamous Cecil B. DeMille/John Ford face-off occurs at a meeting at the Beverly Hills hotel.
- Ida Lupino becomes the second woman director to join the Guild.
- First television film contract is negotiated, which includes the director's right to share in revenue from filmed shows on commercial television.



MANKIEWICZ



LUPINO



SIDNEY

1951

- George Sidney elected president. He would serve in this post for 2 years.
- Screen Directors' Guild Annual Awards begin conforming to the calendar year — and to the Academy Awards.

1952

- First free TV (FTV) to FTV residuals (2-3 runs only).

1953

- The first honorary D. W. Griffith Award, the Guild's highest honor, is presented to Cecil B. DeMille, left, by president George Sidney.
- Director Robert Florey and assistant director Bruce Gowler win the Guild's first Best Direction for Television Award for *The Last Voyage*.



1955

- Screen Directors' Guild sets up headquarters in its own building, including a private theater, at 7950 Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles.

1958

- Residuals increases, FTV to FTV (2-6 runs).



Groundbreaking for the construction of the new Screen Directors' Guild headquarters at 7950 Sunset Boulevard is held on September 17, 1954. President George Sidney, with shovel, makes the ceremonial dig. Others in the photograph include Paul Guilfoyle, Milton Bren, Clarence Brown, Fred Guiol, William Seiter, Reginald LeBorg, George Stevens, Lesley Selander, Claude Binyon, Joseph Mankiewicz, Stuart Heisler, Frank Borzage, Norman McLeod, Rouben Mamoulian, George Marshall, Leo McCarey, Rudolph Mate, Alfred Santell, L.B. Mayer and Howard W. Koch, kneeling. Two participants are unidentified.



Frederick Lights is the first African-American stage manager to join the Radio and Television Directors Guild in New York in the mid-1950s



1950s