

3-D Motion Picture Encyclopedia Article

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3-D Motion Picture

As early as 1894 attempts were made to enhance cinema with 3-D special effects. It was not until the early 1900s, however, after Edwin S. Porter (1870-1941) and W. E. Waddell developed the anaglyphic process that 3-D cinema became a reality. When twin images (one red, the other green) were superimposed and viewed with special red and green glasses, they appeared as one 3-D image.

In 1915 the first commercial 3-D film was shown publicly in New York and consisted of three black-and-white shorts. Movie makers have flirted with 3-D sporadically ever since.

After the development of the *Polaroid* system of filming by Edwin Land, the first color movie with sound to use 3-D was released in Germany in 1937. Fifteen years later producer Arch Oboler used the Polaroid system to shoot *Bwana Devil*, the first feature film to employ 3-D effects. Oboler employed two cameras whose reels had to be specially synchronized. To visualize the 3-D effect, spectators had to wear Polaroid glasses. Polaroid's improved process sparked a short-lived 3-D infatuation. Over one hundred films were produced in this way.

In 1966, Oboler shot *The Bubble* with the use of a special lens, the polarisator. The invention of the polarisator did away with the inconveniences of the double projection method, but the shaky camera movements and other problems with how the film looked remained.

In the 1980s, the Canadian Film Board and ISTECH, a private manufacturer, worked together to invent the 3-D Rig, a camera set-up which steadied the movements. By 1990, the IMAX Corporation (whose films are typically shot on special film larger and sharper than conventional 35mm filmstock and shown on huge screens) became interested in combining the IMAX and 3-D technologies. They invented a new camera that had two lenses and two film-movement mechanisms inside, where the film was synchronized. IMAX produced its first IMAX 3-D short feature film in 1994, *Wings of Courage*, and planned to do others (as well as a full-length feature film). Despite the innovations by IMAX, many viewers disliked wearing the special glasses needed, and 3-D films seem destined to remain a novelty.