

Article written by Paul Harvey and

Published in The Middletown Journal august 7, 1965

Date: Aug. 8, 1929 – The first talking motion picture was shown this afternoon at the Sorg theater. By 1:00 o'clock a long line had formed on South Main Street by those who wanted to see and hear a talkie.

With this first showing, the line never ended until the last showing at night. During the evening, only standing room was available, and there was a continuous line in the lobby of those waiting for a seat.

“In Old Arizona” starring Edmund Lowe and Warner Baxter, was the feature attraction. This film is the first photoplay to be filmed outdoors, as the sound process makes this very difficult. After viewing the film, Middletonians will never be satisfied with anything else. It appears that the days of the silent movie are numbered.

The Chifos Brothers, Gust and Theodore, who manage the Sorg, made possible this innovation for local theater patrons. The cost of the installation of the machinery producing the sound was \$15,000 but the talking effects functioned perfectly, and the recurring laughter of the audience indicated their appreciation.

In talking with Gust Chifos, who sneaked your scribe in for a free showing, he revealed that this had been his dream ever since he first heard the talkies. He and his wife, Zelma Diver Chifos, who incidentally played the piano in the Grand Theater for silent movies, went to Columbus in 1925 to see the first screening of a talkie in this area.

They recall that it consisted of short subjects, representing largely personal appearances of opera singers and speakers. The vitaphone system was used, where synchronized phonograph records went along with the action on the screen. Warner Brothers used this system in 1927 to produce Al Jolson in “The Jazz Singer”. Lee De Forest was trying to find a method of putting sound waves on the film; this system was used by William Fox as Movietone.

At the Sorg, Chifos stated they were using the Vitaphone system, but he stated that the new Strand to be opened in October would be equipped with both systems of sound. In fact, the Strand is being built exclusively as a talking picture house, the first in the city.

The Gordon management had indicated that they will be equipped with sound equipment by October, and will change their policy from road shows to “talking movies.” Gust Chifos, who with his family had been sneaking off to see these talking pictures in other cities, couldn't wait to get them here. He said people kept asking him, “When will the talkies come to Middletown?” The long lines today showed Chifos in a tangible way that the new talkies would be welcome, and the manager is most delighted.

However, to some, there was a tear of nostalgia, when it was announced Sunday. “This is the last time for vaudeville shows to be presented at the Sorg Theater.” This final bill included “A Day in the Asylum” monologues and imitations, a comic, and a display of artistic clay models. The Sorg Theater has brought the finest performers to the local stage since it opened in 1891. Its list of stars is a roll call of famous artists – Eva Tanguay, Charlotte Greenwood, Marie Dressler, Francis X. Bushman, Will Rogers, Eddie Cantor, Sophie Tucker, and many others.

Since 1915 the Sorg has provided both silent movie entertainment and road shows. Charles Rettig, manager, brought in a new show for each week-end and leased week-day privileges in movie exhibitors.

Scheduled at the Sorg in the near future will be Richard Barthelmess in "Weary River." Billy Dove in "Careers", and Richard Dix in "Ain't it the Truth?"