

A Big Change Down Under



Rod Taylor as he looks in person and as he looks as Israel Hands in the movie "Long John Silver."

Australian Star Rod Taylor Leaves Soap Careers Behind

Actor Here to Promote 'Long John Silver' Says Radio Keeps Drama Alive Down Under

By WIN FANNING

There's no TV and little major movie production in Australia, but the handful of top actors and actresses are kept plenty busy in radio and the legitimate theater, according to Rod Taylor, one of the down under stars who visited Pittsburgh yesterday.

Taylor, who was in town to promote his latest motion picture, "Long John Silver," which opens at the Fulton next Wednesday, said he had had to make almost 400 radio tape recordings to keep his soap opera characterizations going while he is on tour in the United States.

"Silver, a sort of follow-up to 'Treasure Island,' is the first CinemaScope movie to be made in Australia," he said. "And it is of tremendous importance to the technicians and others in the film business at home." He said its producer, Joseph Kaufman, hopes to make Sydney "the second Hollywood of the world."

Australians, Taylor explained, are avid radio and movie fans. A government radio network is supplemented by eight or nine commercial radio stations in each of the major cities, and on these stations "Dragnet," "Lux Theater," "Portia Faces Life" and ever so many more United States produced shows are great favorites, he said.

"We are extremely pro-American," Taylor said, "so it isn't surprising that we like your stars and shows." Apparently his fellow countrymen also like Mr. Taylor as he has

been acting for only eight years and has already won the Australian equivalent of the "Oscar" for both radio and stage roles. The nominations for these awards are made by the public, with a board of judges making the final selections, it was explained.

"It has been difficult for our technical people in the movie industry as so little regular employment is available," Taylor said. "Some of the top experts are forced to drive taxi cabs for the major part of the year because the three small studios in Sydney can't provide them with any regular employment," the actor said.

"Yet cost of production is remarkably low when compared with the United States and the climate is practically perfect. We lost only four days in a ten-week winter shooting schedule on outdoor location scenes," Taylor revealed.

In "Silver" the 25-year-old actor proves his versatility by enacting the role of a cackling blind horror bent upon murdering young Jim Hawkins, boy hero of the adventure yarn. His success in this novel feat has drawn interest by several major Hollywood producers who may persuade the Australian to dally in this country a while longer than he originally planned.

"If I do stay longer than I expected, there are going to be an awful lot of drastic 'accidents' on Australian soap operas as the various characters I play are written out of the scripts," Taylor said.